



To: House Committee on Education
From: Richard Donovan, Legislative Services Specialist
Re: House Bill 2697
Date: February 23, 2021

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Chair Alonso Leon, Vice Chairs Neron and Weber, and members of the committee:

On behalf of OSBA membership, including 197 school districts and 19 Education Service Districts, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 2697. HB 2697 would codify in statute rules banning specific symbols of hate: neo-Nazi symbols, the noose, and the battle flag of the armies of Northern Virginia, commonly referred to as the Confederate Flag or the battle flag of the Confederacy.

The process for banning these symbols began in 2020 with outreach to stakeholder and community groups. This was done at the urging of current and former legislators and in response to at least one incident of hate against a student. OSBA has unconditionally supported the adoption of both the initial temporary rule, called "All Students Belong," and the current rule, called "Every Student Belongs," adopted just days ago at the February 18 meeting of the State Board of Education. OSBA has created and distributed sample policies for school districts to use in order to comply with these rules.

Department of Education staff have documented and presented publicly the use of these hate symbols to cause harm in schools. And while it is important to recognize fundamental individual rights of speech and expression, these three types of speech fall outside of these rights. In this unprecedented time of pandemic and distance learning, it is more important than ever that all schools be safe, welcoming environments for students, staff, and families. There is no place for hate, intimidation, or conduct that produces trauma in our schools. These symbols have no place in schools or on school grounds.

The passage of HB 2697 will put a ban of these symbols into law. It will support the good work of the Board of Education and will send a message to the students that have been hurt by these symbols. Please support HB 2697. Thank you for your time and consideration.