



100 for Moses: Preserve an African American Cemetery – Write Your Letter Today!

The Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition (BACC) is organizing a letter writing campaign. We ask you to write a short letter to Montgomery County officials asking them to stop the desecration of a historic African American cemetery.

We are calling this the “100 for Moses” because we want to get 100 county residents to write a letter. When you write the letter, please email savemosescemetery@gmail.com and provide us with your name, email address, and town or city so we can document that you and 99 others from Montgomery County wrote a letter!

The BACC is seeking to protect the Moses African Cemetery on River Road near Little Falls Parkway and Westbard Avenue. This cemetery served as a burial ground for enslaved persons and after the Civil War for a thriving African American community located on River Road.

In the mid-20th century, KKK violence and discrimination practiced by the local government combined to displace the community. Large scale residential and commercial development occurred on top of the cemetery and desecrated it.

However, there is still time to prevent the complete desecration of the cemetery. The BACC would like to use the land near the Westwood Towers on Westbard Avenue for the development of a museum and memorial that would serve as an educational and cultural resource for the local community and could draw domestic and international visitors.

In 2021, a county judge agreed with the BACC and put a halt to a pending land sale by the Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) of Montgomery County to a private developer without any plans for the preservation and memorialization of the cemetery. Last summer, the HOC has appealed the decision.

The template for your letter below would ask the HOC to stop its appeal and to negotiate with the BACC for the development of a museum and memorial to the Moses African Cemetery on the land the HOC is trying to sell. The letter would be sent to the [HOC](#) and copied to County Executive Elrich and members of the County Council.

Add your own views to the letter. Instead of—or in addition to—a letter, you can submit a video, pictures, or poetry that best express your perspective. Please share with us your letter and/or other forms of communication.

This article accessed via [this link](#) provides more background. There was also a terrific MSNBC [podcast](#) and [news story](#) recently. You can also visit the [BACC website](#) and [petition](#).

Here are the officials to which your letter would be sent and their email addresses. You can send your letter to all the recipients in one email since the letter is addressed to elected officials and public agency leaders:



- General Counsel Aisha Memon, Housing Opportunities Commission: aisha.memon@hocmc.org
- For all members of the County Council, you can send just one email: county.council@montgomerycountymd.gov
- County Executive Marc Elrich, email Deborah Spielberg, Special Assistant to the County Executive: deborah.spielberg@montgomerycountymd.gov
- Fagan Harris, Governor Wes Moore's Chief of Staff: fagan.harris@maryland.gov

Sample letter

Dear Elected Officials and Public Agency Leaders of Montgomery County:

I urge you to meet with the Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition (BACC) and negotiate with them to stop the desecration and ultimately create a museum and memorial as a lasting tribute to the Moses African Cemetery. Located in a triangular area bounded by River Road, Little Falls Parkway, and Westbard Avenue, the cemetery is the burial ground of enslaved African Americans and subsequent generations.

In 2021, Circuit Court Judge Karla Smith issued an injunction halting the sale by the county's Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) of Westwood Towers and the surrounding land. The HOC appealed her decision in the summer of 2022. Meanwhile, the construction in this corridor continues unabated, threatening the erasure of history and the complete desecration of the Moses African Cemetery. To stop the desecration, we call on the HOC to negotiate with the BACC with the aim of establishing a museum and a memorial on the land near Westwood Towers.

You have an opportunity to exert real leadership and demonstrate a commitment to racial and restorative justice. If you meet with the BACC and negotiate a solution that includes a memorial and museum, you will preserve history and provide invaluable educational opportunities for future generations. Future atrocities can only be avoided if we remember and teach.

Imagine all the field trips that school classes could take to a memorial located at the Moses African Cemetery. Imagine the lectures that could be given by descendants of the original African American community.

Instead of sanctifying sacred ground, the County has dismissed the community and its ancestors. [Dr. Michael Blakey](#), a renowned anthropologist, advised County Executive Marc Elrich to stop the excavation of Moses Cemetery and return unearthed bones, primarily believed to be of enslaved children, to the descendant community. Mr. Elrich has not followed this advice, nor did he report the finding of potential human remains to the police. I insist that the county must follow proper anthropological procedures including returning the remains and funerary objects to the descendant community, now!



If the leadership of Montgomery County shirks its responsibility to preserve Moses Cemetery, it would be a most shameful action that would lead to the erasure of one more African American cemetery and local African American history in Bethesda.

The time to act is now. Any further delay risks permanent damage. Montgomery County has a reputation as a progressive and inclusive place. This status is endangered if our leadership allows desecration of cemeteries and continues using taxpayer dollars to support the HOC's appeal. We ask you to uphold our best values and act now to preserve the Moses Cemetery.