



Maryland

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

1/19/2024

BILL NO: HB 133

HEARING DATE: January 23 at 1:00 PM

COMMITTEE: Health and Government Operations

POSITION: Support

SUBMITTED BY: Secretary Rebecca Flora

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT: Deputy Secretary Kristin Fleckenstein (410) 279-7893

TITLE: Commission to Study African American Civil War Soldiers in Maryland

BILL ANALYSIS:

This bill establishes a Commission to Study African American Civil War Soldiers in Maryland. The Commission, to be staffed by the Maryland State Archives, will be charged with studying the history of African American Civil War soldiers who fought for the Union Army in Maryland and making recommendations regarding the funding, design, construction and location of an appropriate memorial in their honor. Among the members of the Commission are one representative from the Maryland Department of Planning and one representative of the Maryland Military Monuments Commission which MDP staffs and for which Secretary Flora serves as chair.

POSITION AND RATIONALE:

The history of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) – those African American soldiers who joined the Union Army to fight during the Civil War – is not well known. While institutions such as the Maryland State Archives and Western Maryland's Historical Library have endeavored to collect and share records on the history of these regiments and those individuals who served, public recognition of the unique challenges faced by these service members and their outstanding contributions to the war effort is needed on a statewide level.

There are only two memorials dedicated solely to USCT service members in Maryland at this time. Both focus on the contributions of local citizens rather than on the statewide impact of these soldiers' sacrifices. The first of these is a stone obelisk dedicated "In Memory of More Than 400 Prominent United States Colored Troops from Kent County" which was erected in 1999 at Memorial Park in Chestertown, Maryland. The second monument, entitled the "United States Colored Troops Memorial Monument," was erected in 2021 in Lexington Park, Maryland and is dedicated to those soldiers and sailors from St. Mary's County who fought in the Civil War.

The Maryland Department of Planning would be honored to serve on the Commission proposed by this bill. The work of the Commission will go far to educate the public about the important role these black Marylanders played in the history of the United States. A state sponsored memorial to Maryland's USCT veterans is appropriate to honor the memory of these soldiers and is long overdue.