

Chair and Committee Members
The Ways and Means Committee
Md House of Delegates.

February 2, 2021

Dear Madam Chair, and respected Committee Members,

Subj: Mohan- HB 418-County Board of Education- Symbols of Hate- Policy- Favorable

My name is Jyoti. I came to the University of Maryland as a graduate student in 1998, so I have now been in the United States for more than half my life. Each visit I make to India drives home to me, just how much I am disconnected with India, and how much America is home.

I am lucky to live in a relatively diverse state. Yet I have found hundreds of micro aggressions- I don't get called for job interviews because people see my name and assume that I cannot speak English. Or people hear me speak and ask me 'Where I learned to speak such good English' or look at me and ask 'where I'm REALLY from'. Once, when my daughter was an infant and my best friend (who happens to be white) and I went to the grocery store, the check-out clerk assumed that I was the 'help'. In the aftermath of 9-11, I have experienced the inevitable 'go back to where you belong'. My friends have been assaulted with missiles from vehicles ranging from bottles to feces. I have witnessed these incidents. Over the years I have developed a thick hide to such everyday transgressions. I assume that most people ask from a place of genuine interest; they just do not understand how their questions can be so full of casual racism.

However, the divisiveness in the last few years have shaken me. For ten years I taught history at Morgan State University, an HBCU. I saw that Africans and African-Americans are treated even worse than I have been. I saw firsthand the system which churned out African American graduates from inner city high schools which were woefully funded and staffed, so that they began their adult lives as young University students who were disadvantaged in their learning when compared to their non-Black peers.

I am an academic, so I think I am fairly well informed about issues like racism. Therefore, I refuse to 'perform' whiteness in social settings. I remain myself, a woman of color, who is intelligent and articulate. And for that, I have found that while my white neighbors will speak to me in passing, I cannot build friendships with them, because they are too uncomfortable to step out of their comfort zones and presumptions of me.

Last year, along with a number of other South Asian Americans, I participated in a South Asian Americans for Black Lives Matter Rally. We positioned ourselves at the corner of the Target store in Timonium. Being law abiding citizens, we had already informed and got permission from the local police. In fact, a couple of police cars parked

near us to ensure that no untoward incident occurred. The set-up worked, to the extent that no one actually approached the group to heckle or challenge us. However, the shouted comments from cars driving by drove home the extent to which racism is embedded in our society. Equal to the numbers of people of color who honked in solidarity with us were the people of color and whites who drove silently either looking uncomfortable or staring us down. Then there were the people who, emboldened by the fact that they were in moving vehicles and therefore not required to engage with us, who yelled vile insults from their cars. The whole experience forcibly demonstrated the extent to which our community punishes those who dare to challenge the prevailing system of casual and overt racism. In the succeeding days, Nazi symbols were painted as graffiti in my daughter's school grounds.

The irony of white racism is that entire groups who are now considered 'white' in America were once excluded from that category. The Irish, Italians and anyone from Eastern Europe- they all suffered from this racism and protested against it. Having found acceptance, they now align themselves on the side of their erstwhile oppressors. Education is a huge part of eradicating racism, and our young generations are far better aware of and educated in everyday racism. However, we need to make the expression of racism in the form of hate symbols, a punishable act as well. In the short term, this punitive action will produce better results while the educators deal with the long term job of teaching young generations to be kinder and more inclusive.

Thank you for your time,

Sincerely,

Jyoti Mohan