

HB0667 Delegate Sample-Hughes General Provisions – Repeal State Song

Unfavorable- Opposed

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I appreciate this opportunity to testify in opposition to HB 0667, calling for the repeal of our State song.,

Sadly, this song which chronicles Maryland's history, has been much maligned with false claims that the song has racist connotations, condones slavery and advocates treasonous actions and the overthrow of the government. All of these claims are patently false.

While it is clearly documented that James Ryder, Randall wrote the poem immediately following the events of April 19th, 1865 when violence erupted between Baltimoreans and members of the 6th Massachusetts militia, the claim that the song was adopted by the Maryland Legislature for a nefarious purpose is completely unsubstantiated.

Historically, the song enjoyed immense popularity within the State well before its official adoption as the State Song in 1939 and was showcased, along with the Star-Spangled Banner, at the State of Maryland's exhibition at the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition. The State of Maryland even commissioned the issuance of a Commemorative Coin for this event, featuring the likeness of James Ryder Randall and Francis Scott Key and the titles of their works.

A common criticism of the song involves the usage of the terms "despot and tyrant", presumably a reference to President Abraham Lincoln. How else would one describe the untold Constitutional usurpations and deprivations suffered by Marylanders at the hands of an occupying military force? Examples of such treatment include the suspension of habeas corpus, the arrest of members of the Maryland Legislature suspected of having southern sympathies, arrest of newspaper editors for views deemed unacceptable by the Lincoln Administration, vote manipulation, threats to destroy Baltimore City from cannon placement on Federal Hill and the illegal and unconstitutional arrests of Maryland citizens. Rather than a clarion call to join the Confederacy, many view the song as a reminder of the indignities Maryland suffered when the protections afforded US citizens under the Constitution were not upheld.

There have also been aspersions that the song, directly or indirectly, endorses slavery. While it has become popular to portray the war as a morality play over the issue of slavery, facts dispel the myth. Slavery unfortunately was sanctioned by the United States Constitution until December 6, 1865, when the 13th Amendment was ratified. President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of September of 1862 freed no slaves held in any states that had not seceded from the Union including Maryland. Rather than repudiate the practice of slavery, Maryland's Unionist Legislature ratified the controversial "Corwin" Constitutional Amendment on January 10th, 1862 which stated, "No amendment shall be made to the Constitution which will authorize or give to Congress the power to abolish or interfere, within any State, with the domestic institutions thereof, including that of persons held to labor or service by the laws of said State."

For these reasons, I oppose the bill to repeal our State Song "Maryland, My Maryland".