



## Wala Blegay

Council Member At-Large  
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March 13, 2026

Re: Testimony in Support of Establishing African Heritage Month in Maryland

Good afternoon Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Wala Blegay, and I am the Councilmember At at Large for Prince George's County. I am honored to testify in strong support of establishing African Heritage Month in the State of Maryland. This recognition is long overdue and reflects the growing presence and profound contributions of the African diaspora across our state.

Maryland is home to one of the largest African immigrant populations in the United States. In fact, Maryland has the fifth-largest African immigrant population in the country, with over 190,000 residents of African origin living, working, and raising families here. Communities from across the African continent have made Maryland their home, and the African diaspora continues to grow and thrive throughout the state.

As someone who represents a district with a large African community, I see these contributions every day. But this testimony is also deeply personal to me.

My family's roots are connected to multiple parts of Africa. My father is from Nimba County, Liberia, and my family is from Ganta. My mother is from Nigeria. Like many families in our African community, our story reflects the interconnected nature of the African diaspora and the strong cultural ties that many of us maintain with the continent.

That heritage has shaped who I am and my commitment to ensuring that African communities are recognized for their contributions to our state.

The African diaspora is now a vital part of Maryland's social, economic, and civic life.

Across the state, African immigrants and their families are entrepreneurs, healthcare professionals, educators, engineers, and public servants. African immigrants are also among the most highly educated immigrant groups in the United States, and their contributions to sectors such as medicine, engineering, entrepreneurship, and public service are significant.

In Maryland, African professionals play a major role in healthcare, serving as doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and medical leaders who care for families throughout our communities.

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African entrepreneurs are also a growing force within our small business community, opening restaurants, technology firms, logistics companies, consulting businesses, and many other enterprises that create jobs and economic opportunity.

We are also seeing the African diaspora represented in public leadership. Maryland now has nearly ten elected officials of African heritage, demonstrating the growing civic engagement and leadership within the African community.

But these achievements did not happen automatically. The recognition of African Heritage Month is the result of years of advocacy and organizing by members of the African diaspora, community leaders, faith institutions, and elected officials who understood the importance of visibility and representation.

Maryland's African community is incredibly diverse. Our state is home to residents from Liberia, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Kenya, and many other nations across the continent. These communities bring languages, traditions, food, music, and cultural values that enrich the fabric of our state.

They are also deeply committed to the communities they now call home. They are raising children, volunteering in faith institutions, mentoring young people, building businesses, and actively participating in civic life.

Establishing African Heritage Month is about more than celebration. It is about ensuring that the stories, contributions, and cultural heritage of African communities are recognized and integrated into the broader narrative of Maryland.

It allows our schools, institutions, and communities to highlight the impact of the African diaspora and ensures that future generations understand the role African immigrants have played—and continue to play—in shaping the future of our state.

Maryland is stronger because of its diversity, and the African diaspora has been an essential part of that strength.

By establishing African Heritage Month, Maryland affirms that the contributions of African communities are valued, respected, and worthy of recognition.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I respectfully urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Wala Blegay



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