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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Testimony in Support of House Bill 524: General Provisions - Commemorative Months - African Heritage Month

March 17th, 2026

Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and esteemed members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee, I come before you today to offer testimony in strong support of House Bill 524 - General Provisions - Commemorative Months - African Heritage Month, which would formally designate September as African Heritage Month in Maryland. This bill recognizes the rich history, culture, and economic contributions of Africans and members of the African diaspora who call Maryland home. Furthermore, House Bill 524 encourages state agencies, schools, and community organizations to observe African Heritage Month through educational, cultural, and community programming. In doing so, House Bill 524 affirms Maryland's commitment to honoring the communities that have shaped and continue to strengthen our state.

According to 2023 data from the Migration Policy Institute, approximately 214,000 of Maryland's 1.03 million foreign-born residents were born in Africa, representing roughly 20.8% of the State's immigrant population.[1] A significant concentration of this community resides in Montgomery County, which is home to one of the nation's largest populations of Ethiopian and Cameroonian residents, as well as thriving communities from Ghana, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and many other African nations.

The economic contributions of Maryland's African community are profound and well-documented. According to research published by the Partnership for a New American Economy Research Fund, African immigrant households in Maryland generate $5.6 billion in annual household income, contribute $1.6 billion in total taxes, and pay $530 million in state and local taxes that directly support Maryland's schools, infrastructure, and public services.[2] In Montgomery County alone, residents of African descent play a central role in sustaining local commercial corridors and filling critical labor shortages in sectors such as healthcare support, home care, and essential service industries.

Formally recognizing African Heritage Month would amplify this existing vitality. Cultural observances and commemorative designations are proven drivers of economic activity. They attract tourism, elevate the visibility of small businesses, stimulate spending in retail, food

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[1] "State Immigration Data Profiles | Maryland," Migration Policy Institute, accessed March 13, 2026, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/MD.

[2] Power of the purse January 2018 how Sub-Saharan Africans contribute, accessed March 9, 2026, https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/01/NAE_African_V6.pdf.

service, hospitality, and the arts, and encourage cross-community engagement that strengthens local economies. African cultural celebrations already occur across Maryland every year, from Ghanaian Independence Day and Ethiopia's Timkat Festival to Nigeria's Durbar Festival and many others. These events draw thousands of attendees from across Maryland and neighboring states, filling local restaurants, event venues, and hotels. African-owned businesses and community establishments have consistently seen increased revenue as a result. A formal state designation would provide a unifying framework for these existing celebrations, attract broader participation, and create new opportunities for economic growth throughout the entire month of September.

Beyond the economic case, House Bill 524 carries profound symbolic significance. Formal recognition by the State of Maryland sends a clear message to African Marylanders that their heritage, sacrifices, and contributions are seen, valued, and worthy of commemoration. It affirms Maryland's identity as a state that embraces its diversity not merely in words but in law. Commemorative designations also serve an important educational function. They create structured opportunities for schools, agencies, and communities to engage with African history and culture, fostering a more informed and inclusive society. For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 524.

The Honorable Bernice Mireku-North, Esq.
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