



Office of State Representative Stephanie Howse  
House District II

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**SPONSOR TESTIMONY OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE STEPHANIE HOWSE ON HOUSE BILL 514**

Chairwoman Anielski, Vice Chairman Hambley, Ranking Member Holmes and members of the State and Local Government Committee, I would like thank you for allowing me to have sponsor testimony on House Bill 514 – the recognition of February 1<sup>st</sup> as Freedom Day in Ohio. By officially recognizing Freedom Day in Ohio on February 1<sup>st</sup>, Ohio will be better positioned to raise awareness of National Freedom Day. The purpose of Freedom Day in Ohio is to practice respect of difference, peace and affording equal opportunity among all Ohioans, while remembering that the United States is a nation dedicated to the ideal of freedom.

Many Ohioans, and Americans in general, take for granted the ideal of freedom and are far removed from America’s history on the practice of freedom for all. When I came across the Library of Congress’ website recognizing February 1<sup>st</sup> as National Freedom Day and that “Major Richard Robert Wright, Sr, a former slave, fought to have a day when freedom for all Americans is celebrated”, I was compelled to want to know more about who Major Wright was and why he fought to have the ideal of freedom recognized in the United States.

Major Wright was born near Dalton, Georgia on May 16, 1855 into slavery and later moved to Atlanta, Georgia to attend the Storrs School, an institution founded by the American Missionary Association (AMA) to educate the children of the freedpeople after the Civil War. Major Wright was the first valedictorian of Atlanta University (1876) and studied at several universities from Harvard University to Oxford University. In 1891, he founded Georgia State Industrial College for Colored Youth, now known as Savannah State University. In 1898, he took a leave of absence from the college during the Spanish American War and was commissioned a major in the U.S. Army and appointed paymaster of the United States Volunteers in the United States Army, by President William McKinley. Major Wright retired as President of Georgia State Industrial College in 1921 at the age of 67 and moved to Philadelphia to take classes at Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania to start a new endeavor, opening a bank. Citizens and Southern Bank and Trust Company, was the only African American owned bank in the North and the first African American Trust Company in the U.S.



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Major Wright began the campaign to create a National Freedom Day in the 1930's during his eighties. He selected February 1<sup>st</sup> in acknowledgment of February 1, 1865 the day that President Abraham Lincoln signed the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment (abolishing slavery) to the United States Constitution. Major Wright believed that the adoption of a National Freedom Day aligned with the four freedoms outlined by President Franklin D. Roosevelt:

1. Freedom of speech and expression
2. Freedom of every person to worship God in his own way
3. Freedom from want
4. Freedom from fear

Major Wright stated that the principle of freedoms "implies that all men are not only equally entitled to all the freedoms, but some men in seeking to possess and enjoy these freedoms, must realize that they cannot have them without sharing them with others. In practice, they must prove that our declaration of freedom includes all men."

Major Wright died in 1947 at the age of 94 and in 1948 the U.S. Congress passed a bill to make February 1 National Freedom Day. Sadly in 2018, 70 years later, most people still do not know Freedom Day exists. I hope members of the State and Local Government committee will join me and supporting HB 514 - Freedom Day in Ohio to continue to increase awareness of the Day and to promote the practices of freedom for all in Ohio and beyond.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my sponsor testimony and I'll be happy to take questions from the committee.