



**Senator Sandra Williams
21st Ohio Senate District**

**Senate Bill 71 Sponsor Testimony
Finance Committee
October 1, 2019**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Burke, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 71.

Senate Bill 71 is a reintroduction of Senate Bill 346 introduced in the 132nd General Assembly by former Senator Charleta Tavares. SB 71 makes an appropriation of \$70,000 each fiscal year, totaling \$140,000 over the biennium, to create a two year study committee in recognition of the 400th Anniversary of African Americans in the United States, and to examine the progress, contributions and challenges of African Americans in the state of Ohio. According to the United Census Bureau, Ohio's population is comprised of 11, 689, 442 people. 13% (roughly 1,519,627) of those individuals identify as African American¹.

The African-American community has been disproportionately affected in areas such as, health, education, housing and employment. The committee will analyze statistics from various agencies and departments concerning these issues. The data will be used onward to gain a comprehensive understanding of the affects future and current laws in Ohio have on our African-American community. Additionally, the committee will consist of 30 members appointed from each chamber of the

¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/OH>

Ohio legislature and the Governor's office. Appointed members will include representatives from the Ohio History Connection, National Museum of Afro-American History and Culture as well as public and private institutions in Ohio, including the John Glenn College of Public Affairs and the Kirwan Institution for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at the Ohio State University, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland State University, Health Policy Institute of Ohio, and the Ohio Civil Rights Commission.

Ohio has a rich history surrounding the progress and challenges of African Americans dating back to slavery. As a result of its social stance as an anti-slavery state, Ohio was a destination for a number of escaped slaves before the Civil war and played a significant role in helping fugitive slaves escape to freedom in the early 1800's. Ohio had the most extensive Underground Railroad network of any other state, with an estimated 3000 miles of routes used by runaways and more than twenty points of entry on the Ohio River.

Additionally, Ohio is home to some of the world's most notable individuals: George Washington Williams, originally born in Pennsylvania, moved to Cincinnati and became the first African-American man elected to the Ohio Legislature in 1879. Jesse Owens, who grew up in Cleveland, won four gold medals at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. The late Toni Morrison, from Lorain, Ohio became the first African-American woman to receive the Nobel Prize in literature. Stephanie Tubbs Jones, represented the east side of Cleveland in the United States House of Representatives from 1999 to 2008, and was the first African-American woman elected to Congress from Ohio.

Not only have African Americans contributed greatly to Ohio, but have made considerable improvements to the United States. For example, in 1932, Garrett Morgan, an African American man patented an electric automatic traffic signal (stoplight). Henry Sampson, Jr, invented Cell phone technology. After testing in April of 1973, His invention made advanced telecommunication possible. Each of these inventions we still use today and they help our society run more effectively and efficiently.

Black history is everyone's history and encompasses so much greatness that pushes everyone forward. This examination will not only aid in the growth of the African American community, but our state as a whole to ensure that all Ohioans have the necessary tools needed to advance. We are stronger when we work together to solve problems that disproportionately impact certain segments of our population. Without an honest conversation about the issues and challenges presented to African Americans in our state, all Ohioans risk falling behind.

Chairman Dolan and, Vice Chair Burke, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Finance committee, this concludes my testimony and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.