

**Formal Testimony in Support of House Bill 524 (HB 524)  
African Heritage Month – Designation**

**Presented by:**

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**Before the Maryland House of Delegates – Health and Government Operations  
Committee  
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**Chair, Vice Chair, and Honorable Members of the Committee:**

My name is Reverend Oliver Lorenzo Lloyd, Sr. I serve as the President of the Liberian Christian Ministers, representing a coalition of African diaspora faith leaders dedicated to unity, justice, and the socio-economic empowerment of our community. I also have the distinct privilege of serving as the Senior Pastor of All Saints World Mission Church in Silver Spring.

I stand before you today to offer my strong and unwavering support for **House Bill 524**, which requires the Governor to annually proclaim the month of September as **African Heritage Month**. This legislation serves as a vital formal recognition of the profound historical, cultural, and economic contributions that people of African descent have made—and continue to make—to the Great State of Maryland.

Beyond a mere designation, this bill instructs the Governor to urge educational and cultural organizations to observe this month with rigorous programs, ceremonies, and activities that reflect the dignity of our shared history.

**A Personal and Professional Perspective**

I speak to you today not only as a faith leader but as an immigrant from West Africa who has seen the "Maryland Dream" in action. I am the son of a retired Certified Medical Technician and the proud patriarch of a family that serves this state with distinction: my household includes nurses, high school teachers, psychologists, and IT engineers. We are a microcosm of the broader African diaspora in Maryland—a community characterized by a legacy of resilience, faith, and high-level professional achievement.

**The Merits of House Bill 524**

## **1. Recognition of Economic and Civic Impact**

HB 524 formally affirms the central role of African immigrants in shaping Maryland's identity. The data is clear: the African immigrant community is a cornerstone of our workforce. In Maryland, African immigrants represent a significant portion of the population and contribute to over 40% of minority-owned businesses in various sectors. Furthermore, Maryland consistently ranks among the top states for African immigrant healthcare workers, who comprise over 11% of that vital workforce. With over 42% of our community holding a bachelor's degree or higher, our contributions to management, professional services, and high-tech industries are indispensable to the state's prosperity.

African immigrant churches have been a trusted institutions that have help families integrate into Maryland society and have greatly contributed to the results aforementioned. African immigrant churches provide:

- Informal job-networking and workforce support.
- Crisis support for housing, food, and mental health needs.
- Orientation for newly arrived immigrants through trusted community networks and partnerships with local agencies.
- Platforms for civic engagement that help immigrant families connect with local government and public services.

These roles mirror the functions of social service organizations and reduce strain on state and county systems.

Economically, H524 will strengthen our workforce, contribute taxes, start businesses, and help sustain population growth.

## **2. Honoring Deep Historical Ties**

This bill provides a necessary platform to reflect on the unique historical bond between Maryland and the African continent. Most notably, in 1841, the "Republic of Maryland" (Maryland-in-Africa) was established in present-day Liberia—a movement funded by the Maryland State Legislature. Additionally, Maryland's moral leadership was cemented in the 1980s when it became a national pioneer in divesting \$1 billion from the South African apartheid regime. HB 524 honors this legacy of international solidarity.

## **3. Strengthening Educational and Social Cohesion**

By designating September—the commencement of the academic year—as African Heritage Month, this bill ensures that our schools and cultural institutions can integrate these narratives into their primary programming. It fosters unity among African Americans,

African immigrants, and Caribbean communities, creating a shared platform for cultural exchange and mutual understanding.

#### **4. Inspiring Civic Engagement**

For Liberians, Ghanaians, Nigerians, Ethiopians, and many others, Maryland is a place of belonging. This official recognition sends a powerful message: your heritage is valued. When a community feels seen by its government, it is more likely to engage in civic life, entrepreneurship, and public service.

H524 will be an added empowerment for African immigrant churches in Maryland to continue to contribute more profoundly to both the **cultural vitality** and **economic strength of our beloved state**. Through program and event this bill will preserve Maryland-Africa heritage, foster community cohesion, nurture youth, and anchor immigrant families.

#### **Conclusion**

House Bill 524 is a meaningful step toward unity, historical truth, and cultural empowerment. It strengthens the social fabric of Maryland by ensuring that the contributions of the African diaspora are not merely a footnote, but a celebrated chapter of our state's ongoing story.

On behalf of the Liberian Christian Ministers and the vibrant diaspora community we serve, I respectfully urge this committee to issue a **favorable report** on House Bill 524.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to a more inclusive Maryland. I am available to address any questions the Committee may have.