

GARY SIMMONS  
Legislative District 12B  
Anne Arundel County

Judiciary Committee

Subcommittees

Criminal Law and Procedure

Family and Juvenile Law



The Maryland House of Delegates  
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024

RE: Testimony in Support of HB0535

Dear Members of the Health and Government Operations and Ways and Means Committee,

I write to you today in strong support of HB0535, legislation that seeks to establish the Abandoned and Neglected Cemeteries Fund to ensure the care, preservation, maintenance, and restoration of historic and neglected burial grounds across our state. This bill is a necessary and long-overdue step in preserving the dignity and historical significance of these sacred spaces.

Cemeteries are more than final resting places for our loved ones; they are invaluable historical and cultural landmarks that connect us to our past. Unfortunately, many cemeteries across our state have been abandoned or fallen into neglect due to lack of ownership, funding, or resources for maintenance. Over time, nature and vandalism take their toll, erasing irreplaceable pieces of our collective history. This bill provides a practical and sustainable solution to address this pressing issue by creating a dedicated fund for restoration efforts.

The establishment of an income tax checkoff for contributions to the fund is a simple yet effective mechanism to engage the public in cemetery preservation. By allowing taxpayers to voluntarily contribute to this effort, we harness the goodwill of our citizens to support a cause that benefits communities, historians, and families alike. This funding structure ensures that resources are directed towards maintaining these sites without imposing additional financial burdens on state or local governments.

Additionally, the bill's requirement for an annual report to the General Assembly ensures transparency and accountability. It guarantees that the funds raised are used effectively and that promotional efforts are undertaken to raise awareness of the importance of cemetery preservation. This provision fosters public trust and encourages ongoing participation in the program.

Passing HB0535 is not just an investment in maintaining neglected cemeteries—it is a commitment to honoring our ancestors, preserving our shared history, and upholding our moral responsibility to care for these sacred spaces. I urge the members of this committee to vote in favor of HB0535 and help protect our state's rich heritage for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gary Simmons", written over a horizontal line.

Delegate Gary Simmons