

## WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1088

submitted by:

Commissioner Edwin T. Johnson, PhD., (Baltimore City)  
Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture

Since its inception approximately one decade ago, the African American Heritage Preservation Program Grant (AAHPP) has become the crown jewel of the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture (MCAAHC). Like the Commission that governs the program, the AAHPP initiated a pioneering effort to identify, rescue, restore, and preserve sites significant to the stories of the African American experience in the state of Maryland and share them with the world. The traditional recording of both American and Maryland History typically and often intentionally excluded, overlooked, diluted, and inaccurately presented the journey of African Americans. The MCAAHC has been the leading and galvanizing champion in the state-wide effort to ensure that the history of Maryland's African American citizenry is corrected, reconstructed, appropriately recorded, and illuminated for all to be edified. The AAHPP is among MCAAHC's most powerful tool in achieving its mission.

Since fiscal year 2012, the AAHPP has funded projects throughout the state of Maryland. As of the last grant cycle, all but two Maryland territories have been awarded funding for

projects. The MCAAHC intentionally and strategically endeavors to award qualified projects in the two remaining territories (Howard and Worcester Counties). There are indeed spaces and sites significant to the African American experience in every corner of the state of Maryland. The primary unfortunate challenge that besets the MCAAHC in its execution of the AAHPP is that the program is grossly underfunded. Since its inaugural year, the interest in the program developed an anticipated groundswell. In that African American History has been undervalued in Maryland, funding to preserve the African American experience has followed suit. The success of the AAHPP is a David versus Goliath story. One program has championed the entire effort of the state. As such, the MCAAHC earnestly seeks to be more fully equipped to execute its mission in the years to come.

Support of House Bill 1088 would increase the grant program from \$1 million to \$5 million annually. This increase would allow the AAHPP to fund a significantly larger percentage of qualified projects that are currently unaddressed. It is unfortunate, that each year African American historic sites literally vanish throughout our state because the AAHPP lacks the sufficient funding to save them. In the 2022 grant cycle, the MCAAHC received applications from 36 eligible projects, which amounted to \$3.3 million in funding. Unfortunately, the \$1 million allocation only allowed for 13 of the 36 projects to receive awards. 3 of the 13 awards received only partial funding. It is imperative that we close this gap that widens each year.

Consider the current climate of the state of Maryland and our nation overall. There has not been a more pivotal moment in our history regarding race relations and social justice since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Understanding, appreciating, valuing and illuminating our diversity is central to the forward progress of our state and our nation. The AAHPP is essential to the accurate and authentic story-telling of the African American experience in Maryland. Knowing the contributions of African Americans supplies every Marylander with the irrefutable awareness that indeed Black Lives Matter and have always been essential to the overall advancement of the human race, regardless of the color of your skin. Support House Bill 1088 and secure Maryland's African American History for generations yet unborn.