



MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairman Matt Dolan, Vice-Chair Theresa Gavarone, Ranking Member Vernon Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: James L Moore III 

CC: Senator Hearcel Craig

DATE: November 9, 2021

SUBJECT: Ohio Senate Finance Committee (SB 219)

Warmest greetings! I am Dr. James L. Moore III of The Ohio State University, where I serve as vice provost for diversity and inclusion and chief diversity officer, executive director for Todd Anthony Bell National Resource Center on the African American Male, and Education and Human Ecology Distinguished Professor of Urban Education. I appreciate this opportunity to submit a proponent testimony on Senate Bill 219.

As Senator Hearcel Craig explained in his sponsor testimony, the Commission on African-American Males (CAAM) was created as the Governor's Commission on Socially Disadvantaged Black Males in 1989, and, in 1991, the Ohio Civil Rights Commission undertook coordination of all CAAM activities. Thus, in 1999, HB 283 established CAAM as an independent commission. Later in 2007, HB 119 aligned CAAM with the African American and African Studies (AAAS) Community Extension Center at The Ohio State University.

During this new alignment, CAAM lost its state appropriations in the midst of the 2008 economic downturn when numerous state programs experienced significant funding reductions. Many of CAAM activities were still able to be carried out using the remaining appropriations from the FY 2008-FY 2009 biennium. Thus, as noted by Senator Craig, the state budget for many activities in that period trimmed or diminished funding levels from earlier state appropriations. Specifically to CAAM, the state funding was zeroed out and never restored after 2009. The last deliverable issued by CAAM was the biennial report for 2010-2011.

In the years CAAM functioned as a state commission, it comprised three full-time staff, including an executive director. The date the commission shifted to The Ohio State University oversight was October 1, 2007. In FY 2008, the state appropriated \$792,000 to CAAM and, in FY 2009, a total of \$1,292,000. More details about the transition period and a summary of what the commission focused its attention, during these time periods, can be viewed on this [link](#).

SB 219 recommends changing the name of the commission to the Commission on African-Americans to reflect a broader mission of serving all African Americans in Ohio. The bill also outlines transferring duties to the Todd Anthony Bell National Resource Center on the African American Male at The Ohio State University. Additionally, the bill restores appropriations by including funding for the FY 2022-FY 2023 biennium, extending needed financial support to create a team of commission policy researchers to produce briefs and reports, to establish a statewide data dashboard that policymakers and state agencies could utilize, and to coordinate relevant meetings and conferences.

As described in ORC 4112.13, the commission will maintain committees and conduct research and coordinate special convenings to solve problems and advance recommendations in the areas of unemployment, criminal justice, education, and health. Furthermore, the commission will identify existing programs that address the problems in those four targeted areas and assist in implementing new programs as needed. Public awareness programs, especially designed for African Americans, will be implemented.

As noted in the sponsor testimony, the commission number was reduced from “up to 25 members” to 12. I understand that Senator Craig may offer an amendment to restore the Chancellor of the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) or a designee to the commission. I am very supportive of such an amendment.

In closing, I want to thank Senator Craig for his sponsorship of this important legislation. It is both timely and needed as a way addressing significant unemployment, criminal justice, education, and health concerns in Ohio among African Americans. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to offer this testimony and respectfully ask the committee to support SB 219.