

Testimony for HB 1099 with Amendments

House Appropriations Committee

Greetings

My name is Robert Alex Stubblefield and I am writing this in support for HB 1099 with Amendments. This bill is necessary for one reason and that is systemic racism. The systemic racism which was built on the backs of formerly enslaved Africans and their descendants who have time and time again in the state of Maryland and throughout this country, have had their land stolen and their cemeteries either paved over for parking space or built over. Even efforts in recent years to memorialize historically African-American cemeteries such as the African Moses Cemetery in Bethesda and Laurel Cemetery in Baltimore, which have been desecrated, still get stonewalled by both private and public agencies despite strong evidence that these cemeteries are a key part in the history of the communities they served, are instead parceled about to the highest bidder like Christ's clothes at the Crucifixion is disturbing and sad. The fact this is debated right now is sad to be truthful. This bill should've happened years ago. But even with this bill, this bill needs amendments. My reasons for this are as follows.

The first reason why this bill needs amendments because in its current form, HB 1099 doesn't have any protections or helps the descendant communities. In its current form, Hb 1099 only maintains the status quo in the sense that the current developers and the business friendly historical preservation trusts have the final say, while the descendant communities do not have primary control throughout the process. This is due to the fact that theft of black lands, most descendants are not in a position to benefit from HB 1099. Secondly, this bill does not recognize the basic right of the descendant communities to choose how their families and ancestors are remembered. This is unacceptable because this indicates the disregard and continued dehumanization of the black body. The third reason why this bill needs amendments is because there is no accountability standards. The organizations that this Bill lists have and still play a role in the desecration of black cemeteries like the African Moses Cemetery. This bill offers in its current form symbol without substance while the descendant communities continue to be ignored and the cemeteries are still disrespected and destroyed.

So how can this bill become strong? This bill can become strong with amendments that organizations such as BACC, the United Front among others have endorsed. These amendments include but are not limited to the following: All decision making authority throughout the process of the study must be given to the descendant communities and not to the agencies such as developers, cultural resources groups. In other words, return the power to the people it was taken from. The second amendment for this bill calls for accountability- both civil and criminal penalties for the racist destruction of historic Black burial grounds and the bioarchaeology that shows the history of the communities that were there, the resiliency of these communities, and how they were stolen and destroyed. This is important because these cemeteries are currently under threat of being destroyed right now and cannot wait for a study or funds to be saved.

In conclusion while I support the bill, this bill must be made strong. Add the BACC Amendments to this bill so that HB 1099 can have the strength it needs and help moves forward racial equity and the truth.