



**Senate General Government and Agency Review Committee
Senator Kirk Schuring, Chairman**

**Dr. Charles Wash, Director
National Afro-American Museum & Cultural Center
Proponent Testimony – Senate Bill 334
*December 1, 2020***

Chairman Schuring and members of the Senate General Government and Agency Review Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Senate Bill 334, which proposes to establish Juneteenth as a holiday in the State of Ohio. My name is Dr. Charles A. Wash, Jr. and I have served as the Director of the National Afro-American Museum & Cultural Center in Wilberforce, a division of the Ohio History Connection, since 2011.

I start by thanking the sponsors, Senators Hearcel Craig and Andrew Brenner for championing this legislation. Their foresight in elevating this important event in American history as a statewide holiday demonstrates not only their deep appreciation for history, but also their dedication to equity and inclusion in Ohio. Therefore, on behalf of our staff at the National Afro-American Museum & Cultural Center in Wilberforce and the entire Ohio History Connection, we fully support Senate Bill 334 that will recognize Juneteenth as an official state holiday.

It is important for us to understand that Juneteenth is more than a one-day commemoration once relegated to the state of Texas. It is symbolic of the sustained struggle for freedom by African Americans throughout American history. It should be viewed as one of the early steps towards full civil inclusion and equality for African Americans throughout the United States.

When we take a look at the various ways we celebrate liberty and independence throughout the United States we quickly conclude that celebrating freedom is in our DNA. Obviously, we have the Fourth of July national holiday where we celebrate freedom and independence from England. Unfortunately, the July 4th holiday isn't fully inclusive of all the groups that were present and participated in securing that freedom. Not only did slavery persist after independence, but it also expanded into many of the new, southern territories making it crucial to the overall US economy.

There are many other celebrations around the country that commemorate the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, including South Carolina, the state of New York and even the state of Ohio. Here in Ohio, we have commemorated Emancipation Day since at least the 1890s when Dayton resident, Paul Lawrence Dunbar published his famous poem "*Emancipation*" for the September 22, 1862 signing of the

Emancipation Proclamation. As we know, Abraham Lincoln's proclamation did not spell the end of slavery and did not lend credence to the forthcoming struggles for African Americans and other abolitionists who literally fought and died to end slavery everywhere it existed in the nation. The Juneteenth commemoration embodies the spirit of the Emancipation Proclamation, the fight for the passage of the 13th Amendment that actually ended slavery as an institution, and the passage and adoption of the legislation in Texas that marked the ending of slavery for the last of the enslaved in the United States.

Juneteenth as a state holiday in Ohio simply exemplifies the totality of the sustained struggle for freedom not only by African Americans, but by all Americans. It is a symbol of our deep-seeded history and culture of self-determination and liberty that I believe every Ohioan will recognize. So, it is my pleasure to support Senate Bill 334, which will allow the state of Ohio to join more than forty other states in codifying Juneteenth as an official state holiday, thus recognizing the long struggle for freedom we have all contributed to for generations.