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BILL: **HB0418 - County Boards of Education - Symbols of Hate - Policy**
SPONSOR: **Delegate Michele Guyton**
POSITION: **FAVORABLE**

Monday, March 29, 2021

HB 418

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee. We are writing in favor of House Bill 418.

Every student has the right to feel safe and included in their public school building. While the Maryland Student Coalition supports the rights of students to express themselves in a school setting, that support ends when those means of expression are hurtful and/or intimidating for other students. As an organization composed entirely of high school and college student leaders, the language of this bill fits squarely in our mission to build a public school system that is just and equitable for people of all backgrounds. Many of our members have themselves experienced or learned of hateful symbols in a school environment that have made them and their peers feel unwelcome in their own community. This bill would be a step in the right direction to combatting this form of hate.

The Maryland Student Coalition also supports the provisions of the policy that include disruption as a key factor of a hate symbol. These provisions simultaneously acknowledge that hate symbols are truly problematic in a school environment for all students while also ensuring that this policy is not applied in an unjust or biased way to symbols or causes that are not truly hateful, such as common political speech. Moreover, we support students having the ability to remove or cover up a perceived symbol of hate as a restorative practice and further safeguard against unjust applications of a local policy.

For the reasons stated above, we urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB1166.