



February 16, 2026

Ohio Civil Rights Commission
c/o Hall of Fame Committee
30 E. Broad Street, 5th Fl.
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Members of the Selection Committee,

As members of the Gahanna City Council, we are honored to formally endorse the posthumous nomination of Cora May Jones Thurman for induction into the Ohio Civil Rights Hall of Fame.

Cora Thurman's life exemplified the advancement of civil rights in Ohio through education, leadership, and service. In 1913, she became the first African American graduate of Gahanna High School, demonstrating extraordinary determination at a time when educational access for Black students was severely limited. She earned a lifetime teaching certificate in 1915 and began a remarkable 41-year career in public education.

Throughout her career, Ms. Thurman repeatedly broke racial barriers. She was the first African American teacher in the Jackson County School System (1915), the first African American teacher in the Urbancrest Village School District (1917), and later its first African American principal/supervisor. In 1925, she joined Mansfield City Schools as one of its first African American teachers. From 1930 until her retirement in 1957, she served Columbus Public Schools as a special needs educator, developing innovative remedial reading methods that were shared statewide and beyond.

Her impact extended well beyond the classroom. One of her former students, Ellen Walker Craig-Jones, became the first African American woman elected mayor in the United States (Urbancrest, 1972–1975), reflecting the generational influence of Ms. Thurman's mentorship. In 1940, she and her students were selected to greet President Franklin D. Roosevelt during his visit to Columbus, underscoring her standing as a respected educator and community leader.

Committed to lifelong learning, Ms. Thurman earned a Bachelor's degree with honors (1944) and a Master's degree in Special Education (1946) from Hampton Institute. She also pursued studies at Capital University, The Ohio State University, Miami University, and Chicago State University, becoming one of the first African American women to attend Capital University and the first in her family to earn both a bachelor's and master's degree.

Her excellence was widely recognized. She was a national finalist for "Best Teacher of 1948," received the Sojourner Truth Award in 1956 for meritorious community service and advancing the status of women, and earned multiple commendations from the Columbus Board of Education. Her philanthropic efforts supported widows, orphans, and families in need, reflecting her belief that civil rights work is expressed through both leadership and service.

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In February 2026, the Gahanna City Council and Mayor adopted Resolution RES-0002-2026 honoring Cora Thurman's enduring contributions to education and equity. Her legacy reflects the very mission of the Ohio Civil Rights Hall of Fame: to recognize individuals whose work has significantly advanced civil rights and equality in our state.

For these reasons, we offer our endorsement of Cora Thurman's posthumous induction. Her impact on Ohio's educational system and on generations of Ohioans is historic, enduring, and has made Gahanna proud.

Respectfully submitted,

DRAFT



February 16, 2026

City of Columbus Office of Mayor Andrew J. Ginther
c/o Melanie Crabill, Columbus Hall of Fame
90 West Broad Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215-9005

Dear Mayor Ginther and Members of the Hall of Fame Selection Committee,

As members of the Gahanna City Council, we are honored to offer this letter of support for the posthumous nomination of Cora May Jones Thurman to the Columbus Hall of Fame.

Cora Thurman's life and legacy are deeply rooted in Columbus and reflect a lifetime of service that strengthened the fabric of our community. In 1913, she became the first African American graduate of Gahanna High School, demonstrating extraordinary determination at a time when educational access for Black students was severely limited. After earning a lifetime teaching certificate in 1915, she began a distinguished 41-year career in public education.

From 1930 until her retirement in 1957, Ms. Thurman served Columbus Public Schools as a special needs educator. There, she developed innovative remedial reading methods that were shared statewide and beyond, directly improving outcomes for countless students. Her work helped expand educational opportunity during a period marked by racial segregation and systemic inequities, making a lasting impact on generations of Columbus families.

Her influence extended far beyond the classroom. One of her former students, Ellen Walker Craig-Jones, became the first African American woman elected mayor in the United States (Urbancrest, 1972–1975), reflecting the generational impact of Ms. Thurman's mentorship and leadership. In 1940, she and her students were selected to greet President Franklin D. Roosevelt during his visit to Columbus, underscoring her standing as a respected educator and civic leader within the city.

Committed to lifelong learning, Ms. Thurman earned a Bachelor's degree with honors (1944) and a Master's degree in Special Education (1946) from Hampton Institute. She also pursued studies at Capital University and The Ohio State University, becoming one of the first African American women to attend Capital University and the first in her family to earn both a bachelor's and master's degree.

Her professional excellence was widely recognized. She was a national finalist for "Best Teacher of 1948," received the Sojourner Truth Award in 1956 for meritorious community service and advancing the status of women, and earned multiple commendations from the Columbus Board of Education. Her philanthropic efforts supported



widows, orphans, and families in need, reflecting her belief that leadership in education must be paired with service to the broader community.

Cora Thurman's enduring contributions to Columbus, through education, mentorship, civic engagement, and barrier-breaking leadership, represent the very qualities the Columbus Hall of Fame seeks to recognize. Her work not only shaped the lives of her students but also strengthened the city's commitment to opportunity, equity, and excellence.

For these reasons, we offer our endorsement of Cora Thurman's posthumous induction. Her impact on Ohio's educational system and on generations of Ohioans is historic, enduring, and has made Gahanna proud.

Respectfully submitted,

DRAFT