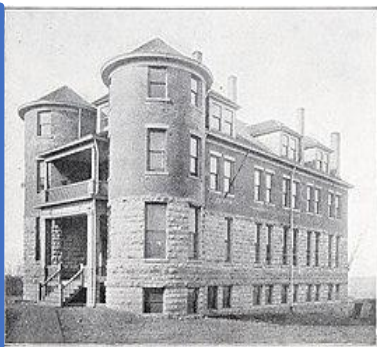


WESTERN UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION OF THE A.M.E. CHURCH

WU
Western
University



1111 N. 8th Street
Kansas City, Kansas 66101

To: Senator Rick Billinger, Chair
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Re: SB 290 – Oral Testimony - Neutral
From: Rev. Stacy R. Evans, Chairperson
Western University Association of the A.M.E. Church
Date: March 17, 2025

Greetings Chairman Billinger and members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present this testimony regarding Senate Bill No. 290. My name is Rev. Stacy R. Evans, and I have served as Chairperson of the Western University Association of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church for 16 years. Since 1881, the Western University Association of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church has been the majority landowner and steward of the Quindaro Ruins. I am also a senior pastor in the A.M.E. Church with over 25 years of experience, holding all requisite degrees, licenses, and responsibilities.

I am here today to provide testimony on behalf of the Western University Association of the A.M.E. Church regarding the Quindaro Ruins Archaeological Park project proposed in SB 290. As of this testimony submission, we take a neutral position on SB 290.

Background on Ownership and Stewardship

The Quindaro Ruins, located in Northeast Kansas City, Kansas, is 70.5 acres of a Federally Designated National Commemorative Site and a historically significant Underground Railroad property. Approximately 95% of this site is privately owned by the Western University Association of the A.M.E. Church Board. Over the years, we have worked diligently to preserve this site and foster community engagement through partnerships with local, state, and federal institutions.

Our stewardship includes maintaining legal documentation such as current title searches, managing grants from organizations like the Sunflower Foundation and the Mellon Foundation (through UMKC), collaborating with National Parks evaluations, and publishing research through institutions such as Johnson County Community College. In the March 11th, 2025 HB 2398 public hearing there was some discrepancy as to how large the historical area of the property is. Today I bring evidence of its size in a supporting document from the National Historic Landmark application, prepared by Rosin Preservation for the National Parks Service. (See attachment # 1)

There was also some question as to whether a landowner can maintain ownership should the land become a national park. Today I am providing the actual House of Representatives bill presented to the U.S. Congress as evidence that a landowner can maintain ownership as well as receive funds. (See attachment # 2)

Finally, I would like to submit evidence of the continuous work that has been done by the A.M.E. church and its community partners over the last 16 years. These include a two-day symposium and community collaboration in which involved entities met monthly for one year. The symposium took place April 19th - 21, 2018, with Freedom's Frontier, Marvin Robinson, the Hope Family, the Old Quindaro Museum, The Vernon Center, the Wyandot Nation Native American tribe, UMKC, Johnson County Community College, Public Libraries of Kansas City Kansas and Kansas City MO, and the Unified Government of Wyandotte County. Approximately 1000 people attended. (See attachment # 3)

We have also organized on July 15th & 16th 2022, and Sept. 30th & Oct. 7th 2022, clearing, cleaning and improvement projects that involved various colleges and universities, community partners and people who traveled from as far as Chicago to help clear brush. (See attachments # 4 & 5) Another clearing, cleaning project celebrating Juneteenth was held on June 3rd, 2023. (See attachment # 6)

Currently, four community meetings are underway to gather input for a professional concept design plan to highlight and augment existing structures, foundations and trails with the initial kick-off on Nov. 8th 2024. The second community meeting was on Feb. 24th, 2025. A third meeting is planned within the next month. An additional meeting is planned thereafter. (See attachments # 7 & 8). Also included are Vireo concept design plan scope and estimate, ariel picture of the site, maps and list of foundation features. (see attachments 9, 10, 11, 12)

We continue to support efforts to honor pioneers like Marvin Robinson and Jesse Hope for their contributions to saving and restoring Quindaro.

Concerns Regarding SB 290

While we appreciate the legislature's intent to allocate \$600,000 for developing a master plan for the Quindaro Ruins Archaeological Park, we have concerns about the lack of acknowledgment of our ownership and ongoing efforts to preserve this property. The current language in SB 290 does not recognize that this land is privately owned by our organization.

Additionally:

- We are already conducting a professional concept design plan facilitated by Vireo Landscape, Architecture, Planning and Design Firm to enhance trails, signage, and other modern amenities.

The project is scheduled to be completed by the 2026 World Cup. (See attachment #)
duplication from above.

- We do not intend to relinquish ownership, but are committed to preserving and developing this historic site responsibly.
- We look forward to continued collaborations with stakeholders like the Kansas Historic Society, to ensure any state-funded initiatives align with our vision for Quindaro's future.

Position on HB 2398

As stated, our position is neutral but can be moved to full support with these considerations:

1. **Acknowledgment of Ownership:** The bill should explicitly recognize that the Quindaro Ruins are privately owned by the Western University Association of the A.M.E. Church Board.
2. **Inclusion in Decision-Making:** Since we own the land, and we already have a plan in progress, our organization should be included in discussions alongside the Kansas Historical Society regarding how funds are allocated and utilized for Quindaro.
3. **Alignment with Existing Plans:** State-funded initiatives should support and complement our ongoing preservation efforts and development plans.

Conclusion

In summary, while we commend the legislature's commitment to preserving Kansas' historical landmarks through SB 290, we urge amendments that acknowledge our ownership and allow meaningful collaboration in the decision-making processes. With these adjustments, we can fully support this bill and work together to ensure Quindaro's legacy is preserved for generations to come.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share our perspectives.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Stacy R. Evans, Chairperson

Western University Association of the A.M.E. Church



FIFTH EPISCOPAL DISTRICT OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Rt. Rev. Francine A. Brookins, Presiding Prelate

9431 Haven Ave., Suite 100 – PMB 127, Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91730

To: Senator Rick Billinger, Chair
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Re: SB 290 – Written Only Testimony - Neutral
From: Bishop Francine Brookins
Presiding Prelate of the Fifth Episcopal District
Date: March 17, 2025

Greetings Chairman Billinger and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my wholehearted support for Rev. Stacy R. Evans and the Western University Association of the African Methodist Episcopal Church regarding Senate Bill No. 290. As the Bishop of the 5th Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, I represent over 300 churches across 16 states, encompassing a significant portion of the AME Church's global membership of approximately 2.5 million adherents. This district alone includes tens of thousands of members who work together on a common mission.

The Rev. Stacy R. Evans, as the Chairperson of the Western University Association of the A.M.E. Church, has been a stalwart steward of the Quindaro Ruins, a site of immense historical significance as a Federally Designated National Commemorative Site and an Underground Railroad property. The AME Church's commitment to preserving such sites aligns with our broader mission to honor our heritage and contribute to the cultural richness of our communities.

I strongly endorse Rev. Evans' efforts to ensure that any legislative actions, such as those proposed in SB 290, acknowledge the private ownership of the Quindaro Ruins by the Western University Association of the A.M.E. Church. It is crucial that our organization is included in decision-making processes regarding the allocation and utilization of state funds for this project. This collaboration will ensure that state-funded initiatives complement our ongoing preservation efforts and development plans.

The AME Church's history and mission emphasize community engagement, preservation of historical sites, and collaboration with local and national institutions. By supporting Rev. Evans and the Western University Association, we reinforce these values and contribute to the preservation of Kansas' historical landmarks.

I urge you to consider the amendments suggested by Rev. Evans to ensure that SB 290 aligns with our vision for Quindaro's future. With these adjustments, we can fully support this bill and work together to preserve Quindaro's legacy for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Francine Brookins

Bishop Francine A. Brookins
Presiding Prelate of the Fifth Episcopal District