

Montgomery County Jewish Parents Coalition Written Testimony: Support of House Bill 1386, Education – Employee Training and Holocaust Education Study - Requirements

Montgomery County Jewish Parents Coalition (MoCo JPC) supports House Bill 1386 with amendments. Should the bill pass, it would be a step in the right direction, but there is one important issue that should be considered.

The part 11-406(a) currently reads “In this section, “cultural diversity” means the inclusion of those racial and ethnic groups and individuals that are or have been underrepresented in higher education.”

While we agree that cultural diversity certainly should be defined to include making sure everyone has a seat at the table, we believe this definition is incomplete. In addition, cultural diversity should also be defined to ensure everyone at the table has a voice, which is not the case when a group at the table—however, it arrived there—is silenced by unchecked and outsized acts of bias, discrimination, and hatred.

For example, last month, the website Moderately Moco¹ published a study, which analyzed all hate/bias incidents in schools from July 2022 through October 2023, citing the Montgomery County Police Departments Hate Bias Summaries. The study was unique in that it compared all forms of bigotry, religious, racial, sexual orientation, disability, etc. and was therefore able to identify those groups that were most frequently targeted.

According to the study, over 90% of all hate incidents in schools, targeted the Jewish, Black and LGBTQ+ communities. When taking into account issues of cultural diversity, school systems can ill afford to ignore the prevalence of bias, discrimination, and hatred. Their duty to fight bigotries against the most targeted groups should be no different than their duty to support the achievement of the most underrepresented.

Accordingly, we propose amending this bill to add a second definition of “cultural diversity”, which would be “the implementation of initiatives to combat bias, discrimination and hate against those racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation and religious groups and individuals that have been subjected to over-representative frequencies of bias, discrimination, and/or hate in higher and local education systems, as may be reflected in federal, state or local law enforcement records tracking such incidents.”

We request that the following be added to Section (B) (2): add a section III: ‘The training program and modules shall be available to the public to view. Any consultant hired must be hired through an open and public Request for Proposals process, similar to that used by the Federal government.’

Under Section (C) we ask for the following text be added after line 13: ‘The consultation and choice of organizations must be publicly available. Any consultant hired must be hired through an open Request for Proposals system and process, similar to that used by the Federal government.’

¹ Opinion: MCPS must combat antisemitism in its schools | MoCo360. (2024, January 21). *Hate’s hidden home: Exposing the stark reality of Anti-Jewish incidents in Montgomery County Maryland where “hate has no home” and MCPS (Montgomery County Public Schools).* Moderately MOCO. <https://moderatelymoco.com/hates-hidden-home-exposing-the-stark-reality-of-anti-jewish-incident-in-montgomery-county-md-where-hate-has-no-home-and-mcps/>

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We request the text change in Section (C) (b) (iii) line 23 to add: within the plan, and results as to its efficacy shall be made public.’

Regarding Section (C) (b) (2) (ii), we request a definition of who will define whether improvement is needed, and how will that improvement be measured as to efficacy.

Similarly, regarding Section 2. (a) (ii), the ‘effectiveness’ how will this be identified and/or measured? Sadly, we have seen all too often self-congratulatory buzzwords as to effectiveness and progress. Fighting bias is very difficult. We are certain that the legislature does not want to pass, and Governor Moore does not want to sign, this bill into law, only to find these are empty promises to the community. We must have a real and robust program to stop antisemitism now.

Finally, Section 3 seems to state that Section 2 of this law will only be in effect for one year. Hopefully we are misreading this. This must be a long-term effort and we must be willing to do the very difficult work of ending antisemitism in our secondary schools and our institutions of higher learning. Please delete Section 3.

While today it is the Jewish community as the target of 61% of all hate incidents in our Montgomery County public schools, history has taught us that what starts with the Jewish people never ends with the Jewish people. The hope is that if this bill is successfully implemented, especially with this proposed amendment included, a day may come when the Jewish, Black and LGBTQ+ communities no longer find themselves overly targeted. When that day comes, the interests of cultural diversity will undoubtedly be served by school systems focusing on combatting whatever bigotries may emerge as the most prevalent of the time.

Thank you.