



Testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 524
General Provisions - Commemorative Months - African Heritage Month
House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

March 17, 2026

Dear Honorable Chair Wells, Vice-Chair Kerr, and Members of the Committee,

We Are Casa (formerly, "CASA") is pleased to offer **favorable testimony** in **support** of **HB 524—General Provisions - Commemorative Months - African Heritage Month**

We Are CASA is a national organization building power and improving the quality of life in working-class Black, Latino/a/e, Afro-descendent, Indigenous, and Immigrant communities.

With a membership of over 189,000 members, We Are CASA creates change with its power-building model blending human services, community organizing, and advocacy to serve the full spectrum of the needs, dreams, and aspirations of members. For nearly forty years, We Are CASA has employed grassroots community organizing to bring our communities closer together and fight for justice, while simultaneously providing vital services to communities across the state and beyond.

CASA represents several hundred African immigrants in Maryland. They bring with them rich cultures, languages, and traditions that strengthen our community - and should be celebrated.

HB 542 would allow Maryland the opportunity to honor residents from the African diaspora and those of African descent by proclaiming the month of September as African Heritage Month in recognition of the contributions that African Americans have made to the State.

Maryland is home to a vibrant and diverse African Diaspora that includes African Americans whose families have shaped this state for generations, as well as immigrants from across the African continent and the Caribbean who have chosen Maryland as their home. While journeys may differ - be it forcibly brought to this country through the brutality of slavery, coming more recently as immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers fleeing war, persecution, political instability, and economic hardship in their home countries, or simply coming to Maryland seeking a better life - they are connected by a shared heritage rooted in Africa.

Recognizing African Heritage Month is an opportunity to celebrate the richness, diversity, and power of African cultures and traditions while also acknowledging the history that has shaped African-descended communities in Maryland. It is a moment to uplift the beauty and vibrancy of African heritage while recognizing the strength of people who have endured displacement, oppression, and hardship and continue to build thriving communities.

Throughout Maryland's history, people of African descent have helped shape the moral, economic, and cultural fabric of our state. From towering civil rights leaders such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Thurgood Marshall, to the countless educators, healthcare workers, entrepreneurs, artists, and public servants who strengthen our communities today, Marylanders of African descent have made lasting contributions across every sector of society.

Today, Maryland continues to be shaped by the contributions of African-descended communities. As the state with one of the largest populations of African immigrants in the nation, African heritage continues to strengthen our state's workforce, economy, and cultural life. The contributions of Marylanders of African heritage continue to pave the way for future generations, including in:

- **Healthcare**, as approximately 15% of the workforce identifies as Black or African American, with the largest representation in localities such as Prince George's County. This demographic plays a crucial role in addressing health disparities in the community. In particular, Black immigrants make up a significant portion of healthcare workers at 11.6%.¹
- **Government and political spaces**, with the Legislative Black Caucus standing as one of the largest Black caucuses in the nation, and countless African descent leaders across Maryland's government.
- **Sciences, arts, and culture**, with Maryland Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) being a hub for the country's next generation of entrepreneurs, researchers, scientists, and artists.

By establishing African Heritage Month, Maryland will continue to affirm that the history, cultures, and contributions of people of African descent are centered and celebrated.

We Are CASA respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 524 - African Heritage Month.

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[https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/report/black-immigrants-in-healthcare-and-essential-industries/#:~:text=New%20York%20\(12.1%20percent\)%2C.of%20Black%20immigrant%20healthcare%20workers.](https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/report/black-immigrants-in-healthcare-and-essential-industries/#:~:text=New%20York%20(12.1%20percent)%2C.of%20Black%20immigrant%20healthcare%20workers.)