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**State Representative David Leland**

**State Representative Thomas West**

**Sponsor Testimony – House Bill 59**

Good Morning Chairman Uecker, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Local Government, Public Safety and Veterans Affairs Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony this morning on House Bill 59, legislation that will designate October 7th as “Moses Fleetwood Walker Day.”

In the Leland household, there are two season: Winter and Baseball Season. And, we are now entering baseball season.

Ohio has been a leader in major league baseball for a long time. The first major league professional baseball team was the Cincinnati Reds in 1869. The first night baseball in the United States of America… was in Columbus, Ohio in the minor leagues, and then in Cincinnati at Crosley Field. But, we had another leader... another pioneer in baseball, and that’s what House Bill 59 is all about. It’s about designating October 7th as Moses Fleetwood Walker Day. Moses Fleetwood Walker was the first African American to play major league baseball.  He was born in Mount Pleasant, Ohio on October 7th 1856 he then moved to Steubenville, Ohio. After that he went to Oberlin College where he was also the first African American to play baseball, and in 1884 he played for the Toledo Blue Stockings, which was a part of the Western League--the precursor to today’s American League.

Fleet was an excellent catcher and performed well while he was at bat. However, his baseball career and life were devastated by rising racism and discrimination. He was refused services granted to his white teammates, opposing managers ousted Walker from catcher so that white batters would not need to be so close to him, and some opponents refused to event play if Fleet was on the same field. While racial attitudes hardened and segregation became the pattern of American society, Fleet experienced such incredible harassment from his teammates, coaches, and opponents that he was soon driven out of the major leagues. He later died in Cleveland on May 11, 1924 at the age of 67.

While Jackie Robinson is frequently credited with being the first African American player to play professional baseball, it was actually Walker who first was contracted by the Toledo Blue Stockings more than 60 years earlier. While we can never right the injustices experienced by Moses, by designating October 7th as Fleetwood Moses Walker Day, we can properly honor the legacy of a pioneer for civil rights.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to taking your questions.