

February 5, 2021
Testimony on HB 418
County Boards of Education - Symbols of Hate – Policy
Ways and Means Committee

Position: Favorable

On behalf of the Young Democrats of Maryland Caucus of Color, I would like to thank Delegate Guyton for introducing this bill. I would also like to thank the Ways and Means Committee for welcoming our commentary regarding how this bill will support young people of color in the State of Maryland.

As an organization that serves to promote the political involvement and well-being of young people of color in Maryland, we are aware that symbols of hate, including but not limited to swastikas, nooses, and confederate flags, can negatively impact the psyche of young people of color. This is especially true in school settings, where students should feel safest. With this in mind, we fully support HB 418. This bill would require counties to adopt a policy prohibiting the use or display of symbols of hate under certain circumstances.

The hate symbols in question, such as swastikas, nooses, and confederate flags, are symbols of regimes and time periods which threatened the very existence of people whose descendants now sit in our classrooms as students. When they see such symbols in the same place where they learn about them and their meaning, there is no question that they are overcome with grief and emotion. Students should not have to see these symbols in their schools “recreationally” while they learn that these symbols represented causes which threatened the very existence of their ancestors.

While it is important to learn about even the darkest moments of history, there is no reason that students, especially students of color, should have to deal with the presence of these symbols, which often represent those darkest moments, outside of educational contexts. It is imperative that all students feel welcome, safe, and included in their schools. Without such a baseline of comfort, their ability to properly learn and perform at their best is impaired. No student should be in an environment where their learning is stunted due to the presence of such symbols.

We urge a favorable report.

Samay Singh Kindra
Chair, Young Democrats of Maryland, Caucus of Color