

Remarks for Yaeunda Pao

Good morning, and thank you, Chair and members of the Committee.

My name is Yaeunda Pao, and I am a proud Marylander. I am the Founder and CEO of Genius Room, a global home for leaders, governments, and entrepreneurs leading in AI, Web3, blockchain, and ethical innovation. I am also a 2026 delegate for Women of Color in Blockchain, selected by Clev Nessenfor to serve on her council.

As a Black woman in blockchain, I know both the promise of this technology and the populations that risk being left behind if we don't act.

When I look at Maryland, I see underused and underserved communities filled with untapped potential. I see talent that isn't funded, ideas that aren't scaled, and assets that aren't activated to their full capacity.

For years, I've worked close enough to markets to understand how value is created, but also how access to that value is controlled. Opportunity isn't evenly distributed. Participation isn't evenly accessible. And wealth-building tools are often designed for those who already have proximity to capital.

Blockchain gives us the tools to break what I call generational monetary curses, by creating access, transparency, and new ways for all to participate in the financial system.

Staking, at its core, is a reward system. If I allow my digital assets to help secure a network, I should be able to earn rewards in return. Platforms like Coinbase offer between 3.5% and 5% in staking rewards in states where it's permitted. That's not speculation, that's the equivalent of building a savings account for my future and for my children's future.

I tell people: I call my money my friends, and I want my friends to make more friends. That's what staking does. But here in Maryland, my friends are stuck in the sandbox alone, while just across the line in Virginia, they're free to grow.

When my own family members in other states can access these opportunities and I cannot, it feels like Marylanders are being intentionally left behind, forced to play catch-up while others accelerate and progress.

Businesses will move. Talent will move. Innovation will move. And I would hate to see our population decrease because we failed to embrace digital transformation.

Through initiatives like the Genius Room, I work to connect high-net-worth individuals, governments, founders, and communities, because this is about partnership, collaboration, and forward-looking policy.

Three, five, ten years from now, the future will be digital. My only request is this: do not leave underserved, underrepresented, and undervalued populations behind.

Maryland needs access to crypto and staking not as a luxury, but as a bridge to a more inclusive financial system. The time is now.

Thank you.