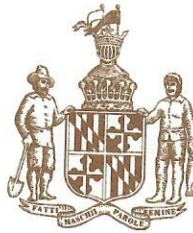


**JOSELINE A. PEÑA-MELNYK**  
*Legislative District 21*  
Prince George's and  
Anne Arundel Counties

—  
*Vice Chair*  
Health and Government  
Operations Committee

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January 21, 2021

**House Bill 297 – Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation  
Commission – Reporting and Sunset Extension  
(as amended)**

**SPONSOR TESTIMONY: Joseline Peña-Melnyk (Favorable)**

Chairman Pendergrass and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, I seek a favorable vote for House Bill (HB) 297, which revises the date for submitting the final report and extends the Commission's cessation date.

In 2019, our legislature voted unanimously to create the Maryland Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In doing so, Maryland became the first state in the nation to launch this effort to heal the horrific wounds of racial injustice. Since then, Maryland's Commission has received national recognition for its work. On November 2, 2020, the Commission was awarded \$300,000 in federal funding to study unsolved lynching crimes in our state. This Commission is doing ground-breaking work at a time not seen before in our history. The coronavirus pandemic created obstacles to conducting public meetings required of the Commission. Additionally, this past year has demonstrated the hunger for racial justice, through the lens of too numerous deaths of Black Americans at the hands of their local police. The Commission's work is so important and impactful that President Biden's team has reached out to the Commission for guidance in the development of a similar Federal Commission. This bill will enable the Commission to complete its vital work.

To address past injustices, we must fully understand them and acknowledge the lasting impact on these victims' families. The Commission has established themselves, with several Black Historians, as the premier entity to preserve oral history and receive documentation from families directly impacted by these heinous crimes.

There is a minor amendment to the bill which conforms the bill title to the bill language. Thank you for the opportunity to present HB 297. I respectfully request your favorable vote of support of this bill.