

Friday, January 28, 2022

Dear Maryland General Assembly,

My name is Nyah Vanterpool, poet, writer, and nonprofit professional, working to advance racial justice and equity. I believe we all want to live in a prosperous society. We all want a society that allows for the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness.

However there is a long-enduring problem. Laws and regulations that were intended to create healthy lives, liberated futures, and happy citizens have had disproportionately adverse effects on poor and Black communities.

As well, there is a long-enduring conflict. The reality that structural inequity and racism exists is treated as controversial. The pursuit of solutions is treated as radical rather than prudent and sensible.

Yet, you all know...the stories of injustice have been told. From Johns Hopkins to the University of Maryland to the Departments of Health and Education to the United Nations, the studies of inequity and inequality have been published. The problems are well-known. And the abuse that persists is our collective apathy that denies the facts, rejects the truth, and refuses to change our trajectory.

Today and historically:

- By legislation and belief, we pay to criminalize the homeless as vagrants and nuisance, rather than expanding our vision and investment in readily available housing solutions.
- By legislation and belief, we pay to criminalize drug users and non-violent offenders, rather than expanding our vision and investment in recovery and rehabilitation.
- By legislation and belief, we pay to track and monitor the poor to ensure they are deserving of food benefits, rather than expanding our vision and investment in distributing food to the hungry.
- By law and belief, we pay to track and monitor the jobless to ensure they are deserving of unemployment benefits, rather than expanding our vision and investment in making living wage jobs readily available to anyone willing to learn and work.
- By law and belief, we pay to surveil, stop and frisk teens and young adults suspected of crime or gang affiliation, rather than expanding our vision and investment in safe havens, family centers, and jobs.
- By law and belief, we pay to keep emergency rooms operating as centers for primary care, rather than expanding our vision and investment in neighborhood clinics.

These ought be our shared aims, towards which we march with shared resolve.

In Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address, reflecting upon the generations that would toil to undo the injustices cast into America's founding, Lincoln said: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in to bind up the nation's wounds...to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace."

Although this matter of economic justice and racial reconciliation is a national problem, Maryland has an opportunity to lead on the frontier of creating a more just, liberated, and equitable society. To make this multi-racial melting pot nutritious for all people, of all races, regardless of economic status, I encourage

you to enact HB 0159 to formalize Maryland's commitment to advancing the work of our founders, who believed our ideals, if lived in earnest, would lead us to greater freedom and unity.

Though difficult and, perhaps, unenviable, it is a duty that your assembly must uniquely fulfill. I pray for your health, wellness and hope as you discern and decide what is good, just and liberating.

Sincerely,

Nyah Vanterpool

Poet, Writer, Facilitator

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