

HOUSE BILL 133

Written testimony (FAV) to support the establishment of Commission to Study African American Civil War Soldiers in Maryland

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This year marks the 160th anniversary of Maryland's new state constitution that legally abolished slavery in November of 1864. Since 2013 Maryland has officially celebrated November 1st as Emancipation Day.

The African American Resources Cultural and Heritage Society (AARCH Society) chronicles, researches and interprets African American life and history in Frederick County, including the documented enlistments of more than 400 men who served in United States Colored Troops regiments formed here in Maryland as well as in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. Their military roles transformed these men into agents of Emancipation.

An active partner of the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area, AARCH Society supports this bill to establish the Commission to Study African American Civil War Soldiers in Maryland and recommend appropriate memorials that honor those who sacrificed to reunify our country and liberate 4 million Americans held in bondage. More than 8,000 African Americans in Maryland, free and enslaved, answered President Abraham Lincoln's January 1, 1863, Emancipation Proclamation that ordered the formation of what became United States Colored Troops regiments.

President Lincoln proclaimed:

I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.

And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

Thereafter, General Order No. 143 established the United States Colored Troops. More than 200,000 men enlisted, among them the 8,000 plus Marylanders. Six African American Maryland soldiers received the Medal of Honor, our country's highest award for military valor in action.

They were:

Private William H. Barnes from St. Mary's County who served in the 38th United States Colored Troops

Landsman William H. Brown from St. Mary's County who served in the Navy

1st Sergeant Decatur Dorsey from Howard County who served in the 39th United States Colored Troops

Sergeant Major Christian Fleetwood from Baltimore County who served in the 4th United States Colored Troops

Sergeant James H. Harris from St. Mary's County who served in the 38th United States Colored Troops

Sergeant Alfred B. Hilton from Harford County who served in the 4th United States Colored Troops

As this Civil War song reminds us, African American soldiers and all their fellow Patriots deserve to be known and remembered for re-unifying our country under one flag.

We Saved This Great Union for You

*We're old, weary soldiers; our battles are over,
Our footsteps are feeble, we're nearing the shore.
We're slowly and surely approaching the crossing,
A little while longer and all will be o'er.
When my comrades and I pass through
The dark valley,
Will you still be faithful? Will you
Remain true?
When the graves mark the spot where
The soldiers are resting.*

Remember! We saved this great Union for you!

The African American Resources Cultural and Heritage Society enthusiastically supports House Bill 133.