

HOUSE No. 4312

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, February 8, 2024.

The committee on Tourism, Arts and Cultural Development to whom was referred the petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 3252) of Bud L. Williams for legislation to authorize the acquisition of land, the development and construction of an underground railroad, civil rights and black heritage museum and cultural center in the city of Springfield, reports recommending that the accompanying bill (House, No. 4312) ought to pass.

For the committee,

MINDY DOMB.

HOUSE No. 4312

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Third General Court
(2023-2024)**

An Act to study the development of an underground railroad, civil rights and black heritage museum and cultural center in Springfield.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 (a) There shall be established, pursuant to section 2A of chapter 4 of the General Laws, a
2 special legislative commission to be known as the underground railroad, civil rights and black
3 heritage museum and cultural center task force. The task force shall study the creation of an
4 underground railroad, civil rights and black heritage museum and cultural center in the city of
5 Springfield to serve: (1) as a catharsis important to alleviate some of the lingering negative
6 effects of the institution of slavery and the discrimination practiced against African Americans,
7 which had state and federal governmental statutory sanction; and (2) to enhance regional tourism
8 and attract conferences and conventions to the city of Springfield.

9 (b) The task force shall: (A) study and review the history of slavery, the underground
10 railroad and the fight for civil rights in western Massachusetts; and (B) make recommendations
11 regarding: (i) the location of the center, with a focus on sites in the city of Springfield
12 specifically; (ii) potential partner institutions and key stakeholders that may be suitable to
13 operate or partner with the center; (iv) the potential cost, timeline for operations and funding

14 mechanisms for the center; and (v) the criteria, requirements, duties and financial responsibilities
15 of an entity to operate and maintain the center.

16 (c) The task force shall consist of the following members: the chairs of the joint
17 committee on racial equity, civil rights, and inclusion, who shall serve as co-chairs; 1 member to
18 be appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives; 1 member to be appointed by the
19 president of the senate; the minority leader of the house of representatives, or a designee; the
20 minority leader of the senate, or a designee; 1 member to be appointed by the governor; the
21 president of the Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau, Inc., or a designee; the
22 mayor of Springfield, or a designee; the executive director of the Museum of African American
23 History, Incorporated in Boston and Nantucket, or a designee; the executive director of the
24 Massachusetts cultural council, or a designee; and the chair of the black advisory commission
25 established by Executive Order 575, or a designee.

26 (d) The task force may seek assistance from design and consulting firms regarding the
27 building, operation and placement of a center, subject to appropriation.

28 (e) The schedule and work of the task force shall be dictated by the chairs. All members
29 of the task force shall have a vote, and a simple majority vote shall be required for all actions of
30 the task force. The chairs may create subgroups to focus on specific responsibilities of the task
31 force. The chairs may invite guests to participate in meetings as speakers.

32 (f) The task force shall file a report with its findings, and any recommendations, with the
33 clerks of the house of representatives and senate not later than July 31, 2025.