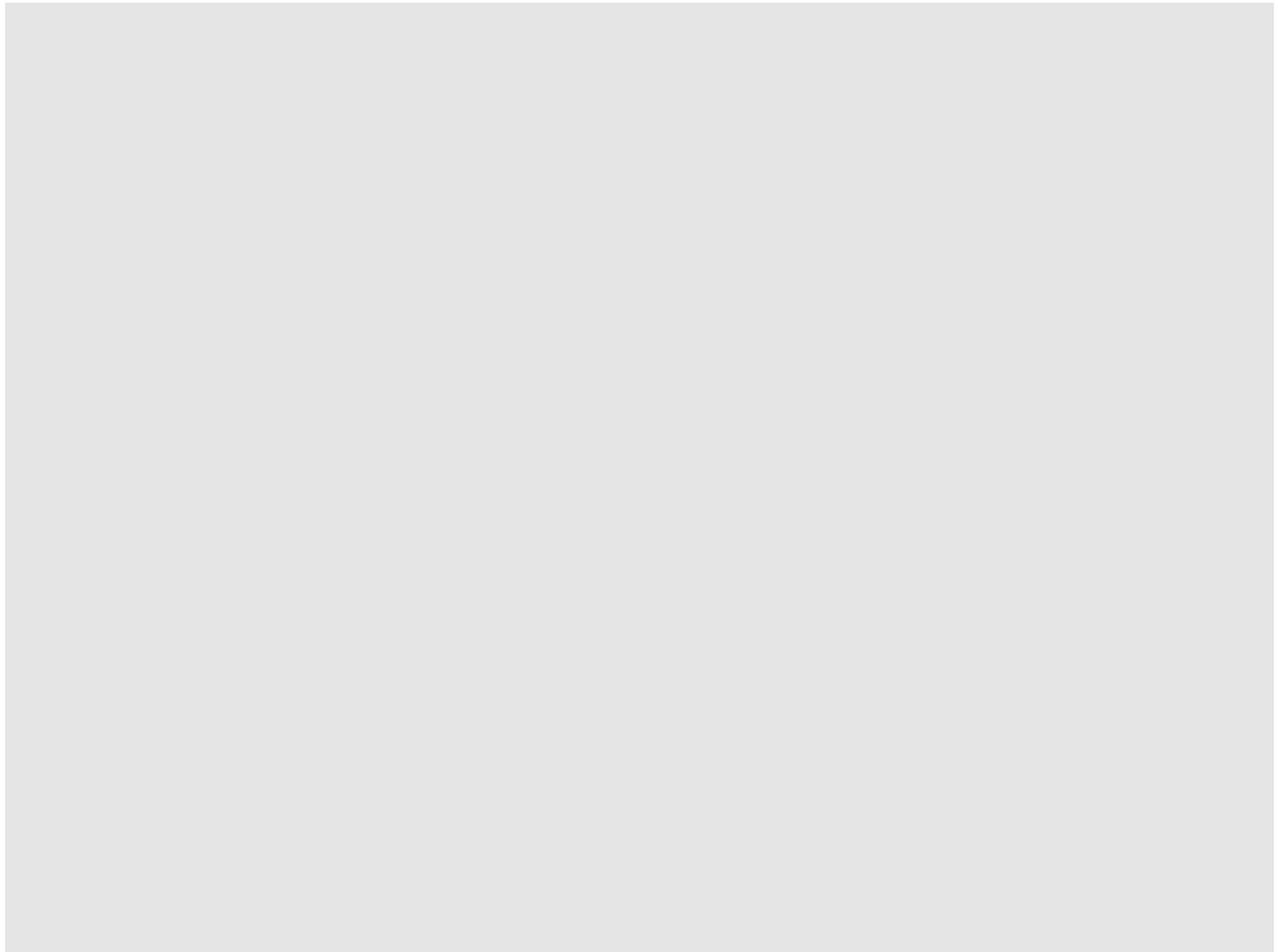


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Advisory group recommends retirement of Maryland's state song

By Danielle E. Gaines dgaines@newspost.com
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Lewis Young

Maryland's first State Song Advisory Group issued a report this week recommending changes to the state's official anthem, "Maryland, My Maryland," which critics say is divisive for its celebration of the Confederacy.

The nine-verse tune has been designated as the official state song since 1939. It has been the subject of several unsuccessful retirement efforts over the past four decades.

With the advisory group's recommendation and with national conversations shifting to the endurance of Confederate symbols and modern race relations, Frederick County state Delegate Karen Lewis Young said she hopes 2016 is the year the song will be changed.

Last summer, Lewis Young was drafting legislation to reconsider the song's designation, a proposal she shared with Delegate Peter A. Hammen, chairman of the House Health and Government Operations Committee.

Lewis Young sits on the committee, which considers bills dealing with official state designations.

Hammen, who was approached by another lawmaker about the topic, asked the Maryland State archivist, Timothy D. Baker, to create an advisory group in July.

The group's report, released Monday, agreed unanimously that the song "is not inclusive of all Marylanders — either when it was originally written or today — and does not reflect current attitudes or what is best about our state."

Earlier efforts

Opposition to "Maryland, My Maryland," started early — before the song even received its official state designation.

In 1935, a bill designating the song was passed by the Maryland General Assembly, but was vetoed by Gov. Harry W. Nice, who opposed the song's "objectionable verses," according to the advisory group's report.

The song, set to the tune of "Lauriger Horatius (O Tannenbaum)," was written by James Ryder Randall, a native of Baltimore, in 1861, while he was living in Louisiana. The song was celebrated in the South but stirred controversy in Maryland, where Civil War sympathies were divided, according to the report.

When Nice lost re-election in 1939, Gov. Herbert R. O'Connor signed a second General Assembly bill into law.

Bills that would have overturned the designation were introduced by lawmakers in 1974, 1980, 1984, 2001, 2002 and 2009. None passed.

Several times, including in 2002 and 2009, lawmakers have proposed replacing "Maryland, My Maryland" with words from John T. White's 1894 poem "My Maryland."

White, who was born in Frederick County, wrote the poem as alternate lyrics to Randall's song.

The advisory group created this year is the first formal body created to offer a recommendation to the General Assembly.

Advisory group report

The Advisory Group on the Maryland State Song was formed in July and included experts in Maryland history, music history, military history, cultural history and folklore. It met twice in October and electronically before submitting its report.

To begin the assessment of "Maryland, My Maryland," Baker wrote that the advisory group first created criteria for measuring suitable state songs.

It concluded that an official state song should:

- celebrate Maryland and its citizens;
- be unique to Maryland;
- be historically significant;
- be inclusive of all Marylanders;
- be memorable, popular, singable and short.

After consideration, the group suggested six alternatives for lawmakers to consider.

The first is to retire all but the third verse of Randall's song.

The second alternative suggests adopting the fourth verse of White's poem to be sung

in the current song's place.

A third alternative would combine Randall's third verse and White's fourth verse, to create a two-verse tune.

A fourth suggestion would be to adopt a state song that would be played instrumentally only.

The group also noted that state has a unique claim to "The Star Spangled Banner" — written by Frederick's Francis Scott Key about an event in Maryland — and could adopt the national anthem as a state song.

A final recommendation suggests retiring "Maryland, My Maryland" with no replacement for 10 years to see if a popular alternative emerges.

A change in 2016?

Lewis Young said she was pleased with the level of detail in the advisory group's report.

"What's really important is that before they made any recommendation, they created a set of criteria," Lewis Young said of the advisory group's work. "After establishing the criteria, they said the current song doesn't meet the criteria except for the third verse."

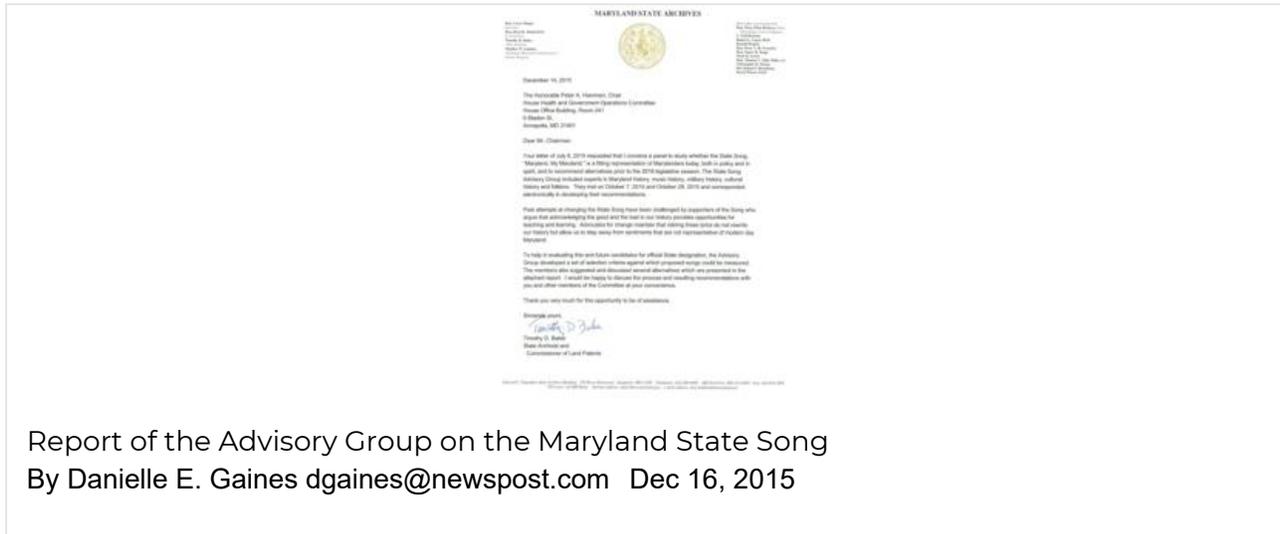
Lewis Young said she has heard from several constituents turned off by the name-calling and divisiveness of the current song. The lawmaker said she will work with fellow legislators to craft a bill to address the state song designation when the General Assembly convenes on Jan. 13.

"I just don't think that's appropriate for a state song. You want something that unites us and doesn't divide us," she said.

At first blush, she likes the committee's recommendation to combine the works of White and Randall and would support that change in Annapolis.

“For those who wanted to keep the song, we’re keeping the verse. For those who wanted something that celebrates Maryland’s beauty and history, we’ve got a verse of the John T. White song,” she said. “I think this is a great compromise.”

Follow Danielle E. Gaines on Twitter: @daniellegaines.



Report of the Advisory Group on the Maryland State Song
By Danielle E. Gaines dgaines@newspost.com Dec 16, 2015

Maryland, My Maryland

I

The despot's heel is on thy shore,

Maryland!

His torch is at thy temple door,

Maryland!

Avenge the patriotic gore

That flecked the streets of Baltimore,

And be the battle queen of yore,

Maryland! My Maryland!

II

Hark to an exiled son's appeal,

Maryland!

My mother State! to thee I kneel,

Maryland!

For life and death, for woe and weal,

Thy peerless chivalry reveal,

And gird thy beauteous limbs with steel,

Maryland! My Maryland!

III

Thou wilt not cower in the dust,

Maryland!

Thy beaming sword shall never rust,

Maryland!

Remember Carroll's sacred trust,

Remember Howard's warlike thrust,-

And all thy slumberers with the just,

Maryland! My Maryland!

IV

Come! 'tis the red dawn of the day,

Maryland!

Come with thy panoplied array,

Maryland!

With Ringgold's spirit for the fray,

With Watson's blood at Monterey,

With fearless Lowe and dashing May,

Maryland! My Maryland!

V

Come! for thy shield is bright and strong,

Maryland!

Come! for thy dalliance does thee wrong,

Maryland!

Come to thine own anointed throng,

Stalking with Liberty along,

And chaunt thy dauntless slogan song,

Maryland! My Maryland!

VI

Dear Mother! burst the tyrant's chain,

Maryland!

Virginia should not call in vain,

Maryland!

She meets her sisters on the plain-

"Sic semper!" 'tis the proud refrain

That baffles minions back again,

Maryland!

Arise in majesty again,

Maryland! My Maryland!

VII

I see the blush upon thy cheek,

Maryland!

For thou wast ever bravely meek,

Maryland!

But lo! there surges forth a shriek,

From hill to hill, from creek to creek-

Potomac calls to Chesapeake,

Maryland! My Maryland!

VIII

Thou wilt not yield the Vandal toll,

Maryland!

Thou wilt not crook to his control,

Maryland!

Better the fire upon thee roll, Better the blade, the shot, the bowl,

Than crucifixion of the soul,

Maryland! My Maryland!

IX

I hear the distant thunder-hum,

Maryland!

The Old Line's bugle, fife, and drum,

Maryland!

She is not dead, nor deaf, nor dumb-

Huzza! she spurns the Northern scum!

She breathes! she burns! she'll come! she'll come!

Maryland! My Maryland!

Alternate state song lyrics

One of the Advisory Group on the Maryland State Song's recommendations includes creating the following song by combining the works of James Ryder Randall and John T. White:

Thou wilt not cower in the dust,

Maryland!

Thy beaming sword shall never rust,

Maryland!

Remember Carroll's sacred trust,

Remember Howard's warlike thrust,

And all thy slumberers with the just,

Maryland! My Maryland!

Sail on, sail on thou Ship of State,

Maryland, My Maryland.

May we thy children make thee great,

Maryland, My Maryland.

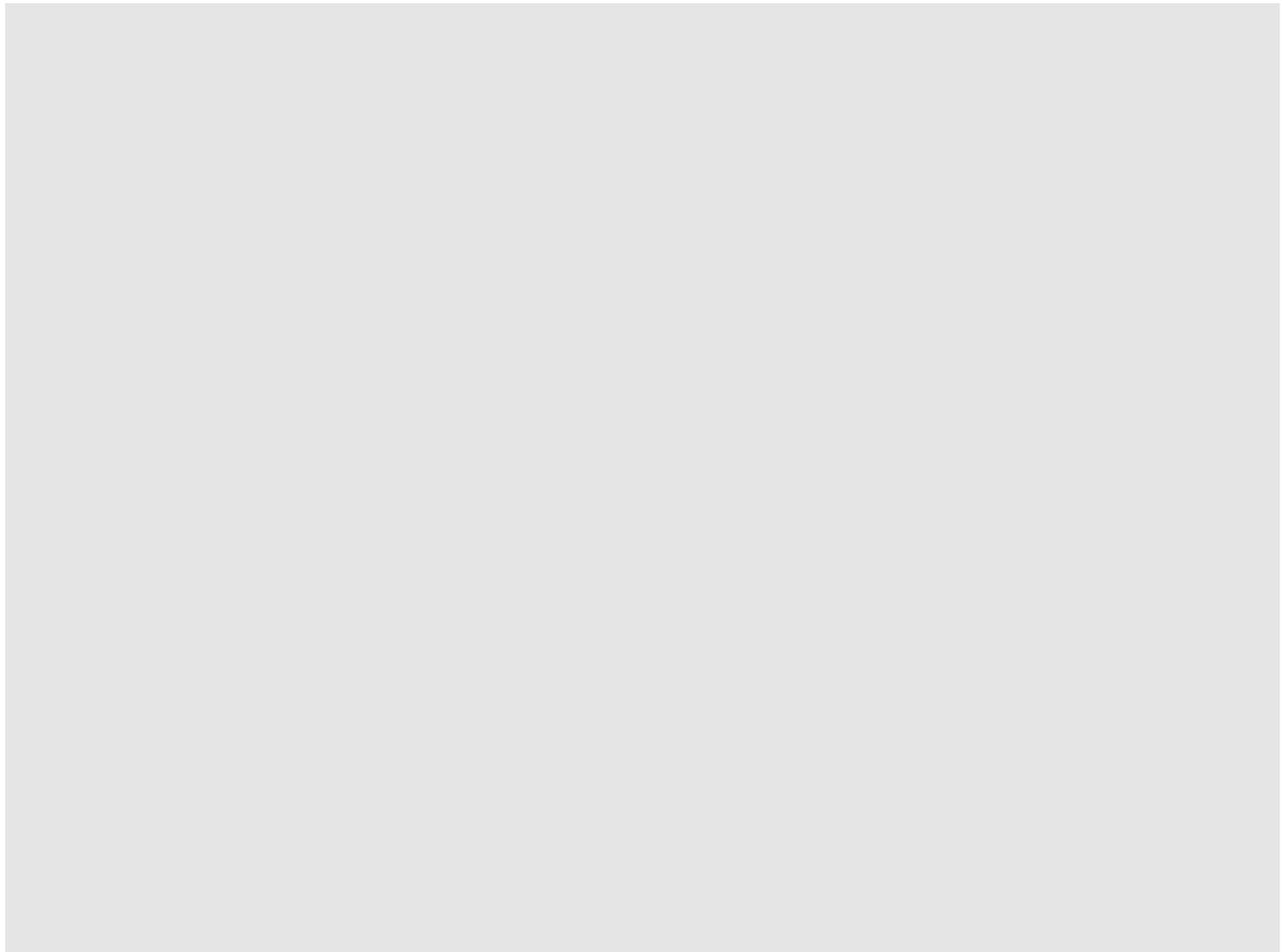
My gratitude our hearts possess,

And boldly we thy claims express,

And bow in loving thankfulness,

Maryland, my Maryland.

MORE INFORMATION



Frederick delegate submits bill to change Maryland state song

Annapolis resident proposes new Maryland state song

'Maryland, My Maryland' faces official retirement

Danielle E. Gaines

Danielle E. Gaines covers politics and government in Frederick County, splitting her time between Winchester Hall and The State House. Having grown up in Illinois, she lived in New York and California before settling in Maryland.