

A C E L E B R A T I O N O F L I F E



**INTERMENT**

Forest Lawn Memorial Gardens,  
Veterans Garden, 5600 E. Broad St., Columbus, OH 43213

**PALLBEARERS**

Brian Lucas, Evan Payton, Jared Payton, Marcus Payton  
Pascal Stephenson III, Ryan Stephenson, Cedric Tolbert Jr.

**HONORARY PALLBEARERS**

Maxley Brooks Sr., Leonard Crawford, Dennis Hazelwood, Phillip Lucas,  
Keith MacNeil, Desmon Martin, Peyton Watts

**REPAST/CELEBRATION OF LIFE**

Gahanna Sanctuary  
82 N. High St., Gahanna, OH 43230

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The family of **G. Michael Payton** wishes to express our heartfelt thanks for the many acts of love, kindness, and support shown during this time. Your prayers, words of comfort, and presence have brought us peace and strength. In lieu of flowers or gifts, please consider making a contribution to a fund that will be shared among Michael's 11 grandchildren to support their future education: [paypal.me/Payton221](https://paypal.me/Payton221) or to the blind/visually impaired at [www.lionsvisionresource.org/donation/](http://www.lionsvisionresource.org/donation/).

With love and gratitude,  
The Payton Family



**MARLAN GARY**  
**FUNERAL HOME**  
1 FUNERAL HOME | 5 LOCATIONS

MINISTRY OF COMFORT ENTRUSTED TO:

**NORTH CHAPEL**  
2500 CLEVELAND AVE.,  
COLUMBUS, OH 43211  
614-267-8310

**EAST CHAPEL**  
5456 LIVINGSTON AVE.,  
COLUMBUS, OH 43232  
614-604-8774

**MANSFIELD CHAPEL**  
753 MCPHERSON ST.,  
MANSFIELD, OH 44903  
419-524-6999

**SPRINGFIELD CHAPEL**  
823 SOUTH YELLOW SPRINGS ST.,  
SPRINGFIELD, OHIO 45506  
937-325-1447

**CINCINNATI CHAPEL**  
674 FOREST AVE.,  
CINCINNATI OH 45229  
513-221-4812

WWW.THECHAPELOFPEACE.COM

REMEMBERING

*G. Michael*  
**PAYTON**

SEPTEMBER 1, 1953 — OCTOBER 11, 2025

*"Burst the bloated belly of the beast of bigotry!"*

# Obituary

George Michael Payton, 72, of Gahanna, Ohio, peacefully passed away on October 11, 2025. Born on September 1, 1953, Michael lived a life marked by purpose, integrity, and a steadfast commitment to justice, service, and family.

Michael is preceded in death by his parents, Marilyn (Milton) Harris and George Payton, sister Cathy Purdy, brother Ronnie William Payton, and sisters-in-laws, Debra Woods, Lynette Woods, and Rogetta Woods.

A proud alumnus of Cambridge High School's Class of 1971, Michael was a letterman in both basketball and track and field. He competed in the high jump, mile relay, and hurdles winning the district high hurdles as a junior and finishing his senior year as the second-fastest hurdler in school history. Those early years of discipline and drive would become the foundation for a lifetime of achievement and leadership. Michael continued his education at The Ohio State University, graduating in 1979, and went on to earn his Juris Doctor from Georgetown University Law Center in 1983.

His 35-year career in public service reflected his deep belief in fairness, equality, and the power of law to create positive change. After law school, Michael began his professional journey serving as a law clerk for the late Honorable Otto Beatty Jr., whose mentorship inspired his lifelong dedication to justice and public service. His journey continued as an Assistant Attorney General for the State of Ohio, where he prosecuted cases under the Ohio Civil Rights Act and later served as Litigation Counsel and Assistant Chief in the Transportation Section. He then joined the Ohio Department of Transportation as Real Estate Administrator, overseeing statewide property operations for highway development.

In 1997, Michael joined the Ohio Civil Rights Commission, where he held several key leadership positions - Director of Operations, Chief Legal Counsel, and ultimately Executive Director, a role he held for 18 years. Under his guidance, the Commission strengthened its mission to ensure equal opportunity for all Ohioans, enforcing the Ohio Civil Rights Act across employment, housing, credit, public accommodations, and higher education. He created the Ohio Civil Rights Hall of Fame in 2009 alongside Honda of America and Wright State University. His thoughtful leadership, humility, and commitment to inclusion left an enduring legacy across the state.

# Order Of Service

## **FUNERAL SERVICE**

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2025 ~ 12PM

VINEYARD COLUMBUS WESTERVILLE

6000 COOPER ROAD, WESTERVILLE, OH 43081

Parting View

Musical Selection

Prayer of Comfort

Scripture Readings

Words of Comfort

Acknowledgment/Resolutions

Remarks

Homily

Recessional

## *When Great Trees Fall*

When great trees fall,  
rocks on distant hills shudder,  
lions hunker down  
in tall grasses,  
and even elephants  
lumber after safety.  
When great trees fall  
in forests,  
small things recoil into silence,  
their senses  
eroded beyond fear.  
When great souls die,  
the air around us becomes  
light, rare, sterile.  
We breathe, briefly.  
Our eyes, briefly,  
see with  
a hurtful clarity.  
Our memory, suddenly sharpened,  
examines,  
gnaws on kind words  
unsaid,  
promised walks  
never taken.  
Great souls die and  
our reality, bound to  
them, takes leave of us.  
Our souls,  
dependent upon their  
nurture,

now shrink, wizened.  
Our minds, formed  
and informed by their  
radiance, fall away.  
We are not so much maddened  
as reduced to the unutterable ignorance of  
dark, cold  
caves.

And when great souls die,  
after a period peace blooms,  
slowly and always  
irregularly. Spaces fill  
with a kind of  
soothing electric vibration.  
Our senses, restored, never  
to be the same, whisper to us.  
They existed. They existed.  
We can be. Be and be  
better. For they existed.

- Maya Angelou

## *Obituary cont...*

Michael's excellence and service were widely recognized. His honors included the 2003 US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's National Award for Innovative and Proactive Education and Outreach, 2007 Ohio Conference NAACP Civil Rights Vanguard Award, 2008 Fair Housing Advocates Association's Keeper of the Dream Award, 2010 Toledo NAACP President's Outstanding Civil Rights Award, 2013 West Virginia Human Rights Commission Special Recognition Award, 2013 Ohio State University Alumni in Government Distinguished Service Award, 2017 Ross County NAACP Chapter President's Award, 2019 Ohio Senate Resolution for exemplary service, and 2020 Equality Ohio's Honored Ally Award, 2021 Cambridge High School Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame inductee, and 2022 Governor's Humanitarian Award.

Beyond his professional accomplishments, Michael was a devoted husband, father, brother, grandfather, and friend whose wisdom, humor, and steady presence were the heart of his family. He is survived by his beloved wife, Joyce Payton, his children Marcus (Abby), Evan, Windai (Cedric Jr.) Tolbert, and Jared, and eleven cherished grandchildren: Jania, Mercedes, Elijah, Julian, Payton, Eli, Malachi, Rosalia, Jude, Lucia, and Alena. He also leaves behind his sisters Rebecca (Maxley Sr.) Brooks, Elizabeth (Phillip) Lucas, and Bonita Harris; brothers-in-laws Silas Woods, Oscar Woods Jr., and William Woods; nieces Jada Tabor, Lynsi (Cal) Cleary, Whitney Woods, and Jessi (Ryan) Kuehne; nephews Brian Lucas, Shawn (Tiffany) Lucas, James Payton, Joel Brown, Pascal III (Tiffani) Stephenson, and Ryan Stephenson.

Michael credited his Cambridge roots, as 'The Patchy Kid' for shaping his character, instilling the values of hard work, humility, and perseverance that guided him throughout his life. To know Michael is to know he loved his family, friends, THE Ohio State Buckeyes, golfing, Pepsi, Ponderosa, and his belly-busting chili!

Michael's life was a testament to perseverance, service, and love. From his days on the track in Cambridge to his leadership in the State of Ohio, he embodied the values of integrity, excellence, and compassion. His legacy will continue to inspire all who strive to make a difference through both their work and their character.

