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Testimony before the Senate Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Public Safety Committee
Senate Bill 253—To designate February 20th as "Black Ohioan Civil War Medal of Honor Recipient Day."

21 October 2025

Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Weinstein and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide written testimony in support of Senate Bill 253.

The forming and training of United States Colored Troops (USCT) Regiments began in full force following the passage of the Confiscation Act by congress and the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Lincoln. By the end of the war there were a total of 175 regiments and represented about one-tenth of the US Army's manpower.

During the four-year civil war the Medal of Honor (MOH) was awarded to 1,200 U.S. soldiers. Only 18 of these medals went to African American soldiers.

The first African American regiment recruited in Ohio was the 127th Ohio Volunteer Infantry. It was formed during the last half of 1863 and was subsequently designated as the 5th Regiment, United States Colored Troops. The regiment was formed at Camp Delaware in Delaware, Ohio. It was made up of 10 companies, each company typically consisting of 97 enlisted African Americans and 3 white officers.

On September 29, 1864, the Battle of Chaffin's Farm and New Market Heights began as a two-day battle leading up to the siege of Petersburg. The 5th USCT was one of four USCTs. It was on this day that Sergeant Major Milton Murray Holland of Company C, First Sergeant James H Bronson of Company D, First Sergeant Powhatan Beaty of Company G, and First Sergeant Robert A Pinn of Company I each took command of their companies and gallantly led them in the battle because their officers had all been killed or wounded.

For their accomplishment each man was awarded the Medal of Honor. They were four of the 14 soldiers to earn the Medal of Honor during the battle. They were all twenty-something African American Ohioans.

About 180,000 black soldiers served during the civil war. Eighteen earned a Medal of Honor. Fourteen of them during the two-day battle at New Market Heights. Ohio claims four of those men.

Senator Craig and Senator Reynolds want to make February 20th "Black Ohioan Civil War Medal of Honor Recipient Day" in Ohio. I cannot think of a better way to honor the brave accomplishments of these four Ohioans, and more importantly to remember them. It will be an excellent tool for schools, veteran service organizations, and others to use as a means to educate all Ohioans about the bravery, sacrifice, and commitment of the black soldiers during the only civil war America has ever had during its 250-year history.

Let me conclude my testimony with a quote from the American social reformer, abolitionist, orator, writer, and statesman, Frederick Douglass.

"Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letter, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, there is no power on earth that can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship."

Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Weinstein and committee members, I hope you will support enate Bill 253 so that we can honor the lives of these four Ohio heroes every year and never forget them.

If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.