

Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education
The Honorable Rick Perales, Chairman
FY 2018-19 Budget Testimony
Testimony from Dr. Charles Wash, Director
National Afro-American Museum & Cultural Center
February 16, 2017

Good afternoon members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education,

I am Dr. Charles A. Wash, Jr. the Director of the National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center (NAAMCC) in Wilberforce, Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning. Our museum, located in historic Wilberforce, opened to the public in March 1988, making it the first museum of its kind in the country dedicated to national African American history and culture. The state of Ohio was very forward-thinking regarding its support for such a ground-breaking institution and has been nationally regarded as a leader in cultural diversity for more than 30 years.

Only a few short years ago the NAAMCC enjoyed a period of being on the leading edge of African American participation in professional fields of museums, library science, archives and public history. Our museum was one of very few cultural institutions anywhere in the country to develop, display and travel meaningful African American exhibitions that not only pointed to a national narrative, but also highlighted the Ohio African American story. Universities, museums and cultural centers not only around the United States, but also internationally greatly benefitted from the work produced by the staff during this period.

Unfortunately, the state's financial support for NAAMCC hasn't recovered since the Great Recession of 2008 and 2009. At that time, the annual GRF support was \$740,000. Today it is \$500,000, a reduction of nearly 33 percent. To adequately run a museum and archive, it takes a staff of eight. At an average of \$50,000 per staff person (including benefits), that totals \$400,000 in staff costs alone. When you combine annual utility costs of \$110,000, it already exceeds the \$500,000 in GRF the state is providing. And, of course, there are additional costs relating to maintenance, marketing, travel, supplies, equipment and so on.

Today we have the opportunity to build back some of our lost capacity with your support. Despite a number of challenges, we have been successful in obtaining financial support in the form of grants, managed to restart our exhibition schedule, integrate programs and events into the statewide curriculum standards for diversity to directly benefit visiting school groups. We began digitizing our archival collections and have shared them in our online repository, which has attracted researchers to Wilberforce from all over the United States and the world. Also, we've diligently represented Ohio in all our collaborations with institutions around the state such as the Charles Young Buffalo Soldier National Monument and the Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, as well as nationally at the Smithsonian's Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington

D.C. We have not only done a tremendous job of reconnecting with Ohio and other parts of the country, but also internationally. We regularly loan pieces of our renowned African American art collection to museums around the world. We currently have pieces on loan to the Musée du quai Branly in Paris, France, which has also traveled to the Grey Gallery in New York. Despite severe budget limitations our small staff have persevered and continued our legacy as much as possible. My fear is that we may become victims of our own recent success. Without more support from the state, our accomplishments will be short lived due to key staff being backed by grants, which will soon expire. Without the work of these staff members, the infrastructure we fought so hard to build is simply unsustainable.

We need your support to bring our institution back to the point where we can fulfill our mission and return to being a state-wide resource for African American history and culture. If you have not been to the National Afro-American Museum & Cultural Center, I gladly extend an offer to you today to visit at your earliest opportunity. Thank you for giving me some time this afternoon. I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

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