

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL HB0594  
State Government - Maryland Reparations Commission - Establishment

TO: Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair  
Pena-Melnyk, and members of the Health  
and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Chris Apple  
7001 Cradlerock Farm Court  
Columbia, MD 21045  
District 13

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Maryland’s slaveholding population acquired vast material wealth by enslaving Black people and exploiting their labor. Maryland was home to one of the largest slave populations in the country<sup>1</sup>, and the second-largest slave breeding operation<sup>2</sup>. By the time slavery was outlawed in 1864, slave-owning Marylanders had been profiting from Black labor for centuries. No recompense was ever made to address the generational wealth that slaveholding families had stolen from their former victims.

The antebellum General Assembly was complicit in this exploitation and abuse. The revenues from agriculture and slave breeding were almost certainly taxed. The State House is built with that money – stolen from Black labor and suffering. Legislators were paid with it, many of whom perpetuated slavery. Corporal punishment for Blacks was a common feature of antebellum Maryland laws. An 1842 law allowed for the “infliction of thirty-nine lashes” on the back of any slave belonging to a secret society.<sup>3</sup> With these laws, the state effectively created legalized torture.

Though no current members of the General Assembly are to blame, the State of Maryland itself bears an ugly moral debt for its pre-war actions. That stain cannot be removed until we take real steps to address what happened.

Though there may be challenges identifying descendants of enslaved persons, it is absolutely possible. Maryland is home to world-class historians, archivists, economists, and sociologists. We have the talent and drive to complete this task.

This bill will discharge a very old moral obligation to remunerate those families who were abused for so long. A dollar amount would put a concrete value on the unquantifiable moral and emotional cost of two centuries of cruelty - and that may help people realize just how enormous that moral cost really is. I urge the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 594.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1850/1850c/1850c-04.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://medium.com/the-aambc-journal/the-truth-about-american-slave-breeding-farms-ee631e863e2c>

<sup>3</sup> 1842 Md Laws Ch. 281 <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000594/html/am594--238.html>