

State of Kansas



Dr. Valdenia C. Winn Assistant Minority Leader

HB 2088: AN ACT concerning the state capitol; relating to permanent displays and murals; directing the Capitol Preservation Committee to develop and approve plans for a mural honoring the 1st Kansas (Colored) Voluntary Infantry regiment; creating the 1st Kansas Colored Voluntary Infantry regiment mural fund; amending K.S.A. 75-2264 and repealing the existing section.

Provided by
Rep. Valdenia C. Winn, 34th District
Kansas House of Representatives
To
Committee on
Veterans and Military Affairs
January 26, 2023

Chairman Ellis, Vice-Chairman Dodson, and Ranking Member Weigel:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today. I stand here before you as a proponent for HB 2088. This bill directs the Capitol Preservation Committee to develop and approve plans for a mural honoring the 1st Kansas Colored Voluntary Infantry Regiment and to create a mural fund for the purpose of financing the creation or installation of the mural. Furthermore, I note that no public funding will be used for the mural. Instead, HB 2088 authorizes the Secretary of Administration to receive donations to finance the creation and installation of the mural.

Nine years ago, renovations were completed that brought this capitol back to its former glory and we are all honored to be able to serve in these halls. This Capitol honors our history. This bill honors the 1st Kansas Colored Voluntary Infantry Regiment with a mural. We are graced with the awe-inspiring John Steuart Curry's "Tragic Prelude" (located on the second floor of the Capitol) illustrating the coming of the Civil War to end enslavement. A mural honoring the 1st Kansas Volunteers would complement that mural and expand the knowledge of and honor more of Kansas Civil War history. Specifically, this mural would honor the first African American regiment from a northern state, Kansas.

In August 1862, at Fort Scott Kansas, United States Senator, Kansas Abolitionist and General in the Kansas state militia recruited and organized the 1st Kansas Colored Voluntary Infantry. One source stated that they engaged in combat even before the regiment was mustered into service. However, on October 29, 1862 they saw action at the Battle of Island Mound, Missouri (near Butler, Missouri) with a unit of Confederates that resulted in the first combat death of African American soldiers in the Civil War. At the battle, 225 African American troops drove off 500 confederate guerrillas. Thus, the 1st Kansas Colored Infantry was the first African American unit to serve in the Civil War. This was more than eight months before the famed assault on Fort Wagner in South Carolina by the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, chronicled in the 1989 film, "Glory".

Following the Emancipation Proclamation, the regiment was mustered into federal service on January 13, 1863 and was redesignated as the 79th United States Colored Infantry Regiment on December 13, 1864. Not only did the regiment serve valiantly at the Battle of Island Mound, but also at many battles. Just to name a few: the battles at Reeder Farm; Cabin Creek-Cherokee Nation; Honey Springs-Native American territory; Lawrence, Kansas; Poison Spring, Arkansas; Fort Gibson, Cherokee Nation; and Timber Creek, Cherokee Nation.

The Battle of Cabin Creek was the first during the Civil War that black and white soldiers were joined into action. At the Battle of Poison Springs, a large number of men were massacred. This regiment suffered heavy losses amounting to nearly one half of their men. Their sacrifices were steep, not to mention the confederate threats of execution on the battlefield or being taken back into enslavement. The massacre at Poison Spring was similar to the massacre of black soldiers at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, April 12, 1864 by confederate soldiers under the command of General Nathan Bedford Forrest.

HB2088 is about honoring those who gave their last full measure of devotion and ultimate sacrifice to serving the United States of America. A mural honoring this Regiment will not only honor the sacrifices of the 1st Kansas Colored Infantry, but will also further recognize Kansas' role in holding the union together.

If you would like to learn more, there are thousands of sources but I have referenced a few sources in my testimony:

The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1961-1865 by Dudley Cornish;

Soldiers in the Army of Freedom: The 1st Kansas Colored, the Civil War's First African American Combat Unit by Michael Spurgeon;

Like Men of War: Black Troops in the Civil War, 1862-1865 by Noah Andre Trudeau;

The Slaves' War: The Civil War in the Words of Former Slaves by Andrew Ward.

Thank you.

Representative Valdenia C. Winn, 34th District, Kansas House of Representatives

