

MEMORANDUM

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

From: Keisha J. Hunley-Jenkins, JD, PhD



Cc: Senator Hearcel Craig

Date: March 29, 2022

Re: Ohio Senate Finance Committee (SB 219)

Greetings, Chairman Dolan, Vice-Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee-

I am Dr. Keisha J. Hunley-Jenkins, Esq. of The Ohio State University (OSU), where I serve as Assistant Director and Community lead for the [Boys and Young Men of Color Collective \(BYMOC Collective\)](#) in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and the Todd Anthony Bell National Resource Center on the African American Male.

The BYMOC Collective seeks to engage boys and young men of color in charting a new, collective way forward to reduce the disproportionate gaps they experience in Columbus and across Franklin County. The BYMOC Collective serves as the Columbus and Franklin County backbone organization that works directly with young men of color and key stakeholders to design and implement policy and practice changes that enable BYMOC to thrive. The BYMOC Collective works with policymakers, funders, and programs and organizations serving young men of color.

With my personal and professional connection to this work, I am grateful for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony for Senate Bill 219 which expands its focus from improving the quality of life for socially disadvantaged Black males, to serve all African Americans throughout the State of Ohio. Please note that underlined items in my written testimony are hyperlinks to additional information on these topics.

As has been described in previous sponsor and proponent testimony, the Commission on African-American Males (CAAM) originated as the Governor's Commission on Socially Disadvantaged Black Males in 1989. In 2007, HB 119 granted the African American and African Studies Community Extension Center at OSU oversight of CAAM. Ultimately, the 2008 economic downturn led to the elimination of CAAM's State Appropriation in 2009. CAAM was able to carryout deliverables through its final FY 2008-FY 2009 biennium appropriation, culminating with its 2010-2011 biennial report. Additional detail about CAAM's transition period and areas of focus are available [here](#).

It is exciting that 13 years after the elimination of CAAM's State appropriation in 2009, SB 219 reestablishes the CAAM as the Commission on African-Americans (CAA) in the FY 2022-FY 2023 biennium. The timing is apropos given the ongoing, disproportionate, and negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black and brown people as evidenced by the [Centers for Disease and Control](#), and the

[US Department of Health and Human Services](#), through analysis of and strategic action to address racial disparities within the [Social Determinants of Health](#) (SDOH). SDOHs are defined as the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. The SDOHs are reflected in the SB 219's areas of focus of criminal justice, education, employment, healthcare, and housing.

As the nation grapples with a changing economy in the information age, a growing number of US citizens are experiencing declining living conditions across the SDOHs. However, [Black and brown populations are the hardest hit](#). This reality, heightened by the ongoing police-involved deaths of an alarming percentage of Black and brown people—including Eric Garner and Tamir Rice (2014), Freddie Gray (2015), and George Floyd and Casey Goodson (2020)—culminated in racial uprisings right here at the intersection of Broad and High Streets, throughout our State, across our nation, and globally. While the COVID-19 numbers are trending downward, its impact and increasingly challenging living conditions for African-Americans warrant study, strategic planning, and data-driven, evidence-based action that is measurable and transparent for public accountability.

SB 219 also transfers oversight of the CAA to the [Todd Anthony Bell National Resource Center on the African American Male \(BNRC\)](#) at OSU. Although the BNRC was established to focus its efforts on improving outcomes for males of color, women and gender-nonconforming young people of color also participate in and benefit from BNRC programs and opportunities. As a bi-racial woman, I personally benefitted from being selected as a BNRC fellow while pursuing my graduate and professional degrees at OSU. Further, the BNRC's qualitative and quantitative research approach, centered on analyzing the lived experiences of the population it serves and key stakeholders, positions the BNRC to direct CAA's development evidence-based, data-driven policies, plans, and programs that will improve the quality of life for African Americans in Ohio. See BNRC's priorities [here](#) and SB 219's purpose. There is significant overlap. Specific to CAA's statutory duties, the BNRC has to expertise to ensure that the CAA:

- Conducts research to determine the nature and extent of the problems and solutions in the areas of criminal justice, education, employment, healthcare, and housing
- Holds public hearings to collect data
- Identifies existing federal, state, and local programs relevant to the areas of study
- Implements new programs and pilot projects
- Develops and implements community education and public awareness programs
- Develops strategies to improve socioeconomic conditions
- Raises funds to grow and sustain CAA
- Ensures public accountability through annual reporting and public testimony to State of Ohio elected officials and government agencies

Additionally, BNRC's strong connection to OSU, ensures that the place-based approach needed to design and implement policies, plans, and practices that improve the quality of life for African Americans in communities across the State is possible. The credibility that the BNRC brings to the forthcoming data collection and analysis, data dashboard, and repository of what works in closing persistent opportunity gaps through policy and programs, will bolster the capacity of individuals and organizations in Ohio to close the persistent opportunity gaps African Americans disproportionately experience.

In closing, thank you Senator Craig for your sponsorship of this important legislation. It is both timely and necessary to address significant criminal justice, education, employment, healthcare, and housing concerns in Ohio among African Americans. I would also like to sincerely thank Chairman Dolan, Vice-Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee for your attention and the opportunity to submit proponent testimony for this critical bill. I respectfully request the committee to support SB 219.