



February 5, 2021

Honorable Delegate Anne R. Kaiser
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building, Room 131
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB418 – County Boards of Education - Symbols of Hate - Policy

Dear Chair Anne R. Kaiser and House Ways and Means Committee Members:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB418 – **County Boards of Education - Symbols of Hate - Policy**. CAIR is America’s largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

Following a long string of incidents across the state where hate symbols such as nooses and swastikas have been discovered on school property, school administrative officials are taking action to discourage and take appropriate disciplinary action against those responsible.

Last Fall, in a unanimous vote, the Howard County Public School System’s Board of Education updated its existing policy to ban the Confederate flag, swastikas and other symbols it deemed as “promoting hatred, intimidation or harassment” from school property.¹ The ban applies to clothing, vehicles and at school-related events. The board updated its bullying, harassment and intimidation policy, as well as in the student code of conduct.

In a statement, Howard County schools Superintendent Michael Martirano explained that the revised policy was necessary because the school system’s guidelines should “evolve with new realities.” He said that the new language was an example of school administrators and staff remaining vigilant to the welfare and needs of the student body.

CAIR has called on multiple Maryland school systems in the past to take action after racist, hateful incidents – including in Anne Arundel County, where these have included an AP class essay written by a student suggesting extermination of the Black race; a racist petition circulated by “Kool Kids Klan” – a thinly veiled reference to the KKK; swastikas and racial slurs discovered on school property; and nooses hung on school property.²

As a civil rights organization dedicated to defending and upholding our Constitution, protecting free speech is an important priority. However, we do believe that – in light of increased intolerance sweeping across the nation especially under four years of the previous White House

administration, and the rising threat of white supremacy that led to the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol last month – we have a responsibility to balance defending free speech with ensuring a safe, inclusive learning environment for all students regardless of race, religion ethnicity or other protected classes.

We support this bill that would require each county board of education to adopt a formal policy prohibiting the use or display of a hate symbol of hate under certain circumstances with the amendment that the language specifically also include hate graffiti on school property; and with the amendment that it if such a symbol were to be on clothing, book bags or similar items, that it remain completely concealed for the entire duration of the time that the student or staff member is on school grounds.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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Council on American-Islamic Relations
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References:

1. Maryland school system bans hate symbols from properties. *Associated Press*. October 19, 2020. <https://apnews.com/article/maryland-b7ffc3a384c9c9da01a92426234607cb>. Accessed February 3, 2021.
2. CAIR, NAACP AACo, Community Allies to Call on Anne Arundel County BOE to Address Discrimination, Racism in School System. August 1, 2018. https://www.cair.com/press_releases/cair-naacp-aaco-community-allies-to-call-on-anne-arundel-county-boe-to-address-discrimination-racism-in-school-system/. Accessed February 3, 2021.