



Representative Cecil Thomas

25th House District

House Bill 452- Sponsor Testimony

February 4th, 2025

Chair Richardson, Vice Chair Mathews, and members of the Veterans and Military Development Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present Sponsor testimony on House Bill 452. I find it powerful that we are beginning our first committee back—and our first committee meeting of Black History Month—with the hearing of this bill.

House Bill 452 seeks to designate October 1st as 761st Tank Battalion Day, honoring the extraordinary legacy of the 761st Tank Battalion, famously known as the *Black Panthers*. They were the first African American tank unit to see combat in World War II, a unit whose heroism reshaped American history and is too often forgotten.

The courage of the 761st extended far beyond the battlefield. Despite facing intense racism both at home and within the Army, these men served with unmatched valor. They fought for 183 days of continuous combat, broke through enemy lines across six European countries, and played pivotal roles in some of the most brutal battles of the war, including the Battle of the Bulge.

The 761st defeated over 6,000 enemy soldiers, captured 30 towns, and helped liberate Jewish prisoners from Nazi concentration camps. They fought not just for military victory, but for dignity, equality, and the opportunity to serve their country with honor.

National WWII Museum. (n.d.). Black Panthers: The 761st Tank Battalion. The National WWII Museum. Retrieved November 14, 2025, from <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/black-panthers-761st-tank-battalion>

The History Makers. (n.d.). Sgt. Johnny Holmes. The History Makers. Retrieved November 14, 2025, from <https://www.thehistorymakers.org/biography/sgt-johnny-holmes>

General George Patton recognized the weight of their mission, telling them:

“Men, you’re the first Negro tankers to ever fight in the American Army... Everyone has their eyes on you and is expecting great things from you. Most of all, your race is looking forward to your success. Don’t let them down.”

And they did not let us down.

Among their ranks was Sergeant Johnny Alfred “Bobo” Holmes of Alliance, Ohio, who faced racism from the moment he enlisted in 1939. Yet, like his brothers in arms, he fought not only for the freedom of others, but for the right to be treated as a full and equal citizen. The service of Sergeant Holmes and the 761st helped pave the way for the eventual integration of the U.S. military, proving that bravery and character have no race.

Today, the legacy of the 761st Tank Battalion stands as a testament to extraordinary courage and resilience. Their sacrifices helped defeat tyranny abroad while advancing the fight for racial equality at home.

By passing House Bill 452, we ensure that their story—too often left out of our history books—is remembered and passed down to future generations. Designating October 1st as 761st Tank Battalion Day affirms that the Black Panthers were warriors not only for freedom overseas, but for equality here at home.

Their sacrifice helped secure not only the freedoms of this nation, but the freedoms that I, and other African Americans, experience today. This bill sends a clear message: **Black veterans are worth remembering.** I am proud to champion this legislation alongside my joint sponsor, Ranking Member Lawson-Rowe.

I would now like to turn things over to her now.

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