

Dear Chairpersons and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

My name is Daniel J. Phelan, and I reside in Baltimore County, Maryland. I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Baltimore County Genealogical Society.

I am writing you to ask that you help support Senate Bill 354, Maryland Inventory of Cemeteries and Burial Sites Workgroup. As a genealogist who researches primarily in Maryland, I have come across too many abandoned cemeteries, and some cemeteries that are coming close to being abandoned.

Specific examples that immediately come to mind are (1) Western Cemetery—a large cemetery that was established in 1849 in Baltimore City; that has closed their office and has been providing only minimal maintenance in only a few newer sections, (2) St. Peter's Cemetery which began in 1851 in West Baltimore that became abandoned when the parish of St. Peters the Apostle closed around 2008. The cemetery was the burial place of both Whites and African Americans well before the Civil War, (3), the Western Star Cemetery—an African-American cemetery in Catonsville whose owner died and left the cemetery abandoned, and (4) Mount Zion Cemetery—a cemetery primarily for African American in Landover, which has been unkept for years. There too many other cemeteries in these conditions to mention in this letter.

The establishment of a commission to inventory cemeteries and burial sites is critical in establishing an inventory system in the state to monitor the continued preservation of existing cemeteries, and to build historical preservations programs that can allow for protection of abandoned cemeteries by providing financial assistance to restore these cemeteries through grants.

The tragic abandonment of sacred burial grounds is absolutely necessary to uphold a civilized society that respects the rights of our deceased ancestors. Please support the establishment of the proposed commission.

Thank you for your time and considering my input.

Sincerely,

Daniel J. Phelan