

Good Morning Madame Chair and Delegates. My name is Meghna Chandrasekaran, a 11th grader from Western School of Technology in Catonsville Maryland. I am the Student Body President of Western Tech and the Environmental Affairs Director of Baltimore County Student Councils. I am a member of the Baltimore County Youth Climate Advisory Panel, directed by the Baltimore County Executive, Johnny O. Currently, I am in the process of receiving my Seal of Biliteracy for the language of Tamil. I have received an Executive Citation and Governor Citation recently for the founding of a club 23:59, focusing on environmental activism and international humanitarianism, the SGA presidency and having an active role in the community.

I have come here today to voice my stance on HB 0906: Pongal Day Tamil Heritage Month Bill.

Pongal is a multi-day Tamil harvest festival where all religions, people, cultures come together to celebrate agriculture, farmers and the sun.

As an American-born Tamil, I am very distanced from my cultural roots. I barely get to go back to India and truly witness festivals such as Pongal. It creates a huge cultural disconnect and at times, it feels like I lose a part of myself. I assure you, most Tamil American children in Maryland share the same sentiment. Organizations such as Tamil Sangam has done a remarkable job of bringing Tamil culture and a little bit of home for us Tamil American children who were born here. However, there are so many kids who are out of touch with their roots and have no clue about Tamil culture itself. They barely even know what Tamil is, and it isn't their fault. In our history classes, we aren't able to learn about our culture at all. Whenever lessons center around civilizations, Tamil civilization and culture is not discussed at all. Tamil American children grow up knowing that they aren't represented. I, for one, can tell you that I have seen

the word “Tamil” once in my AP World History textbook and we were only known as merchants. Tamil people are much more than just merchants. Our history and culture is very rich and we never learnt about that, especially not in schools. Growing up as the underrepresented, Tamil American children lose their cultural identity and their heritage.

Knowing that Pongal day and Tamil heritage is being commemorated in the state of Maryland as an official day and month will let them know that their heritage, their culture, their history, their people are being represented and acknowledged. It provides them a sense of assurance that their state got them.

Government has always been defined as for the people, by the people, of the people. Passing HB 0906 will alert children like me, that they are being appreciated for their cultural roots.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to voice my stance on this bill today.