

COMMENTARY

United American Cemetery must be restored

🕒 Sep 3, 2022 📍 [African American](#), [cemetery](#), [cincinnati](#), [Jan-Michele Lemon Kearney](#), [Madisonville](#), [Mark Jeffreys](#), [Sherrod Brown](#), [United American Cemetery](#).



[Photo provided](#)

By City Councilman Mark Jeffreys



Mark Jeffreys. Provided

The United American Cemetery is a historic African American Cemetery in Madisonville. Founded in 1883, it is the oldest African American cemetery in Ohio. Unfortunately, despite a dedicated team of volunteers and donations, the cemetery has been under-resourced and has faced challenges for years. Recently, flooding has eroded gravestones and the cemetery is closed to the public due to fecal matter contamination.

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Nationally, it is all too common for African American cultural and heritage sites to be disregarded, degraded, and allowed to diminish over time, which is why at the federal level Senator Sherrod Brown has introduced a bill to provide the resources needed to upkeep African American cemeteries.

But we can't wait for that relief in Cincinnati – we must act now. The folks buried here are people's loved ones: parents, siblings, cousins, children, friends. Not only are members of the community prevented from seeing the gravesites of their loved ones, but they also cannot bury loved ones in it now as it's a public health hazard.

When I first became aware of the flooding earlier this year, I reached out to Union Baptist Church to set up a site visit. When I arrived, I discovered a much more dire situation. Levels of fecal matter at the Cemetery are hundreds of times higher than the EPA standard for what is considered safe based on testing completed in 2021. I immediately called the Interim Health Commissioner, who was very responsive. Within a day, the Health Department sent staff out to test the site. They have now completed multiple tests to identify the source, but those tests have come back as inconclusive.

We cannot take that for an answer. The Health Department and our office have reached out to the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency to partner with representatives from the United American Cemetery to identify a source of this pollution. I'm pleased that Vice Mayor Jan Michele Kearney is also working with the City Administration to apply for a grant to refurbish the cemetery. Identifying the source of the contamination will be an important part of securing that funding.

I remain committed to helping resolve the immediate public health issue at the cemetery and the damage that it has caused and working with the Vice Mayor and the Administration on identifying funding sources to make sure we honor those buried at the cemetery.

As a small token of assistance, I donated the \$2,000 from my office budget last year to the United American Cemetery. While that's a drop in the bucket for what's needed, if others would like to make a contribution to help, then they can reach out to Angelita Jones with the Union Foundation of the United American Cemetery Fund at amjones@easternhires.com.

Together we can right the wrong done to those buried at the cemetery and their families and honor the role this cemetery plays in our city's history and story going forward.

If you would like to help in any way, reach out to me at Mark.Jeffreys@Cincinnati-oh.gov.



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