



Senate Government Reform & Oversight Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chairwoman

Dr. Charles A. Wash, Jr., Executive Director
National Afro-American Museum & Cultural Center
Proponent Testimony – Senate Bill 31

February 24, 2021

Chairwoman Roegner and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of Senate Bill 31, which proposes to include the remaining buildings from the Poindexter Village public housing complex, situated just two short miles from where we stand today, to the Ohio History Connection's historic site system. Before I begin, I want to thank Sen. Hearcel Craig for his leadership on getting this legislation introduced and I know he is as passionate as anyone about seeing the memories and legacy of Poindexter Village preserved for future generations.

My name is Dr. Charles Wash and I serve as the Executive Director of the National Afro-American Museum & Cultural Center located in Wilberforce, Ohio, which is a division and site of the Ohio History Connection. I have also been charged with spearheading the efforts of the Ohio History Connection to revitalize the two remaining buildings of Poindexter Village and work with our community partners, the James Preston Poindexter Foundation, to develop and share this important history.

Our efforts around the Poindexter Village historic site revolve not only around preserving the site and creating an interactive museum and cultural learning center, but also to assist our community colleagues to become our site management partner. Because the history surrounding Poindexter Village and Near East Side Columbus is such an important aspect of Ohio history we view this project as one of the top priorities within our organization.

There are two main aspects of the project for us; the tangible restoration of the buildings and the sharing the intangible legacy and history of the site itself. The first aspect deals with securing the exterior of the buildings so as to halt any further deterioration and damage caused by the elements, neglect and time. This includes the restoration of the exterior to the time of the 1940s when the site opened as one of the earliest public housing complexes in the nation. Tied to the focus on these tangible aspects of the project are the many artifacts that will be collected to help us capture an array of stories otherwise forgotten by history. It must be understood that

Poindexter Village was an absolute bustling hub of artistic and creative energy that rivaled what we saw in Harlem, New York, Baltimore, Maryland or even Oakland, California at the time. As a result, by collecting the material culture related to Poindexter Village we will better place its relevance and history within the larger context of not only Ohio, but also American history.

Connecting Poindexter Village to the larger narrative of Ohio and American history is vital. It provides us with an opportunity to demonstrate how African American culture developed and evolved over time within a relatively hostile socio-political environment of Ohio. Poindexter Village is a clear example of courage and triumph that is frequently overshadowed by images of despair and anguish that incorrectly characterize the African American experience in America. This is truly an amazing and necessary story to preserve and share.

The second aspect of the project for which we are involved, deals with the intangible legacy and memories of not only Poindexter Village as a public housing complex, but also the surrounding community and its role in Ohio history. This is where our work with the James Preston Poindexter Foundation becomes essential. We are working with the Foundation to implement an interpretive plan that seeks to tell the full and complete story of Rev. Dr. James Preston Poindexter, the namesake of this public housing community, as well as the indomitable story of African Americans in Ohio. It is this story that helps us achieve our goals of being more thorough and inclusive in presenting authentic Ohio history to the public.

Poindexter Village is more than a historic public housing complex, it is a symbol of perseverance and a sustained struggle for freedom and equality. This struggle is not only one by African Americans, but it is shared among all Americans. This is a universal story for which we believe all Ohioans will recognize and benefit. So, it is my pleasure to support Senate Bill 31 to add the remaining two buildings from Poindexter Village public housing complex to the Ohio History Connection's historic site system.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this with you today. I'll be happy to answer any questions you have of me.

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