



Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture

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MCAAHC

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March 23, 2022

Budget and Taxation Committee
State Office Building
11 Bladen St., Annapolis

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

On behalf of the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture (MCAAHC), I am writing to express our support of Senate Bill 953 - The Senator Verda Welcome Act, which proposes \$1.6 million to be included in the annual budget for the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture to increase the operational capacity of the Banneker-Douglass Museum, an appropriation of \$3 million to address the critical capital repairs the museum requires, and an increase of The African American Heritage Preservation Program from \$1 million to \$5million per year.

Senator Verda Freeman Welcome founded the Commission at a time of civil unrest in the nation's history following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and today over 50 years later the Commission has remained true to the vision of preserving and presenting Black history to inspire communities and help uproot racism in Maryland.

The Banneker-Douglass Museum (BDM) was established to help carry out this vision. Since its founding, it has become a popular tourist attraction known for its outstanding exhibitions, youth conferences, and symposiums. It has also become a very sacred place for adults and children to come and dialogue about social justice matters that continue to impact Black communities in Maryland. Citizens come from far and wide to learn strategies to tear down barriers and create an equitable and just society. The continuation of these initiatives is threatened by the critical capital repair needs of the museum.

Additionally, the Commission oversees the African American Heritage Preservation Grant (AAHPP), the state's one-million-dollar capital grant in partnership with the Maryland Historical Trust. This program provides grants that 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. Yet, an average of more than \$3.4 million others has been denied.

The Commission has served as a national model for other ethnic Commissions. However, with its oversight of these two very important state treasures, the BDM and the AAHPP, the Commission stands as one of a kind.

Therefore, I humbly ask that you support this bill to address these critical needs to ensure that the public continue to have full access to African American heritage experiences in the state of Maryland.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tamara Wilson".

**Rev. Dr. Tamara E. Wilson,
Chair**