

To the members of the House Ways and Means Committee,

I am a resident of District 21. I am a retired mental health professional and a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice Annapolis and Anne Arundel County. I am testifying **in opposition to HB1256 Education - Discriminatory Concepts in Instruction - Prohibition (Ending Discrimination in Public Education Act of 2022)**

It is described as “Prohibiting a teacher, an administrator, or any other employee of a public primary or secondary school and certain nonpublic schools from including certain discriminatory concepts in a unit of instruction.” However, what does it really mean in practice?

I oppose efforts by our elected officials to deny our students access to our true, shared histories by censoring the use of concepts that help reveal that history. According to the 2020 US Census, the population of Anne Arundel County is 64.19% White, 17.76% African American, 9.65% Hispanic, .4% Indigenous, 4.34% Asian, and .08% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander. If this bill passes, this would mean that white parents will have more of a say in the curriculum; they would be able to challenge the Culturally Responsive curriculum as well as the new elective courses on African American history in Anne Arundel County and LGBTQ+ studies; and it would give parents more authority than teachers who have the knowledge and skills of how and what to teach.

On October 18, 2021, there was a Board of Education Workshop on Civics & Social Topics in the classroom. The presenters said that the Anne Arundel County Public School System is using Culturally Responsive Teaching and that students are learning the truths of our history (the good, bad, and the ugly). I would like this to continue because I believe our students are capable of facing uncomfortable truths with understanding and compassion.

Students deserve to be provided with honest, up-to-date education. This bill would not allow that.

Students should be equipped to solve our nation’s problems by examining and learning from its mistakes rather than repeating them. This bill would not allow that.

Teachers should be able to teach the truth about our history, including the facets of this country’s history that have been erased, such as the 38 known extrajudicial lynchings that took place right here in Maryland. This bill would not allow that.

Teachers should be able to find age-appropriate ways to tell hard truths about our country’s past and present. This bill would not allow that.

Teachers should be able to provide students with the education they deserve, including one that acknowledges pressing real world problems like police violence and equips students with the practical skills and conceptual tools needed to address them. This bill would not allow that.

Schools should have the resources to meet every child’s needs including well-trained and supported teachers and a curriculum that helps them reckon with our nation’s past and reshape our nation’s future. This bill would not allow that.

I believe that those who want to challenge the curriculum do not believe students deserve any of this or that teachers should teach the truth. I hope the Maryland General Assembly does not succumb to those forces in our State who are against Culturally Responsive Teaching. I implore you to rise above the pull of not allowing teachers to teach the truth and to rise above the rhetoric that says our children can’t handle it, that our teachers can’t handle it, that our parents can’t handle it. We can handle the truth. In fact, it is one of the things that will set us all free.

Having spent decades as a therapist, I can tell you that people can grow from dealing with difficult feelings. In fact, they rarely can grow without them. Certainly generations of children of color have managed to survive the myriad of moments in the classroom where a biased history was taught. I think white kids and straight kids today can actually handle American history and discussions of gender and race better than a lot of their parents can. Let's not rob children of the opportunity to grow and learn in ways that will help them develop character and resilience, because adults want to have a cancel culture approach to important concepts used in education.

Let's finally stop repeating the past, so we can make Maryland truly the "Free State," free of hate and bias and with justice and liberty for all.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to oppose HB1256.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

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