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Re: Support Senate Bill 76

Legal Holiday—Maryland Emancipation Day—Establishment

Dear Committee Chair and Members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee:

I am Cheryl A. McLeod, a Maryland resident, member of the Commission on African American Culture, and public education, social justice advocate.

I am here today to support Senate Bill 76 Entitled: Legal Holiday—Maryland Emancipation Day—Establishment

During the month of February, African American History is celebrated. Although Black History is 365 (this year 366 days a year), designating a particular month provides an opportunity to focus specifically on the perseverance and accomplishments of African Americans and their contributions to **American History**.

As I have observed numerous presentations and programs throughout the years, one missing thread appears to be the story of Maryland and the African American experience.

I have concluded that nothing can be taken for granted.

For example:

Many Marylanders did not know that *Harriet Tubman* was born into slavery in Maryland until they saw the movie "**Harriet**." (Think of the many who missed it)

Many Marylanders did not know that *Frederick Douglass* was born into slavery in Maryland (many think he was born in Washington, D.C.)

As I have randomly asked these basic questions regarding Maryland's history, I have concluded that we know very little about the true history of our state:

Who abolished slavery?

How did Maryland treat slavery?

Was Maryland a free state or a slave state?

What is a border state?

When did slavery begin in Maryland?

How did Maryland benefit from slavery?

Did Maryland seceded from the union? Why or why not?

(Did Maryland fight for the north or south?)

Is Maryland a northern state or southern state?

What is the Mason Dixon line?

Is Maryland above or below the Mason-Dixon line?

How did the union benefit from holding Maryland ~~as a free state~~?

When did slavery end in Maryland? (November 1, 1864)

Not knowing the answers to these questions is not limited to what is or is not not taught in schools. It is a reflection on a need to support opportunities to focus and dialog among ourselves as we weave the fabric of the African American story into the quilt of *"One Maryland."*

When Maryland honored the anniversary of the *War of 1812*, I must admit I learned more about the state of Maryland's role than I ever knew.

The same can be said when we honor *Maryland Day* each year.

Just as all Americans are encouraged to honor Rev Dr. Martin Luther King's Birthday as a "Day of Service," Maryland can recognize "Maryland Emancipation Day" as a "Day of Enlightenment."

Please support Senate Bill 76.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Cheryl A. McLeod

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Commissioner, Maryland Commission on African American History & Culture

Social Justice and Public Education Advocate

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