

EQUITY FOR ALL KIDS



To: Health and Government Operations Committee
From: Jennifer Bevan-Dangel, Executive Director
Re: HB1201, State Government - Maryland Reparations Commission –
Establishment (Harriet Tubman Community Investment Act)
Date: March 10, 2020
Position: Support

Advocates for Children and Youth supports HB1201, which would establish a Commission to advance reparations in Maryland. Reparations are about acknowledging the harm that was done to Black Americans and beginning the process to repair and heal those harms.

The legacy of slavery continues to have economic and health impacts on our African American and Black children to the current day. In 2018, 164,213 children in Maryland were living in poverty. Nearly 49% of those children, or 80,334 individuals, were African American or Black. Another 22%, or 36,379 children, were White. 78,000 children in Maryland were living in extreme poverty, or 50% of the poverty line. This includes 10% of African American or Black children, or 41,000 individuals, and 3% of White children, or 17,000 individuals. These numbers show the disproportionate impact of poverty on Maryland's children, an impact that did not happen overnight or through mere chance.

The disparate rates of poverty facing African American children in Maryland are rooted in 400 years of systemic economic disadvantage, and ultimately rooted in the state's history as a slave holding state. While the institution of slavery provided the cheap labor that powered the rise of America's economy, the institution – followed by Jim Crow, segregation, and redlining – created an unequal, uneven, and unwinnable financial playing field for the slave families living in America and their descendants.¹

That legacy also created an entrenched racism that impacts the mental health of Black children to today. The American Academy of Pediatrics has acknowledged the deep impact racism has, stating: "The impact of racism on communities of color is wide-reaching, systemic and complex."² A Commission on reparations allows Maryland to have an honest conversation about the racism that continues to fester today, and how to move forward in a way that addresses and remediates that harm.

We cannot change our history, but we can change the way we allow that history to impact families and children in the current day. HB1201 is an important step towards addressing that harm, recognizing our past, and changing our future. ACY urges a favorable report on HB1201.

¹ Baptist, Edward; "The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism," 2014

² American Academy of Pediatrics; <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-1765>