



The Menare Foundation, Inc.
"Preserving the Legacy of the Underground Railroad"

Re: SB 105-Burial Sites of Enslaved Persons - Protection and Access (Emancipation for the Maryland Deceased Enslaved Act)

January 29, 2024

Dear Senator Ellis,

I am writing in support of SB 105 legislation to protect and provide access to the burial sites of enslaved person in Maryland. As the president of the Menare Foundation, Inc.—a nonprofit preserving the legacy of the Underground Railroad—I understand the importance and urgency of this matter. I applaud your proactive legislation to insure the preservation of these vital and irreplaceable cultural resources.

For far too long the final resting places of Africans and their descendants have been overlooked, under-maintained and in many cases are forgotten altogether. Unrelenting forces including development, suburban sprawl, urban renewal and neglect have buried-over, covered-up and obliterated many of these historic resting places and their associated black communities. Those that survive continue to suffer from lack of access and care by descendant communities.

Our facility, The Button Farm Living History Center—located in Germantown Maryland—features an unmarked burial site believed to be the resting place of enslaved people. A dozen or so field stones remain to tell the story, but who is buried there we do not know. As stewards of the land we regularly grant access to the public to engage them in restoration, preservation and education efforts and hope that public engagement will assure the longevity of the site.

The proposed legislation would help to protect these hallowed grounds by promoting preservation, documentation, commemoration and access to descendant communities. As Maryland was the first state in the Union to abolish slavery by popular vote, in 1864, so too let us take the lead in protecting our cultural heritage for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Anthony Cohen
President
The Menare Foundation, Inc.