

- My name is Reverend Charles Winston McNeill, Jr., I am the President of the National Capital Baptist Convention. I am here today to voice my support for passage of Senate Bill 76 *Legal Holiday Maryland Emancipation Day—Establishment*.
- Currently, in the State of Maryland, Emancipation Day is a niche holiday, celebrated by black Americans and a handful of others who know and understand the occasion to be a part of our American history which is aligned with the founding principles of this country.
- I strongly believe Emancipation Day rightfully deserves to be added on the calendar as an official Maryland state holiday— a day to pay homage to all Americans' contributions, especially those who endured bondage in the tobacco fields of Maryland and those who risked serving as conductors on the Underground Railroad. It would be a day to honor and celebrate Maryland's rich historical and diverse cultural heritage.
- Passage of Senate Bill 76 to establish Emancipation Day would be the least we could do commemorate the sacrifices of Marylander who are unsung heroes and those who efforts are such as:
 

**Josiah Henson**, who escaped slavery in Charles County; became an activist who was Harriet Beecher Stowe's inspiration for the main character of her book, *Uncle Tom Cabin*.

**Frederick Douglass**---born as a slave in Talbot County and became a fierce abolitionist and a world-renowned orator

**Harriet Tubman**, an underground conductor born in Dorchester County who led countless slaves to freedom from Maryland Eastern Shore, in addition to serving the Union as a spy during the Civil War

**Benjamin Banneker**, of Ellicott City was a surveyor, astronomer, watch repairer, and almanac printer. In 1791 he and Major Andrew Ellicott were appointed by President George Washington to survey the District of Columbia, which became the capital of the United States.
- To make Emancipation Day a legal statewide holiday is to provide an opportunity for current and future generations of Marylanders to learn of and appreciate the sacrifices of slaves and others who sought freedom and pursued justice.

- The African-American struggle was an American fight against the horrors of slavery that marked the real beginning of this country's commitment to liberty and equality, in word, if not always in deed.
- Inevitably, the liberated slave, in those states where the Emancipation Proclamation applied, shed their blood in captivity in the tobacco field, despite the State of Maryland's failure to recognize the validity of the Emancipation Proclamation.
- These slaves would later become liberators and preservers of the Union, in combat no different from any other Marylanders who fought in the Civil War.
- In closing, I remind you it would be nothing short of a travesty to not pass Senate Bill 76. For we must remember, the words of the late great Fredrick Douglass, when he learned of the Emancipation Proclamation, *"I shall never forget that memorable night, when in a distant city waited and watched at a public meeting, with 3,000 others not less anxious than myself, for the word of deliverance which we have heard read today. or shall I ever forget the outburst of joy and thanksgiving that rent the air when the lightning brought to us the Emancipation Proclamation."*

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*Pastor Charles W. McNeill, Jr.*

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