

Distinguished members of the Rules and Executive Nominations Committee

My name is Leo Igwe, a son of an American citizen resident in Maryland. I hold a doctoral degree in religious studies and wrote my doctoral thesis on witchcraft accusations in Northern Ghana. In Ghana, some make shift shelters known as "witch camps" still exist and accused witches take refuge there. In my thesis, I explored the dynamics and contestations of witchcraft allegations in post colonial Africa, where witch hunting rages and ravages the lives of many people. In 2020, I founded the Advocacy for Alleged Witches to address this problem, work and campaign to end witch hunts in the region. As an organisation, we are dedicated to [ending witch hunts and ritual attacks in Africa](#). BBC has featured our [work](#) and [campaign](#) in its reports.

I am testifying on behalf of the Advocacy for Alleged Witches in support of exoneration for the accused witches of colonial Maryland because in many parts of Africa, Asia and Oceania witch hunting is not a thing of the past. The miscarriage of justice continues and persists in this 21st century. Witchcraft accusation is a form of death sentence for the accused. Witch trials take place and jungle justice is meted out on the accused. In fact some weeks ago an elderly woman who had dementia was accused of witchcraft and beaten to death in Nigeria. Alleged witches, mainly women, children and people with disabilities are attacked, banished, lynched, stoned death, buried alive or tortured to confess to the 'crime of witchcraft' as was the case in colonial Maryland.

Exoneration of accused witches of colonial Maryland will be a powerful symbol. It will send a clear message of hope and light to contemporary victims of witchcraft accusation and witch persecution in Africa, and in the rest of the world. A yes vote aligns with the 2021 UN resolution urging states to take measures to end abuses linked to witchcraft beliefs and ritual attacks.

So I urge you to vote yes to this bill I urge you exonerate the accused.