

Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang, members of the Appropriations committee, thank you so much for the opportunity to send in testimony today. I would like to encourage you to vote in the affirmative on Bill 1099, which would create a "Historic African American Cemeteries Preservation Fund to identify, preserve, restore, protect, maintain, or commemorate graves, monuments, or markers at historic African American cemeteries."

As someone who is actively engaged in preserving my local history and who lives on the remnant of a slave plantation, the history of neglecting and desecrating African-American cemeteries is one that I am all too familiar with.

About a 15-minute walk from my home are two historic burial sites: that of the Waters Family, the first European settlers in Germantown, and that of the Africans enslaved on their plantation. The former is protected by a fence and is soon to reside in a dedicated park, while the latter is half destroyed and half neglected. In the 1990s, a developer ignored outcry from local activists about the cemetery and turned over a good portion of it to put in new housing. What remains is in the woods, including the field stones that marked the graves tossed away as debris.

Several of my friends and I have been working in our local Historical Society to get this site the recognition it deserves and honor the lives and legacies of those who lived on this land long before us.

I wish I could say that this wrong was just one developer who cared little for the community and the law, but sadly this exemplifies a much larger problem throughout the state of Maryland. Many of those in power simply do not care about Black history. They elevate whitewashed narratives of our communities that ignore essential truths of our collective past and are willing to destroy the hallowed resting places of those who came before us to advance their own financial interests.

While I am under no illusions that this bill will cure our society of the racism that leads to these kinds of actions, I do know that it will give local activists like myself one more powerful tool to ensure that important African-American burial sites are maintained and honored. I urge you to vote for this bill's passage.

Thank you,

Andrew Saundry