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Senate Finance Committee  
Senate Bill 219 Sponsor Testimony  
Senator Hearcel F. Craig  
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Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony today on Senate Bill 219. This piece of legislation would assist in reinstating and providing operating funding for the Ohio Commission on African-Americans. This commission is essential for identifying issues and promoting strategies and public policies to foster improvements in the social, economic, and educational problems that affect the African-American population across Ohio.

The Commission on African-American Males (CAAM) was initially created based on the study conducted by the Commission on Socially Disadvantaged Black Males. However, research has shown that African-American women and children also experience similar life obstacles that need to be addressed.

Many commissions and services were defunded in 2008 due to the recession, including the CAAM. However, the CAAM remained in the Ohio Revised Code. That is why we included a \$500,000 appropriation to cover not only operational costs but also to hire a team of Commission policy researchers and research assistants to create reports, papers, and briefings. The Commission would also create a statewide data dashboard for community partners and elected officials while also developing special webinars targeted to state agency and local leaders. The Commission would not just meet but also coordinate special sessions and town halls to help engage the public.

There will also be several key changes under the new legislation that will increase outreach and efficacy, including updates to the scope of responsibilities and revisions to the membership structure. Currently in the Ohio Revised Code, the Commission on African-American Males consists of up to 25 members, appointed by the Governor, representing a number of executive branch agencies, private associations, and other community groups. The new structure of the Ohio Commission on African Americans would include a maximum of 13 members. This includes either the directors of or the designees of the Departments of Health, Development, Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Job and Family Services; the Superintendent of Public Instruction; two members of the Ohio House of Representatives and two members of the Ohio Senate, who will serve as nonvoting members. The Ohio State University Bell National Resource Center, in consultation with the Governor, will appoint two members from the private or non-profit sector and a member from the philanthropic sector. Reducing the number of members will help encourage a more intentional member selection process, resulting in more productive collaborations that better solve problems and advance recommendations pertinent to African-Americans in the areas of economic development, criminal justice, education, and health.

Earlier this year, the CDC announced that the U.S. life expectancy dropped one and half years in 2020. However, the life expectancy for African Americans dropped nearly three years. According to the Ohio Department of Health, Black babies are also more than 2.8 times more likely to die than white babies.

We know that Black Ohioans face other challenges that impact their health and wellbeing at disproportionate rates compared to white Ohioans, including poverty. In 2020, over 27 percent of Black Ohioans lived in poverty, according to [talkpoverty.org](http://talkpoverty.org). In fact, a 2020 report by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis showed that Black Ohioans make 55 cents for every dollar Caucasian Ohioans make. Expanding the scope of CAAM will allow the commission to take a more inclusive approach to rectifying societal challenges faced by African Americans of all genders and ages. We want to ensure that these disparities are addressed. By reinstating this commission, we will not only help African Americans rise, but ensure that all Ohioans rise together.

I wanted to take a moment to thank Chairman Dolan and the members of the committee for the opportunity to consider this legislation. I welcome any questions you might have at this time.

