

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2004 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 898 (Delegate Burns, *et al.*)
Rules and Executive Nominations

Apology for Slavery

This bill requests the Governor to apologize on behalf of the citizens of Maryland for the State's history of slavery, its long-held silence in the face of slavery, and the atrocities committed under slavery in the State. The apology should be made on September 22, 2004, the 142nd anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation.

The bill is effective July 1, 2004.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Compliance with this bill would not directly affect State operations or finances.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Article 2 of the State Constitution incorporates the U.S. Constitution and all laws made pursuant to it, as the supreme law of the State. In 1865, the 13th amendment was ratified, which abolished slavery in every state. No formal apology for slavery has been issued by the State of Maryland.

Background: In the 105th session of the U.S. Congress (2000), the House of Representatives considered a resolution (H. Con. Res. 356) calling for Congress to issue a formal apology for slavery on the date in 1865 when the last remaining slaves in America learned they were free (commonly referred to as "Juneteenth"). In addition, the

resolution called for the establishment of a commission to study the legacy of slavery, a national museum, and a memorial. The bill was not reported from the House Judiciary Committee.

Similar bills were also introduced in several state legislatures. In 2003, the Pennsylvania general assembly adopted a resolution making the third Saturday of June 2003 “Juneteenth National Freedom Day.” Also, a bill was introduced during the 2003 session that would have established a commission to study the long-term effects of slavery on Pennsylvania and to recommend whether an official apology and reparations was warranted.

Precedents exist for official state apologies in the U.S. and abroad. In 1993, Congress offered a formal apology to native Hawaiians for the U.S.’s role in overthrowing the Hawaiian government in the late nineteenth century. In 1988, Congress formally apologized to Japanese Americans for their imprisonment in internment camps during World War II. This apology was part of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which also established an agency to distribute monetary reparations to survivors and their descendents. Moreover, the State of Florida apologized and paid reparations to several survivors for its role in the 1923 Rosewood riots, which lasted several days and destroyed an African-American enclave.

The emperor of Japan has apologized to Korea for Japan’s 36-year colonial rule, and the East German legislature has issued a formal apology to Jews who suffered through the holocaust.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HJ 10 of 2003 was introduced, but no action was taken by the House of Delegates.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Governor’s Office, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 18, 2004
mam/jr

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