

Testimony SB 888

Education – American Studies and Social Equity Standards Advisory Board 3 – Academic Standards and Model Policy

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

March 8, 1:00 p.m. Hearing

Name: Laurie Halverson (8812 Harness Trail, Potomac MD 20854) LD15

Position: Strongly Oppose

I was a Maryland State Board of Education member and County PTA leader for a number of years. I strongly oppose SB 888. This bill is discriminatory, illegal and an example of over-legislating what our school systems are already doing without more legislative interference.

Reasons for opposition:

Social equity is not defined. How can an Advisory Board advise without a thorough definition of what “social equity” is? When you look up a definition online, there are various definitions. But the definition often states that social equity means equal access to both opportunities **and outcomes**. If the intention is to expect all students to have equal outcomes, the authors of this bill are choosing to suppress high and moderate achievers so that they can equal the lowest common denominator in educational outcomes. Excellence in education was once a goal in Maryland, but the supporters of this bill feel differently. “Equity for all” is not excellence.

SB 888 is a Discriminatory and illegal bill. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 sets forth a structure that prohibits discrimination. However, SB 888 is discriminatory and illegal. **The Civil Rights Act of 1964** prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. Yet, this bill recommends that standards be based on the definition of “ethnic groups” which include every race except Caucasians and every combination of humans in the “social group” definition except for white heterosexual male U.S. citizens. “Social groups” even include “refugees” and “immigrants” so it appears this subset may be lumped with illegal immigrants as well.

The makeup of the Advisory Board is racially and sexually biased against Caucasian U.S. males and females. Its members are classified according to race, skin color, ethnicity and sexuality. The Constitution and the Declaration of Independence do not classify human beings. SB 888 does, with the explicit exclusion of what the bill considers to be the “dominant” race.

The bill specifies that the members chosen on the Advisory group must have a history of advocacy for that particular group. I can think of a number of people from African descent who fall into the conservative category and advocate for the human race, not on behalf of a certain race. You would be excluding them from participating on the Advisory Board. Did you mean to exclude conservative black men and women?

The curriculum will end up being skewed to a collection of perspectives about race and sexuality and not so much about history. The goal of the Advisory Board appears to place more importance on cultural competency and being welcoming than it does on portraying the facts. As the board works diligently to make sure it has the specific 80% of members representing the ever changing geographic diversity of the state, and as each ethnic group (except the excluded Caucasians) advocates to add a particular perspective to the curriculum, the historical truth and weight of the stories will likely become distorted. Pressure to represent each ethnic group (except for Caucasians) equally in history is not a reflection of the true history. It is important for U.S. history to reflect the facts and the overall message that our Founding Fathers created for the people of our country in perpetuity.

The Model Policy is not necessary: There are already so many policies our school districts already have to address racism and sexual identity. I would rather see more effort on how our state schools will prepare students for the real world through curricula, focused on academics. This bill charges the Advisory Board with coming up with a Model policy on racial and social equity.

I am especially concerned with the requirement that emphasizes “restorative justice.” I was one of the co-chairs of the MCPS anti-bullying policy and remember how it is often mentally detrimental to the victim when he/she is required to meet with the bully to work it out together with the Principal. Restorative justice recommends this as a way to solve problems. This is most often not the best way to help the victim.

I am also very concerned what the Advisory Board would recommend for parents where it says that they are charged with providing parents with "a welcoming way to raise concerns about their child’s experiences relating to racial or social identity.”

It may set a mandate on local government: The Fiscal and Policy Notes mention this. Our local governments should have flexibility to set their curriculum to a wide extent. Mandates from the state to the local government should be rare. This bill would be an example overstepping.

SB 888 is over-legislating and overcompensating what is already addressed in the Civil Rights Act. Current state and local curriculum policies already address the importance of prohibiting racism and promoting diversity. The authors of this bill are really pushing the envelope by excluding one race in its definition of “ethnic group.” It is no excuse to say that it is fair to remove Caucasians based on this race being considered “the dominant” race. It is illegal to discriminate and this bill violates the Civil Rights Act.

Please get rid of this bill today. It will achieve nothing but more headaches for educators and will not improve student achievement in education.