

I am writing to express my strong support for HB0892 and HB0893, legislation concerning the protection of abandoned and neglected cemeteries and their transfer to descendant communities.

As the visionary founder of the Ancestral Remains Project and a former Maryland Commissioner on African American History and Culture for Anne Arundel County and the Maryland Historical Trust, I have seen firsthand the critical importance of preserving these sacred spaces. Since the age of six, I have been active in preserving and documenting cemeteries through my own genealogical methodology. My advocacy is deeply personal, rooted in the stories of my late mother, grandmother, grandfather, aunt, husband and my dear friend, Ms. Terri V. Sorrell.

Terri and I reconnected decades after our high school days on the Eastern Shore. While battling cancer, her greatest wish was to obtain and maintain the property in Queen Anne's County where her family is laid to rest, including her ancestor London Ghound, a conductor on the Underground Railroad. In a powerful twist of history, we discovered that London Ghound served over eight years in the Maryland Penitentiary for helping my own ancestors escape slavery.

Terri worked tirelessly to organize a non-profit to protect this cemetery, but she sadly passed away on January 3, 2026. The fate of her ancestral resting place now remains uncertain. If Terri were here today, she would undoubtedly be a vocal advocate for these bills.

I urge you to support HB0892 and HB0893 to ensure that descendant communities have the right to care for their ancestors and that history like that of Terri and London Ghound is never erased.

Sincerely,

Elinor Thompson