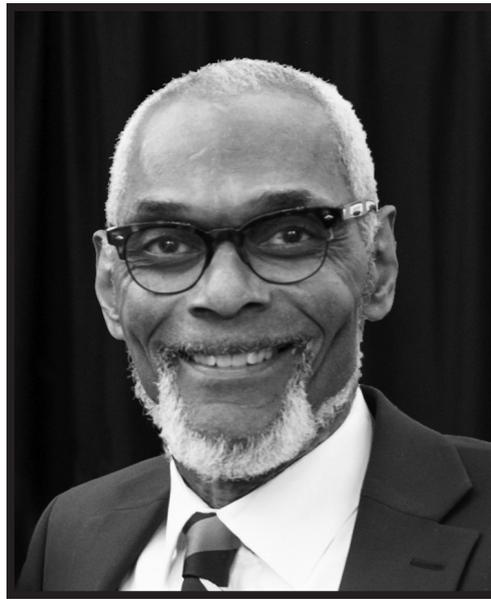


Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Governor's Humanitarian Award

Award criteria: This award seeks to honor those quiet soldiers who promote the welfare of humanity and the elimination of pain and suffering through their own selfless service, often without recognition.

Nominees possess a personal activism that has inspired unheralded long-term service to the community and stands as a model for others to emulate. Those who have gone far beyond the normal duty of being a good neighbor receive special consideration. It is the individual who watches the children when no one else is there, who organizes children's games to get them off the streets, or who cares for the sick and feeds the hungry. It is the individual who does what no one else will and does so because that is who she or he is.



G. Michael Payton
Gahanna

G. Michael Payton spent 35 years in public service, including 18 years as the Executive Director of the Ohio Civil Rights Commission (OCRC). Before retiring in 2019, Payton led a statewide staff of 80 employees supporting the commission's mission to promote "positive human relations amongst Ohio's diverse population through education and enforcement of laws against discrimination."

His nominator described him as engaging and collaborative, with strong dedication to the OCRC, its staff, and the citizens he served. During his time at OCRC, Payton led unprecedented statewide education and outreach initiatives and oversaw an enhancement of the OCRC's case investigative process. Payton was also instrumental in the creation of the OCRC's annual MLK Jr. Art and Multimedia Contest, Ohio Civil Rights Hall of Fame, and the Columbus Bar Association's Annual MLK Jr. Civil Rights Symposium, among other accomplishments.

Payton began his career with the State of Ohio in 1984 as an Assistant Attorney General in the Civil Rights section where he prosecuted civil rights cases and served as counsel to the OCRC. He served in the Attorney General's Office for 11 years, including as Assistant Chief of the Transportation Section, where he provided legal counsel to the Ohio Dept. of Transportation (ODOT). He also served as ODOT's Real Estate Administrator. Then at OCRC he served in legal and operations capacities before becoming Executive Director.

Payton earned his bachelor's degree in political science from The Ohio State University and his Juris Doctorate from Georgetown University Law Center.

He is the recipient of numerous awards, including a 2003 U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission award for innovative initiatives in education and outreach related to employment discrimination. He is a 2007 recipient of the Ohio Conference NAACP's Civil Rights Vanguard Award; a 2008 recipient of the Fair Housing Advocates Association's Keeper of the Dream Award for fair housing advocacy; a 2010 recipient of the NAACP Toledo Chapter President's Outstanding Civil Rights Award; a 2013 recipient of The Ohio State University's Alumni in Government Distinguished Service Award; a recipient of the 2017 Ross County Chapter of the NAACP President's Award for commitment, dedication, and leadership; a 2019 Ohio Senate resolution recognizing exemplary service; a 2020 recipient of Equality Ohio's Honored Ally award; and a 2021 inductee into Cambridge High School's Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame.

"For over 30 years, Mr. Payton has used his positions in public service to champion civil rights, diversity, and inclusion," said his nominator, who went on to praise Payton for seeking to support "those who were in most need of a voice."

"Although Director Payton retired in December 2019, his legacy continues to be vibrant within state government. I cannot think of an individual who had done so much for others and embodies the spirit of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. than G. Michael Payton."