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January 23, 2024

BILL: HB133 Commission to Study African American Civil War Soldiers in Maryland

COMMITTEE: Health and Government Operations Committee

POSITION: Letter of Support

The Maryland State Archives supports HB133 to create a statewide Commission to study, recognize, document, and honor the contributions of African Americans who fought in the American Civil War. Service records held at the National Archives document approximately 185,000 individual members of the United States Colored Troops during this era. Some of those participants were forced into service by War Department Order No 329 of 1863 which allowed citizens in states like Maryland to enlist their enslaved individuals in the Union Army with the promise of compensation for the loss of their laborers. This Commission would bring together important partners in this complex work to share their expertise and accelerate the process of proper commemoration of those Black soldiers from Maryland. As the permanent repository of Maryland's historic record, we urge the passage of this bill to more fully document the history of all people of our state.

The Legacy of Slavery Program of the Maryland State Archives (established in 2001) has, through collaborative partnerships and grant funding, brought to light the overlooked history of thousands of Black citizens who lived and participated in all aspects of Maryland's past, both civilian and military. Our staff strives to make this research fully and freely accessible to the public for genealogical and educational use, and our goals for documentation of the lives of both free and enslaved Blacks are aligned with this proposed Commission. Therefore, the Archives is in full support of this initiative to tell the story and to publicly memorialize those Black soldiers who built our state and our nation through their bravery and sacrifice. In endorsing this initiative, we have also respectfully presented a fiscal note to request the resources necessary to provide administrative and research staffing support as required in the bill and to successfully facilitate the work of the Commission on which we would be proud to serve.

Please contact Liz Coelho, Archives' Legislative Liaison, at 410-260-6401 or liz.coelho@maryland.gov if you have any questions.