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Ways and Means Committee

Joint Committee on
Children, Youth, and Families



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1066
African American Heritage Preservation Grant Fund - Alterations

Chair Ben Barnes
Vice Chair Mark S. Chang
Room 121
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Chairman Ben Barnes and members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am writing to provide my testimony in strong support of House Bill 1066, which I sponsored to expand the uses of the African American Heritage Preservation Grant Fund and empower the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture (MCAAHC) to better support African American heritage organizations across our state.

For over 50 years, MCAAHC has been a vital institution in our state, working tirelessly to preserve and present Black history and culture as a tool for racial equity, community empowerment, and social change. MCAAHC stands as the only African American state commission in the nation to operate a museum. In 2010, MCAAHC partnered with the Maryland Historical Trust to develop the African American Heritage Preservation Program (AAHPP) grant, addressing equity gaps in preservation grant funding.

House Bill 1066 proposes several key changes to the existing grant fund. First, it expands the fund's uses to include non-capital grants for African American heritage organizations' operations and activities, in addition to the current capital grants for preservation projects. This change recognizes the vital role these organizations play in preserving and promoting African American history and culture, and the need to support their ongoing operations.

Second, the bill allocates up to 30% of the grant fund each year specifically for these non-capital grants. This dedicated funding stream will ensure that African American heritage organizations have access to the resources they need to thrive and share their important work with the public.

Third, and crucially, House Bill 1066 grants the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture the sole authority to award these non-capital grants to African American heritage organizations. This provision acknowledges MCAAHC's expertise and deep understanding of the needs of these organizations, and ensures that the distribution of these grant funds will be determined according to the Commission's sole authority and discretion.

The need for this legislation is clear. While the existing African American Heritage Preservation Program grant has been successful in supporting capital projects, many of the grant recipients are smaller

organizations that operate with limited hours and volunteer staff. By providing non-capital grants for operations and activities, House Bill 1066 will enable these organizations to operate at their full potential and better serve their communities.

Furthermore, with over 200 African American heritage sites promoted by the Maryland Office of Tourism, it is essential that we provide the necessary support to ensure these sites can thrive and share their stories with visitors from across the state and beyond. House Bill 1066 represents a significant step forward in this effort, empowering MCAAHC to directly support the vital work of African American heritage organizations.

In conclusion, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1066. This legislation will not only help preserve and promote the rich history and culture of African Americans in Maryland, but also foster a more equitable and inclusive society for all. Thank you for your time and consideration..

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SHAN', enclosed within a large, loopy oval scribble.

Hon. Delegate Shaneka Henson