

# Letter to the Ethics Committee

Dear Sir/Madam,

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 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 those of 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 and we value and appreciate that transparency.

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 are writing to inform you of breaches of ethics that we have witnessed during the course of the 2021 Legislative session. It is our understanding that it is within your purview to censure members of the General Assembly who violate the code of ethics, and we respectfully request that you investigate these incidents, if they are not already the subject of an investigation.

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.

Delegate Dan Cox: During a floor vote on a mental health bill, Delegate Cox equated the bill to the Holocaust. The measure would have lowered the age of consent for minors to seek care for certain mental health services without parental permission to as young as 12. Speaking on the House floor with a mask that depicted the Nuremberg Trials, which he referenced, Cox spoke of the need to guarantee “that never again will the state and the health care community interfere with the rights of parents and the right to family.’ Just the mask was inappropriate enough. Your past investigations of conduct not becoming of a Delegate, caused Delegate Mary Lisanti to be censured in 2019. She was censured for her comments to a white colleague during an after-hours gathering at an Annapolis cigar bar, where she said that the colleague was door-knocking in a “n----- district” when he was campaigning in Prince George's County for another candidate. However, she now has her committee assignments back. It would seem more fair to have them taken away until the next election, where she would have to prove her worthiness to her constituency.

Being a member of the General Assembly should be treated with the honor and professionalism, and acceptable conduct must include respect to others who have been elected and to the constituents they represent. We have seen that public respect and dignity have suffered greatly in recent years at all levels of government. While unfortunate, the fact that other public figures are acting in an irresponsible, demeaning, and unprofessional manner does not mean that anyone in public office can act out without fear of consequences. Consequences are the only means to ensure that standards of behavior are followed and people treat others with the respect they deserve.

Thank you for your attention in this matter.

Sincerely,