

Thank you for allowing me time to speak today in support of HB340. My name is Sarah Richardt and I am the executive Director of the Kelton House Museum and Garden, an underground railroad site and local history museum. But I choose not to be the face of the underground railroad for the Kelton House I brought with me the portrait of Martha Hartway, a freedom Seeker in Columbus, who is a much more important figure.

Awareness months are an important tool to highlight cultural and historic issues. Although the underground railroad is a known issue and subject taught in schools often it is just a brief chapter forgotten after the next quiz. The passing of HB 340 will spotlight the history and historic sites in the state of Ohio that teach about the Underground Railroad along with the stories of the freedom seekers and abolitionists.

Fernando and Sophia Kelton were abolitionists in Columbus, OH. Their home, built in 1852, is just one mile from where we currently stand. In 1976, the Kelton House was donated to the Columbus Foundation by their granddaughter Grace Kelton and is run by the Junior League of Columbus as a museum focusing on decorative arts and local history. As a privately funded museum and historic site the Junior League of Columbus continues to raise money to preserve this important story and the site in which the story lies. The Kelton House Underground Railroad Learning Station was created in 2002 and since then has taught approximately 4000 students per year about the Underground Railroad. Last month alone, over 1000 students returned for in person learning at the Kelton House. But even with all of the fourth graders attending, people in Columbus do not know about the history here of the Underground railroad. They do not know about the Kelton's contribution and most importantly they do not know the story of Martha and Pearl

Hartway's journey from a plantation in Virginia to find freedom. Martha left that plantation at the young ages of 10 and 14 and we are honored to tell that story every day. Martha not only traveled along the Underground Railroad, she then stayed with the Keltons for over a decade, living with the Keltons as one of their own children, even marrying in the front parlor at 586 E. Town St. officiated by Reverend James Poindexter.

Designating September as *International Underground Railroad Month* is a powerful step to call attention to this point in history that brings together people of multiple religions, race, and heritage in order to right an injustice. The simple 25 words of HB 340 has the power to capture the attention of the state, even for just 30 days, to continue the stories told by Frederick Douglass, Wibur Siebert, and Levi Coffin.

The Junior League of Columbus and the Kelton House Museum and garden has actively told the story of the Keltons and Hartways for 45 years. We will continue our commitment to preserve and educate about the underground railroad the passage of HB 340 will make teaching that story easier.

Thank you for your time and attention today and please consider this an invitation to visit the Kelton House Museum and Garden.