



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL

Legislation Text

File #: 19-3081, **Version:** 1

PROPOSED RESOLUTION

A RESOLUTION HONORING ARAB AMERICAN FAMILY SERVICES

WHEREAS, April is National Arab American Heritage Month, which celebrates the history, culture, and people and the many contributions Arab Americans have made to our country; and

WHEREAS, in light of this celebration it is important to honor the people and organizations that make many contributions in Cook County, such as Arab American Family Services (AAFS); and

WHEREAS, AAFS was established in 2001 by Itedal Shalabi and Nareman Taha and was registered with the State of Illinois in January 2001; and

WHEREAS, the philosophy of AAFS is to help participants find solutions and to build a culture of learning and sharing that empowers individuals, families, local leadership, and institutions, as well as to reduce the cultural, religious, and linguistic barriers that limit Arab Americans from accessing services and opportunities for personal growth; and

WHEREAS, in early 2001, they opened a one-room office at 64th and Pulaski in Chicago with just enough space for two desks and filing cabinets; They started showing up at every community gathering and government agency meeting they could find and went to mosques and churches and schools and hospitals, even sitting down with families in the parks and in their homes to listen to their concerns and learn of their needs, and during these meetings, they experienced the intense suffering and fear in many Arab and Muslim women and asked how AAFS might help; and

WHEREAS, Itedal and Nareman began helping women to complete immigration forms, finding domestic violence shelters for those abused, providing parents with translation services at school meetings, and advocating for services with government agencies, striving to provide services based on client eligibility and proper legal procedures; and

WHEREAS, their work conducting awareness programs for government officials and agencies, as well as other mainstream organizations to combat negative imagery and to help agency personnel understand, respect, and learn to work with the cultural and religious differences of Arabs and Muslims gained AAFS a reputation as a “bridge builder” between Arab and Muslim-Americans and mainstream society; and

WHEREAS, today, AAFS is headquartered in Worth, IL, in the 6th District, the heart of the Arab and Muslim-American community in the southwestern metropolitan Chicago area and since their founding, AAFS’ programs and services have expanded dramatically to meet the needs of Arab and Muslim-Americans, as well as thousands of people from mainstream society residing within their service areas as AAFS does not discriminate in providing services on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, national origin, or disability; and

WHEREAS, AAFS provides services to over 30 communities in the South Suburban Chicagoland area and in 2018 worked with 15,144 families and 59,285 individuals were served in various areas of their programs; and

WHEREAS, the agency reaches out to more than 160,000 Muslims and individuals of Arab descent, as well as

mainstream audiences, living primarily in southwestern Cook County, northern Will County, and eastern DuPage County; and

WHEREAS, the population AAFS serves today is 92% Arab American, 3% Asian, 2% African American, 2% Caucasian (non-Arab), and 1% Hispanic; 60% are female, 85% are immigrants, 30% are youth under the age of eighteen, 10% are elderly age sixty-five or older, and 5% are people with disabilities; 75% percent of AAFS' clients have identified themselves as Muslims, while 25% have stated they are Christians and AAFS estimates that 92% of their clients live below the federal poverty line; and

WHEREAS, AAFS staff and volunteers are culturally sensitive, most are Arabic speaking and skilled in meeting the special needs of the Arab-American community; languages include each of the various dialects found in the 22 Arab nations and is the only social service agency in the southwest suburbs that provide immigration or translation services to Arabic speaking immigrants and the only provider of domestic violence services for the Arab population in the Midwest; and

WHEREAS, the members of the Cook County Board of Commissioners are pleased to celebrate Arab American Heritage Month by highlighting the good work of AAFS;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the President and Members of the Cook County Board of Commissioners proudly honor Arab American Family Services for their outstanding service to the community, Cook County, and our Country; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, this text be spread upon the official proceedings of this Honorable Body and that a suitable copy be presented to Itedal Shalabi and Nareman Taha as a symbol of our respect and esteem.