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Health and Government
Operations Committee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**TESTIMONY FOR HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
COMMITTEE**

CHAIR SHANE PENDERGRASS
VICE CHAIR JOSELINE PENA-MELNYK

HOUSE BILL 667: GENERAL PROVISIONS – STATE SONG - REPEAL

February 23, 2021

POSITION: SUPPORT

Thank you Madam Chair and Members of the Committee. Today, I am pleased to introduce HB 667, General Provisions – State Song - Repeal.

This is a simple, straight-forward bill, and I believe the decision we have as a committee is simple and straight-forward as well. HB 667 will repeal the State Song because of its reference and connection to Maryland’s racist past, and that is all the bill will do. I am bringing this bill before you today because I believe that symbols matter. I was very proud to be part of the process when, two years ago, the statue of Chief Justice Taney was removed from our grounds. Since then, we have added monuments that I believe our state can be much more proud of, Fredrick Douglass and Harriet Tubman. Through this action, we were able to show what our beliefs are through symbols, and we have a chance to do the same with this bill.

We saw a perfect example of this on January 6th. The crowd of people who rioted at the Capitol that day were spurred on by the toxic words and actions of a man they looked up to. In that crowd were symbols of racism and hate that those people risked their lives to hold up with pride in front of the Nation. Those events were scary to watch for many reasons, least of all that I know it will inspire more people to hold those abhorrent beliefs.

I know firsthand what happens when people who revere the Confederate flag feel empowered. I knew this before I ever ran for office. Since entering public life, I have only become more concerned for my family and myself. After the riot in Washington, we here in Annapolis overrode the veto of a bill limiting the sale of long guns in the state. As you all know, it was very contentious piece of legislation, and unfortunately one of its more fervent opponents on the Eastern Shore chose to make a symbol of his opposition by erecting a gallows outside his business. Regardless of that business owners’ thoughts before hanging those nooses, I know what that symbol means to me. I believe he, and men like him are inspired by the symbols they can identify with around them. One of those is “Maryland, My Maryland.” It is a song that

pleads for Maryland to answer the Confederacy's call to war, to "spurn the Northern Scum" and calls President Lincoln a tyrant for abolishing slavery.

These sentiments are wholly antithetical to what I believe the General Assembly stands for, and to continue to allow its words to stain the pages of our laws is unacceptable. As you will hear from our panel, I am far from the first legislator to believe this, but I am honored to hopefully be the last one to have to introduce a bill about it.

Again, I would like to thank the Committee for hearing the bill, and I urge a favorable report on HB 667.