



Bill Number:	F-24-02	Sponsored By:	Senator Immaculata James
Introduced On:	December 5th, 2024		Chair Alec Palumbo
Voted On:	January 9th, 2025		
Result:	Passed		
Vote Count:	28-0-0		

A BILL TO: Establish a Holiday Hosting Program to Foster Cultural Exchange and Support International Students.

Recognizing, that many international students face isolation during major holidays when university campuses are closed and local students return home, leaving them without a community to share holiday traditions; and

Whereas, cultural exchange programs foster mutual understanding, promote diversity, and strengthen relationships between international students and local communities, enhancing the overall student experience and sense of belonging; and

Recognizing, that providing international students with opportunities to participate in local family traditions during holidays can ease homesickness, improve student well-being, and create a more inclusive environment; and

Recognizing, that as of Fall 2024, Grand Valley State University (GVSU) is home to a total of 625 international students from over 60 countries¹. Of these, 387 are graduate students and 238 are undergraduate students. The largest international student populations at GVSU come from India (230), Kenya (68), and Ghana (30)². These students significantly contribute to GVSU’s mission of promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion by enriching classroom discussions and

¹ “Enrollment Numbers, International Students - Grand Valley State University.” 2017. Gvsu.edu. 2017. <https://www.gvsu.edu/istudents/enrollment-numbers-122.htm>.

² “Enrollment Numbers, International Students - Grand Valley State University.” 2017. Gvsu.edu. 2017. <https://www.gvsu.edu/istudents/enrollment-numbers-122.htm>.

broadening cultural understanding. However, many international students face challenges in building local support networks or participating in American holiday traditions, leading to feelings of isolation. In Winter 2024, GVSU's international student population totals 606 students, with 419 graduate students and 187 undergraduate students.³ These students continue to play an integral role in fostering global perspectives within the university community; and

Whereas, peer institutions such as Michigan State University (MSU), University of Michigan (UoM), and Central Michigan University (CMU) have implemented successful hosting initiatives that connect international students with local families; and

Recognizing, Michigan State University's International Friendship Program (IFP) matches international students with residents for monthly interactions, including holiday celebrations, outings, or dinners. The program emphasizes cultural exchange, community building, and easing academic pressures, offering students a connection to American culture and a sense of belonging⁴; and

Recognizing, that the University of Michigan's (UoM) hosting agreements facilitate hosting opportunities for international students, ensuring cultural and academic integration. The program includes logistical support⁵ to match students with hosts and fosters meaningful cross-cultural engagement⁶; and

Recognizing, Central Michigan University (CMU) has taken a different approach. Through its Global Ambassadors Program, CMU fosters cross-cultural engagement by empowering international students to share their cultures with the broader community. This initiative, supported by community members, helps international students integrate into American life while enhancing mutual understanding and appreciation⁷; and

Therefore, Let it Be Resolved, that Grand Valley State University will establish a Holiday Hosting Initiative to connect international students with local families, alumni, or hosts during university breaks, this program will promote cultural exchange, shared holiday celebrations, and a stronger sense of belonging for international students; and

³ "Enrollment Numbers, International Students - Grand Valley State University." 2017. Gvsu.edu. 2017. <https://www.gvsu.edu/istudents/enrollment-numbers-122.htm>.

⁴ "Community Volunteers for International Programs :: International Friendship Program (IFP)." 2024. Msu.edu. 2024. <https://cvip.isp.msu.edu/programs/international-friendship-program/>.

⁵ "Templates and Forms | Global Michigan." 2024. Umich.edu. 2024. <https://global.umich.edu/international-collaborations/templates-and-forms/>.

⁶ "Templates and Forms | Global Michigan." 2024. Umich.edu. 2024. <https://global.umich.edu/international-collaborations/templates-and-forms/>.

⁷ "Community Resources." 2021. Wwww.cmich.edu. 2021. <https://www.cmich.edu/offices-departments/international-student-scholars/community-resources> .

Furthermore, Let it Be Resolved, the program will be led by Padnos International Center in collaboration with GVSU Student Senate, local community organizations, and alumni. It will reignite the legacy of the Friendship Families Program, incorporating successful practices from Michigan State University’s International Friendship Program⁸ and the University of Michigan’s hosting agreements.⁹ The program will provide logistical support by matching students and hosts based on mutual preferences, offering orientation sessions, and coordinating transportation and resources. It will enhance GVSU’s mission by creating opportunities for international students to engage with local traditions, enriching the cultural awareness of hosts and the broader community, while supporting the university’s goals of global engagement and student success.

⁸ “Community Volunteers for International Programs :: International Friendship Program (IFP).” 2024. Msu.edu. 2024. <https://cvip.isp.msu.edu/programs/international-friendship-program/>.

⁹ “Templates and Forms | Global Michigan.” 2024. Umich.edu. 2024. <https://global.umich.edu/international-collaborations/templates-and-forms/>.