

Letter to Speaker Jones

Dear Speaker Adrienne Jones,

The Maryland Legislative Coalition, the MLC Climate Justice Wing (our sister organization), and our allies are writing to express solidarity with our communities and legislators in Maryland. Our Nation and our State have been struggling to achieve racial and social progress for centuries, but just as we seem to be moving forward, we witness those in positions of power demonstrating how much farther we must move. And, although many believe we are experiencing a racial reckoning in our country, we know the battle for equality is not over. In fact, despite the passage of time, it has barely begun.

We know that racial and social progress is something you are passionate about. We applaud the work you have done on police accountability, education policy and funding, as well as the significant advancements you accomplished in ensuring diversity and fair treatment of State employees. Because of your steadfast leadership related to such matters, we are writing to you about reported instances of disrespect and unprofessional behavior by some delegates towards fellow delegates and targeted communities (usually women, African-American, Latino Americans, Asians, and LGBTQ+).

Summary -

Our organizations work very hard to empower as many Maryland residents as possible to get involved in the state legislative process. We believe that this is true Democracy in action, and we hope that our involvement offers the General Assembly a better understanding of constituent needs and concerns particularly of the people whose voices are seldom heard. That being said, our members are now tuning in to Subcommittee meetings, Committee hearings, voting sessions, and floor sessions. They are testifying in greater and greater numbers and getting involved in the legislative process. This is a good thing.

However, what they have seen, and reported on, are multiple instances of disrespect, racist and other derogatory remarks, and general unprofessional behavior by some Delegates towards other Delegates (usually women, minorities and LGBTQ+ individuals) and towards lobbyists and constituents testifying during hearings. We understand that the General Assembly has standards and guidelines that govern the behavior of the body and that any behavior outside of those guidelines is subject to censure, as recommended by an ethics review.

We would respectfully ask that you remind the House Delegation that their constituents expect them to conduct themselves professionally and show respect for all of the people they interact with. We would also like to ask that you speak to the Committee Chairs and the Subcommittee Chairs and request that they call out this behavior as it is happening. Finally, we ask that all Delegates participate in JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion) training. It is an effective

measure that could benefit those Delegates who are insensitive to certain groups of people. We believe that all Delegates, as public figures whose words and actions have a greater effect than those of most Marylanders, should reach for a higher standard of conduct, and they should show respect to other members of the General Assembly and constituents at all times.

Here are a few specific incidents, which you are undoubtedly aware of -

Delegate Mark Fisher: Delegate Fisher has made degrading remarks directed at women who testified before the House Economic Matters Committee. He also made remarks towards Delegate Qi and dubbed her bill, HB 658 - a bill to establish a workgroup on transforming Maryland's manufacturing industries in the digital economy - as "Communist China" in addition to other racially coded remarks. His remarks to Delegate Lily Qi were reported in Maryland Matters on March 19, 2021, but more importantly, were witnessed by many constituents.

Last session, in response to Delegate Qi's bill to establish a mobile laundry pilot program for the homeless, he calculatedly and maliciously used a stereotype stating, "How come the only Chinese in the House is introducing a laundry bill?"

Delegate Haven Shoemaker: During a recent floor vote on legislation introduced by Prince George's County Delegate Nicole Williams to remove a police officer's ability to have sexual intercourse with those under arrest, Delegate Haven Shoemaker made the disgusting comment that this would "de-fun" the police. Implying that a police officer sexually assaulting those under arrest is "fun" is utterly deplorable, disgusting, and unprofessional, and in the context of police misconduct can be considered anti-Black as well.

Delegates represent all the people of their districts. In every District, there are Asians, Blacks, Latinos, LGBTQ, Disabled, Women and other minorities. Each person in every district represents an integral part of our Maryland economy. Each time a Delegate speaks disrespectfully against a minority, they are not only disrespecting the people in the room, but also disrespecting their constituents. And each time they fan the flames of hatred they bring us closer to another January 6th or another massacre. We appreciate your leadership and any steps you can take to set the expectations for respectful conduct in the House of Delegates.

Sincerely,