

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Preserving History, Reconciling the Past**

[Royal Oak Township, MI, October 4, 2021] –The Michigan Historical Commission approved a historical marker for the Ulysses S. Grant Elementary School. It is located in Royal Oak Charter Township (Oakland County, MI), a historically Black community dating back to 1819, Ulysses S. Grant Elementary School was at the center of a protracted school desegregation battle which pitted the Ferndale Public School District against the U.S. Supreme Court between 1969 and 1981.

Ulysses S. Grant Elementary School was built in 1926 during an extended period of population growth in Ferndale which contributed to overcrowding in Ferndale schools. Despite district policy, students were not transferred out of Grant to other schools operating under capacity. Overcrowding at Grant became so extreme from 1939 through 1942 that the school implemented half-day sessions to educate its students; this overcrowding was often artificially prolonged between 1926-1970.

When the school district refused to negotiate with the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) and failed to provide a desegregation plan for Grant Elementary School in 1969, it became the focus of a decade long legal battle. HEW conducted an official hearing in 1969 that ruled Grant school was *de jure* segregated and terminated the district's federal funds. Consequently, Ferndale School District (FSD) became the first district in the North to be officially found in violation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the first to have its federal aid revoked. The court ordered desegregation plan in Ferndale went into effect January 5, 1981.

According to Brigitte R. Hall, FOROT President and co-founder, "the historically underserved Royal Oak Charter Township is now comprised of approximately 97% people of African ancestry and a disproportionate number of medically fragile elders."

FOROT is a volunteer-driven, community-based, 501c3 founded in 2010 to serve historic Royal Oak Township (MI) which originated as a 36 square mile area in 1819 and predated 1837 Michigan statehood. However, due to annexation, Royal Oak Charter Township is now a mere .55 square mile remnant and a demographically marginalized, disenfranchised, economically depressed community.

Visit [www.forot.org](http://www.forot.org) to learn more about the work of Friends of Royal Oak Township, Inc. (FOROT) over its 10-year history.

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