

Tuesday, March 8, 2022

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Dear Chair Atterbeary and Vice Chair Washington,

We, the undersigned chapters of the American Association of University Professors, which collectively represent hundreds of faculty and librarian members from private, public, and community colleges across the state, submit this written testimony to express our strong opposition to H.B. 1256 and other efforts to restrict education about racism and related topics.

The Maryland State Conference and local Chapters of the American Association of University Professors affirms the importance of academic freedom to the proper functioning of universities, citing AAUP's [1940 statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure](#), and encourages the Maryland legislature to respect and support academic freedom as well.

H.B. 1256 targets primary and secondary educators teaching topics tied to race and sex, should they cause individuals “discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress,” and this would bear serious consequences beyond this setting to higher education and society as a whole.

The term “discomfort” is indeterminate, subjective, and chills the capacity of educators to explore a wide variety of topics based on subjective criteria that are inapposite from the goals of education and the development of essential critical thinking skills. Additionally, the phrase does not take into account the potential discomfort caused to minority students whose history would necessarily be minimized or outright erased.

Educating about systemic barriers to a multiracial democracy free of misogyny and racism should be understood as central to the active and engaged pursuit of knowledge in the 21st century to produce engaged and informed citizens. And educators, the experts in their fields and professions, should have the final word on what gets taught, and how. Their expertise informs curricula decisions, taking into account age-appropriateness, and ensuring that facts are taught within the proper context.

In a nation and in a state that has for centuries struggled with issues of racial inequity and social justice, and where many students do not have adequate knowledge of histories and policies of structural racism, misogyny, and homophobia, faculty have a scholarly responsibility to confront painful histories with directness and rigor, and a moral obligation to help build equity and social justice.

Therefore, we, the undersigned, and the members we represent, urge the members of this committee to resolutely reject any attempt by the legislature to restrict or dictate university curriculum on any matter, including matters related to histories of racism and the pursuit of social justice. We urge you to stand firmly against encroachment on or interference with faculty authority by the legislature.

In addition, we, the undersigned, and the members we represent, stand firmly with our K-12 colleagues in Maryland and across the country who may be affected by this or other pernicious laws when they seek to teach the truth in U.S. history and civics education, engender respect for the diverse and multilingual students we serve, and prepare teachers of the future. We urge the members of this committee to do the same.

Sincerely,

Bowie State University AAUP
Coppin State University AAUP
Frederick Community College AAUP
Johns Hopkins University AAUP
Loyola University AAUP
McDaniel College AAUP
Montgomery County Community College AAUP
Salisbury University AAUP
Towson University AAUP
University of Baltimore AAUP
University of Maryland College Park AAUP
Washington College AAUP