



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 170

Commission to Study African American Civil War Sailors in Maryland FAVORABLE

TO: Delegate Melissa Wells. Chair; Delegate Kenneth Kerr, Vice-Chair and the members of the House Government, labor and Elections Committee

FROM: The Rev. Ken Phelps, Jr., member of the Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network (MEPPN)

DATE: February 17, 2026

The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland, at its 237th Convention in 2021, passed a resolution calling upon the Maryland General Assembly, convening in January of 2022, to pass what was then The Public Schools: African American History Development of Content Standards and Implementation Act, relating to the development and implementation of an African American history curriculum in public schools. We are dismayed that bill and subsequent versions to revise the history and culture that we teach never moved beyond committee.

Given the hostility that has engulfed local school boards in the past few years, we understand that fear and misinformation have made any rational conversation about expanding our history to include all who played a part in living it - though not writing it - and the circumstances faced by each player.

We support the inclusive intent of this bill because it is about truth, a truth without which there can be no true reconciliation in our nation - a shared history of which we may not be proud, but which defines us, one we can embrace, and finally move on together with a shared understanding of who we are as a people - a truth without which we can never be set free from the insidious grip of our past.

The contributions made by African-American sailors may seem insignificant to some, but it is an important part of the larger truth which begs to be heard in the form of the sacred stories of so many who were participants in our history and whose legacies have been denied. Including, we might add, Frederick Douglass, who in spite of his

The Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network (MEPPN) is a ministry of The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland, The Episcopal Diocese of Washington, and The Delaware-Maryland Synod ELCA



relentless pressure on Lincoln before, during and after the Civil War and the influence that he exerted on his policies concerning slavery, does not appear in the Spielberg film, *Lincoln*.

History without truth is a fairytale at best, and propaganda at its worst. And as is the case with all sin, too many have suffered at the hands of those who have owned our past to the benefit of too few and the oppression of far too many. We have nothing to fear from knowing our true history, from learning and sharing wonderful stories of bravery and valor. But in the reconciliation, the repair that it offers, we have everything to gain.

The Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network requests a favorable report.