

Testimony for HB 602—Operational Funding for Historic Sotterley, Inc.

I am Nancy Easterling, the Executive Director for Historic Sotterley, Inc., located in St. Mary's County, Maryland: a 300 year old National Historic Landmark and UNESCO Site of Memory for the Slave Route Project which interprets our complex, and often difficult, shared history. It offers a full range of programming to include education programs and field trips, tours, cultural events, recreational opportunities, a working farm that donates produce to our local community, our Common Ground Initiative supported by our over 200 self-identified Descendants, and so much more. Historic Sotterley is truly an exceptional educational and cultural resource for our community, our State, and our Nation.

I am writing to respectfully request that the Committee look favorably upon the amended HB 602, and approve the generous support it will offer to Historic Sotterley in future years. While Sotterley has never wavered in its dedication to improving how we serve our community and to advancing Sotterley's stories and mission, it has often been a challenge to do so. Historic Sotterley operates without an endowment, does not have governmental support outside of the grants it receives, and has to earn and raise the majority of its budget every year. Sotterley has long been dependent upon special events and earned income, and even without a pandemic, this has been a difficult way to support and advance its mission.

I would also like to take the opportunity to more clearly answer questions that came from the Committee regarding how the funds from this bill would be used. The generous funds from HB 602 would provide the operational support needed to fund the nonprofit and its mission. Historic Sotterley runs a 94 acre site, a working farm, and an ever-expanding variety of programs, events, and initiatives, and the funds from this bill would be used to offset its many operational costs to include site maintenance. This precious breathing room would free the staff from spending the vast majority of its time chasing every dollar needed to support its day-to-day operations, thus also giving staff the ability to focus more of its time and energies on expanding its mission as well as acquiring the financial support necessary for many capital needs and infrastructure improvements. This bill would not fund capital improvements, but would finally allow staff members the bandwidth to seek out critical funding necessary to make more capital projects a reality.

As one more point of clarification, the bill refers to Sotterley by its colloquial historic name, Sotterley Plantation, but to clear up any possible confusion, the site and the organization are actually legally known as Historic Sotterley. If this technical name change is deemed necessary and is possible to execute, it would of course be appreciated.

Historic Sotterley is like no other historic site in Maryland or truly anywhere in this nation, and it is an invaluable and irreplaceable resource. The incredible support from HB 602 will give Sotterley the ability to expand its important mission by offering the operational support it so desperately needs. The State of Maryland's investment in this bill be an investment in Sotterley's work - promoting an understanding of the realities of our shared history in order to create a better future together, and never wavering in our commitment to bettering the lives of our citizens. We are profoundly grateful for the generous support of the State of Maryland, and ask that you vote favorably regarding HB 602.