

Senate Transportation Committee
Senator Hearcel F. Craig and Senator Michele Reynolds
March 26, 2025
Senate Bill 95

Good morning Chairman Patton, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member Leader Antonio and members of the Transportation Committee. Thank you for allowing Senator Reynolds and myself to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 95, which would designate a portion of I-71 in Columbus as the “Chief of Police James G. Jackson Memorial Highway.”

Chief Jackson passed away earlier this year. Chief Jackson, a Columbus native, was an extraordinary mentor and visionary leader. He was defined by his persistent expectation for excellence and his transparent accountability, serving the City of Columbus for over 50 years, becoming the first African American Chief of Police within the division.

Chief Jackson held many different positions. While he transcended department rankings, he became the only person in the Columbus Division of Police to place first on three written examinations within the department (Sergeant, Captain, and Deputy Chief)¹, passing multiple tests or exams with the highest score. He started as a patrolman assigned to foot patrol and cruiser duty and was then promoted to Sergeant in 1967. He later worked in Patrol and Vice, leading to a promotion to Lieutenant in 1971 serving in Patrol and Community Relations. In this role, he created the first Minority Recruiting Unit.

In 1974, he was then promoted to Captain, was later appointed to be Deputy Chief in 1977, and finally climbed the ladder being named Chief of Police in 1990. Chief Jackson was the longest serving chief in the division’s history and was the longest serving chief in the history of the Major City Chiefs organization in the United States and Canada.

In 1995, Chief Jackson promoted the first female to the rank of commander, and most of the supervisors were promoted, including all 5 of the deputy chiefs, 16 of the 18 commanders, 52 of the 56 lieutenants, and 204 of the 228 sergeants.

He was a beacon for equal opportunities and anti discrimination, he wanted his police department to look like the communities he served. He gave testimony in multiple court cases and served a pivotal role in promoting minority officers within the division of police. He created community policing programs, helping to build and foster trust between the police and our communities. Chief Jackson also received a multitude of awards during his time in public service.

¹ [1]
<https://www.columbus.gov/Government/Mayors-Office/City-of-Columbus-Hall-of-Fame/Chief-James-G.-Jackson>

In July 2005, Chief Jackson received the Lloyd Sealey Award for outstanding service or accomplishments in the field of criminal justice from the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives. The division's training academy was even renamed James G. Jackson Columbus Police Academy to honor his devotion to the city when he stepped down as Chief in 2009.

In 2012, he was inducted into the Ohio Civil Rights Hall of Fame for making significant contributions in support of civil rights and cultural awareness.

Now it is time for the State of Ohio to honor him by designating I-71, between I-670 and Hudson Street in Columbus as the "Chief of Police James G. Jackson Memorial Highway."

I now invite my joint sponsor Senator Reynolds to say a few words.

Thank you, Senator Craig. Chairman Patton, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member Leader Antonio, and members of the committee—thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 95.

Chief Jackson's career is a testament to the values of hard work, leadership, and accountability. His rise through the ranks, earning top scores on multiple examinations and becoming the longest-serving chief in the division's history, reflects a deep commitment to excellence and service. He led with strength and fairness, ensuring that the Columbus Division of Police reflected the community it served while maintaining high standards of professionalism and integrity.

Chief Jackson's focus on community engagement and equal opportunity helped build a stronger, more trusted police department. His establishment of the Minority Recruiting Unit and his efforts to promote qualified officers created new opportunities and strengthened the relationship between law enforcement and the community. His leadership demonstrated that effective policing is not only about enforcing the law—it's about building trust and understanding with the people you serve.

Naming this portion of I-71 in his honor is a meaningful way to recognize Chief Jackson's lifetime of service. He set a standard for leadership and accountability that will continue to inspire future generations.

Chairman Patton and members of the committee, we appreciate your attention and consideration of honoring Chief Jackson. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.