

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 1201**  
**with**  
**Recommendations for Amendments to be considered by a Working Group prior to final**  
**passage**

submitted by

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I commend Delegate Wanika Fisher and the other co-sponsors of House Bill 1201, for introducing this bill In the Maryland House. Repairing the injuries caused by Maryland’s wholehearted embrace of slavery is essential for racial healing in Maryland and will advance racial healing nationally.

I am the great, great granddaughter and great granddaughter of Mary and Lucinda (mother and daughter), respectively, who were enslaved in Maryland and sold to a plantation owner in Missouri. This makes my testimony both personal as well as springing from my long-time commitment to racial justice and reparations, both in my activism and scholarship.

A decision by Maryland to develop a reparative justice package for descendants of Africans enslaved in Maryland is long overdue. In 1867, the Maryland legislature petitioned the federal government for payment of reparations to those who lost the Africans they enslaved as a result of the Civil War and the legal end of slavery.<sup>1</sup> Embodying the view that the recently freed Africans

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., JOSEPH A. RANNEY, IN THE WAKE OF SLAVERY: CIVIL WAR, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF SOUTHERN LAW 60 (2006) (“Compensation for freed slaves was [so] important to slaveholders in Maryland and Kentucky . . . [that] the 1867 legislatures formally petitioned Congress for compensation ‘for the inconveniences, public and private, produced by such changes of system . . . ‘ “

deserved nothing, there was not only no action by the Maryland legislature to provide reparations to them; Maryland has also embodied a litany of forms of discrimination against the descendants of Africans, enslaved in Maryland or relocating to Maryland or passing through Maryland that the courts have had to stop. Maryland has perpetuated, therefore, the legacies of slavery that reflect the conviction that Black people of African descent are inferior to white people and not deserving of equal and just treatment. Based on this history, some of which may not be too far in the past, I recommend that a working group be established to assess the following:

- Whether confining a reparative justice package to those who can document their descendancy from someone enslaved in Maryland is fair. I know I am a descendant of two people who were enslaved in Maryland, yet have no documents to prove that fact. Given that the state supported slavery and part of that system was the lack of documentation, the burden should be on the state to disprove descendancy.
- The provision of reparations to only the descendants of Africans enslaved in Maryland is also too narrow as the crimes of slavery were continued after the state could no longer legally allow bondage. The demeaning, inhumane treatment of the formerly enslaved, their descendants and those who looked like them whether enslaved or not in Maryland continued. For example, refusal to provide blacks equal education lasted many years after slavery was abolished; as has disparate treatment by law enforcement.
- Whether there are models of reparative justice packages that have been developed that can assist Maryland in addressing its embrace of slavery and its role in continuing the legacies of slavery. There are two pieces of legislation, Florida's Rosewood Compensation Act of 1994 and Evanston, Illinois' 2010 resolution that may provide the

working group and Commission some guidance in developing a reparative justice package that reflects the injuries caused by Maryland's embrace of slavery and recalcitrance in rejecting the legacies of the inhuman system.<sup>2</sup>

I am happy to provide further testimony and be of whatever service I can be in the development of reparative justice in Maryland as a descendant of Africans enslaved in Maryland, a former resident of Maryland and someone committed to reparative justice.

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<sup>2</sup> Laws of Florida, 1994, c. 94-359; [www.cityofevanston.org/government/city-council/reparations](http://www.cityofevanston.org/government/city-council/reparations).