



February 19, 2026

Education, Business, & Administration Subcommittee
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Greetings Madam Chair and members of the committee,

I would first like to thank Budget Analyst Conner Brown for his presentation of our agency's budget.

As Executive Director of the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture, I stand before you representing the only African American agency in the *nation* that operates both a state museum and an African American heritage grant program, a unique model that positions Maryland as the national leader in African American historic preservation. Maryland, as a founding colony, has a profound history in the anti-slavery movement, arts and science innovation, and civil rights legacy. As an agency, we aim to build a stronger ecosystem for preserving Black history, educating and inspiring all people, about this shared story of resistance and achievement.

In partnership with Maryland Historical Trust, In FY25, we awarded \$5 million to 31 projects spanning sacred burial grounds, freedom schools, and sites of resistance. Sites such as Quinn Chapel AME Church in Frederick, a safe house on the Underground Railroad that later became a Civil War hospital and one of the first schools for Black children, and Catoctin Furnace African American Cemetery in Thurmont, where research has identified over 40,000 descendants of enslaved ironworkers. This year brought unprecedented demand: 78 applications requesting over \$15 million demonstrating the urgent need for expanded preservation funding.

Meanwhile, the Banneker-Douglass-Tubman Museum, as a product of our 5 year strategic plan, delivered transformative programming that engaged over 100,000 people. The *Sacred Spaces* exhibition garnered international attention with features in BBC, Ebony, and The New York Times. We published a scholarly catalog of essays for the exhibit and launched the Senator Verda Freeman Welcome archival project of her legislative office, honoring Maryland's first

African American woman senator. Our museum will be a flagship location to learn her story and profound civil rights legacy to our nation.

Beginning in 2027, we are also launching pre-development to reimagine our permanent exhibition to capture the untold stories and more contemporary moments in Maryland black history that will educate, inspire, and empower people to be positive agents of change in their communities.

Our youth programs cultivate the next generation of cultural stewards. Through our third year of partnership with the Housing Authority of Annapolis, last summer students did a cross analysis of Annapolis history with the Gullah Geechee heritage in South Carolina, learning indigo dyeing, sweetgrass weaving, and oral traditions. This summer, they'll travel to Senegal, connecting Maryland's African American legacy to the broader diaspora, a transformative educational model recognized nationally.

Our commission and staff are also fulfilling state historical research. Through federal funding, we have hired five county historians, who are researching the descendant communities of 13 individuals of African descent who lived during the 18th and 19th centuries, whose remains were displaced by land erosion and construction sites. This work represents healing, dignity, and our commitment to those who came before us.

Your support of our FY2027 budget, will ensure Maryland remains the national standard for state-level African American history preservation. These investments will ensure the growth and impact of our preservation and educational work throughout our state.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chanel C. Johnson".

Chanel C. Johnson
Executive Director
Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture