

## **Written Testimony of the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

### **In Support of Senate Joint Resolution 3 (2026)**

#### ***Apology and Acknowledgement of the State's Responsibility in Racial Terror Lynchings***

#### **Submitted to the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee Hearing**

**Date: March 12, 2026**

---

**Submitted on behalf of:** The Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission (MLTRC)

---

Chair Brian J. Feldman and Distinguished Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

The Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission (MLTRC) submits this written testimony in strong support of Senate Joint Resolution 3 (SJ 3), sponsored by Senators Sydnor and Augustine. The passage of this resolution would fulfill one of the Commission's most foundational recommendations and represent a defining act of moral courage by the Maryland General Assembly.

---

### **I. The Commission's Mandate and the Final Report**

The MLTRC was established in 2019 by the Maryland General Assembly as the first state-sponsored commission of its kind in the United States — charged with investigating, documenting, and reckoning with the history of racial terror lynching within Maryland's own borders. Over more than six years, the Commission held fourteen public hearings in counties across the state, examined thousands of pages of archival records, and received testimony from descendants, historians, community leaders, and advocates. The Commission's Final Report, issued in December 2025, documents the stories of 38 known victims of racial terror lynching between 1854 and 1933 and puts forward 84 recommendations for repair and reconciliation. It is a record of extraordinary scope, rigor, and moral weight.

SJ 3 is the direct legislative expression of the Commission's first and most foundational category of recommendations: *Maryland's Apology and Acknowledgment of Responsibility*. It is not incidental to the Commission's work — it is its necessary predicate.

---

## II. What the Record Shows

The Final Report bears witness to a chapter of Maryland's history that has been too long denied. Between 1854 and 1933, Black Marylanders — many of them farmers, laborers, veterans, and fathers — were terrorized, brutalized, and murdered by white mobs, often with, at best, the negligence and, at worst, the complicity of local and state institutions. Not a single perpetrator of these 38 documented racial terror lynchings was ever held accountable.

The Final Report is unsparing in its findings:

*"These crimes against humanity were not isolated acts of violence; they were part of a system designed to enforce an unfounded racial hierarchy, White power, through fear."*

The Report further documents that the harms of this era did not end in 1933. The systems and structures that enabled racial terror lynching — disparities in law enforcement, economic exclusion, educational inequity, and health injustice — did not disappear. They transformed. The racial wealth gap, disproportionate incarceration rates, maternal mortality disparities, and land loss among Black families are, as the Commission found, direct descendants of the policies that racial terror lynching was designed to enforce.

The Final Report also offers this sobering reminder: there is no statute of limitations on murder. The Commission's work represents, among other things, an opportunity to investigate and address 38 open cases — crimes against humanity for which no one was ever held accountable. Delay has not diminished this harm; it has compounded it.

---

## III. Why an Apology Is Essential

SJ 3 asks the State of Maryland to do what justice has long required: to acknowledge the truth of its history, name its complicity and negligence, and commit to reparative action. This is not a symbolic gesture divorced from consequence. It is, as the Commission's Final Report makes clear, the moral and legal foundation upon which all other repair must rest.

Acknowledgment matters for descendants, for communities, and for the integrity of our democratic institutions. The men whose names are recorded in the Final Report — John Simms, Howard Cooper, Matthew Williams, George Armwood, and 34 others — were denied due process, denied a fair trial, and denied the protection of the very government that SJ 3 now asks to account for its failures. Passing this resolution does not assign personal guilt to individual Marylanders living today. As the Chair and Vice Chair wrote, it asks only what we owe one another as members of a shared community: *acknowledgment of truth and participation in repair.*

The Commission's Final Report is unambiguous on this point:

*"Accountability for these crimes cannot be limited to individual acts of violence; it must address the institutional structures and state actors who enabled, encouraged, or failed to prevent these murders."*

A formal apology by the General Assembly is how Maryland's institutions begin to discharge that accountability.

---

#### **IV. The Moment Calls for Action**

The Commission recognized in its Final Report that Maryland faces fiscal and political challenges. It also recognized — clearly and without equivocation — that the cost of continued inaction is far greater. Lost human potential, economic inefficiency, social instability, and the compounding burden of unaddressed historical harm impose real costs on Maryland and its people. As the Chair and Vice Chair wrote:

*"The question is not whether Maryland can afford to act, but whether we can afford to continue bearing the mounting costs of unaddressed historical harm."*

The Commission's six years of work — its public hearings, its historical research, its engagement with descendants and communities across every region of Maryland — culminated in a Final Report and a set of 84 recommendations that chart a clear path forward. SJ 3 is where that path begins. It is the act that makes all subsequent repair possible. As the Chair and Vice Chair concluded:

*"The choice before us is not whether to pay for the past, but whether to invest in a future worthy of our highest values."*

---

#### **V. Conclusion**

The Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission respectfully and strongly urges this Committee to support and advance Senate Joint Resolution 3. Passage of this resolution would honor the courage of those who survived and witnessed racial terror in Maryland, restore dignity to the 38 known victims and the countless others whose names are lost to time, and fulfill the promise that motivated the creation of this Commission: that Maryland would reckon honestly with its history in pursuit of justice, healing, and reconciliation.

May truth remain our guide, justice our practice, reconciliation our legacy, and peace our goal.

---

*Submitted on behalf of the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission*

**Dr. David O. Fakunle**, Chair

**Dr. Charles L. Chavis, Jr.**, Vice Chair

Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission

*For questions regarding this testimony, please contact Dr. David O. Fakunle at [david.fakunle@morgan.edu](mailto:david.fakunle@morgan.edu).*