



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO SB 0364:

Public Schools – Expanded American History – Development of Content Standards and Implementation ****UNFAVORABLE****

February 16, 2022

TO: Hon. Paul J. Pinsky, Chair, Hon. Cheryl Kagan, Vice Chair and the members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

FROM: Rev. Kenneth O. Phelps, Jr., Co-Chair, Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network, Diocese of Maryland

DATE: February 16, 2022

As we have consistently testified in the hearings held in support of the development of African-American history, we have nothing to fear in teaching a complete history of the United States which includes both the achievements of and injustices suffered by a significant percentage of our population and their ancestors.

Do children in Germany suffer because they learn about the Holocaust? Or white South African children because they learn about apartheid? Without an honest accounting of our past, how can any path into a unified future be possible? It is time to lay aside fear – and more importantly, disingenuous and calculated election year tactics – and embrace the lessons that history can teach us.

In 2006, the General convention of the Episcopal Church, USA passed Resolution 2006 – A127 which stated in part;
“[t]hat in the spirit of inclusion, dioceses also be invited to determine whether their call is to conduct truth and reconciliation processes in regard to other histories and legacies of racial discrimination and oppression that may be applicable in their geographic area, while not diminishing the strong call to focus on the history and legacy of slavery;”

In addition, resolution 2006 – C011, stated in part; the General Convention “urge[d] the Church at every level to call upon Congress and the American people to support legislation initiating study of and dialogue about the history and legacy of slavery in the United States...”



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The Episcopal Church has acknowledged its complicity in creating and sustaining the institution of slavery, and by its resolutions has underscored the importance of telling this story as part of the larger story of the African experience in America, and how this truth-telling is vital to our work of reconciliation.

In convention in November of 2021, the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland overwhelmingly passed a resolution in support of HB 0047. We support this resolution because it is about truth, without which there can be no reconciliation and without which we can never be set free from the insidious grip of our past.

And that is a truth which begs to be heard in the form of the sacred stories of so many who were participants in our history and whose legacies have been denied. Including, I might add, Frederick Douglass, who in spite of his relentless pressure on Lincoln and the influence that he and others like Harriet Tubman exerted on the President's policies concerning slavery, does not appear in Steven Spielberg's biographical film, *Lincoln*, which speaks volumes about the way African-American contributions to history are still being ignored.

Personally, I am ashamed to admit that I did not learn about the Tulsa Massacre until I was in my forties – and I was a US History major in college. Or that I never knew the stories of activist Claudette Colvin, or aviator Bessie Coleman, or that I might have spent my childhood pretending that I was Bass Reeves, one of the greatest lawmen the wild west ever knew.

I do not want that to be my grandson's regret. I want him to celebrate the fullness of who we are as a people - the triumphs and the horrors – because History without truth is a fairytale at best, and propaganda at its worst. And as is the case with all sin, too many have suffered at the hands of those who have owned our past to the benefit of too few and the oppression of far too many.

The Diocese of Maryland request an unfavorable report.