

ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT
DEPARTMENT OF LAND USE
AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT
William Hunt, Director, AICP



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF ST. MARY'S:
James R. Guy, President
Michael L. Hewitt, Commissioner
Tom Jarboe, Commissioner
Todd B. Morgan, Commissioner
John E. O'Connor, Commissioner

February 26, 2018

**Copy for
Rebecca Bridgett**

St. Mary's County Delegation
Senator Waugh and Delegates
Morgan, Rey and Clark
2 West Wing
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

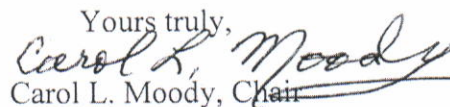
Dear Representatives,

The St. Mary's County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) reviewed House Bill 877, an Act Concerning Burial Sites—Access, Disinterment, Criminal Penalties, and Tax Credit. Each member of the Commission enthusiastically supports this bill. The HPC has a standing Cemetery Committee, and with Rob Gibbs' leadership, literally hundreds of graveyards and burial sites have been identified in St. Mary's County.

The preservation of burial sites serves an essential role in the preservation of our history. As you are probably aware, the practice of the Catholic faith was illegal in Maryland from 1705 until the creation of our Republic in 1776. Without an organized church with its graveyard, burials had to be conducted elsewhere. This is only one of many reasons that small burial sites are an important and unique part of St. Mary's County's history and culture.

In addition to the preservation of history, there is a real concern that descendants have sometimes been unable to access the burial sites of their ancestors. HB-877 addresses this issue. The HPC receives a handful of reports every year concerning the removal and/or desecration of burial sites and headstones. In one example, a tennis court was built on top of a burial site and the headstones haphazardly discarded and leaned against trees on a different part of the property. In another example, cows were allowed to graze on a burial site. The HPC has met with the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office and we learned that in many ways, the Sheriff's hands are tied because of the current laws in Maryland. HB-877, introduced by Delegate Knotts from Prince George's County, addresses these concerns. It is apparent the Prince George's County has the same problems with cemeteries as those experienced by our Historic Preservation Commission.

We ask you to vote in support of House Bill 877.

Yours truly,

Carol L. Moody, Chair

St. Mary's County Historic Preservation Commission

cc: Commissioners of St. Mary's County, County Administrator and Director of Land Use and Growth Management