



Oseh Shalom

עושה שלום במרומיו...

TESTIMONY ON HB1422- POSITION: FAVORABLE
State Government - Maryland Reparations Commission
Date of Hearing: February 25, 2025

To: Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee

From: Linda Bergofsky & David Friedman, Montgomery County, MD

We are writing on behalf of the Board and members of Oseh Shalom, a vibrant Reconstructionist synagogue located in Laurel, at the crossroads of Howard, Montgomery, Prince George's, and Anne Arundel counties. **We strongly support HB1422, which would create the Maryland Reparations Commission.**

By way of background, the Reconstructionist Movement to which we belong, passed a [Resolution on Reparations](#) in January 2023, calling on all groups affiliated with the Movement "to engage in deep reflection on the ways we have participated in or benefited from racial injustice." According to a Legislative Toolkit developed by [Osiris and First Repair](#):

Every level of government in the US has some complicity in the state of Black America since emancipation. Various states have ... passed discriminatory legislation causing direct and indirect harm to the descendants of slaves and their ancestors... those states can develop policy to atone for that damage.

Recognizing their unique roles in perpetuating racial inequality, States and localities across the country have wrestled with the meaning of reparations and ways to address it; the usual first step is creating a Commission to study the issue. **The Commission proposed in HB1422 is that critical first step for Maryland; the number of co-sponsors reflects a level of political will needed to approach this task fully and honestly.** In our work to promote social justice and racial diversity and inclusion, Oseh Shalom members are inspired by Bryan Stevenson, Director of the Equal Justice Initiative, who said:

*America's history of racial inequality continues to haunt us. Many of the issues we face today are shadowed by an underlying narrative of racial difference and bias that compromise our progress. Our nation, **now more than ever**, is in desperate need of **truth and recovery**. That process is sequential: **we must first tell the truth about our past before we can overcome it.***

Our Torah teaches that the Israelites obtained reparations from the Egyptians as they were leaving Egypt, although there is no Hebrew term that fully encompasses the range of meanings that are associated with the English word reparations. Reparations encompass both *teshuvah* — the Jewish process of **public accountability, apology, mending, and returning to right relationship**, and *tzedek* — **the ethical demands of material and legal justice**. HB1422 offers a pathway to both.



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There is a very famous saying from Pirkei Avot (Ethics of our Fathers), Chapter 2:16; “...(Rabbi Tarfon) used to say... *It is not up to you to finish the task, but you are not free to avoid it.*”

For all these reasons, the Board and members of Oseh Shalom urge the Committee to make a favorable report for HB1422.

Respectfully,

Linda Bergofsky, Chair, Social Justice Committee

David Friedman, Chair, Racial Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee