

Representative Willis E. Blackshear Jr. – Witness Testimony for HB 137

Chairman Hoagland, Vice-Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Veterans and Public Safety Committee, I come before you today to talk about House Bill 137, which would designate March 29th as “Ohio Tuskegee Airman Day”. I am proud to be reintroducing this bill with Representative Upchurch as we highlight the bravery and heroism of the first African American military aviators in the United States Armed forces at a time when many people thought African Americans lacked the intelligence, skills, courage, and patriotism to accomplish the necessary duties of a military pilot. Also, I must add, this bill is even more special for Ohio because we had two of our very own, Jerome and John Ellis Edwards, brothers from Steubenville who were Tuskegee Airmen. So, this isn’t just American history but Ohio history. The Tuskegee Airmen accomplished a lot in the mist of adversity, they completed a little over 1500 combat missions, 179 bomber escort missions with a good record of protection, and because of all their accomplishments they received 8 purple hearts, 744 Air Medals, 14 Bronze Stars, 96 Distinguished Flying Crosses, at least one Silver Star and a list of many more awards that I can go on and on about.

I just want to thank this Committee for hearing our testimony and with that I will leave room for questions.