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MAJORITY WHIP

Budget and Taxation Committee

Education, Business and  
Administration Subcommittee

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Ending Homelessness

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## THE SENATE OF MARYLAND ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

### Testimony of Senator Joanne C. Benson SB469

#### Maryland Reparations Commission-Establishment (Harriet Tubman Community Investment Act)

Good afternoon, Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and esteemed committee members, I stand before you on this amazing Civil Rights Heroes Day to express my unwavering support and the importance of the Harriet Tubman Community Investment Act.

As a proud graduate of the oldest HBCU in Maryland Bowie State University and a lifelong civil rights activist, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges individuals have faced due to unfair policies that have affected African Americans. the lasting impacts of systemic racism and inequality. Families torn apart by the weight of history; dreams deferred by the invisible chains of discrimination. The echoes of our ancestors' suffering still reverberate through the halls of our schools, the wards of our hospitals, and the streets of our neighborhoods.

This legislation is not just a policy proposal but a moral imperative. It is a testament to our collective commitment to righting the wrongs of Maryland's challenging past and is a crucial step towards increasing equity, protecting vulnerable populations, and improving access to resources, and helping fulfill the promise of the American Dream, here in Maryland.

The purpose of this bill is to establish the Maryland Reparations Commission which will develop and administer a program that will provide compensatory benefits to the descendants of individuals enslaved in Maryland.

#### The key provisions of this bill are:

**Eligibility:** Individuals whose ancestors were enslaved in Maryland are eligible for benefits.

**Commission Composition:** The Commission will include members from various organizations and institutions, such as the Maryland Historical Society, the Greater Baltimore Urban League, and historically Black colleges, among others.

**Responsibilities:** The Commission is tasked with: Developing processes and applications for benefits. Administering cash payments and tuition reimbursements to eligible individuals. Collaborating with state agencies for support and implementation.

**Funding:** The Governor is required to include necessary funds in the annual budget to support the Commission's activities.

This bill is crucial to rectifying the harm done to people of African descent caused by discriminatory policies. Making sure those who are descendants of those who have been enslaved in the state receive compensation for their trauma.

Nonetheless, many states have adopted similar reparations bills which illustrate the transformative potential for a bill like this one, such as.

To illustrate the transformative potential of reparations programs, let us look to the examples set by other states:

1. **California:** The state of California has embarked on a journey of reconciliation by establishing a task force to study and develop reparations proposals for African Americans. Their preliminary findings indicate that addressing disparities in housing, education, and economic opportunities could potentially uplift over two million residents, bridging the gap between the past and the promise of a brighter future.
2. **North Carolina:** In 2020, the city of Asheville in North Carolina took a bold step toward justice by approving a reparations resolution focused on investing in housing, healthcare, and employment opportunities for Black residents. The positive outcomes are already evident, with noticeable improvements in the economic stability and well-being of the community proof that change is not only possible but within our reach.
3. **Illinois:** Evanston, Illinois, made history by becoming one of the first U.S. cities to fund reparations for Black residents in 2019. Through grants for homeownership and property improvements, this initiative has empowered Black residents, fostered increased homeownership rates, and created a foundation for generational wealth.
4. These examples serve as powerful testaments to the potential of reparations to effect meaningful change, restore dignity, and build bridges to a more equitable society.

Finally, I implore you to support MD SB469. This is more than a bill it is an opportunity to take a stand against the injustices of the past and to pave the way for a future where every Marylander can thrive. Let us honor the sacrifices of our ancestors, acknowledge the pain that lingers, and take decisive action to ensure that their legacy is one of resilience, justice, and hope.

Therefore, currently I am respectfully urging the committee to issue a favorable vote. Thank you for your time and consideration.