

**Statement of Idotha Bootsie Neal
President, Wright Dunbar Inc.**

“Census Data and Its Use in the Development Process”

**Information Policy, Census and National Archives Subcommittee
Oversight and Government Reform**

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John W Berry, Sr.

Wright Brothers Aviation Center

1000 Carillon Blvd.

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Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the Information Policy, Census and National Archives Subcommittee. Welcome to the City of Dayton, the birthplace of aviation, the center of innovation and the home of the Wright brothers and Paul Laurence Dunbar. My name is Idotha Bootsie Neal, President of Wright Dunbar, Inc. Wright Dunbar, Inc. is a private non-profit organization dedicated to the economic and community development of the historic commercial corridor of the Wright-Dunbar Village.

Congressman Turner, welcome home! I would like to thank you for inviting the congressional sub-committee to hold this hearing in Dayton, Ohio. I would also like to thank you for the hard work that you are doing to help save America's cities, which will aid in rebuilding and transforming neighborhoods.

The Wright-Dunbar neighborhood is where the Wright Brothers invented the plane and African American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar began his career.

For decades, Wright Dunbar was a thriving neighborhood with middle class families, and a strong, vibrant commercial corridor. During the devastating race riots in the mid-1960's, the Wright Dunbar community suffered significant disinvestment until the 1990's.

Under your leadership as Mayor of the City of Dayton, Congressman Turner, in partnership with me as an elected official on the Dayton City Commission, an important initiative was developed and called *Rehabarama* or *Citirama*. These programs were targeted in residential areas where housing stock was deteriorating, vacant lots were the norm, and high crime was simply a way of life. There were very few stores opened and little hope for any future commercial development.

In 1997, the City of Dayton targeted the Wright-Dunbar neighborhood for redevelopment and held the first ever "*Citirama*", a program which began to give way to rehabilitated or newly constructed homes. Prior to this City initiative, many empty abandoned lots and existing homes were valued at \$5000 or less. Since the *Citirama* initiative was launched, property values range from \$79,000 to \$225, 000.

Now, 10 years later, there are several housing construction projects still underway. Our partners include: ISUS, a charter school partially funded by Youthbuild, is building 70 new low to moderate homes in the area. The Innerwest Community Development Corporation is a joint venture that has built 70 newly constructed single family lease to purchase homes. Ecumenical Neighborhood Development Corporation, another community development partner, has built 50 new federally subsidized single family homes. And private sector developers are continuing to acquire lots in Wright-Dunbar to build single family market rate homes.

The 2000 census tract for the City of Dayton has already been discussed; however the future census data will clearly represent a reverse in the trend of families moving out of Wright-Dunbar to a shift in families returning to this historic urban neighborhood. At present the surrounding neighborhoods are attracting a diverse mix of families, young professionals and retirees. These families will need services and amenities to enhance their quality of life.

As stated earlier, the primary mission of Wright-Dunbar, Inc. is the redevelopment of the West Third Street commercial corridor within the historic district. Strong American neighborhoods are the key to rebuilding strong urban core cities. The probability of attracting businesses to this area would be significantly lower if the *Citirama* housing initiatives had not been implemented in 1997. Wright Dunbar, Inc. is working diligently to attract businesses that will bring necessary goods and services, along with employment opportunities for neighborhood residents which are critical components for stabilizing or transforming a neighborhood. These opportunities will positively stimulate not only the local economy, but the national economy as well.

Without the infusion of financial resources targeted to the areas where poverty exists, unemployment is a way of life, health challenges are a crisis, and housing and infrastructure is deteriorating, the future of America's core cities is dismal!

Census data clearly identifies the areas where the needs are the greatest. Congressman Turner, as you know, our decision to fund *Rehabarama* and *Citirama*'s throughout Dayton was based on this data.

Since 1997, the innerwest urban neighborhood of historic Wright-Dunbar received \$107 million of public and private sector resources. These resources were leveraged as a result of the initial investments made by the federal and local governments. The City of Dayton's *Rehabarama* and *Citirama* initiatives were the catalyst that ignited community development and those initiatives in turn, have ignited the momentum for commercial redevelopment and the potential for private sector investment.

Thank you Mr. Chair, members of the Committee, and a special thank you to Congressman Turner for allowing me to share this testimony with you today.