



City of Cleveland
Justin M. Bibb, Mayor

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October 24, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

Thank you for your steady yet bold leadership during these challenging times. As Mayor of Cleveland, I see the positive impact your presidency is having on the people in my city every day.

Today, I am writing in support of a leader who has shaped Cleveland for the better: Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, Jr. I proudly nominate Rev. Moss, Jr. for the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Rev. Moss's awards, accomplishments, and accolades are many. As a young man, he organized lunch counter sit-ins and was arrested protesting segregation at the Georgia State Capitol Building. He marched with late Congressman John Lewis in Selma, helping lay the groundwork for the Voting Rights Act in 1965. He served as the Southwest Ohio regional director of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He contributed to some of the most important moments in our nation's recent history.

Rev. Moss' impact on the state of Ohio and the city of Cleveland is just as profound. As pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church outside of Cincinnati, Ohio, Rev. Moss connected Northerners to the struggle of Black people in the Deep South. Realizing that the North was not immune from segregation, racism, and poverty, he organized the Greater Cincinnati community, setting the stage for the election of the city's first Black mayor, Ted Berry, in 1972.

When he came to Cleveland in 1975 to serve as pastor of Olivet Institutional Baptist Church, Rev. Moss soon became one of our most influential civic leaders. His years in the civil rights movement taught Rev. Moss that freedom of mobility is essential to a person's economic security. He led the call from the pulpit to create the Greater Cleveland Regional Transportation Authority (GCRTA) in 1975. Today, the GCRTA remains one of the nation's largest public transit systems, connecting more than 19 million riders a year.



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In the 1980s, Rev. Moss sat on the Greater Cleveland Roundtable, a group of civic leaders who convened to improve race relations. One of the roundtable's first missions was to successfully pass a critical levy for the Cleveland Metropolitan School District - the first levy in 12 years. Rev. Moss also pushed the city to tear down abandoned homes and build new housing to revitalize the neighborhood surrounding Olivet Church. In 1997, he worked with University Hospitals to build the Otis Moss Jr. Health Center across from the church. The Center continues to provide high-quality medical care, workforce training programs, legal assistance, housing counseling, food assistance and more to thousands of residents.

As a sharecropper in rural Georgia, Rev. Moss's father, Otis Moss, Sr. was stopped from voting under oppressive Jim Crow rule. Seeing the forces of voter suppression newly emboldened in 2020, Rev. Moss and his son, Rev. Otis Moss, III, produced a short film about Moss, Sr.'s struggle to vote. Combined with voting resources, they distributed the film to churches in communities at risk for disenfranchisement.

One letter cannot convey the importance of Rev. Moss's legacy to Cleveland, Ohio, and the entire nation. His commitment to social justice pushed him to do more than preach the Gospel. His fingerprints can be found on nearly every victory for justice over the last 50 years. I can think of no more deserving American to be graced with the honor of the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Sincerely,

Justin M. Bibb
Mayor | City of Cleveland