

## Montgomery County Councilmember Kristin Mink 6/6 31:00 FULL STATEMENT

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNhffhRC5vY> (link in QR code)



I've had a lot of really good conversations this morning with many of the people who are testifying here, and it's more complicated I think than a lot of people would like to know of would like to make it. This issue unfortunately does put some, not all of course, some Muslim families on the same side of an issue as white supremacists and outright bigots. However the folks who I talked to here today I would not put in the same category as those folks, although it's, again, complicated, because they're following the same side of this particular issue. But many members of the Muslim community who have been activated around the opt-out issue are members of Muslim organizations that I have advocated side-by-side on other issues about. Issues around housing, and welcoming immigrants, and feeding our neighbors, and providing healthcare, and all of those sorts of things.

So this is a kind of a different situation, so as I've been having these conversations I've been trying to understand why it's falling the way it is, and trying to understand the perspective of some of our Muslim neighbors and community members who felt the way that we've heard today. And I do genuinely hear and believe that there is a desire to not do harm to the LGBTQIA+ members of our community. They've been very clear in our conversations and we've heard here today that it's important to them to not remove those books from our schools, to make sure they know they are available to the LGBTQIA+ students and community there so that those students can see themselves in the curriculum.

And the place where we differ is that I think they're feeling that to allow Muslim families to opt their children out of those books, of those pieces of literature that are LGBTQIA+ inclusive, that that does not harm the LGBTQIA+ community. And the fact is that it does. You cannot say that this is a particular demographic of people who when they appear in books now we allow some families of students to say we're not gonna read those books. There's no way to do that without sending a clear message to the LGBTQIA+ community that you are seen as different, as othered, and other people don't need to learn about your existence or have you included in the curriculum.

Montgomery County Public Schools has a responsibility to teach a fact-based science-based curriculum. And the science here, the scientific and medical community has come to a clear consensus that LGBTQIA+ people exist. When we have children's books that represent a child who is transgender and whose parents are telling them that, or acknowledging that this is a child who was born and was identified as a baby as one gender and it turns out this child is actually another gender, the scientific and medical community, there is widespread consensus that that is the reality. And so, MCPS has the responsibility to include and reflect that reality in our curriculum, the same as we have the responsibility to teach about evolution.

There are religions that don't agree with evolution, we don't allow them to opt out of those portions of our science curriculum. And so those families who may not believe in evolution are welcome to teach a counternarrative at home or in their own religious institutions, and to say here's what you're gonna learn in school and here is what our family believes. All different religions of people have the ability to teach around the facts and the science that are going to be reflected in the MCPS curriculum, but we cannot modify our fact-based, science-based curriculum to reflect particular religious beliefs that are not aligned with that science based curriculum. And that is actually [?], that's not an infringement on particular religious freedoms, just as you cannot allow those to opt out of teachings about evolution we can't allow them to teach about this [sic]. And that I said, I want to acknowledge that I think it's important to have some nuance in these conversations depending on who we're talking with. There are folks who are not intending to come with hate or harm, I think there are good healthy conversations that can be had there and I appreciate those that I've had and that said, it is essential that we continue to reflect our community accurately and include everyone in the materials that are present there. [Loud applause, including from Muslims in the audience.]