

# State of Maryland

## Commission on Civil Rights

*“Our vision is to have a State that is free from any trace of unlawful discrimination.”*



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March 1, 2022

### **House Bill 594 – State Government - Maryland Reparations Commission - Establishment (Harriet Tubman Community Investment Act) POSITION: Support**

Dear Chairperson Pendergrass, Vice Chairperson Peña-Melnyk, and Members of the House Health & Government Operations Committee:

The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (“MCCR”; “The Commission”) is the State agency responsible for the enforcement of laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, health services and state contracts based upon race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, physical and mental disability, and source of income.

House Bill 594 establishes the Maryland Reparations Commission, which is staffed by the Maryland State Archives. The purpose of this Commission is to develop and administer a program for the provision of compensatory benefits to descendants of individuals enslaved in Maryland. Benefits include a cash sum, reimbursement for tuition at institutions of higher education in the State, and assistance with-low interest loans and mortgages.

The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights supports HB 594 because establishing a system of reparations for descendants of enslaved Black Marylanders would both help to atone for slavery while reducing the racial wealth gap that is a lingering vestige of the institution of slavery. While the Maryland General Assembly passed a resolution in 2007 apologizing for its role in promoting, utilizing, and defending slavery<sup>1</sup>, the state has yet to undertake substantial efforts to make whole Black Marylanders for the wealth generated for their work that was stolen from them by inhumane means. Additionally, as declared in Senate Joint Resolution 6 from the 2007 Legislative Session, “Slavery fostered a climate of oppression not only for slaves and their descendants but also for people of color who moved to Maryland after slavery’s abolition,” and, “Slavery’s legacy has afflicted citizens of our State down to the present”.

For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights strongly urges a favorable vote on HB 594. Thank you for your time and consideration of the information contained in this letter. The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights looks forward to the continued opportunity to work with you to improve and promote civil rights in Maryland.

<sup>1</sup> <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2007rs/bills/sj/sj0006e.pdf>

