



Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Hearing on SB624 Hearing Date: February 12, 2025

CPMBS position: FAV

The Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites was organized in 1992 by Marylanders distressed by the weak protections for cemeteries existing in the Maryland Code. Some protective legislation has been enacted in past decades, and now it is time to strengthen State laws and procedures. Current State law is insufficient and infrequently enforced at local levels to protect cemeteries from desecration, vandalism, neglect, and exploitation. Stronger State laws and uniform procedures, better documentation, public awareness, widespread information, and guidance are sorely needed.

Several of the initiatives filed this session were called out in a 2022 report to the Joint Chairmen on Historic African American Cemeteries in Maryland. This survey and study with recommendations provides templates for improving the situations of all cemeteries, with emphasis on sites where ownership is unknown and the site is abandoned, on creating a complete inventory of all known Maryland cemeteries, and on improving current law where experience shows it cannot protect descendants nor the physical sites.

https://africanamerican.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2022/07/2022-Historic-African-American-Cemeteries-JCR-Report_small.pdf

CPMBS supports the concepts of SB624, to increase notice requirements for proposed relocation of remains, to allow State's Attorney offices to share non-criminal cases with OCO, to take descendant notification more seriously, and to update this authorization process.

While the Coalition is a State-wide nonprofit, my experience in Montgomery County lends insight into recognition of the outdatedness of this process. Permitting State's Attorneys to concentrate on criminal situations and OCO some others is a good step forward.

SB624 provides needed improvement to certain situations, including the likelihood that descendants or other persons of interest will learn in time of disinterments or development at sites where loved ones are buried. The improvements outlined in SB624 provide greater protection for Maryland citizens, living and deceased. This bill acknowledges the limitations of previous laws and raises protections while providing more assurance to descendants and interested parties that tighter rules will result in better outcomes.

Thank you for your consideration.

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