

Dear Maryland General Assembly,

Please accept my written testimony in support of the amendments to HB-1099 proposed by BACC and supported by Delegate Carr.

In late June of 2020, I noticed a group of protesters standing on River Road in Bethesda, MD, only a half of a mile away from where I grew up. Of the many signs held by protesters, one in particular caught my eye - "Black Ancestors Matter". It was such a powerful statement, that not only got my attention but also made me deeply think. The next day, I went to the protest to learn what brought this group together to demonstrate, and why in this seemingly innocuous part of residential Bethesda which I was so familiar with.

I learned that these were protesters with the Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition, and that this group had been fighting to preserve the historic Moses African Cemetery from desecration for nearly five years. As I spent more time listening, reading, demonstrating, and getting to know the members of BACC, I came to deeply understand the history of the land I had called home for my whole life. I learned of the black families who had built their homes on these streets. I learned of their contributions to life in Montgomery County and D.C.. I learned of how these families were systematically displaced and relocated to make space for racialized development in Montgomery County. And, more contemporarily, I learned of BACC's struggle for protecting Moses Cemetery, an officially recognized, undelineated cemetery, from its imminent desecration. I learned of the seemingly endless roadblocks they faced from developers and county officials, and as the summer months ran on, I experienced this dismissal firsthand.

BACC has fought tirelessly for the most basic forms of recognition for the descendent community: things like having a say in the archeologist hired to examine the site, having government officials uphold their commitment to ethics and archeological integrity, or being able to have formal complaints acknowledged and investigated. Instead, county officials have decided to do nothing in the face of the developers who are currently desecrating plots of land where there are, in all likelihood, bodies and burials of former residents of the land. I watched alongside members of the descendent community as dozens of trucks carted away the soil from the site, to be dumped in a landfill and bulldozed, with virtually no archeology being conducted. I watched in real time as BACC photographers captured the blatant disregard for ethical archeological processes by Thunderbird Archeology, the private archeologists hired by the developer to greenlight their desecration.

This type of trauma is a continuation of the blatant racism and white supremacy that has plagued this nation since its inception. It is hard to imagine this type of treatment being levelled on the burials of any other population within the United States, and I urge you to let that reality sink in.

Fortunately, as members of the Maryland General Assembly, you are uniquely positioned to address this issue in the form of legislation. You can ensure that the same type of violence is not allowed to continue in the state of Maryland. You can honor Black ancestors and uphold your responsibility to their descendants. Please carefully consider the amendments proposed by BACC, and I urge you to embrace them into the HB-1099 bill. You have the opportunity, no, the responsibility, to begin to make a change in this historical narrative of inequality, violence, and hate. Please take that responsibility seriously.

Thank you for your time and attention,
Adam Simon