

Senate Bill 958 Testimony March 15, 2023

There is no way you can right the wrongs of hundreds of years of disenfranchised minorities, however today you can start with making the crooked ways straight by passing Senate Bill 958. While we can't correct the past, start by creating an inclusive environment that includes diverse management that has a greater propensity to invest in diverse founders and create a venture that is more inclusive and nurturing of diverse employees. It will allow Maryland to advance to the highest levels of equity, inclusion, and remediation.

Please forgive me for some hard words today. Four hundred and four years ago the first African set foot here in Annapolis. Followed by possibly hundreds of thousands more. They came here as slaves. For close to 250 of those years, the majority of Black Marylanders could be sold, whipped, beaten, mutilated, forced to work, forced to watch their women, men as well as their children raped and they built a wealthy state for the benefit of their white masters. Finally they were freed. But free to do what, free to be beaten or shot by police. Free to be lynched from a tree. Civil rights came slowly to Maryland. We're still fighting some of those fights.

That's why I am deeply saddened and even more deeply disillusioned by this bill. According to the Maryland Health Department, 45.3% of the people in Maryland are African American. When you include mixed race individuals, those who admit to it and those who don't admit to it, more than half the people in Maryland trace ancestry back to Africa.

So, now you're going to say that 20% of these opportunities have to go to minority businesses. Not to African American businesses. Maybe not even to people who were born in America. You're going to take 20% and give it to some nebulous crew, some of whom might be African American. Then you're going to say 80% can go to the people who are descendants of slave Masters. In business circles, African Americans are still dismissed as the hewers of wood and drawers of water.

How dare you steal from us and beat us and kill us and enslave us for hundreds of years and then tell us that even though we are roughly 50% of the population, we can have 20% of the contracts. How dare you! I stand here before you on the backs of my ancestors who suffered a physical genocide, to now sadly witness their economic genocide in present day 2023, we still suffer and we are not going to take it anymore!

There is no way you can right the wrongs of hundreds of years of disenfranchised minorities, however today you can start with making crooked ways straight and passing Senate Bill 958. By passing this bill we can begin the process of equity, inclusion, remediation and the healing of over 400 years of injustice because...WE ARE NOT GOING TO ANYMORE."

-Courtney Finklea Green, M.F.A., Ed.S.