

Testimony for Janice L. Briscoe for HB 602 for Historic Sotterley, Inc.

I am Jan Briscoe, the President of the Board of Trustees for Historic Sotterley, Inc., and I am writing in support of HB 602. The original structures that still stand at Sotterley span three hundred years starting in 1703 and the site grew to be a large plantation for much of its existence. The Historic Sotterley foundation came into being when the owner at that time, Mabel Ingalls, granddaughter of JP Morgan, opened Sotterley to the public in 1961, and upon her death in 1993, bequeathed the property to the foundation she had created.

There was no endowment with which to operate and Historic Sotterley struggled those first years as a museum, and it was recognized 26 years ago by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of the most endangered historic sites in America. At that time, the President of the Board of Trustees was my father, John Hanson Briscoe, who was Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates from 1973 – 1979. He was involved with Sotterley because our family owned Sotterley from 1826 – 1910.

What happened next changed Sotterley forever. My father was approached by another Trustee, Ms. Agnes Kane Callum. Ms. Callum also had a connection to Sotterley, but a very different one than my family had. Her descendants had been enslaved here. Agnes had made my father aware of a side of our shared history he had never truly understood— Sotterley’s long history with slavery. Once he understood a fuller picture of the realities of the past, he realized, as Agnes did, that these stories and the lives of all those who lived and labored here were too important not to preserve and tell. Sotterley had a unique opportunity to set its foot on a different path, and one of inclusiveness and honesty. Ms. Callum and my father joined forces to rally the community to save Sotterley so that the story of

That union of two seemingly unlikely allies began Sotterley’s journey to honestly, and with integrity, interpret and share all aspects of our shared history. This legacy of working together in a respectful and positive way is being continued by the next generation of Sotterley descendants who today serve on the Board, committees, and as participants in our impactful programming.

I thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony about the importance of this rare and important place to our State, and to say how critical this support is to the furtherance of our mission and work.

Historic Sotterley Inc’s Mission: Preserve our historic structures and natural environment and use the powerful stories of our land, lives, and labor to bring American history to life while serving as an educational and cultural resource.