

411 Belview Avenue  
Hagerstown, MD 21742

February 9, 2024

### **Testimony on HB 566**

State and Local Government – Real Property – Confederate Naming Prohibited

#### **Position: Favorable**

I'm writing to lend my strong support to House Bill 566. Maryland should not have public spaces named for Confederates. My opposition to Confederate naming is on two grounds: it's racist, and it's unpatriotic.

As a scholar of African American history in Maryland before and during the Civil War, I've learned a lot about slavery and its impact. No serious historian believes, today, that slavery was not the cause for which the South seceded and fought the Civil War. While individual Confederate soldiers may not have been enslavers and may not have been motivated by slavery to fight, their leaders certainly were both. This meant that the South as a whole was indeed fighting to preserve slavery. Without slavery, there would have been no war, no Confederacy, and no Southern "heritage." Today, of course, we still live with slavery's pervasive legacy of inequality, racism, and hatred. Public memorials to Confederates at best ignore that terrible truth and at worst sustain it. We should not be furthering hatred and injustice through the choices we make about things like street names. We should not be teaching our children that racist leaders and slavery-defenders of the past are worthy of honor.

Confederate memorials also honor individuals who took up arms against the United States. In some cases they broke their oaths as military or civilian officers to join the Confederacy. They committed their treason against the U.S. for a long period of time. Those who survived the war were pardoned, but that does not mean they deserve honors. They were not heroes; they were defeated traitors who tried to destroy this country *while keeping millions of our fellow Americans enslaved*. It's time for us as a society to stop acting as if both sides were the same in the Civil War. They were not.

Finally, as a historian, let me say that changing the names of streets and parks is not changing or erasing history. It's changing whom we choose to honor, which is a separate matter from knowing our history. If we knew our history better, we probably wouldn't have Confederate-named spaces in the first place. Please pass HB 566 and help us take a step toward a more just understanding of past and present.

Sincerely yours,

Emilie Amt, D.Phil.

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Author, *Black Antietam: African Americans and the Civil War in Sharpsburg*