



**Senator Sandra Williams**  
**21<sup>st</sup> Ohio Senate District**

**Senate Bill 67**  
**Sponsor Testimony**  
**Finance Committee**  
**March 16, 2021**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 67.

Senate Bill 67 is a reintroduction of Senate Bill 346 introduced in the 132<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly by former Senator Charleta Tavares. SB 67 makes an appropriation of \$70,000 each fiscal year, totaling \$140,000 over the biennium, to create a two-year study committee in recognition of the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of African Americans in the United States, and to examine the progress, contributions and challenges of African Americans in the state of Ohio. According to the United Census Bureau, Ohio's population is comprised of 11,689,100 people. 13% (roughly 1,519,627) of those individuals identify as African American<sup>1</sup>.

The African-American community has been disproportionately affected in areas such as, health, education, housing and employment. The committee, created by this legislation, will analyze statistics from various agencies and departments concerning these issues. The data will be used onward to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact that future and current laws in Ohio have on the African-American community.

The African American study committee shall consist of ten members appointed by the Governor, five members appointed by the President of the Senate, five members appointed by the Minority Leader of the Senate, five members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and five members appointed by the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives. Other Appointed members will also include representatives from the Ohio History Connection, National

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/OH/PST045219>

Museum of Afro-American History and Culture as well as public and private institutions in Ohio, including the John Glenn College of Public Affairs and the Kirwan Institution for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at the Ohio State University, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland State University, Health Policy Institute of Ohio, and the Ohio Civil Rights Commission.

Ohio has a rich history when it comes to the progress, and challenges, of African Americans dating back to slavery. As a result of Ohio's social stance as an anti-slavery state, Ohio was a destination for a number of people who escaped slavery before the Civil war and played a significant role in helping more people escape to freedom in the early 1800's. Ohio had the most extensive Underground Railroad network of any other state, with an estimated 3000 miles of routes used by runaways and more than twenty points of entry on the Ohio River.

Additionally, Ohio is home to some of the world's most notable individuals: George Washington Williams, originally born in Pennsylvania, moved to Cincinnati and became the first African-American man elected to the Ohio Legislature in 1879. Jesse Owens, who grew up in Cleveland, won four gold medals at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. The late Toni Morrison, from Lorain, Ohio became the first African-American woman to receive the Nobel Prize in literature. Stephanie Tubbs Jones, represented the east side of Cleveland in the United States House of Representatives from 1999 to 2008, and was the first African-American woman elected to Congress from Ohio.

African Americans have made significant contributions to both Ohio, and the United States, that changed society as we know it. For example, in 1932, Garrett Morgan, an African American man patented an electric automatic traffic signal (stoplight). Henry Sampson, Jr, invented cell phone technology. After testing in April of 1973, his invention made advanced telecommunication possible. Lee Burridge invented the typewriter. Otis Boykin invented the pacemaker. Marie Van Brittan Brown invented closed circuit television security. Each of these inventions we still use today and they help our society run more effectively and efficiently.

Black history is everyone's history and encompasses so much greatness that pushes everyone forward. This study will not only aid in the growth of the African American community, but our state as a whole to ensure that all Ohioans have the necessary tools needed to create better lives. We are stronger when we work together to solve problems that disproportionately impact groups of our population. Without an honest conversation about the issues and challenges presented to African Americans in our state, all Ohioans risk falling behind.

Chairman Dolan and, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Finance committee, this concludes my testimony and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.