

February 17, 2026
Delegate Melissa Wells
Chair, House Government, Labor and Elections Committee
Annapolis, MD

RE: HB751 Victims of Communism Memorial Day

Good afternoon, Chair Wells, and members of the committee.

I was born in Odesa Ukraine, under the Soviet Union, and my family came to Maryland as refugees when I was eight years old because freedom was impossible where we lived, and here it was within reach.

My name is Karina Lipsman and I serve as the Director of Government Relations at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation.

But before any title or professional role, I am someone whose life was shaped by communism.

Like many immigrant families, we arrived with very little. We did not speak English, we had limited resources, and we had to rebuild our lives from scratch. For my parents and for millions of others who lived under communist rule, the United States represented Hope, the hope that a person could live without fear of their government, speak freely, worship freely, and determine their own future.

I remember growing up in a system where people were careful about what they said and who might be listening. My parents understood that speaking openly about politics could carry real consequences. When my family came to the United States, one of the most striking differences was something many Americans take for granted the ability to speak freely without fear of punishment. That freedom is something my family never experienced under communism, and it is something we should never take for granted.

Our story is not unique.

Across the US and here in Maryland, there are countless families who escaped communist regimes in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America in search of liberty. Many of them carry memories of political repression, censorship, surveillance, and the constant fear that came with living under a communist system. That is why remembrance matters. Over the past century, communist regimes have been responsible for the deaths of more than 100 million people.

Entire societies were devastated.

In Ukraine, millions were deliberately starved during the Holodomor.

In Cambodia, nearly a quarter of the population was murdered in the killing fields.

In China, political campaigns and purge destroyed millions of lives.

Across Eastern Europe, generations lived behind the Iron Curtain without basic freedoms. While many people think of this history as something confined to the past, the reality is that communist repression did not end with the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Today, more than 1 billion people still live in their communist regimes. From China to North Korea to Cuba and Vietnam, millions still live without the most basic freedoms. Remembering the victims of communism should not be a partisan issue. The defense of human rights and human dignity is something people of all political perspectives can agree on.

Establishing a Victims of Communism Memorial Day would ensure that Maryland takes time to remember the millions who suffered under these regimes and to educate future generations about the dangers of communism.

Remembrance is important not only for honoring the victims, but also for preserving historical truth. As time passes, fewer survivors remain to tell their stories. It becomes our responsibility to ensure that their experiences are not forgotten. Maryland has long been a place where people fleeing persecution have come to build new lives in freedom. My family's story is one example of that tradition.

By establishing a Victims of Communism Memorial Day, Maryland can honor the victims of communist regimes while standing in solidarity with those who still struggle for freedom today. As congressman, Tom Lantos, cofounder of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, once said, "The veneer of civilization is paper thin. We are its guardians, and we can never rest."

For families like mine, the consequences of communism are not abstract. They are personal. Establishing this day of remembrance will ensure that the stories of those who suffered are never forgotten, and that future generations understand the value of the freedoms we enjoy today.

I respectfully urge the committee to give House Bill 751 a favorable report.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Karina Lipsman
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Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation.