



# THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

Testimony of the Rev. Kenneth O. Phelps, Jr.

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Policy Network

Before the House Ways and Means Committee

**IN OPPOSITION to HB 1158**

Calvert County - Training on the 1776 Report - Referendum

February 24, 2021

The work of reconciliation is a fundamental calling for the Diocese of Maryland – which includes the parishes of Calvert County. Reconciliation not only builds on our understanding of history, but also underscores the importance of knowing that history in full, embracing the best and the worst of our past, which includes an honest portrayal of the institution of slavery and how it continues to manifest itself in a systemic racism that touches almost every aspect of our common life together. That history is not to be feared because it provides energy for the present and forms the foundation to a more just and equitable future.

We join our voice with those who condemn the 1776 Report which we believe was created to refute teachings on systemic racism, critical race theory, and deeper examinations of how slavery has affected American society. It is rife with false assertions intended to distort well-documented accounts about how discrimination was enshrined by the nation’s founders and continues to persist in various forms, hundreds of years later.

Among the many sections called out for whitewashing historical narratives, the "1776 Report" claims there’s no truth to statements that the Founding Fathers were hypocritical for upholding slavery while claiming that all men are created equal, and that it’s destructive to “our civic unity and social fabric.” The report also paints slave-owning leaders such as George Washington and James Madison as pioneers who “set the stage for abolition.”

The 1776 Report wished to tell the story of America as if racism is a thing of the past, and that the only racism that continues to persist is what it refers to as identity politics, which in the document seems to be routinely conflated with the discussion of race itself and other characteristics like gender and sexuality, and implies that it is un-American to question disparity in the ways in which the law and other systems are applied across our multicultural society, even though multiculturalism also seems to be a target of this Report.

The report drew intense criticism from historians, some of whom noted that the commission, while stocked with conservative educators, did not include a single professional historian of the United States. James Grossman, the executive director of the American Historical Association, said the report was not a work of history, but “cynical politics, that skillfully weaves together myths, distortions, deliberate silences, and both blatant and subtle misreading of evidence to create a narrative and an argument that few respectable historians, even across a wide interpretive spectrum, would consider plausible, never mind convincing.” We seek an unfavorable response.