



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

January 30, 2024

SB 105

Burial Sites of Enslaved Persons – Protection & Access (Emancipation for the Maryland Deceased Enslaved Act)

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Position: Favorable With Amendments

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) offers this testimony in support of Senate Bill 105 with amendments. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 105 seeks to protect and ensure access to the burial sites of enslaved persons. The significance of these burial sites cannot be overstated, as they serve as tangible and poignant reminders of our shared Maryland history, reflecting the struggles, resilience, and contributions of enslaved individuals to the foundation of our State and country.

As we acknowledge the painful legacy of slavery, it is essential that we take proactive measures to preserve and honor the final resting places of those who endured unimaginable hardships. For these reasons the Catholic Church in Maryland has taken significant steps to identifying and preserving the enslaved burial sites that are found on its properties.

While we support the intent of Senate Bill 105 there are some aspects of the bill that are overreaching and broad and we suggest the amendments below to help remedy these issues. We do fully support the formation of the Office of Burial Sites of the Maryland Enslaved that is proposed in this legislation.

In June of 2022 there was a report provided to the chairmen of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee and the House Appropriations Committee. The report entitled *Historic African American Cemeteries* was issued by the Maryland Commission on African American History & Culture and the Maryland Historical Trust and made several recommendations including several

that deal with the issues raised in SB 105. Here is a link to the report: [2022-Historic-African-American-Cemeteries-JCR-Report_small.pdf \(maryland.gov\)](https://www.maryland.gov/egovernment/AboutMD/Reports/2022-Historic-African-American-Cemeteries-JCR-Report_small.pdf)

The amendments that are proposed below are taken from the recommendations made in the report and accomplish the goals and intent of SB 105 while removing language that is unclear or broad.

AMENDMENT 1

PAGE 2: STRIKE LINES 24-27 AND INSERT: “The Maryland Historical Trust and the Maryland Commission on African American History & Culture, in consultation with the Office of Burial Sites of the Maryland Enslaved shall create and disseminate best practice guidance on how to use archaeological investigations, land survey techniques, and archival research approaches for identifying historic African American burial sites with a special focus on family cemeteries, cemeteries that predate emancipation, and burial grounds of enslaved individuals.”

AMENDMENT 2

PAGE 2-3: STRIKE LINES 32-33 (page 2) and LINES 1-14 (page 3) AND INSERT: “The Maryland Historical Trust and the Maryland Commission on African American History & Culture, in consultation with the Office of Burial Sites of the Maryland Enslaved shall create informational packets for owners of properties that contain cemeteries regarding legal access requirements and make them available for distribution by local governments.”

Access and protection of these burial sites is not only a matter of historical preservation but is vital for educational and commemorative purposes. It fosters a deeper understanding of the struggles faced by enslaved individuals and their descendants and through public awareness and education we can promote a more informed and empathetic citizenry, fostering a sense of unity and shared responsibility for our state’s complex history.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable with amendments report on Senate Bill 105.