

In regards to HB418, I am writing to whole- heartedly support this bill. It is past time to remove symbols of hate from our schools. I fully expect that you will hear the catch phrase "Cancel Culture" bandied about, in response to this bill, but the majority of people are capable of understanding that actions having consequences is not "Cancel Culture" but simply how society exists. If I run a red light and receive a ticket, my rights have not been violated, I have received a justified consequence for breaking a rule. Likewise, if my child wears or displays something containing foul language, suggestive imagery, or hateful symbols, in violation of the rules, and receives suspension or other repercussion, that is a consequence for breaking the rules. We can and do understand that our actions have consequences.

I graduated from Hereford High School in 1997. That same year, students hoisted the Confederate flag on our school's flagpole, during the cover of night, so that we arrived to school, bright and early, ready to learn, only to be confronted with a racist, symbol, flying high where our American flag should have been. The local news covered the event as a "hate crime", and we the students were interviewed about our feelings on the subject. As a white student, I was horrified and embarrassed to be associated with the act, but worse was listening to those who attempted to control the narrative, calling the flag a "cultural" or "historical" symbol, not a hate symbol. The student body knew, from experience, that the kids who displayed this flag on their clothing or vehicles were the same students who used racial slurs, even shouting the "n- word" at our students of color. We knew then exactly what that flag represented to those who hoisted it. It was a bold, racist move that had a devastating effect on students of color. After that event, we had several, race- related altercations. We were angry and frustrated that consequences were not severe for the actions of the racist individuals who perpetrated the act.

We currently have one child still in Baltimore County schools and one child who is a recent graduate of Hereford High. Both have expressed frustration at the lack of apparent consequences for displaying these symbols of hate. Both have expressed repeatedly that those same undercurrents of racism that I felt helpless to counter in the late 90's are STILL in play in 2021. Open racism is still on display in our area, and the effect this has on our students is demeaning, devaluing, and, often, openly hostile. Both children have described encounters with racism that left them fearful for their own safety and their fellow students. These symbols belong in history books and museums and not on display, unpunished, as if tacitly endorsed by those in power.

We have the freedom of speech, but hate speech and hate symbols are not enveloped in those rights. We understand the limits to our freedoms, and we are fully capable of rendering hateful artifacts from our past to the history books and museums where they belong. Our students and families have a right to attend school in a welcoming, kind environment, free of distraction, hatred, and fear.

Warmest regards,
Carol Carton