



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

The Maryland House of Delegates, 6 Bladen Street, Room 300, Annapolis, Maryland 21401
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- February 25, 2025

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Chair Joseline A. Pena-Melnik
Health and Government Operations Committee
240 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Pena-Melnik and Members of the Committee,

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers its strong and favorable support for House Bill 1422 (HB1422) - Maryland Reparations Commission. This bill establishes the Maryland Reparations Commission, which will study and recommend appropriate benefits for Black Marylanders whose ancestors were enslaved in the state or who have been impacted by inequitable government policies. The Commission will examine historical injustices such as housing discrimination, redlining, and economic exclusion, and propose measures to address the long-term disparities caused by these policies. HB1422 represents a critical step in Maryland's efforts to acknowledge and rectify systemic racial inequities that have disproportionately affected Black residents. **This bill is a 2025 legislative priority for the Black Caucus.**

Reparations are not unprecedented in the United States. Victims of the 1942 Japanese internment camps received reparations 50 years later, under the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which authorized payments of \$20,000 after adjusting for inflation to each surviving victim of the internment camps that forcibly displaced over 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II. The first payments were made in 1990, with the final reparations distributed in 1999. These payments significantly improved economic mobility for Japanese Americans by boosting homeownership rates, enabling higher education access, and reducing the wealth disparities that had been exacerbated by internment policies.

Even before this, following the Civil War, slave owners were compensated for their financial loss through the District of Columbia Compensated Emancipation Act of 1862, which provided up to \$9,374.41 today after adjusting for inflation per freed enslaved person to former slaveholders. This act underscores the long-standing practice of the U.S. government prioritizing the financial well-being of those who upheld systemic oppression over those who suffered from it. More recently, in 2016, the Guam World War II Loyalty Recognition Act granted reparations to Guam residents who had suffered forced labor, internment, and property destruction during Japanese occupation in World War II. These payments acknowledged the harm suffered and provided financial relief for those affected.

Despite facing systemic barriers, Black Marylanders have been critical to the economic and social development of the state. Historically, enslaved Africans built much of Maryland's infrastructure, including key port cities such as Baltimore and Annapolis, and played a foundational role in agriculture, shipbuilding, and commerce. Today, Black Marylanders contribute significantly to the state's economy. Black-owned businesses in Maryland generate over \$10 billion in annual revenue, employing thousands across industries. According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Black Marylanders represent a substantial portion of the workforce in education, healthcare, and public service, sectors essential to statewide economic growth and quality of life. The Maryland Center on Economic Policy reports that reducing racial disparities in income and wealth could add over \$50 billion to Maryland's economy, demonstrating how structural reparative policies would benefit not just Black Marylanders, but the state as a whole.

By establishing a framework for reparations, HB1422 will allow Maryland to take the first critical step in acknowledging and rectifying past injustices. While previous reparations efforts, such as those for Japanese Americans and Guam residents, were led by the federal government, Maryland has a unique responsibility to address its specific history of slavery, segregation, and discriminatory policies. This bill will create a structured approach to studying harm, identifying tangible solutions, and ensuring that the state holds itself accountable for its past actions.

A critical provision of HB1422 is its focus on funding sources, including fees on private businesses that benefited from slavery and discriminatory government policies. This ensures that reparations are not just a symbolic gesture but are supported by tangible financial mechanisms that address historical harms. Additionally, the bill provides a clear process for verifying eligibility and distributing benefits efficiently, ensuring that those most affected receive the support they deserve.

For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland strongly supports HB1422.

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland