

## Honorable Committee Chair Delegate Pena Melnyk

Testimony of Richard Turner  
BEFORE THE HOUSE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE  
January 23, 2024

HOUSE BILL 133: "Commission to Study African American Civil War Soldiers in Maryland"  
Speaking in (FWA) support of HB 133 with proposed amendments

Honorable Chair Pena Melnyk and members of the Committee, I am Richard Turner a Maryland resident 43 Kate Wagner Ct., Westminster, Carroll County. I'm speaking in favor of the intent of HB 133 to research, recognize and honor the contributions, accomplishments and sacrifice of the segregated Civil War Colored Troop regiments in Maryland. I am before you as an individual and not as a representative of the various organizations with which I'm associated. These are my observations and opinions alone.

I am not a historian or researcher, but come from a family who appreciate the importance of understanding history and working to expand those works to include the contributions of those whose efforts have gone unrecorded and often forgotten. My father was a World War II era Buffalo Soldier. He rarely if ever shared his wartime experiences and I didn't know of his contribution until I was a young adult. I was stunned when I went to the Encyclopedia Britannica and among the many references to other stories of the war, I could find none for the Army's 92nd or 93rd Division. I came to learn there were no welcome home VE day parades for the Buffalo Soldiers, as the Division and regiments were disbanded in Europe.

In a quest to find out more about my family roots in Kentucky, the family discovered we had three great, great grandfathers, born into slavery who ultimately served in the Civil War to end slavery. So this quest for recognition is personal.

Living and working in Carroll County, I became aware of the efforts to restore and sustain Ellsworth Cemetery founded by slave descendant Civil War veterans. The subsequent history including neglect, desecration and now heroic efforts to restore the cemetery are significant in healing such prior disregard.

A memorial is but one step that can and should be taken to recognize the service, sacrifice and honor those veterans deserve. My hope is that this legislation would expand the scope of the proposed commission and rather than a single memorial, that "memorial" becomes plural. The research envisioned and already accomplished should include sailors and recommend other recognitions such as landmarks, wayfinding, interpretive placards, etc.

I sincerely hope that as this bill works its way toward adoption it will incorporate, build upon and collaborate with the efforts of others in Maryland who have been doing the time honored work of recognizing those who have served, sacrificed and brought our Nation toward a more perfect union.