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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
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**Testimony for Senate Joint Resolution 3**  
**Apology and Acknowledgement of the State's Responsibility in Racial Terror Lynchings**  
**Before the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**  
**March 12, 2026**

Good afternoon, Chair Feldman and members of the committee.

In 2019, we unanimously voted to establish the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission (the “Commission”)<sup>1</sup> and in 2023 we unanimously voted to support legislation I introduced extending the Commission’s termination date to June 30, 2026 and its deadline to submit its final report to December 1, 2025.<sup>2</sup> The Commission was charged to:

- hold public regional hearings in areas where a lynching of an African American by a white mob has been documented;
- receive recommendations from the public, including families and communities affected by lynching, for addressing, engaging, and reconciling affected families and communities, as specified; and
- make recommendations for addressing the legacy of lynching that are rooted in the spirit of restorative justice and may include the erection of memorial plaques or signage at or near sites of racially motivated lynchings.<sup>3</sup>

The Commission delivered its final report<sup>4</sup> last December and identified 38 victims of racial terror lynching—which was defined as “the unlawful killing of an African American by white mob violence, often with the apparent complicity of state and local officials, intended to incite racial

<sup>1</sup> [2019 Maryland House Bill 309, House of Delegates Third Reader Voting Record; 2019 Maryland House Bill 309, Senate Third Reader Voting Record.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Chapter 12 of 2023.](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Chapter 41 of 2019](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Final Report \(revised December 9, 2025\).](#) Unless otherwise noted, all statistics, facts, and quotations in this testimony are from this Report.

terror and subservience to white supremacy”—across the state of Maryland. The earliest victim the Commission identified was David Thomas, who was lynched in 1854 at age 34 in Caroline County. The most recent was George Armwood, at age 22, of Somerset County in 1933. According to the Commission’s report at least 38 Black Marylanders were “terrorized, brutalized, and murdered by white mobs” during this 80-year period.

I had the opportunity to personally visit the site in Allegany County where 18-year-old Robert Hughes (a.k.a William Burns) was accused of shooting Officer August Baker and lynched three days later by beating and repeated shooting on October 6, 1907. I also visited the site in Baltimore County where 15-year-old Howard Cooper was accused of rape and lynched by hanging on July 13, 1885. In both of these lynchings, the teens were abducted by lynch mobs from local jails and murdered.

Howard Cooper’s lynching took place as his lawyers attempted to take his case to the Supreme Court, with white residents fearing the prospect of a ruling in his favor. At around 11:00pm on July 12, 1884, a mob of masked white men broke into the jail using a flagpole, overpowering the local sheriff and watchman. The mob dragged Cooper out of his cell with a rope around his neck and hung him on the nearest tree outside the jail. A local Baltimore Sun reporter on the scene described as many as 40 men pulling the rope.<sup>5</sup>

In the lynching of Robert Hughes, the county sheriff deliberately declined to place additional guards at the jail, leaving one deputy sheriff to defend against a mob of masked men on the evening of October 5, 1907. By midnight, the mob had grown to several hundred and demanded that the deputy sheriff turn over his keys. Some reports claimed he refused, leading the mob to hold him at gun point, strip him, and seize the keys. Other reports claimed his wife arrived at the scene and convinced him to turn them over. As the mob stormed the jail, a local attorney attempted to find additional officers to urge them to respond, later describing that they “moved in a rather leisurely fashion” and “of course... arrived too late”. Robert Hughes had already been dragged into the street, shot repeatedly, and mutilated.<sup>6</sup>

These two incidents reflect a broader pattern of the deliberate failure of our state to protect the Black community from lynch mobs. The report’s findings noted the following themes of these extrajudicial killings:<sup>7</sup>

- **Accusations Without Due Process:** Lynching victims were often accused of crimes, not convicted. The allegations frequently involved an assault of a white women, which triggered mob violence without any investigation, evidence, or legal process.
- **Mob Violence Enabled by Law Enforcement:** In many cases, local law enforcement failed to protect prisoners in their custody, allowing or enabling mobs to seize and lynch them.

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<sup>5</sup> [The Lynching of Howard Cooper | CCBC Invisible History.](#)

<sup>6</sup> [About William Burns — The Brownsville Project.](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, \*Final Report\*](#) (Page 117).

- **High Rates of Free Black Residents and Black Landownership:** Counties where lynchings occurred often had established and prosperous Black communities whose economic and civic success provoked resentment and backlash from white residents.
- **Segregation and Political Suppression Post-Emancipation:** Maryland’s white political leaders used tools like poll taxes, literacy tests, and gerrymandering to suppress Black political power, while mob violence reinforced that system of control.
- **Geographic and Jurisdictional Isolation:** In more geographically isolated counties, distance from state oversight often allowed local residents to carry out lynchings without outside intervention or accountability.
- **Erasure from Public Memory:** The victims and history of lynching were largely omitted from local histories, textbooks, and public commemorations.

The structures that enabled racial terror lynchings transformed into the structures that find today’s Black Marylanders facing more traffic stops, more incarceration, more maternal mortality, and more land loss than their white counterparts.

As Commissioners David Fakunle and Charles Chavis wrote in their introduction to the Report, “lynching was never solely about the individuals killed. It was a system of terror designed to subjugate an entire community and to enforce racial hierarchy.”<sup>8</sup> The report expands on this point stating:

“Maryland’s history of racial terror lynchings cannot be fully understood without grappling with the structures that made them possible. The patterns across counties—law enforcement complicity, economic resentment, political suppression, and media normalization—reveal that lynching was never an isolated act of rage. It was a systemic tool of racial control, aided by public institutions and cultural gatekeepers.”<sup>9</sup>

In acknowledgement of this reality, the Commission specifically recommended that we enact legislation and support remedies in nine key categories. Senate Joint Resolution 3, seeks to enact one of those recommendations of Commission’s Reconciliation Committee: the Apology and Acknowledgment of Responsibility.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, \*Final Report\*](#) (Page 4).

<sup>9</sup> [Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, \*Final Report\*](#) (Page 119).

<sup>10</sup> [Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, \*Final Report\*](#) (Page 132). The other categories include “(1) Material Reparations – proposing tangible investments to repair historical and ongoing harm; (2) Criminal Justice – strengthening due process protections for the accused and addressing the absence of accountability and broader failures of the legal system; (3) Community Healing – fostering spaces and practices for grief, remembrance, and resilience; (4) Educational – integrating the history of racial terror into curricula and public education and expanding opportunities for communities impacted by this legacy; (5) Mental Health – supporting culturally competent, trauma-informed services for descendants and communities; (6) Symbolic Reparations – including apologies, memorials, and public acknowledgments to honor victims and affirm the truth; (7) Media – promoting accurate, respectful storytelling to counter historical distortion; and (8) Funding, Implementation, and Monitoring – ensuring recommendations are resourced, enacted, and assessed with transparency and accountability.”

The Commission and I acknowledge that “There is no single act or policy that can undo this history. But by confronting it with honesty and committing to meaningful repair”, we have an “opportunity to lead.” The Commission was clear that this and its other three recommendations were offered “to restore what was taken, to remember what was lost, and to move—together—toward healing.”<sup>11</sup> It is this healing which “requires an honest reckoning with the past.”<sup>12</sup> Acknowledging and apologizing as a body for the role the State played is a small but necessary step. Not sufficient by any means, but necessary.

For these reasons, I ask for a favorable report on Senate Joint Resolution 3.

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<sup>11</sup> [Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, \*Final Report\*](#) (Page 132).

<sup>12</sup> [Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, \*Final Report\*](#) (Page 123).