



Good morning. My name is Walter L. Fields and today I appear before this committee in the role of Chairman of Brown and Gold PAC, the national political action committee of Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc., an organization founded in 1963 on the campus of Morgan State University and a member of the 'Divine 9,' – the National Pan-Hellenic Council. I also serve as Co-Chair of Strong Schools Maryland, member of the Anti-Racism for Maryland Schools Coalition, and as a member of the Prince George's County Board of Education.

I am also the great-great grandson of a Civil war veteran of the 14th Regiment, United States Colored Heavy Artillery, the nephew of a United States Navy WAVE, and the son of a World War II veteran. My cousin was just sworn-in as a member of the House of Representatives in the 188th Congress. I am well aware, from familial experiences, of the contributions Black people have made to this country.

I want to express the Brown and Gold PAC's support of HB 890 as an important step toward a correction of the historical narrative of our nation, and the contemporary reality of American life. I also want to thank Delegate Acevero for sponsoring this bill. The proposed Commission has an opportunity to enlighten Maryland's children to live cooperatively, productively, and peacefully in a multi-cultural society, and world. And for me, that is our responsibility.

As a child growing up in New Jersey, and attending relatively progressive K-12 public schools, I did not learn about the contributions of Black New Jerseyans to our nation. I did not learn about the great singer, actor, athlete, and human rights champion, Paul Robeson. I did not learn about Thomas Mundy Peterson, the first Black person in the nation to cast a vote after the passage of the 15th Amendment. I also did not learn that Harriett Tubman spent time and worked on Cape May. Nor did I learn that the community of Lawnside, New Jersey was the first independent self-governing Black community north of the Mason-Dixon line. And I did not learn that attorney Oliver Randolph, the first Black lawyer admitted to the state bar and only Black delegate to the 1948 state constitutional convention, by himself, pushed for an anti-segregation

clause for public education in the New Jersey Constitution, six years before the historic Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Myself and all the children from my childhood, and decades later, were denied the opportunity to learn this history.

New Jersey has since corrected this omission when it created the Amistad Commission, and in 2002 when the state legislature passed the Amistad law, mandating the teaching of Black history in all of New Jersey's public schools. Maryland now can do the same.

I do have a suggested amendment to the language of this bill. I would recommend this bill is amended to include representatives of the state's historically Black colleges and universities to serve on this proposed Commission. Our state's four HBCUs are the epitome of Black history and equity, and their expertise must be recognized. My alma Mater, Morgan State University, and Bowie State University, Coppin State University and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, aside from having resident scholars, are institutions that have contributed greatly to the history of Maryland. Their omission would paint an incomplete picture of our state.

Finally, given what we are witnessing in other states, my hope is that Governor Moore will elevate this Commission as an executive panel to demonstrate that Maryland will show the nation a blueprint of truthfulness and fidelity to history. I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts with you.