



Senator Hearcel F. Craig
15th Senate District

Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
Senate Bill 31 Sponsor Testimony
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Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chair McColley and members of the Senate Government Oversight Reform Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony today on Senate Bill 31. This piece of legislation honors 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, a prominent African American who was born in 1819 in Richmond, Virginia and moved to Columbus when he was 18 years old. Here, Poindexter wore many hats: He was an esteemed clergyman, abolitionist, politician and a civil rights activist. He officiated services at Second Baptist Church when a minister was unavailable. He created the Anti-Slavery Baptist Church when he discovered a family of slave holders at Second Baptist. Under 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 was heavily involved in the Underground Railroad. He personally paid for wagons and horses that aided 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 use their newly obtained right to vote. The Republican Party then nominated Poindexter for a seat in the Ohio House of Representatives. In 1880, Poindexter also 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.

More than 30 years later in 1940, Poindexter Village opened on North Champion Avenue in Columbus' Near East Side. It was the second community housing development in the nation and part of FDR's New Deal, which 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 influential artists, social activists, athletes and political and national leaders in our state. These include Angela Pace, whom Columbus citizens watched as a former anchorwoman, and now the director of community affairs, for Channel 10 news. When visiting the Kings Arts Complex, you can marvel at the powerful Afrocentric artwork that former resident Aminah Robinson created. 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. Many Americans watched Edward "Skip" Young play for the Boston Celtics. 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. The sense of community was instilled within Poindexter Village and its influence can be seen across the country.

The vibrant history of Poindexter Village still lives on today. However, the community has changed. 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 of what the Black community was like in the 1940s and 1950s.

I wanted to take a moment to thank Chairwoman Roegner and the members of the committee for the opportunity to consider this legislation. I welcome any questions you might have at this time.