



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 0050:

Commission on History, Culture, and Civics in Education

****FAVORABLE****

TO: Hon. Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair, Hon. Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Vice Chair and the members of the House Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Rev. Kenneth O. Phelps, Jr., Co-Chair, Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network, Diocese of Maryland

DATE: January 17, 2024

I want to begin by stating that the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland, at its 239th Convention this past November, voted overwhelmingly in support of a resolution (2023-03 — *Regarding the Commission on History, Culture and Civics in Education; 11/11/2023*) calling upon the General Assembly to enact this legislation. We took this action for several reasons.

In the State of Maryland, our Diocese has shown leadership in advancing the cause of reparations, beginning in 2020 with the establishment of a reparations fund with an initial investment of \$1,000,000, this based on the belief that slavery was theft – of wealth and opportunity, and that its impact was still being felt. But, as our Bishop declared in his pastoral letter, “Reparations, at its base, means to repair that which has been broken. It is not just about monetary compensation. An act of reparation is the attempt to make whole again, and/or to restore; to offer atonement; to make amends; to reconcile for a wrong or injury.”

This bill is another form of reparation and it addresses another theft – of story, of heritage, of legacy. We – as people of faith – believe in the sacredness of story, be that of an individual, a community, a nation. To deny the telling of a story, an individual’s truth, is to devalue them and their standing in community, it dismisses their contribution to the common weal, and it sends the clear message that you are not important and that you do not belong – that you have no share in what is or what is to come. And we applaud the language which expands the work of the commission to include everyone whose story has been suppressed and whose contributions have been ignored.



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Ultimately, then, we support this resolution because it is about truth, a truth without which there can be no true reconciliation in our nation. There is a greater story that needs to be told. It is a shared history of which we may not be proud, but which defines us. And it is one we can embrace, and finally move on together with a shared understanding of who we are as a people - a truth without which we can never be set free from the insidious grip of our past.

History without truth is a fairytale at best, and propaganda at its worst. And as Orwell observed, 'who controls the past controls the present; who controls the present controls the past.'

The Diocese of Maryland requests a favorable report.