

HOUSE No. 4840

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, December 24, 2025.

The committee on Tourism, Arts and Cultural Development, to whom was referred the petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 3601) 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. 4840) ought to pass.

For the committee,

SEAN GARBALLEY.

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In the One Hundred and Ninety-Fourth General Court
(2025-2026)

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

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

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

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

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

(f) The task force shall file a report with its findings, and any recommendations, with the clerks of the house of representatives and senate not later than July 31, 2027.