

February 13, 2025

Delegate Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk  
Chair  
House Health and Government Operations Committee  
**HB 668** Victims of Communism Memorial Day

**FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Pena- Melnyk and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 668, which establishes a Victims of Communism Memorial Day in the state of Maryland. This important legislation honors the millions who have suffered and perished under communist regimes around the world and provides a solemn occasion for remembrance and reflection.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by the rise of totalitarian regimes that infected the world with their evil ideology. One of these failed—and lethal—ideologies is communism.

On November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1917, communist forces in Russia started a revolution. That movement would inspire dictators around the world and unleash a regime of oppression that can still be seen today. Establishing a Victims of Communism Memorial Day is important because it empowers Marylanders to remember the victims. We must remember the Ukrainians who were starved in the Holodomor, the brave Chinese students massacred in Tiananmen Square, the Cambodians murdered in the killing fields, and the countless held captive behind the Iron Curtain. We must remember that communism has always been and will always be incompatible with liberty, prosperity, and the dignity of life that we hold so dear in these United States. And we must remember that the scourge of communism still oppresses more than 1.5 billion people to this day.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many thought the era of communist oppression was at an end. But communism did not end when the Berlin Wall fell.

Today, one-fifth of humanity still lives under communist tyranny—over 100 years after the Russian Revolution. North Korea threatens nuclear war and holds 25 million people in a sprawling, 21st-century Gulag. Cuba continues to jail, torture, and murder dissidents who dare to dream of democracy. Vietnam arrests citizens for simply posting messages on social media that are critical of the Party. Laos openly suppresses civil society. And China commits cultural genocide in mass “re-education” camps, separates families, sterilizes minority women, and uses forced labor, all while crushing liberty in Hong Kong and threatening to invade Taiwan.

As a state founded as a refuge for those fleeing persecution, Maryland has a long history of leading the way to protect human rights. And today, Maryland has a unique opportunity to lead the way forward once again by honoring the victims of communist regimes. This bill is not only an act of remembrance but a call to action, reminding us all of the dangers of extremism, totalitarianism, and political oppression. It will contribute to ongoing efforts to promote human

rights worldwide and ensure that the stories of those who suffered under communism are not forgotten.

By establishing a Victims of Communism Memorial Day, we remember the courage of those held captive and reaffirm our commitment to upholding human dignity, liberty, and freedom. This day will provide an opportunity for Marylanders to come together in solidarity with the victims of communism worldwide and to educate future generations about the horrors of totalitarianism. It will be a day to reflect on the importance of democratic values and the rights of individuals to live free from persecution, fear, and oppression.

As the Honorable Tom Lantos, the only survivor of both the Holocaust and communist oppression to ever to serve in Congress said, “The veneer of civilization is paper thin. We are its guardians, and we can never rest.”

The fight against communism is not partisan. It is not about left, or right, Democrat or Republican. Rather, it is simply wrong from right. The passage of HB 668 will ensure that Maryland never rests in the fight against totalitarian ideologies and mark an important step in ensuring that the lessons of history are never lost.

I urge the Committee to support the passage of HB 668 and establish a Victims of Communism Memorial Day in Maryland. Let us honor the memory of those who suffered and reaffirm our commitment to a world where freedom and dignity are respected by all.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Karina Lipsman

Director, Government Relations

Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation