LOUDOUN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Superintendent's Office
21000 Education Court
Ashburn, VA 20148

Delegate Griffin:

I have spent more than three decades working in public education. During that time, I have encountered plenty of disagreements about what schools should teach, how they should operate, and the role they should play in our communities. Those disagreements are part of a healthy democracy. I welcome them. I believe deeply in the importance of honest debate, respectful disagreement, and the responsibility of public officials to engage thoughtfully with the people they serve.

But there is a difference between disagreement and deliberate distortion. There is a difference between questioning decisions and attacking the dignity of an entire community. And there is a difference between legitimate public discourse and spreading inflammatory claims without basis in the truth.

Your recent comments on social media about our School Board's proclamation recognizing LGBTQ+ History Month crossed those lines. You described the recognition of LGBTQ+ history as "despicable" and "disgusting." You suggested, in ways that unfortunately mirrored comments in some corners of the media, that our schools are engaged in a campaign to "trans" children. You characterized the recognition of a community's contributions to American history as something from which children must be protected.

Enough is enough.

Let us begin with something that should not be controversial. LGBTQ+ Americans exist. They have always existed. They have helped build this country, defended it, educated its children, advanced its science and innovation, strengthened its communities, and fought courageously to secure the rights and freedoms promised to every American.

Their contributions are a part of the fabric of our nation's history. Their struggles are part of our nation's history. Their victories, their sacrifices, and their pursuit of equal treatment under the law are part of our nation's history. Acknowledging those truths is not indoctrination. It is not recruitment, and it is not an attack on anyone's religious beliefs or family values. It is history.

And the suggestion that recognizing those contributions is somehow disgusting should trouble every American who believes that our history belongs to all of us. There is something

disturbing about the impulse to erase or diminish the contributions of people simply because of who they are. History offers too many examples of what happens when those in positions of power decide that certain people, certain identities, or certain experiences are unworthy of acknowledgment.

Authoritarian movements have long sought to control public memory by deciding whose stories may be told and whose must disappear. That is why the honest teaching of history matters so profoundly in a free society. We do not protect children by pretending that certain Americans never existed. We do not strengthen democracy by selectively editing its history to make some people more comfortable. We strengthen democracy by telling the truth, even when that truth challenges us.

And the truth is, public schools are in the business of educating children—all children. We teach them to read, to write, to reason, to solve problems, to understand history, to appreciate science, to engage with literature, and to become thoughtful, contributing members of society.

We also work every day to ensure that the children entrusted to our care feel safe, respected, valued and that they belong. That includes children who are LGBTQ+. It includes children who are not. It includes children whose families hold deeply conservative religious beliefs and those whose families hold very different beliefs. It includes children from every background, every circumstance, and every walk of life.

Our responsibility is not to tell children who they should be. Our responsibility is to ensure that every child can become the best version of who they already are. We want every child to know they matter and that their identity is not something they need to hide in order to be treated with care and with dignity.

Who our children are matters every bit as much as what they know. That is not a political agenda. That is a commitment to children. Yet you and others continue to repeat the accusation that public educators are engaged in some coordinated effort to change children's gender identities. It is a sensational claim, repeated as though saying it often enough might somehow make it true. Let's be clear. This is not what we do or who we are, and anyone who says otherwise is simply lying.

Where is your evidence? What specific provision of this proclamation directs educators to change a child's gender identity? What evidence can you offer that recognizing LGBTQ+ Americans' contributions to history causes children to become transgender, or even a part of the LGBTQ+ community?

These are not merely rhetorical distractions. They are reasonable questions that anyone making such extraordinary public accusations should be prepared to answer. And, absent credible evidence, these accusations should stop, because words have consequences, and attempts to score political points should be weighed against that.
When an elected official describes the recognition of LGBTQ+ Americans as disgusting, there are children listening. There are families listening. There are students who are already

struggling to understand their place in the world, listening and wondering whether the adults around them believe they deserve the same dignity, safety, and opportunity as their classmates.

There are also teachers, counselors, principals and other dedicated public servants listening—people who show up every day to care for and educate children, only to hear their work misrepresented as something sinister and "despicable." And there are parents who deserve accurate information about what is happening in their public schools rather than fear-driven narratives designed to provoke outrage.

We can have serious conversations about curriculum. We can debate the appropriate roles of schools and families. We can have substantive discussions over policy matters. Those are all legitimate subjects for public discussion, and they deserve thoughtful engagement. But we cannot have those conversations when the starting points are incendiary accusations unsupported by evidence.

We cannot build trust by manufacturing fear, and we cannot model civility for children while treating entire communities of Americans with contempt. And we cannot claim to defend American values while suggesting that some Americans' contributions to our shared history are too objectionable to acknowledge.

Delegate Griffin, you are entitled to your opinions. You are entitled to disagree with the Loudoun County School Board. You are entitled to criticize public education and to advocate for the policies you believe would better serve children. But with the privilege of elected office comes the responsibility to distinguish fact from fiction, disagreement from dehumanization, and public service from political spectacle.

I have always welcomed honest discussion about our schools and the opportunity to explain what our educators actually do, how we serve families and students, and why ensuring every child feels safe and valued is essential to the work of public education.

What I will not accept without challenge is the continued misrepresentation of our schools, the vilification of our educators, or the suggestion that acknowledging the existence and contributions of LGBTQ+ Americans is somehow a threat to children. Our children deserve better than this. Our educators deserve better than this. And frankly, our democracy deserves better than this.

Dr. Aaron Spence

Superintendent
Loudoun County Public Schools