

To: Sen. Rick Billinger, Chair of Senate Ways and Means Committee
Re: **SB 290** – Written Testimony – **Urging more specificity in bill before passage**
From: Dr. Tai S. Edwards
Douglas County Resident, Professional Historian, and Long-time Collaborator with Rev. Stacy R. Evans of Western University Association of the AME Church on Quindaro Preservation
Date: March 13, 2025

Chair Billinger and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for your commitment to safeguarding Quindaro! I am a historian and one of many partners who have worked with Rev. Stacy R. Evans of the Western University Association of the AME Church to support preservation of the Quindaro townsite in Kansas City, Kansas, as well as expand awareness of the town's rich history, and increase public access to the site.

Senate bill 290 needs to clarify how funding would be allocated based on land ownership in the Quindaro townsite.

First, it should be acknowledged that **Quindaro is directly connected to Wyandot history** – and the town is named for Nancy Quindaro Brown, a Wyandot woman. The Treaty of 1855 dissolved the Wyandot Nation's tribal government and divided their Kansas reservation into allotments, individually-owned tracts assigned to Wyandot citizens. The Treaty guaranteed that Wyandot allottees (as they were known) would not have to pay local or state taxes on their land for five years *after* Kansas statehood. However, beginning in 1860 (before statehood!) county governments began selling Wyandot allotments for allegedly unpaid taxes. Wyandot citizens had co-founded Quindaro on Wyandot allotments in 1857. But by 1866 most Wyandot land, including in Quindaro, no longer belonged to Wyandot citizens.¹

This is how Quindaro eventually became the home of a Freedman's School after the Civil War, followed by **Western University** – the first HBCU (Historically Black College/University) west of the Mississippi River and the only one ever in Kansas, which was **partially funded by the Kansas legislature**.² Today, the majority of the Quindaro townsite ruins are located on land owned by the Western University Association of the AME Church.

¹ Paul Wallace Gates, *Fifty Million Acres: Conflicts Over Kansas Land Policy, 1854-1890* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 46-47; John Nichols, "Canada to Kansas: The Wyandot Origins of Quindaro," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains*, vol. 42, No. 2 (Summer 2019), 80-89.

² Kim Cary Warren, *The Quest for Citizenship: African American and Native American Education in Kansas, 1880-1935* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 136-137.

Therefore, **in the context of SB 290:**

- **Any appropriations** for the “Quindaro ruins archaeological park project,” and/or drafting of a “master plan” **must be allocated proportionally to Quindaro townsite property owners, of which the Western University Association of the AME Church is the majority holder.**
 - In other words, language in the bill needs to specify that the majority of funding (even if administered by the state historical society), should be distributed to, through, or in direct consultation with the Western University Association of the AME Church.
- If the legislature determines there is a need for further study and creates a **taskforce or other body, representation should include Wyandot Nation of Kansas, as well as proportional representation based on land ownership**, reflecting Western University Association of the AME Church’s majority status.³

Finally, a **public-private partnership** for land preservation already exists in Kansas that could serve as a model for similar work at the Quindaro townsite: the **Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, which is privately owned by The Nature Conservancy and co-managed with the National Park Service.**⁴ Former Governor Kathleen Sebelius, former Secretary of Wildlife and Parks (and governor) Mike Hayden, former U.S. Senator Nancy Kassebaum Baker, as well as Alan Pollom of the Nature Conservancy, were among the leaders who crafted this partnership and could advise on **replicating the process for Quindaro.**

Thank you for your commitment to Quindaro preservation!

Sincerely,

Dr. Tai S. Edwards
Historian and Educator
Douglas County Resident (Senate District 19)

³ Wyandot Nation of Kansas, <https://www.wyandot.org/wyandotKS/>.

⁴ “The U.S.’s only national park unit dedicated to the tallgrass prairie, privately owned by The Nature Conservancy and co-managed with the National Park Service,” <https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/places-we-protect/tallgrass-prairie-national-preserve/>.