

SB0587- Testimony In Favor of Maryland Reparations Commission

Nicole Bruno

13816 Park Ave Brandywine, MD 20613

Hello, my name is Nicole Bruno, and I have been a Prince George's County resident for 13 years. I am here today to voice my strong support for establishing the Maryland Reparations Commission.

In my own journey of learning and unlearning as a white person, I have come to understand that white supremacy is like the ocean we swim in—so pervasive that many white people, myself still occasionally included, often don't even see it, much like a fish unaware of the water it swims in. This blindness allows us to uphold systems and beliefs that not only harm others but also harm ourselves, our families, our communities, and our country.

Generational trauma—from racism, war, mental health struggles, and more—continues to live in our bodies and minds like a virus and we must acknowledge it as so; not just for our own health but for the well-being of our children. We are witnessing a pandemic of hate, cruelty, and fear tearing us apart and leaving hopelessness in its wake. Make no mistake—this is intentional and is being used like biological warfare.

Yet, I hold onto hope. Dr. King said, *"The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."* What he didn't say, though I believe it to be true, is that the arc bends only when hope is turned into action. It bends when enough people demand something different, when policy protects rather than controls, when leaders have the courage to do what is right—especially when it feels perilous. In fact, history shows that the arc only ever bends in times of uncertainty—just as we don't grow when we are comfortable.

I know some will oppose this commission, arguing that now is not the right time or that our government has more pressing concerns. Others, out of fear, complacency, or a lack of education, may believe this is a relic of the past, an issue that no longer affects us. I do not shame those who are afraid—it is difficult to imagine safety, rest, and liberation for all when that has never truly existed. However, if history has taught us anything, it is that the past continues to repeat itself until, as Margaret Mead said, *"a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."*

Establishing a reparations commission is not the finish line—it is the starting point. It carves out space for imagination, creativity, and the kind of bold vision that has always driven progress. Throughout history, people have dreamed their way into new realities—whether it was Harriet Tubman envisioning freedom from slavery, our founding fathers dismantling monarchies, Ida B. Wells and Alice Paul fighting for women's right to vote, or Dr. King and Malcolm X advancing civil rights. The futures we take for granted today *began as radical ideas*. It is our collective responsibility to continue this work, to dream and build a just future. But if we do not explore this—if we do not even allow the conversation to begin—we ensure that history remains unchallenged and injustice continues unchecked. I believe Maryland has the courage to step into this moment with leadership and conviction, and I am deeply grateful to live in a state that prioritizes protecting its most vulnerable as much as its most powerful.

Tricia Hersey, author of *Rest Is Resistance*, writes: *“We can imagine a way, a new world, and a new opportunity for us to be rooted in that liberation... People think imagination is just frivolous, that it’s a thing for children, that you’re daydreaming and wasting time. They want us to always be locked up and focused on work, production, labor. But to be able to imagine and wander, that’s where the ideas for liberation come.”*

As someone advocating for this commission, I also recognize the crucial role of white allies, which is why I am here today. Acknowledging historical injustice and working toward reparations is not the responsibility of Black communities—it requires collective action, solidarity, and support from those in positions of power. White support, when done with thoughtfulness, not only amplifies the voices of marginalized communities but also demonstrates a commitment to community healing and being in partnership for justice, equity, and reconciliation. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are the strengths of our country's legacy, not its burden.

Dr. King also said: *“However difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because ‘truth crushed to earth will rise again.’ How long? Not long, because ‘no lie can live forever.’ How long? Not long, because ‘you shall reap what you sow.’”*

I hope Maryland is brave enough to sow the seeds of hope and justice today. The future can look different than we imagined—but only if we dare to dream it into existence. Let’s begin by allowing this conversation to take shape.

Thank you.

