



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 0077

Commission to Study African American Civil War Sailors in Maryland

****FAVORABLE****

TO: Hon. Joseline Pena-Melnyk, Chair, Hon. Bonnie Cullison, Vice Chair and the members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Rev. Kenneth O. Phelps, Jr., Co-Chair, Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network, Diocese of Maryland

DATE: January 21, 2025

The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland, at its 237th Convention in 2021, passed a resolution calling upon the Maryland General Assembly, convening in January of 2022, to pass what was then The Public Schools: African American History Development of Content Standards and Implementation Act, relating to the development and implementation of an African American history curriculum in public schools. We are dismayed that bill and subsequent versions to revise the history and culture that we teach never moved beyond this committee.

Given the hostility that has engulfed local school boards in the past few years, we understand that fear and misinformation have made any rational conversation about expanding our history to include all who played a part in living it though not writing it, and the circumstances faced by each player.

We support the inclusive intent of this bill, and all related bills that hopefully will still be filed, but ultimately, we support this because it is about truth, a truth without which there can be no true reconciliation in our nation - a shared history of which we may not be proud, but which defines us, one we can embrace, and finally move on together with a shared understanding of who we are as a people - a truth without which we can never be set free from the insidious grip of our past.

This is a small part of the larger truth which begs to be heard in the form of the sacred stories of so many who were participants in our history and whose legacies have been denied. Including, we might add, Frederick Douglass, who in spite of his



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relentless pressure on Lincoln before, during and after and the influence that he exerted on his policies concerning slavery, does not appear in the Spielberg film, *Lincoln*.

History without truth is a fairytale at best, and propaganda at its worst. And as is the case with all sin, too many have suffered at the hands of those who have owned our past to the benefit of too few and the oppression of far too many. We have nothing to fear from knowing our true history. But in the reconciliation that it offers, we have everything to gain.

The Diocese of Maryland requests a favorable report.