

SHANEKA HENSON
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Appropriations Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 23, 2022

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Chair Guy Guzzone

Vice Chair Jim Rosapepe

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe and Esteemed members of the Senate Budget & Taxation Committee. Thank you for allowing me to introduce before you HB1048 “ Commission on African American and Culture- Alterations (Senator Verda Welcome Act).

I am pleased to bring forth this bill, with a favorable consideration from the House Appropriations Committee and 117 votes in the affirmative out of the House Chamber. With minor Amendmendments to the bill, HB1048 makes the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture (MCAAHC) an independent entity that will simply require the Governor to include an appropriation of \$1.6 million for the commission in the annual budget each fiscal year.The required funding would be subject to audit by the State and with your consideration would take effect July 1, 2022.

This Bill proudly mirrors SB953 with Senator McCray and with great honor works in conjunction with Speaker Arienne Jones’s Bill HB1088 “ African American Heritage Preservation Program - Annual Appropriation and Alterations”, as HB1048 provides technical assistance for HB1088 to administer the increase funds for the African American Heritage preservation grant while subsequently establishing the necessary funding needed for capital repairs for the vastly under resourced Banneker Douglass Museum, the State's official Museum on African American History and Culture.

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.

For over 35 years, the Banneker-Douglass Museum has done just that and its mission has served and continues 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 and 11,700 square foot National treasure has been vastly under-resourced by the State. There is currently \$3 million worth of capital repairs and the States 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 means 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.

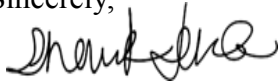
The Banneker-Douglass Museum's mission, work, and founding are rooted in civil rights history. The museum is a National Historic site and National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom site. Why? The Banneker-Douglass Museum was once Mt. Moriah Church, built by a congregation of African Americans. 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.

Today, the Banneker-Douglass Museum (BDM) mission is 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 training 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. Let's work together to keep Senator Verda Freeman's vision alive for the next generation, Thank you and I urge a favorable report on HB1048

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shaneka Henson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Delegate Shaneka Henson