

Justin Gallardo, HB0418, Favorable
February 5, 2021

Testimony on HB0418
County Boards of Education – Symbols of Hate – Policy
Ways and Means

Position: FAVORABLE

Madame Chairwoman and Members of the Committee:

I, Justin Gallardo of Parkville, strongly support this legislation outlining requirements to prohibit the display of hate symbols under certain circumstances. This bill specifically mentions (although not limited) the display of swastikas and Confederate flags. While we recognize that these two symbols are associated with a dark historical context, they can be used for educational purposes; however, they should not be used by students as a form of expression because these symbols are strongly associated with hate and terrorism.

I am fortunate to have attended and graduated from Baltimore County Public Schools. It was prepared me well for the future. It was not perfect, as it held its flaws. The school system failed to tackle issues of homophobia which was especially damaging to me at a young age, in an era where states passed constitutional amendments to bar same-sex couples from getting married. What is not well documented – and still concerns me to this day – is their inability to keep up with a changing demographic that includes more Black, Asian, and Latino/a students.

Our school system taught us about the triumphs of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Harriett Tubman. They are remarkable; however, it is greatly white-washed and romanticized. The school system failed to teach that people like Dr. King and many of his like-minded activists were met with great hostility and hate. Yes, that includes fire bombings, political corruption, and ultimately assassination. They were even met with angry mobs waving CONFEDERATE FLAGS.

Just this past year, as many states were shutting down the economy due to the uncertainty and spread of COVID-19, the use of both the swastika and the Confederate flag were used in the Reopen Michigan protests. Another protester was displaying a dark-haired dolls with a noose around its neck. Members of the Boogaloo called on Governor Whitmer to be “lynched, shot, and beheaded.” On January 6, the US Capitol was stormed by a mob of terrorist and a Confederate flag was waved within the building – that had never happened in its history.

February is Black History Month. I believe we can do something positive this month for the greater good of our children. On June 27, 2015, The summer before I graduated from the University of Maryland, College Park, I remember the Charleston Massacre. Dylan Roof, a white supremacist, sat-in on a Bible study at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. While they greeted him with kindness, prayed with him, and taught the word of God – he repaid them with bullets. Nine parishioners were killed. As a result of this atrocity, many government entities removed monuments that idolized the Confederacy, especially Confederate Flag. When Governor Nikki Haley announced the decision to remove the Confederate flag from the state grounds she said, “fly the flags of our country and our state and no others.”

Justin Gallardo, HB0418, Favorable
February 5, 2021

Roof tried to instigate a “race war” by waving the Confederate flag and killing innocent black civilians – he failed! It has only brought us closer in racial reconciliation. The State of Maryland, Howard County, Montgomery County, and the City of Baltimore have removed Confederate monuments and names from public property. Just this passed summer with the murder of George Floyd and the eruption of Black Lives Matter protests, more jurisdictions have followed suit. Notably NASCAR banned the waving of Confederate flags at their races.

People time and again will say this is about “preserving history” and “heritage.” Let us not forget, that the Confederate flags and monuments were erected under Jim Crow America in order to gloat white supremacy and intimidate the Black community. After the Civil War, Robert E. Lee stated, “The only question on which we did not agree has been settled, and the Lord has decided against me.” Since that dark time in American History, the Lee family’s Virginia estate is now Arlington Cemetery which is the final resting place for many patriots who died fighting for the Republic under the American flag. It would be shameful for the seditious flag to be flown anywhere near those graves, let alone justifying and equivocating a failed state that fought to expand and preserve slavery. Not to mention that other members of the Lee family have had more honorable careers like acting Governor Blair Lee III of Maryland and novelist Harper Lee.

History can be taught inclusively. It is an arts & humanities because it shows the raw emotion of the people who lived through it. At the same time, we must condemn hate symbols that serve no academic or civic purposes, especially if they are intended to create more hostility and violence. If you cannot teach triumphs without teaching the violence that led to them; otherwise, you have no business teaching history at all. I strongly ask for this committee to vote favorably of this bill.

Thank You!