

Written Testimony in Support of House Bill 1422 (Maryland Reparations Commission)

On behalf of the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission (MLTRC), I as its chair offer favorable support for House Bill 1422, as well as support for how the Maryland Reparations Commission can build upon the significant work that the MLTRC has undertaken to provide justice for Marylanders affected racial terror lynchings. The MLTRC's mission is to chronicle the legacy of racial terror lynchings in Maryland and to catalyze restorative justice in communities that have been impacted by these events. To that end, the commission is encouraged by the recent introduction of H.B. 1422, which aligns with the spirit of its work, and believes it is a critical step toward addressing the systemic injustices that have long affected Maryland's Black communities. Together, we can and must work towards a more just future.

For context, the MLTRC was established through the passage of H.B. 307 in 2019, following years of research and advocacy by scholars, community leaders, and state-wide organizations. The MLTRC is authorized to research cases of racially motivated lynchings that occurred between 1854 and 1933 and hold public hearings in every region of Maryland where a documented lynching of an African American by a white mob took place. Research reveals that no fewer than thirty-eight Black men were lynched across the state of Maryland. The MLTRC is scheduled to expire in June 2026 following the submission of our report to the Maryland State Legislature in December 2025.

Maryland History

Since Maryland's founding in 1634, the state has been shaped by a history of racial exploitation and violence. Maryland's economy relied heavily on the labor of enslaved Black people—those who toiled in the tobacco and wheat fields and labored on ships brought to the Harbor. Despite formal abolition of slavery in 1864, the shadow of enslavement persisted, as Black communities throughout the state faced legalized segregation, violent acts of racial terror, and discriminatory laws that denied them basic human rights.

Only 161 years later, Black communities are still impacted by the lingering effects of the institution of slavery, including economic disparities, educational segregation, and the over-policing and criminalization of Black communities, among other issues.

- **Racial Wealth Gap:** Black Marylanders consistently have the lowest median income compared to Asian, non-Hispanic White, and Hispanic households. This disparity is the result of a longstanding history of discriminatory policies, including redlining, employment discrimination, and the exclusion of Black families from wealth-building opportunities such as homeownership.
- **Disparities in Education:** Black students in Maryland often face systemic barriers to educational success, including underfunded schools, disparities in disciplinary actions, and limited access to advanced coursework and college preparatory programs. These factors contribute to lower graduation rates and reduced opportunities for higher

education and economic mobility.

- **Overrepresentation in Criminal Justice System:** Black Marylanders are disproportionately represented in the state's prison population. This overrepresentation is linked to systemic issues such as racial profiling, sentencing disparities, and socioeconomic factors that contribute to higher arrest and conviction rates in Black communities.

In working to address the legacy of lynching and racial violence, the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission acknowledges the lasting impacts of centuries of enslavement and legalized racial discrimination and seeks to address the related root cause – the systematic dehumanization of Black people. The MLTRC is grateful for your attention to this matter and are eager to collaborate.

Overview of the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Work

The MLTRC was formed six years ago with the goal of recognizing the victims of racial terror lynchings in Maryland and to facilitate reflection and dialogue about the legacies of racism and racialized violence. Since then, the commission has:

- Hosted twelve hearings that covered lynchings that occurred in counties across the state including: Allegany, Baltimore, Anne Arundel, Wicomico, Somerset, Frederick, Montgomery, Harford, Cecil, St. Mary's, Calvert, Charles, Howard, Prince George's, and Carroll.
- Connected with numerous descendants of lynching victims and lynching perpetrators, whose stories have shaped our accountability and reconciliation efforts.
- Received dozens of recommendations from communities affected by these histories, many of which are rooted in the spirit of restorative justice and aim to repair the harm caused by racial terrorism.

This spring, on April 4th and 5th, the MLTRC is hosting a hearing specifically focused on exploring legislative remedies to address the legacy of racial terror lynchings, and in December 2025, will publish the final report with key findings and recommendations for how to repair the harm. The commission is proud of its work, and yet recognizes that the path to justice and reconciliation is an ongoing fight. I can assure you that the MLTRC staff, my fellow commissioners, and I will **not** stop fighting. Now more than ever, nothing else makes more sense.

Support for H.B. 1422 & Recommendations for Next Steps:

The MLTRC supports H.B. 1422, which establishes the Maryland Reparations Commission to develop and administer a program providing compensatory benefits to descendants of individuals enslaved in Maryland. Reparations are not only a moral imperative but also an important step towards acknowledging and addressing the lasting harms of slavery in Maryland. Based on the MLTRC's work and findings, it is believed that the provisions of H.B. 1422 bill can go a long way in redressing the harm done to Maryland's Black communities, and offer mechanisms for meaningful improvements to overall health and wellbeing.

As H.B. 1422 progresses, my colleagues and I look forward to providing suggestions on how the work of the Maryland Reparations Commission and the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission can be complementary in creating a more just future for Marylanders. The MLTRC is committed to partnering with the Maryland General Assembly, the Governor's Office, and affected descendant communities to help guide the successful implementation of the reparations bill.

Conclusion

The passage of H.B. 1422 is an important step toward addressing the enduring legacies of slavery, racialized violence, and racial discrimination in Maryland. The MLTRC stands ready to collaborate with lawmakers and other stakeholders to ensure that the bill's provisions are implemented effectively and that reparative justice is delivered to Black Marylanders to whom it is long overdue. In working to address this harm the necessary healing for all people can occur, so may the healing continue with us.

For Justice and Peace,

Dr. David Fakunle

Chair David O. Fakunle, Ph.D.
Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission