



**Testimony for the House Ways and Means Committee**

**Wednesday, March 1, 2023**

**HB 890 - Commission on History, Culture, and Civics in Education**

**FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and committee members,

We write to you on behalf of the Peaceful Resistance in Southern Maryland (PRISM). We are a community-lead grassroots social justice organization in Southern Maryland. Our organization is composed of diverse members who graduated from Calvert County Public Schools (CCPS). We were elated to hear about HB 890 because we can see the immense value this proposed committee could bring to the curriculum throughout the state of Maryland if it is passed in its strongest posture with the proposed amendments.

We cannot accept the whitewashed version of the history, culture and civics of this state. Our children should be taught the truth (no matter how ugly and painful it may seem) and allowed the opportunity to truly understand the world around them and the rich history on the very ground they walk on. Before colonization, this land we now know as Maryland was home to the Algonquin, Iroquois and Siouan tribes<sup>1</sup>. This land and the people of this land have been through unspeakable pain and incomprehensible joy, too. We believe it is important that Maryland students have the opportunity to learn about it all. This land has seen so much— let’s encourage having honest conversations about it.

We’ve seen the photos in the textbooks and heard the “lessons” where slavery is depicted as a “great time” on the plantation. The propaganda about how much “fun” the enslaved people had as they sang to each other, made music, and praised together. We’ve heard how Africans “migrated” to this land. We know they’re lies— no more. “A lie is always more of a threat than the truth, even when the truth is painful,” says Kevin Welner, a professor of education at the University of Colorado

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<sup>1</sup> <https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/01glance/native/html/01native.html>

Boulder and the Director of the university's National Education Policy Center<sup>2</sup>. We agree. We have hope of a public school where the student's minds are enriched with the history of the world they know. We have hope of our public high schools being occupied with students who understand why it's offensive and inappropriate to dress head-to-toe in confederate wear for "spirit week" because they understand the true history of the confederacy and how deeply ingrained it is into our world. We have hope of having public schools that aren't broken into and spray painted with racial slurs. We have hope that the legislators and education leaders in Maryland value inclusivity and take the substance and integrity of the curriculum as seriously as they take their Blue Ribbons.

We are asking that HB 890 be passed with the following amendments:

- Ensure that the teacher appointed to the commission is certified
- Ensure that the Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs can nominate candidates for the two seats allotted for Indigenous Americans
- Expand the commission's membership to ensure that Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Maryland can nominate candidates for at least one appointment
- Ensure that the process includes opportunities for the public to provide input and engage authentically with the commission

The proposed committee would encourage a curriculum that is true— a curriculum that accurately depicts history, racism, white supremacy, how land was stolen from Indigenous people, the importance of civics, the immense contributions of individuals from many different marginalized demographics, the driving forces behind societal systems and more. The proposed committee would bring immense value to the Maryland Department of Education and to the wonderful students in Maryland Public Schools.

We must stand together and forge a future for this state that we are proud of. We must be inclusive and we must be honest with each other and especially with our students. It is our responsibility and the time is now.

For the foregoing reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 890 with the outlined amendments referenced above.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/teaching-anti-racist-lens>