

Word Count: 343

Time: 2:00

Amendment Testimony for SB 707 / HB 1026

For Major General Janeen L. Birckhead (House)

Good afternoon, Chairman Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee.

A sincere “thank you” to Delegate Patterson for amending SB 707 to provide for a posthumous commission of certain distinguished civilians to the Maryland Defense Force.

I am honored to exercise my authority ... to recommend to the Governor ... the posthumous commission of Harriet Tubman, a Volunteer Soldier of the Union Army ... whose extraordinary accomplishments ... contributed to victory ... in the war to preserve our great nation.

I have long looked with pride to Harriet Tubman, a fellow Maryland native – my role model for her courage and values-based leadership.

I have come to understand that it is not enough to tell her story in small circles, and to privately share our admiration.

It's time to publicly – loudly -- and officially declare that Harriet Tubman earned the respect of our nation.

A century and a half later, we can reject the cultural blinders that dismissed her because she was a Black Woman and despite her many contributions to the war effort -

- Nursing and training nurses for battlefield medicine ...
- Risking everything to scout and recruit a spy network behind enemy lines,
- Advising Union commanders,

- Leading a dangerous military raid behind enemy lines – described at the time by General Rufus Saxton as –

“the only military command in American history wherein a woman, black or white, led the raid, and under whose inspiration it was originated and conducted.”

I propose that we signal respect and honor with the designation of ‘General.’

- A General must organize, direct, and accomplish major actions with strategic effect.

- A General inspires others to exceed their own vision ... to endeavor beyond what they might themselves attempt ... to accomplish together something that is seemingly impossible.

This describes Harriet Tubman.

Let us celebrate her record of valor ... service ... and contribution to our freedoms ... and the promise of equal opportunity.

I invite your support in commissioning Harriet Tubman to the status of General Officer.