

Honored members of the Rules and Executive Nominations Committee;

Those who were accused of witchcraft in Maryland's past deserve exoneration for their own sake, but also for the sake of their relatives living today and for every person living in Maryland now. Witch-hunting is as unjust as it is cruel, and a strong message needs to be sent that it is not acceptable.

Unfortunately, the end of formal witch trials in North America did not mean the end of witch-hunting. We know that vigilante justice was employed against numerous individuals accused of witchcraft throughout the 18th and 19th centuries and that accusations of witchcraft and spirit possession can lead to violence even now.

Furthermore, in the 21st century, tens of thousands of individuals around the world have been murdered or executed as the result of witchcraft accusations. Historian Wolfgang Behringer has said more people are dying today because of witchcraft fear than at any other point in history.

It is now, today, that we must take action against harmful practices related to accusations of witchcraft and ritual attacks. In addition to death, consequences of witchcraft accusations today include humiliation, banishment, ostracization, and torturous physical, emotional, and sexual violence. Victims are often beaten, burned, stabbed, sliced, hacked, maimed, drowned, poisoned, raped, paraded through communities naked, and forced to consume human feces and urine. Anyone can be accused, but women represent more than 80% of victims worldwide. Children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities are also disproportionately impacted.

In 2021, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted resolution 47/8: Elimination of Harmful Practices Related to Accusations of Witchcraft and Ritual Attacks. This legislation calls upon all nations to take every action possible to end witch hunts, including denouncing witch hunting. We and our international colleagues firmly believe the world will listen when Maryland takes a stand against witch hunts.

In September 2024, I spoke at the International Conference on Witchcraft and Human Rights in Lancaster, England. There, many international advocates expressed deep gratitude for American states taking action to address the injustices of witch hunts. What we do in America resounds worldwide, so please support HJ 2 to exonerate those accused, tried, or convicted of witchcraft in the Province of Maryland prior to the American Revolution, and let the world know Maryland does not approve of witch-hunting.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,  
Joshua Hutchinson