

Written Testimony in Support
HB1099 — Historic African American Cemeteries Preservation Fund and Study
Committee: Appropriations
Hearing Date: February 24, 2021
Submitted by:
Charlotte Troup Leighton, Cabin John, Montgomery County, Maryland

I am a resident of Cabin John, Maryland and a neighbor of the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)-eligible Morningstar Tabernacle No. 88 Moses Hall and Cemetery (MIHP No. M: 35-212). **I am also testifying as Vice President of Advocacy for Cabin John Citizens Association (CJCA), and a member of Friends of Moses Hall**, a volunteer organization of community leaders and descendants formed to protect and preserve the Morningstar Tabernacle No. 88 Moses Hall and Cemetery site in Cabin John.

I wholeheartedly support MD HB1099, which establishes the **Historic African American Cemeteries Preservation Fund** to identify, preserve, restore, protect, maintain, or commemorate graves, monuments, or markers at historic African American cemeteries in Maryland.

When I first moved to my home in Cabin John nearly a decade ago and discovered the historic Morningstar Tabernacle No. 88 Moses Hall and Cemetery next door, the apparent neglect of the site bothered me greatly — and ultimately compelled me to action. Notwithstanding religious practices and cultural traditions, isn't our society's ceremonial burying of its dead intended as a memorial to our ancestors and a tangible reminder of our history and genealogy? Allowing our sacred cemeteries to be neglected (or worse) does not conform with the ideals of a civil society.

When I was a child, my family often visited cemeteries where generations of our family members were interred. These visits were my first introduction to my 'family tree'. How might African American descendants have these privileges if their cemeteries are not respected and preserved for future generations?

All cemeteries deserve our respect, care and attention, but I am especially appalled to have learned over the last few years that African American cemeteries, in particular, have been the hardest hit by Maryland's lack of meaningful protections and preservation funding. Within my lifetime, Maryland has permitted African American cemeteries to 'disappear' through neglect, development, and infrastructure projects. What does this say about Maryland's commitment to racial and environmental justice?

Additionally, I am authorized to include in my testimony that **Cabin John Citizens Association (CJCA) on behalf of the entire Cabin John community supports** the preservation of Morningstar Tabernacle No. 88 Moses Hall and Cemetery and, by extension, HB1099 and all historic African American cemeteries in Maryland.

I urge this Committee to issue a favorable report and advance HB1099.