

13 March 2026

**Dear Members of the Committee**

My name is Henok Mengistu. I live in Maryland with my family, and I am the founder of Ethiopique, a local news organization that serves immigrant communities in the Washington DC, Maryland, and Virginia region.

I am writing to express my support for the Heritage bill.

For many immigrant families like mine, heritage is not only about the past. It is also about how our children grow up in this country. My children are United States citizens. Like many other children of immigrants, they are growing up between cultures. Policies that recognize and support heritage help them feel that their background is not something that must be hidden, but something that can exist comfortably within American society.

When children see their culture reflected through music, food, and community traditions, it helps them feel welcomed and confident in who they are. At the same time, these experiences create opportunities for them to engage with the wider American community. Cultural exchange through music, culinary traditions, and community events allows people from different backgrounds to learn from each other and build stronger connections.

Supporting heritage initiatives does not separate communities. In fact, it does the opposite. It helps immigrant families integrate with confidence while sharing their traditions with their neighbors. This strengthens the social fabric of our state.

Maryland is home to many families from around the world. Recognizing and supporting heritage helps ensure that children growing up here can feel both fully American and proud of where their families come from.

Thank you for considering my perspective and for your service to the people of Maryland.

Sincerely,

Henok Mengistu

Founder, Ethiopique

Maryland Resident