

Chair, Vice Chair, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of House Bill 524, which would officially designate September as African Heritage Month in Maryland and provide for annual statewide recognition of that observance. The bill summary further notes that this recognition would encourage schools, community groups, businesses, and cultural organizations to celebrate through programs, events, and educational activities.

As a Commissioner on the Prince George's County Multicultural Commission, and President of the African Catholic Association in the Archdiocese of Washington, Board Member of the National Association of African Catholics in the United States, Director of Uganda Martyrs Society, Inc., and on behalf of fellow African Catholic diaspora leaders, I believe this bill is both timely and important. It affirms the dignity, history, and contributions of African communities whose lives and labor continue to enrich Maryland socially, culturally, spiritually, and economically.

Maryland is home to a vibrant African immigrant and diaspora community. The bill materials describe that community as a major economic and cultural force, noting the significant presence of African-born residents and their contributions as entrepreneurs, healthcare workers, engineers, educators, small business owners, and community leaders.

In our churches, families, and community organizations, we see these contributions every day. African Catholics and other African diaspora communities are deeply engaged in service, education, small business development, youth mentorship, civic participation, and the strengthening of family and moral values.

HB 524 is not merely symbolic. It creates an opportunity for Maryland to recognize and elevate the many ways African communities contribute to the common good. The bill materials also highlight the economic value of African immigrant households, including billions in household income and substantial tax contributions that support schools, infrastructure, and public services. ♦ Establishing African Heritage Month would help promote festivals, educational programming, tourism, cultural exchange, and African-owned businesses across the state.

From a civic and educational standpoint, this legislation would foster a stronger culture of understanding, respect, and unity. It would help ensure that future generations of Marylanders learn not only about Africa's history and heritage, but also about the ongoing contributions of African immigrants and African diaspora communities to the life of our state. In a diverse society such as ours, this kind of recognition strengthens social cohesion and affirms that all communities have a valued place in Maryland's story.

For those of us in faith-based leadership, this recognition also carries moral significance. It honors the sacrifices, resilience, faith, and cultural inheritance of African peoples and families. It gives our children and young adults a stronger sense of belonging and encourages them to contribute proudly and constructively to Maryland's future.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 524.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to the people of Maryland.

Respectfully submitted,

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