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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB 906

March 12, 2020 * Health and Government Operations

What this bill does

This bill proclaims January as Tamil Heritage Month to honor the many Tamilians living in our state. Tamil people are individuals who speak the Tamil language and trace their ancestry to Tamil Nadu (a State in Southern India), Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Malaysia, Singapore, and other countries.

Why this bill matters

January is chosen because of the annual Tamil festival called “Pongal Day” which occurs around January 14 each year to celebrate the harvest and mark the end of the winter solstice. The festival is named after the ceremonial “Pongal,” which means “to boil or overflow” and refers to the traditional dish prepared from the new harvest of rice. This holiday is similar to Thanksgiving in the United States. Both celebrate the earth, animals, and nature for the resources necessary for the harvest.

Pongal Day was celebrated originally in South India and Sri Lanka by Tamil people, but now worldwide by the Tamil diaspora, including here in Maryland. Pongal Day is one of the most important holidays for Tamil people. It is a very old tradition dating back at least to the 3rd century BC. I am proposing this legislation to honor the culture of the many Tamilian people in my district, and across the state. They are back here in Annapolis for the third year advocating for recognition of their culture and holiday.

Why you should vote for this bill

Maryland has a long tradition of honoring cultures from around the world. We recognize Caribbean Heritage Month, Irish-American Heritage Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, German-American Heritage Month, American Indian Heritage Month and others. Many other states, including Virginia, have recognized Pongal Day. Maryland should join in support of the Tamil community that lives in our state, and help them celebrate this important holiday which brings together Tamilians living across Maryland. In this time of divisiveness and fear of others, it’s important that we take steps to celebrate our diversity and educate one another about our many different cultural traditions.