

SHANEKA HENSON
Legislative District 30A
Anne Arundel County

Appropriations Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 152
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3045 · 301-858-3045
800-492-7122 Ext. 3045
Shaneka.Henson@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 8, 2022

Chair Maggie McIntosh
Vice Chair Mark Chang
Room 121
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang and esteemed Colleagues of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for allowing me to introduce HB1048 “Commission on African American History and Culture - Alterations (Senator Verda Welcome Act)”

In 1964, Maryland Senator Verda Freeman Welcome, the founder of the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture (MCAAHC), survived an assassination attempt designed to silence her voice in the civil rights movement. She developed the MCAAHC with a vision to develop a State commission to preserve and share Black history and help uproot and diminish racism in Maryland. HB1048 is vital to the future success of this vision and its important work in our state.

This bill will fund and support capital projects in conjunction with the African American Heritage Preservation Program by requiring the Maryland Historical Trust establish perpetual support through the Commission on African American History and Culture as an independent agency requiring certain appropriations be included annually in the State Budget.

For years, museums like the Banneker-Douglass Museum (the State's official Museum on African American History and Culture) have served to tell the story of African Americans in our state, provide context to our state's history, and amplify voices that are often disregarded. Unfortunately, this important work has been vastly under-resourced by the State. The Banneker-Douglass Museum in particular has suffered.

The State's investment is critical to ensuring the museum's viability for Marylanders and its tourists. As a Marylander, an African American woman, a mother, and legislator, I know how

much this museum and others like it mean to our State, youth, and communities. I have seen firsthand how their work keeps alive community memory that is often lost and forgotten and inspires and empowers young people and adults to be agents of positive change.

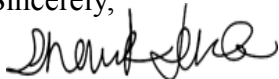
The Banneker-Douglass Museum's mission, work, and founding are rooted in civil rights history. The museum is a National Historic site and National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom site. Why? The Banneker-Douglass Museum was once Mt. Moriah Church, built by a congregation of African Americans. The church was built nearly 10 years after abolishing slavery in Maryland. In 1874, Frederick Douglass gave their dedicatory address. One hundred years later, Senator Verda Freeman Welcome, along with her newly formed Commission, fought to save the church from demolition and would open it as the State's museum. And now we must again fight to preserve it and its work.

Today, museums like the Banneker-Douglass Museum (BDM) and the work of MCAAHC are needed more than ever. We are in a pivotal moment in our nation's history; everyday people, teachers, parents, students, and artists of all backgrounds use their voices to educate others on African American history and culture. As Maryland's official state museum, the Banneker-Douglass Museum is at the forefront of these collective efforts to preserve and share our State's rich history in the anti-slavery movement, civil rights, education, and innovation.

The museum serves as a tremendous resource, reaching over 50,000 people through its onsite and virtual programs. The museum annually presents outstanding exhibitions, youth conferences, and symposiums to amplify Black history, art, culture, and critical social justice causes impacting Black communities in Maryland. In addition, the museum produces programs such as after-school programs and trainings for museum professionals and teachers. Our museum actively preserves over 12,000 artifacts and objects such as materials from Benjamin Banneker, Frederick Douglass, and more.

Increasing their annual operational budget and addressing their capital repairs will ensure that the Banneker-Douglass Museum's collection practices, exhibitions, and educational programming are sustained and thriving, and that MCAAHC is able to continue to do its vital work. Let's work together to keep Senator Verda Freeman's vision alive for the next generation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shaneka Henson".

Delegate Shaneka Henson