

Chair Hall, Vice Chair Ferguson, Ranking Member Humphrey, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 53, which seeks to designate John Rankin Day in Ohio.

I am deeply honored to represent Ripley, Ohio, a picturesque village nestled along the banks of the Ohio River. Established in 1812 by Colonel James Poage, Ripley has a storied history rooted in the pursuit of freedom and justice.

Ripley is renowned for its rich heritage and vibrant community events. The annual Heritage Festival, formerly known as the Tobacco Festival, celebrates our agricultural traditions and brings together many residents and visitors. Our town has been home to numerous notable figures, including Rosa Washington Riles, known as Aunt Jemima; John P. Parker, an African American inventor and abolitionist; and, of course, John Rankin, whose commitment to human rights has left an indelible mark on our history.

The residents of eastern Brown County are among the kindest and most hospitable individuals I have ever encountered. Their pride in our community is remarkable, and they cherish the legacy of those who have contributed to our region.

John Rankin, a humble presbyterian minister, was a man of deep conviction and compassion. In 1822, he settled in Ripley and became one of Ohio's first and most active "conductors" on the Underground Railroad. From his home atop Liberty Hill, he would signal escaping slaves with a lantern, guiding them across the treacherous waters of the Ohio River to the safety of free soil. It is estimated that over 2,000 fugitive slaves found refuge in the Rankin household.

Beyond his direct actions, Rankin's influence extended through his writings. His "Letters on Slavery", published in 1826, articulated a powerful moral and religious opposition to the institution of slavery. These letters resonated deeply within the abolitionist movement, inspiring figures such as William Lloyd Garrison, who referred to Rankin as his "anti-slavery father."

Despite the personal risks—including threats to his life and property—Rankin remained steadfast in his mission. His home, now a National Historic Landmark, stands as a symbol of courage and moral fortitude.

Designating a day to honor John Rankin would be an affirmation of the values he championed: freedom, equality, and moral courage. It serves as a reminder of Ohio's role in the fight against slavery and the importance of standing firm in the face of injustice.

I would like to thank my joint sponsor Tex Fischer for partnering with me on this bill. Thank you for your consideration and we would be happy to answer any questions.