



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

January 17, 2025

The Honorable Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee
240 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: **Request for FAVORABLE Report** – HB0077 – Commission to Study African American Civil War Sailors in Maryland

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and distinguished members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

On behalf of the members of the Maryland Military Coalition (MMC), I write to recommend a **FAVORABLE report** by the Committee on **HB0077 – Commission to Study African American Civil War Sailors in Maryland**, sponsored by Delegate Christopher Eric Bouchat. This bill will establish a Commission that will study the history of African American Sailors who fought for the Union Navy and make recommendations for an appropriate memorial.

Of the nearly 18,000 men of African descent who served in the U.S. Navy during the Civil War, and identified by name, more than 2,300 were from Maryland. The size of the Maryland contingent benefited from an agreement to transfer nearly 800 of them from incomplete units of the U.S. Colored Troops into the navy.¹ However, the extent of their participation, their individual stories, and their naval unit history are not well known. The Commission proposed in this legislation will address this gap by studying the history of African American Civil War Sailors and publishing its findings to enhance public awareness of the contributions they made.

Most importantly, the Commission will make recommendations for an appropriate memorial to these sailors. The memorial, when completed, will serve to not only commemorate their service to the Union but also how they served important roles on some of the navy's most important ships.

The Maryland Military Coalition **strongly supports HB0077** and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report from the Health and Government Operations Committee.

¹ <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2001/fall/black-sailors>, Black Men in Navy Blue During the Civil War, Prologue Magazine, Fall 2001, Vol. 33, No. 3

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The Maryland Military Coalition is a registered non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization comprised of 22 prominent Maryland-based veteran and military groups, representing over 150,000 service-connected individuals, including those currently serving, veterans, retirees and their families, caregivers, and survivors. Visit our website at <https://www.mdmilcoalition.org/>.

We want to thank Delegate Bouchat for sponsoring this legislation and for his support of the uniformed services community in Maryland.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David L. Dragics". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David L. Dragics
COL (Ret), U.S. Army
Legislative Director