

My name is Harvey Matthews, I am one of the founders of the Bethesda African Cemetery and I am also a Trustee at Macedonia Baptist Church in Bethesda, Maryland. I grew up on River Road and played in Moses African Cemetery as a children. When I was a child, Black children were not allowed to play in the parks so our refuge was playing hid and go seek in Moses Cemetery. I was surprised when Montgomery County officials attempted to deny the existence of Moses Cemetery. But, the reality is that those same politicians have never acknowledge the violence and displacement of my community on River Road.

My community was violently forced to flee from our homes on River Road by the Klu Klux Klan and Montgomery County police in the 1950s and 1960's. All of our intergenerational wealth was stolen by the County and developers. In fact, my home is where the current Whole Foods is located. My father was nearly beaten to death in front of my family by the KKK. The KKK was determined that my father had to turn over our land. He refused, even after the beating. The KKK came back a week later and kidnapped him. It was only after these violence events that my father, fearing that one of us would be killed, that he decided to leave River Road.

When Moses African Cemetery is called an abandoned cemetery that is a reflection of the lack of knowledge of what happened to the Black community. We never abandoned our homes or Moses Cemetery; we were terrorized out of our property.

Because of court battles, Moses African Cemetery has the attention of the international community.

I want to commend the bill's co-sponsor, Delegate Gary Simmons, for his introduction of other bills aimed at preserving and funding the restoration of historic cemeteries that are vulnerable to desecration.

BACC was able to use the judicial process to educate the world about the desecration of Moses Cemetery. This decision around burial grounds must not be left in the hands of the Director of Cemeteries but rather the court system.

Inf fact, my ancestors are being desecrated as we meet today. The desecration is occurring directly across from my church, Macedonia Baptist Church. It is now impossible for me to attend church without starring the ashes of my ancestors in the eyes. The desecration of Moses reminds me of the violence against my family. We need the support of the courts to assist communities, such as the River Road community.

The amendment offered by Delegate Simmons to central to BACC support. We just have access to the courts.

Montgomery County officials have failed us but the Maryland Supreme Court and the Montgomery County Circuit Court have been our refuge. If we had relied on any other institution, our case would have died. The amendments by Delegate Simmons is central to the survival of Black burial grounds.

I thank you for consideration of my views in this important matter.