

Honored members of the Rules and Executive Nominations Committee;

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I'm the Executive Director of End Witch Hunts nonprofit and a descendant of four women who faced colonial witchcraft trials, two of whom were executed in Salem. I'm here to urge your support for HJ 2, which would exonerate those wrongly accused of witchcraft in colonial Maryland. HJ-2 is not a partisan issue. It's the responsibility of all citizens to stand up for innocent victims of witchcraft accusations. These baseless allegations destroy lives and communities, and addressing this injustice requires unified action across political divides.

This straightforward resolution requires minimal resources while delivering meaningful impact. Among those it would exonerate are Rebecca Fowler, an innocent woman hanged for alleged witchcraft, and Moll Dyer, who died alone after being driven from her home by false accusations.

Last year, Connecticut successfully passed similar legislation with strong bipartisan support. Their House Joint Resolution 34 passed overwhelmingly - 121-30 in the House and nearly unanimously in the Senate. This demonstrates how states can model responsible leadership in addressing historical injustices. Legislators in Massachusetts have now sponsored a similar bill to exonerate the 5 women hanged for witchcraft in Boston.

HJ 2 aligns with the United Nations' formal resolution calling for global action to end accusations of witchcraft, which tragically continue to threaten vulnerable populations worldwide. Stories just like Moll Dyers are happening now across the world. Elderly women are still targeted and banished from their homes for the same reasons. By addressing its own historical cases, Maryland can join this crucial international initiative.

I urge you to vote yes on HJ 2 and send it to the House of Representatives for consideration. As committee members, you have a unique opportunity to use your legislative authority to formally recognize that these convictions were not just wrong - they followed a dangerous behavior of using unfounded accusations to convict vulnerable members of our society. This pattern continues today.

Through this resolution, you can deliver justice for an overlooked chapter of Maryland women's history and acknowledge the gender-based persecution and misogyny that led to these wrongful deaths. Your vote will demonstrate that we stand firmly against misogyny and the practice of condemning people based on unprovable allegations, whether in our past or present.

A yes vote acknowledges that Rebecca Fowler and others lost their lives to accusations that could never be proven. While we cannot change the past, we can take this meaningful step to right a historical wrong and strengthen Maryland's commitment to protecting all its citizens from unfounded accusations. It's never the wrong time to do the right thing.

Thank you for your work on this committee,

Sarah Jack