



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony

**SB 13: Commission to Study African American Civil War Sailors in Maryland**

Chairman Feldman, Vice Chairwoman Kagan, and esteemed members of the Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee, Senate Bill 13, would establish the Commission to Study African American Civil War Sailors in Maryland. This bill represents an important step in recognizing the often-overlooked contributions of African American sailors who served in the Union Navy during the Civil War.

The contributions of African American sailors in the Union Navy have largely been left in the shadows. This bill acknowledges the need for a comprehensive study to understand the experiences, contributions, and histories of these sailors, particularly those who served from Maryland. These sailors were crucial in the Union Navy's success, and it is critical to ensure their story is told, recognized, and memorialized.

The creation of the Commission to Study African American Civil War Sailors in Maryland will allow for thorough research into the records, muster rolls, and honors awarded to these sailors. It will also make recommendations on how to appropriately memorialize their sacrifices and contributions, which include potential funding, design, construction, and location of a memorial. By requiring the Commission to submit a report to the Governor and General Assembly by December 1, 2025, we will ensure that this important work is completed in a timely manner.

Additionally, I would like to clarify why this bill is necessary and why we cannot simply amend last year's bill, which created a commission to study African American Civil War Soldiers. Researching Army records is fundamentally different from researching Navy records, particularly when it comes to African American soldiers and sailors. The Army organized its African American soldiers into regiments of 1,000 men, making them easier to track and document in comparison to Navy personnel. In contrast, the Navy initially separated African American sailors to only four sailors per ship, largely out of prejudice. This intentional segregation of African American sailors creates challenges for researching their service and contributions. The complexity and time-consuming nature of this research highlight why a separate commission focused on African American Civil War sailors is so crucial.

We must not overlook the contributions of these sailors, who played a pivotal role in the Union Navy's success. Their stories are an integral part of Maryland's history and our nation's broader

history. By supporting this bill, we ensure that their service is not forgotten, and that future generations will have the opportunity to learn about their bravery and sacrifice.

Therefore, I respectfully urge a FAVORABLE report for Senate Bill 13, so that we can honor and memorialize the legacy of African American Civil War Sailors in Maryland in an appropriate and meaningful way.