

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 2341 Session of 2015

INTRODUCED BY TOOHL, BOBACK, D. COSTA, DeLUCA, GIBBONS,
 GINGRICH, MARSICO, ORTITAY, QUIGLEY AND SANTARSIERO,
 SEPTEMBER 15, 2016

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, SEPTEMBER 15, 2016

AN ACT

1 Amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), entitled "An
 2 act relating to the public school system, including certain
 3 provisions applicable as well to private and parochial
 4 schools; amending, revising, consolidating and changing the
 5 laws relating thereto," providing for Italian and Americans
 6 of Italian heritage cultural and educational programs and for
 7 a transfer.

8 The General Assembly finds and declares as follows:

9 (1) For the past several decades, Hollywood and the
 10 communications media have continuously portrayed Italians and
 11 Americans of Italian heritage as mobsters, buffoons and other
 12 nefarious characters to such an extent that it appears to be
 13 an orchestrated program of cultural dismemberment and disdain
 14 which can and will promote ethnic bigotry and loss of
 15 cultural identity.

16 (2) The exposure of our children and others to this
 17 unrelenting barrage of negative images has led to the erosion
 18 and denigration of Italian-American culture, history and
 19 heritage. It has, furthermore, encouraged children to emulate
 20 negative role models and promoted the social acceptability of

1 disrespect for and bigotry towards Italians and Americans of
2 Italian heritage and their culture, history and heritage.

3 (3) The histories of our nation and this Commonwealth
4 have been significantly enriched by the heritage of Italians
5 and Americans of Italian heritage. The cultural heritage of
6 Italy includes the classical civilization of Rome, the fine
7 arts of the Renaissance, the scientific and artistic genius
8 of da Vinci, the literary works of Dante and Petrarch, the
9 operas of Verdi and Puccini and many other contributions that
10 have ennobled civilization.

11 (4) More than 5,400,000 Italians emigrated to the United
12 States between 1820 and 1991. Our nation and this
13 Commonwealth have benefited substantially from the influences
14 and contributions of these men, women and children and their
15 distinctive culture, history and heritage.

16 (5) It is desirable to educate our citizens about the
17 positive aspects of the culture, music, art, language,
18 history and heritage of Italians and Americans of Italian
19 Heritage.

20 (6) It is the policy of the Commonwealth that the
21 culture, history and heritage of Italians and Americans of
22 Italian heritage be a proper concern for all people,
23 particularly students enrolled in the schools of this
24 Commonwealth.

25 (7) It is appropriate and desirable that programs,
26 workshops, institutes, seminars and other teacher-training
27 activities for the study of the culture, history and heritage
28 of Italians and Americans of Italian heritage be conducted at
29 the various high schools and institutions of higher education
30 in this Commonwealth.

1 (8) It is fitting and proper to establish a permanent
2 State-level commission to survey, design, encourage and
3 promote the implementation of Italian and Americans of
4 Italian heritage cultural and educational programs in this
5 Commonwealth, with responsibility for the coordination of
6 events that will provide appropriate awareness and
7 memorialization of the culture, history, heritage and
8 language of Italians and Americans of Italian heritage on a
9 regular basis throughout this Commonwealth.

10 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
11 hereby enacts as follows:

12 Section 1. The act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known
13 as the Public School Code of 1949, is amended by adding an
14 article to read:

15 ARTICLE XV-H

16 ITALIAN AND AMERICANS OF ITALIAN HERITAGE

17 CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

18 Section 1501-H. Definitions.

19 The following words and phrases when used in this article
20 shall have the meanings given to them in this section unless the
21 context clearly indicates otherwise:

22 "Commission." The Commission on Italian and Americans of
23 Italian Heritage Cultural and Educational Programs.

24 "Department." The Department of Education of the
25 Commonwealth.

26 "Institute." The Institute of Italian and Italian American
27 Heritage Studies.

28 Section 1502-H. Commission on Italian and Americans of Italian
29 Heritage Cultural and Educational Programs.

30 (a) Establishment.--The Commission on Italian and Americans

1 of Italian Heritage Cultural and Educational Programs is
2 established. The commission shall be placed within the
3 department but shall be independent of supervision or control by
4 the department.

5 (b) Composition.--The commission shall consist of the
6 following members:

7 (1) The Secretary of Education.

8 (2) The following:

9 (i) Nine public members who shall be appointed by
10 the Governor. At least four of the members appointed
11 under this subparagraph must, at the time of appointment,
12 have at least a master's degree in an area of Italian
13 studies or language.

14 (ii) Five public members who shall be appointed by
15 the President pro tempore of the Senate. At least one of
16 the members appointed under this subparagraph must have a
17 master's degree in an area of Italian studies or
18 language.

19 (iii) Five public members who shall be appointed by
20 the Speaker of the House of Representatives. At least one
21 of the members appointed under this subparagraph must
22 have a master's degree in an area of Italian studies or
23 language.

24 (c) Qualifications.--Each member must be a resident of this
25 Commonwealth who has served prominently as a spokesperson or
26 leader of an organization in the Italian and Americans of
27 Italian heritage community which serves members of religious,
28 ethnic, national heritage or social groups or who are
29 experienced in the field of Italian and Americans of Italian
30 heritage education. To the greatest extent practicable, the

1 members shall be chosen with due regard to afford the commission
2 with broad regional representation and ethnic diversity. At
3 least one-half of the public members must be of Italian descent.

4 (d) Terms.--

5 (1) Each public member shall serve for a term of three
6 years, except that of the initial members appointed:

7 (i) Two members appointed by the Governor, one
8 member appointed by the President pro tempore of the
9 Senate and one member appointed by the Speaker of the
10 House of Representatives shall serve for terms of one
11 year.

12 (ii) Three members appointed by the Governor, two
13 members appointed by the President pro tempore of the
14 Senate and one member appointed by the Speaker of the
15 House of Representatives shall serve for terms of two
16 years.

17 (iii) Four members appointed by the Governor, two
18 members appointed by the President pro tempore of the
19 Senate and one member appointed by the Speaker of the
20 House of Representatives shall serve for terms of three
21 years.

22 (2) A public member shall be eligible for reappointment.

23 (3) A public member shall serve until the public
24 member's successor is appointed and qualified. The term of
25 the successor of an incumbent member shall be calculated from
26 the expiration of the term of the incumbent. A vacancy
27 occurring other than by expiration of term shall be filled in
28 the same manner as the original appointment, except for the
29 unexpired term only.

30 (e) Compensation.--The members shall:

1 (1) Serve without compensation.

2 (2) Be entitled to reimbursement for necessary expenses
3 incurred in the performance of the member's duties.

4 (f) Chairperson.--The commission shall annually elect a
5 chairperson from among commission members.

6 (g) Meetings.--The commission shall meet upon the call of
7 the chairperson or a majority of the commission members.

8 (h) Quorum.--The presence of a majority of the authorized
9 members of the commission shall be required for the conduct of
10 official business.

11 (i) Executive director.--The commission shall appoint an
12 executive director, who shall serve at the pleasure of the
13 commission and shall be an individual qualified by training and
14 experience to perform the duties of the office.

15 Section 1503-H. Duties.

16 The commission shall have the following duties:

17 (1) To provide, based upon the collective knowledge and
18 experience of the members, assistance and advice to the
19 public and nonpublic schools of this Commonwealth with
20 respect to the implementation of Italian and Americans of
21 Italian heritage cultural and educational programs.

22 (2) To meet with county and local school officials and
23 other interested public and private organizations for the
24 purpose of assisting with the planning, coordination or
25 modification of courses of study dealing with issues, matters
26 and subjects concerning or relating to the culture, history
27 and heritage of Italians and Americans of Italian heritage.

28 (3) To survey and catalog the extent and breadth of
29 Italian and Americans of Italian heritage cultural awareness
30 and educational programs presently being incorporated into

1 the curricula and taught in the school systems of this
2 Commonwealth.

3 (4) To inventory Italian and Americans of Italian
4 heritage exhibits and resources which may be incorporated
5 into courses of study at various locations throughout this
6 Commonwealth and, upon request, to assist the department and
7 other educational agencies in the development and
8 implementation of Italian and Americans of Italian heritage
9 cultural awareness and educational programs. In furtherance
10 of this duty, the commission may contact and cooperate with
11 existing Italian and Americans of Italian heritage public or
12 private nonprofit resource organizations and may act as a
13 liaison concerning issues and topics involving and relating
14 to the culture, history and heritage of Italians and
15 Americans of Italian heritage to members of the General
16 Assembly and the Congress of the United States.

17 (5) To compile a roster of individual volunteers who are
18 willing to share their knowledge and experience in
19 classrooms, seminars and workshops on subjects concerning and
20 relating to the culture, history and heritage of Italians and
21 Americans of Italian heritage. The volunteers may be
22 scholars, members of the clergy, community relations
23 professionals and other individuals who, by virtue of their
24 experience, training or interest, have acquired personal or
25 academic knowledge of the culture, history and heritage of
26 Italians and Americans of Italian heritage and who are
27 willing to share that knowledge with students and teachers.

28 (6) To coordinate events observing the culture, history
29 and heritage of Italians and Americans of Italian heritage
30 and to seek volunteers who are willing and able to

1 participate in commemorative events that enhance student
2 awareness of the significance of the culture, history and
3 heritage of Italians and Americans of Italian heritage.

4 (7) To prepare reports for the Governor and the General
5 Assembly regarding the commission's findings and
6 recommendations to facilitate the inclusion of Italian and
7 Americans of Italian heritage studies and special programs
8 memorializing the culture, history and heritage of Italians
9 and Americans of Italian heritage in the educational system
10 of this Commonwealth.

11 (8) To develop, in consultation with the department,
12 curriculum guidelines for the teaching of subjects and topics
13 concerning and relating to the culture, history and heritage
14 of Italians and Americans of Italian heritage. To the
15 greatest extent practicable, each school district shall
16 incorporate the guidelines as part of the curriculum for the
17 school district's elementary and secondary school students.

18 (9) To ask a department or agency of the Commonwealth or
19 of a municipality or school district to supply data, program
20 reports and other information, personnel and assistance, as
21 the commission deems necessary to discharge the commission's
22 responsibilities under this article. The departments and
23 agencies shall, to the extent possible, cooperate with the
24 commission and shall furnish the commission with information,
25 personnel and assistance as may be necessary or helpful to
26 accomplish the purposes of this article.

27 (10) To create, establish and oversee the Institute of
28 Italian and Italian-American Heritage Studies as an entity
29 whose purpose is to assist the commission in implementation
30 of the commission's responsibilities. The commission shall

1 function as the board of governors for the institute and
2 shall appoint an executive director of the institute who
3 shall serve at the commission's pleasure.

4 (11) To survey the four-year universities and colleges
5 in this Commonwealth that have an advanced degree program in
6 the field of Italian and Italian-American studies and select
7 one to serve as host to the institute. The institute shall
8 not be administered by the college or university selected as
9 the host site. The institute must collaborate with and
10 otherwise engage, share and exchange resources with the
11 higher education community of this Commonwealth and work to
12 establish mutually beneficial public service programs and
13 activities consistent with the mission of the commission. The
14 institute may raise private funds and obtain public funds to
15 be used towards scholarships, grants and studies in the field
16 of Italian and Italian-American studies.

17 (12) To appoint an advisory council to the commission
18 and institute. The advisory council shall consist of
19 individuals who have served prominently as spokespersons for,
20 or as leaders of, organizations in the Italian and Americans
21 of Italian heritage community which serve members of
22 religious, ethnic, national heritage or social groups or who
23 are experienced in the field of Italian and Americans of
24 Italian heritage education.

25 Section 2. The amount of \$250,000 is transferred from the
26 General Fund to the Department of Education to enable the
27 Commission on Italian and Americans of Italian Heritage Cultural
28 and Educational Programs to effectuate the purposes of Article
29 XV-H of the act.

30 Section 3. This act shall take effect immediately.