

Dear Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

I am a resident of District 21 and a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice Annapolis and Anne Arundel County.

I am requesting that you support **SB0005 General Provisions – Commemorative Days – Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day**, a bipartisan supported bill that would make the fourth Thursday in March a day to celebrate and remember some of our local heroes who fought racism at home and fascism abroad.

The Tuskegee Airmen were the first African Americans allowed to train as aviators and support personnel in the US Army Air Corps. During the 1940s, “the Tuskegee Institute trained nearly 1,000 pilots and 14,000 navigators, bombardiers, instructors, aircraft and engine mechanics, control tower operators and other maintenance and support staff” (history.com). They faced discrimination from segregation and Jim Crow laws, flew second-hand planes, and were sent on scouting missions that they weren’t expected to return from. Despite these challenges, they excelled at escorting bomber air crafts during WWII, with the lowest loss rate of all fighter groups. Proving that African Americans have the aptitude and leadership as military pilots paved the way for desegregation of the US armed forces in 1948.

Did you know that Maryland is home to several Tuskegee Airmen?

[Airman Brigadier General Charles McGee from Bethesda, MD](#) served in the US Air Force for 30 years. He is recognized in the National Aviation Hall of Fame for his 409 aerial fighter combat missions over the span of three wars. He was an invited speaker to an overflow crowd at the Odenton Public Library in Anne Arundel County a few years ago. The Silver Spring Library was recently named after him. He died at 102 years old in January. Who will tell his story now?

[Second Lieutenant Leroy Battle of Harwood, MD](#) was a jazz musician with double degrees in education and music who later went on to work for Prince George's County Public Schools as a teacher, band director, guidance counselor and vice principal. In 1945, he and 100 other airmen participated in a nonviolent action to integrate an officer’s club that later inspired civil rights activists in the 1950s and 60s ([Evans](#)).

Another notable Marylander is [Willam Broadwater of Upper Marlboro, MD](#). He trained as a military pilot but the war ended before he could go overseas. After that he applied to a major commercial airline and scored the highest grade on the entrance test. The airline

insisted that there must be a problem with the test and required him to take it over again. The second time he scored the second highest grade,

“A company representative visited Mr. Broadwater at home. “He said the company could never hire a black pilot because . . . no one would fly if they knew there was a black pilot,” Mr. Broadwater’s son said. “My dad told him, half jokingly, that they would never have to know because he would just stay in the cockpit. The guy from the airline didn’t think that was funny.” ([Lester](#)).

Mr. Broadwater went on to work for the FAA as an air traffic controller and senior administrator. He helped found the nonprofit Tuskegee Airmen Inc. which provides scholarships and grants for youth seeking careers in aviation and aerospace.

Other local Tuskegee Airmen:

- [Dr Cyril Byron of Randallstown, MD](#) served as a crewman maintaining the airplanes. He later became a Baltimore college professor and coach. He was also the first African-American referee in Division I East Coast football.
- [Charles H. Toogood of Northeast Baltimore, MD](#), a retired machinist and decorated World War II combat pilot, who was wounded in the line of duty.

These stories deserve to be told to those who will never get a chance to meet these brave men. These are stories of Maryland and of America. Let’s commemorate these them and many others whose memory still inspires and serves to empower boys and girls and men and women today. For these reasons I am encouraging you to vote **in SUPPORT of SB0005.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Linda Girdner
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