

To the members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

I am a resident of District 33 and a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice Annapolis and Anne Arundel County. I am testifying **in opposition to SB364** Anne Arundel County - Board of Education - Parent's Right to Challenge Curriculum Act.

I oppose efforts by our elected officials to deny our students access to our true, shared histories by authorizing parents or guardians to sponsor, sign, and circulate a petition to challenge the use of certain curriculum in a course taught in a public school in Anne Arundel County. According to the 2020 US Census, the population of Anne Arundel County is 64.19% White, 17.76% African American, 9.65% Hispanic, .4% Indigenous, 4.34% Asian, and .08% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander. If this bill passes, this would mean that white parents will have more of a say in the curriculum; they would be able to challenge the Culturally Responsive curriculum as well as the new elective courses on African American history in Anne Arundel County and LGBTQ+ studies; and it would give parents more authority than teachers who have the knowledge and skills of how and what to teach.

On October 18, 2021, there was a Board of Education Workshop on Civics & Social Topics in the classroom. The presenters said that the Anne Arundel County Public School System is using Culturally Responsive Teaching and that students are learning the truths of our history (the good, bad, and the ugly). I would like this to continue because I believe our students are capable of facing uncomfortable truths with understanding and compassion.

Students deserve to be provided with honest, up-to-date education. This bill would not allow that.

Students should be equipped to solve our nation's problems by examining and learning from its mistakes rather than repeating them. This bill would not allow that.

Teachers should be able to teach the truth about our history, including the facets of this country's history that have been erased, such as the five known extrajudicial lynchings that took place right here in Anne Arundel County. This bill would not allow that.

Teachers should be able to find age-appropriate ways to tell hard truths about our country's past and present. This bill would not allow that.

Teachers should be able to provide students with the education they deserve, including one that acknowledges pressing real world problems like police violence and equips students with the practical skills and conceptual tools needed to address them. This bill would not allow that.

Schools should have the resources to meet every child's needs including well-trained and supported teachers and a curriculum that helps them reckon with our nation's past and reshape our nation's future. This bill would not allow that.

I believe that those who want to challenge the curriculum do not believe students deserve any of this or that teachers should teach the truth. I hope the Maryland General Assembly does not succumb to those forces in our County who are against Culturally Responsive Teaching. I implore you to rise above the pull of not allowing teachers to teach the truth and to rise above the rhetoric that says our children can't handle it, that our teachers can't handle it, that our parents can't handle it. We can handle the truth. In fact, it is one of the things that will set us all free.

There are those in the community who are against teaching that tells the truth of our shared history and the truth about systemic racism because they believe it makes white people feel inferior, it makes white people feel like we are being adversely treated, and it makes white people feel responsible for actions committed by other white people. The fact is that the truth hurts and systemic racism hurts all of us. Resmaa Menakem, author of *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, and Heather McGhee, author of *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone*

*and How We Can Prosper Together*, make it clear in their books that racism hurts all of us and we would do well to fix it by learning about, acknowledging, and then fixing the problem together. This might feel bad to those of us who are socialized as white and trigger our white fragility. However, this should not be challenged. Rather it should be embraced. In fact, white people would do well to work through our fragility, develop resilience, and endeavor to grapple with rather than hide the truth. If we do this, perhaps, we can finally stop repeating the past and we can make Anne Arundel truly the best place for all: free of hate and bias and with justice and liberty for all.

Finally, this bill only applies to Anne Arundel County. Why? Because the Anne Arundel County Council voted against a resolution that had a similar intent. This is an end run around the Anne Arundel County Council on a decision that should be made by the representatives of the residents of Anne Arundel County.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to **oppose SB364**.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Sell  
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