

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 14th, 2025

RE: Testimony in Support of HB0724

Chair Pena-Melnyk and Vice-Chair Cullison and esteemed members of the committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB0724, which seeks to establish the Commission on Abandoned and Neglected Maryland Cemeteries within the Office of Cemetery Oversight. This important legislation will help ensure that Maryland's forgotten burial sites—particularly historically significant but long-neglected African American cemeteries—receive the recognition and protection they deserve.

Cemeteries are not just resting places; they are vital records of our collective history, containing invaluable genealogical, cultural, and historical significance. However, too many cemeteries across the state, particularly those associated with African American communities and other marginalized groups, have been left to deteriorate due to neglect, lack of resources, and unclear ownership. These sites hold the stories of our ancestors, and their neglect represents a broader disregard for the historical contributions of these communities.

By establishing clear definitions for neglected and abandoned cemeteries, this Commission will create a necessary framework for identifying and protecting these sacred spaces. Furthermore, the support of a statewide inventory of burial sites will allow for comprehensive documentation and preservation efforts, ensuring that these cemeteries are acknowledged and maintained for future generations.

The specific focus on abandoned African American cemeteries is especially significant. These cemeteries often suffer from systemic neglect due to historical inequities in property laws, land use, and lack of institutional support. By prioritizing research and recommendations for these sites, the Commission will help restore dignity to those who have been historically marginalized, fostering a more inclusive approach to historical preservation in Maryland.

I urge the General Assembly to pass HB0724 to honor and preserve Maryland's heritage. Protecting and maintaining these cemeteries is a moral and historical imperative, ensuring that the stories of those interred are not lost to time. This legislation represents a necessary step toward acknowledging our past, preserving our history, and respecting the lives and legacies of those who came before us.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB0724.

Sincerely,

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

Delegate Gary Simmons