Harriet Elizabeth Brown Commemoration Task Force

*To Honor Calvert County’s Own Civil Rights Hero*

For Immediate Release

Date: August 27, 2015

**Harriet Elizabeth Brown Commemoration Task Force**

**Seeks Public Input**

***Hearings Scheduled for September 14, October 5, and October 20***

*Prince Frederick, MD*

The Harriet Elizabeth Brown Commemoration Task Force invites community members to provide input and recommendations to honor a remarkable Calvert County woman. In 1937, Harriet Elizabeth Brown, then 30 years old, successfully challenged Calvert County Public Schools for paying African-American teachers about half of what equally qualified white teachers received. Hearings will be held on September 14, October 5, and October 20.

According to Task Force Chair, Margaret Dunkle: “We welcome recommendations and personal stories about Harriet Elizabeth Brown and salary equity for African-American teachers in 1937. This will help the Task Force make the best recommendations to the County Commissioners, the Governor, and the General Assembly.”

**Dates and Times of the Hearings**

Two short – half-hour – public hearings will be held at Calvert Library in Prince Frederick (850 Costley Way), immediately before regular Task Force meetings:

**Monday, September 14** – 3:00 to 3:30 p.m.

**Monday, October 5** – 12 noon to 12:30 p.m.

In addition, a third – and longer – hearing will be held the evening of **Tuesday, October 20** – from 6:00 to 8:30 p.m. at the College of Southern Maryland in Prince Frederick (115 J.W. Williams Road, just off Route 231). From 6:00 to 6:30 p.m., there with be sign-in and networking, with the formal hearings beginning at 6:30 p.m. The College will also videotape hearings for the historical record.

**The Task Force Wants Your Ideas and Participation!**

Each hearing speaker will have three minutes to provide input and make recommendations – with up to five minutes for organizations. There will be some time flexibility: for example, for presenters who personally knew Ms. Brown. The Task Force also encourages electronic submission of information and recommendations.

To make a request to speak at a hearing, send an email to HEBTaskForce@aol.com at least five days before the event. Please include: (1) your name, (2) organization, if any, (3) phone number, (4) email address, and (5) the date you wish to speak (September 14, October 5, or October 20). Anyone who does not sign up in advance will be allowed to speak if time permits, or invited to participate in a future hearing or to submit recommendations in writing.

The Task Force invites members of the general public – from students to budding local historians – to attend and to learn more about the important, but largely unknown, legacy of Harriet Elizabeth Brown, Calvert County’s own civil rights hero.

**Why Harriet Elizabeth Brown Is Important for Calvert County, for Maryland, and Nationwide**

Harriet Elizabeth Brown’s 14th Amendment case was a turning point for pay equity for African-American teachers. Her 29-year-old NAACP attorney was Thurgood Marshall, who later became the first African-American Supreme Court Justice.

In 1937, the Calvert County Board of Education agreed – at an unusual meeting *just two days after Christmas* – to equalize salaries for African-American and white teachers over three years. After consulting its own attorney and requesting needed funding from the County Commissioners, the official 1937 School Board minutes conclude: “It was pointed out that this seemed the only alternative to a costly litigation in which the Board of Education was likely to lose.”

Larry Gibson’s brilliant 2012 book, *Young Thurgood*, calls Ms. Brown’s case “a huge boost to the NAACP and the teachers’ equalization movement, not just in Maryland but throughout the South.” In fact, her NAACP attorneys soon won in federal court, when neighboring Anne Arundel County dug in to litigate rather than settle. With the handwriting on the wall, the Maryland General Assembly passed a 1941 law equalizing pay for black and white teachers. Buoyed by these successes, the NAACP then took on unequal teacher salaries, based on race, in school districts across the South.

**About the Task Force**

The Harriet Elizabeth Brown Commemoration Task Force was established by law, with 100% support from Calvert County’s Annapolis delegation – Senate President Miller and Senator Waugh, and Delegates O’Donnell, Fisher, and Jackson. After HB 354 unanimously passed the House and Senate, Governor Larry Hogan signed it into law on May 12, 2015. The Task Force bill was drafted in response to the Calvert County Commission for Women’s request “to find a way to recognize Ms. Brown’s important historical role from the state level.”

The seven-members of this blue-ribbon Task Force are:

Chair: Margaret Dunkle, Chair of the Calvert County Commission for Women

Members:

Dan Curry, Superintendent of Calvert County Public Schools

Joyce Freeland, President of the Calvert County NAACP

Malcolm Funn, Designee of the Maryland Senate

Michael Jackson, Member of the Maryland House of Delegates

Pat Nutter, Member of the Calvert County Board of County Commissioners

Guffrie Smith, President of the Calvert County Historical Society

The Task Force also welcomes members of the public to observe its regular meetings. These meetings will be held after the hearings on September 14 and October 5 – and on November 2 (2:00 p.m.), December 7 (12 noon), and December 14 (2:00 p.m.) at the College of Southern Maryland in Prince Frederick. The Task Force will present its recommendations to the Governor, County Commissioners, and General Assembly by year-end.

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