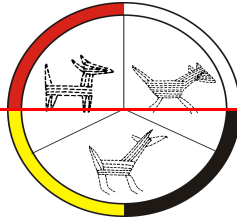


STATE OF MARYLAND
Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs

Wes Moore
Governor

Aruna Miller
Lt. Governor



E. Keith Colston
Administrative Director

Tuesday, February 18, 2025

The Honorable Ben Barnes, Chair
House Appropriations Committee

Testimony in Support of HB 794 - Maryland Commission On Indian Affairs -
Indian Heritage and Culture Grant Program and Fund
Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs

Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs
E. Keith Colston, Administrative Director

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

As Director of the Ethnic Commissions and Administrative Director of the Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs (MCIA), under the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives (GOCI), thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony concerning HB 794 – Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs – Indian Heritage and Culture Grant Program and Fund.

As my written and verbal testimony, I give my strong support for the Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs – Indian Heritage and Culture Grant Program and Fund.

Personal and Professional Connections

At the age of 11, I attended a cultural program provided by the Cumberland County Association for Indian People. My first out-of-state trip for a cultural event, known today as a powwow, was held in Baltimore City, sponsored by the Baltimore American Indian Center. A cultural event that provided connection, generational involvement, awareness, and revenue to the tribal organization as well to the State. At the age of 13, I dedicated my life to my people, to the point I served as a cultural teacher to tribal communities throughout NC by 16. This course of action led me back to Baltimore City and locations around the world. Now in my 50's after various nonprofit and federal positions, to where I sit now for the great state of Maryland; all possible due to my cultural competency, expertise, and awareness utilized for the betterment of Native and non-Native Marylanders.

Educational Experiences and Opportunities

HB 794 – Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs – Indian Heritage and Culture Grant Program and Fund can provide resources and opportunities for corrected and factual tribal history and culture that reflects the contributions, achievements and contemporize lives of Maryland's Indigenous peoples. The generational impact is more important; Native and non-native. Cultural programs with limited lifespans provided the following yet not limited to: Safe spaces, physical improvement, community partnerships, language access, and public speaking. Due to awareness and cultural practices, many of the Federal laws that protect American Indians were rooted in such actions as "The Longest Walk", leading to examples of legislation that were amended or created that led to the improvement of life for American Indians/Native such as the Freedom of Religion Act, Indian Child Welfare Act, Indian Education, and the American Indian Arts and Crafts Act. HB 794 allows for the foundation of specific tribal histories and cultures of Maryland's Indigenous Peoples to be discovered, maintained, and serve as a positive example to others.

Outcomes of HB 794

Cultural programming continues to play as a vehicle of support in education, prevention, entrepreneurship, and leadership. By providing a funding source, tribal communities can structure a program utilizing history and culture. The proven by-products are the following yet not limited to: Decrease in generational gaps, depression, loneliness, suicide. An increase in education, motivation, self-awareness, cultural pride, graduation rates, small business, and preparation of youth

to become leaders inside and outside their communities. Direct and in-direct outcomes would play a role in conservation efforts, the arts, history, health, secondary education, civics, community activism, and legislation. Thirteen (13) tribal entities currently engage on a regular basis with MCIA directly, over 128,000 Marylanders that recognize their ethnic background as being American Indian (as of the 2020 Census), and the 24 counties that interact with American Indians in one form or another. There is a need and desire for funding and support for a severely marginalized group many times termed “the minorities of minorities” or simply “other” to mainstream society.

I humbly request your support in the passage of HB 794, paving a brighter path for tribal youth and Maryland’s commitment to her Indigenous Peoples.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

E. Keith Colston

Administrative Director,

Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs

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