



Senate Budget & Taxation Committee Hearing on SB963 Hearing Date: March 4, 2025

CPMBS position: FAV

Abandoned and Neglected Cemeteries Fund -- Establishment

CPMBS is an all-volunteer nonprofit that since 1992 has advocated for improvement in distressful cemetery situations that occur across Maryland and for needed changes in state law. In 2021-2, I served on the committee that was charged by House and Senate Joint Chairmen to survey citizens and study historic African American Cemeteries and recommend strategies to improve their current situations. Not surprisingly, the published JCR report encouraged strengthening Maryland law to better protect all cemeteries and bolster those citizens and groups who strive to improve their futures. A major recommendation in that report was helping to address ownership and title issues for abandoned and neglected cemeteries. www.cpmbs.org has a link to the report on our Home Page.

Although African American cemeteries are over-represented in the numbers of abandoned and un-maintained sites today, all Maryland counties and municipalities have identified such sites within their borders. One of the most common problems is unknown ownership; without proven, recorded ownership, it is impossible to take steps to resolve problems or even to organize a clean-up, be officially recognized, or apply for a grant. Now is the time to recognize these deplorable situations and pledge to address them, with the assistance of nonprofit groups and descendant communities.

SB963 fits neatly with SB631, which establishes a Commission to address issues and strategies for all Maryland Abandoned and Neglected cemeteries. In tandem, creating a Commission and a dedicated fund are high priorities that the General Assembly can accommodate without costing taxpayers any money.

Our organization suggests amending the language of SB963 to omit the income tax check-off. This may become a recommendation in the future, but it is neither needed nor feasible in 2025.

Other states that have tackled these problems include New York, South Carolina, and Georgia. With the passage of SB963 and SB631, our state can begin to address a serious problem that affects every county and municipality in Maryland.

Thank you for your consideration.

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