



Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture

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MCAAHC

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March 24, 2022

Maryland State Appropriations Committee
Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen St., Annapolis

Dear Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe and members of the Budget and Taxation Committee,

On behalf of the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture (MCAAHC) and the Banneker-Douglass Museum, I am writing to express our support of Senate Bill 953 – Commission on African American History and Culture- Alterations (Senator Verda Welcome Act) - to increase the grant program from \$1 million to \$5million per year, include in the annual budget \$1.6 million for the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture to increase the operational capacity of the Banneker-Douglass Museum. In addition an appropriation of \$3 million to address the museum's urgent capital repairs.

For over 50 years, MCAAHC has been dedicated to preserving and celebrating African American history and culture in Maryland. As the nation's first state ethnic commission, which operates the state museum on African American history and culture, the Banneker-Douglass Museum, and the state's African American Heritage Preservation Grant (AAHPP), the state's one-million-dollar capital grant, the Commission remains to this day unique as a national model.

The MCAAHC was founded in 1969 under the leadership of Maryland Senator Verda Freeman Welcome--the first Black woman senator in Maryland. Her vision was to develop a state commission to preserve and present Black history to inspire communities and help uproot racism in Maryland. The Commission established the Banneker-Douglass Museum (BDM) in Annapolis in 1984 to help carry out this vision. Today, the mission of the Commission and the Banneker-Douglass Museum is needed more than ever.

Banneker-Douglass Museum's Work & Impact

- For over 35 years, the Banneker-Douglass Museum has served as the State's official Museum on African American History and Culture.
- The museum serves as a tremendous resource in the State's preservation and presentation of Black history and culture and reaches over 50,000 people through its in-person and virtual resources.
- 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, racial equity community trainings, and professional development for teachers and heritage preservation.
- The Banneker-Douglass Museum is a National Preservation Site and a National Underground Network to Freedom site.
- The museum preserves over 12,000 artifacts and objects in its newly renovated collections and research facility and Maryland State Archives.
- The museum presents virtual and onsite tours of their exhibitions, collections, and programs to people of all ages and backgrounds.

The Need

Banneker-Douglass Museum Operational and Capital Budget: It is imperative to increase the Banneker-Douglass Museum's operating budget to \$1.6 million and address our \$3 million worth of capital repairs.

Capital Repairs include but are not limited to:

- **HVAC System:** Nearly 20 years old, the system has surpassed its life expectancy, indicated by its constant need for repair from malfunction.
- **Elevator Repair:** The main elevator is often offline, thus rendering the museum inaccessible to the public. Also, the service elevator is entirely offline.
- **Technology Upgrades to Facility**
- **Update Permanent Exhibit** to include additional Maryland Black history, art, and cultural milestones.
- **Restoration to Original Wood Floors:** The historic wing of BDM was once Mt. Moriah AME Church, built-in 1874. The original wood floors require repair/restoration.

Operations

The Banneker-Douglass Museum has been chronically under-resourced and staffed for years. The museum's operational budget needs to raise at a minimum of \$1.6 million. Increased funding towards staffing, exhibitions, public & youth programs, and collections management is imperative to their operations and growth. Increasing their budget to \$1.6 million will ensure that the Banneker-Douglass Museum's collection practices, exhibitions, and educational programming are sustained and thriving.

The African American Heritage Preservation Grant (AAHPP)

The AAHPP, administered in partnership with the Maryland Historical Trust, provides grants across the state to preserve buildings, sites, and communities of historical and cultural importance

to the African American experience in Maryland. Since its inception in 2010, MCAAHC has awarded nearly 150 capital projects totaling over **\$12 million**. While this is an incredible accomplishment for the state, MCAAHC's capacity to award only \$1 million to address urgent capital needs means that the \$3.4 million (five-year average) requests go unanswered.

Therefore, to address the critical need to preserve African American sites, capital and non-capital, as important Maryland historical sites, and address inflation costs associated with preservation, it is crucial to increase the AAHPP grant from \$1 million to \$5 million. With the Maryland State Appropriations Committee's support of this bill, African American heritage sites (museums, historic homes, communities, schools, churches, and more) will be strengthened, which will substantially help revitalize communities economically throughout the state.

We hope the Budget and Taxation Committee will join us in investing in this effort.

Sincerely,
Chanel Compton
Executive Director