



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**Minority whip  
Paula Hicks-Hudson  
House District 44**

**Erica C. Crawley  
Franklin County Commissioner**

#### **House Bill 238 Sponsor Testimony**

Chairman Hoagland, Vice-Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 238, which will designate July 28th as “Buffalo Soldiers Day” in Ohio.

After the ending of the Civil War in 1865, there was a need for a peacetime Military as part of the reconstruction period to bring together the North and the South. On July 28, 1866, recognizing the contributions of the more than 180,000 Black Americans who fought to preserve the Union during the Civil War, the 39th United States Congress passed a bill titled: "An Act to Increase and Fix the Military Establishment of the United States." That bill created 60 Military Regiments, 6 of which were all Black Army Regiments. Of those six units, two were Cavalry and four were Infantry regiments, which eventually became the most highly decorated units in American military history during that time.

These regiments of African American men, later known as Buffalo Soldiers, served on the western frontier, engaged in a protection mission of the United States. For more than two decades in the late 19th century, the 9th and 10th cavalries engaged in military campaigns for the protection of Native American Reservations on the Plains and across the Southwest. The Buffalo Soldiers also captured horse and cattle thieves, enforced Marshall Law in cities that were lawless, guarded the southern U.S. borders, built roads, and protected the U.S. mail, stagecoaches, and wagon trains, all while contending with challenging terrain, inadequate supplies, and discrimination. During a battle in 1867 near Fort Hays, Kansas, Cheyenne warriors remarked that the black American soldiers fought as fiercely and with as much strength as a buffalo. Hence, the Buffalo Soldiers wore their nickname as a badge of honor.

While the Buffalo Soldiers blazed many significant trails in the history of the American frontier, their achievements were not limited to the western United States. Members of these regiments

also answered the call to duty in places as far-flung as Cuba, Mexico, and the Philippines. They continued to prove their courage through two world wars and the conflict in Korea. In 1948, President Harry Truman issued an executive order eliminating racial segregation and discrimination in America's armed forces. In 1952, the military was integrated, eliminating black and white segregated regiments. By the time of their integration, the Buffalo Soldiers had earned twenty-four Congressional Medals of Honor, including honors from France, as well as numerous campaign and unit citations.

In honor of the Buffalo Soldiers' significant contributions to the United States, on July 24, 1992, by Proclamation 6461, President George H. W. Bush, proclaimed July 28, 1992, National Buffalo Soldiers Day. On July 28, 2021, we will celebrate the 29th Anniversary of National Buffalo Soldiers Day. With recent passing of General Colin Powell, it is important to note that he was also a Buffalo Soldier and instrumental in President Bush's proclamation.

This past February, we honored the passing of one of the last Buffalo Soldiers here in Ohio, Mr. John B. Williams, a constituent of the 26th district who was committed to service and community as a public servant, patriot, and civil rights advocate.

Mr. Williams was drafted into the Army in 1943 and assigned to the 28th Horse Ridden Cavalry, where he joined many other African American men as a Buffalo Soldier. Mr. Williams served in combat in North Africa, Italy, France, Germany, and Belgium, earning the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with Silver Star; the WWII Victory Medal with Bronze Star; the American Campaign Medal; the Good Conduct Medal; and the Knight of the Legion of Honor Medal – French Republic.

After returning home to Columbus from his Army service, Mr. Williams graduated from The Ohio State University and went on to work for the U.S. Postal Service. He soon realized that he was not getting promoted despite his diligent work ethic, and he filed a class action complaint of discrimination in 1974 that led to an affirmative action plan to create equal employment opportunities for minorities and women.

As a military veteran and civil rights advocate, Mr. Williams' contributions earned him inductions into both the Ohio Civil Rights Hall of Fame and the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame. It is his contributions that are a true reflection of the heart of Buffalo Soldiers, to educate future generations on the importance of service to others.

It is vital to the preservation of the history of Buffalo Soldiers and the contributions they made to American history that we honor them today with recognition on July 28th. Despite suffering discrimination that plagued Black Americans during the days of segregation, the members of the Cavalry and Infantry regiments served with pride and distinction.

While the history of the Buffalo Soldiers is rich and integral part of U.S. History, the current members of the various Buffalo Soldier Posts are still actively engaged in our communities throughout Ohio and the Nation. There are currently four organizations: Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton and Toledo. Each provide community service activities such as mentoring young

people, providing support to veterans or scholarships to graduating students. Soldiers continue to live up to the motto, "Deeds Not Words".

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak on behalf of this legislation, Commissioner Crawley and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.