



State Representative Dontavius L. Jarrells
House District 25
State and Local Government Committee
House Bill 114 Sponsor Testimony
State Representative Dontavius L. Jarrells

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Chairman Wiggam, Vice-Chair John, Ranking member Kelly, and members of the State and Local Government Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony today on House Bill 114. House Bill 114 recognizes one of the nation's first community housing developments, Poindexter Village, by requiring that the Ohio History Connection designate Poindexter Village as an official state historical site.

Poindexter Village is named after James Preston Poindexter, an eminent African-American born in 1819 in Richmond, Virginia. He later moved to our state's capital here in Columbus when he was 18 years old, making his mark as a clergyman, abolitionist, politician, and civil rights activist. Poindexter went on to conduct services at Second Baptist Church and soon created the Anti-Slavery Baptist Church when he discovered a family of slaveholders at Second Baptist. Because of Poindexter's leadership, the Anti-Slavery Baptist and Second Baptist combined and he served as minister until 1898. Today, Second Baptist Church is still an active part of the Columbus community.

Poindexter played a vital role in the Underground Railroad paying for wagons and horses out of pocket to aid fugitive slaves on their treacherous voyages to freedom in Canada. When Poindexter and his wife realized Ohio did not support African-American veterans, they established the Colored Soldier Relief Society. In 1870, with the implementation of the 15th Amendment, Poindexter rallied a statewide convention of African American men to ensure they would be able to exercise their right to vote.

Soon after, Poindexter was nominated by the Republican Party for a seat in the Ohio House of Representatives. Following serving as one of our very own legislators, in 1880, Poindexter became the first African American to be a member of the Columbus City Council. When he

passed away on February 7, 1907, he had one of the most attended funerals in Columbus history.

Over 30 years after Poindexter's passing, Poindexter Village opened on North Champion Avenue in Columbus' Near East Side becoming the second community housing development in the nation and part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal that included 700 community housing developments across the country. These developments were created to offer housing to working Americans, especially the Works Progress Administration workers. Poindexter Village, Ohio's first public housing development, was designed by architect Howard Dwight Smith. It sat on the former site of the Blackberry Patch, a prominent African-American neighborhood, and consisted of 35 two-story brick townhouses that housed 333 families.

Poindexter Village has been home to many influencers such as artists, social activists, athletes, and political and national leaders in our state. These include Angela Pace, a former anchorwoman, and now the director of community affairs, for Channel 10 news. If you've ever visited the Kings Arts Complex, the powerful Afrocentric artwork was created by a former Poindexter resident, Aminah Robinson. Another former resident, Myron Robinson, took his political career to Memphis where he was mayor pro temp and has taken leadership in many African American-oriented initiatives. For the sports fans in the room, you may have heard of Edward "Skip" Young play for the Boston Celtics. And last, but certainly not least, Dr. Earl Sherard saved a multitude of lives in World War II as a Tuskegee Airman and then later became the chief of pediatric neurology at Nationwide Children's Hospital. Poindexter has a historic influence felt and seen across the country.

The vigorous history of Poindexter Village remains today. However, the community has shifted. In 2013, all but 10 of the original townhouses were demolished. Today, only two of the original buildings stand. New housing units have replaced the old buildings. However, because of the advocacy and leadership of the recently created John Preston Poindexter Foundation in collaboration with the Ohio History Connection, the importance of this historical landmark will be preserved for future generations. Making Poindexter Village a historic site will preserve a vibrant and important piece of Ohio history, one that captures the essence and richness of the Black community.

I wanted to take a moment to thank Chairman Wiggam, Vice-Chair John, and Ranking member Kelly, and the members of the committee for the opportunity to consider this legislation. I welcome any questions you might have at this time.