



HOUSE OF DELEGATES WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

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September 23, 2020

via email

The Honorable James C. Justice
Governor
State of West Virginia
1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East
Charleston, WV 25301

Dear Governor Justice:

Where do I begin? Please, in no shape, form, or fashion do I want you to deem this as political. It's time we run to the fire as elected officials of this Mountain State.

I'm still in the process of dealing with the trauma I received in Kingwood, West Virginia, on Saturday, September 12, 2020. I was invited there to join a peaceful Black Lives Matter protest organized by one of Kingwood's residents.

Kingwood could have been the place I took my last breath. An angry mob of White supremacists approached us and pushed many peaceful protestors off the sidewalk. I have been called a NIGGER before, but never in that tone of voice and with eyes full of rage, looking at me as if I wasn't American enough. We were called apes. We were told to go back to Africa and that we didn't belong there. It was an intense walk of a few blocks to get to the courthouse past a crowd of counter protestors screaming "All Lives Matter!" and "White Power!"

At the courthouse, there were counter protestors to the right of us and across the street continuing to yell. It was at that moment I noticed the Nazi "SS" symbols and swastikas tattooed on their bodies. We cut our program short to protect the lives of the people who had come together peacefully.

Since the murder of George Floyd an awakening for change has been on the horizon throughout the world. Just as Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcom X, and Rosa Parks were considered terrorists because they were taking a stand against the status quo of the unjust laws in their time, it seems like that same stigma is being placed on the Black Lives Matter movement.

The only terrorists in Kingwood on September 12 identified themselves quite openly with Nazi ideology and White supremacy. Several of them appeared the next day at our Morgantown event as well.

Sir, I am Black. I am a Black Woman. I am Black and I am PROUD of who, whom, and whose I am. By no means am I a terrorist. I am a voice of the voiceless. I am a truth teller. I willingly share any platform I am granted so others may be respected as they share their truth.

In West Virginia, there are many police brutality cases with the use of excessive force. The state has paid out countless sums to victims of this abuse, both Black and White. When many of us support and say Black Lives Matter, no one has ever stated ONLY Black Lives Matter. But Black Lives are becoming an endangered species.

I'm disappointed that you have not denounced the White supremacists that rose in Kingwood on September 12 and in Morgantown on September 13. It was embarrassing being an elected official and not allowing the list of speakers to speak because of the danger and risk of someone not returning to the starting point. I'm disgusted that a colleague, Senator Sypolt, watched these events from the safety of his vehicle as I was approached with AR-15s and AK-47s.

I have night tremors and nightmares every night because what I experienced in Kingwood. Body armor is part of my wardrobe, and I travel with security, even to go to Walmart, because of the threats I receive every day.

We have heard nothing from our state leaders in response to this attack on free speech. Instead, some of my colleagues in the Senate decided to write a letter to condemn a Marshall University employee who made a hurtful comment in class and to condemn the West Virginia University football team because of a sticker with the letters BLM.

Will you condemn the hate that was illustrated in our Mountain State from these White supremacists? Will you take a stand for racial equality and equity? Will you protect me as one of your House of Delegates members, as I live every day in fear for my life? Will you protect my freedom to speak?

I don't want a written response to this correspondence. I would really appreciate a phone call. With all due respect, I would hope you would mention this in your Friday Covid-19 briefing. I need you to see me, protect me, and govern me with unity and solidarity.

Hate is not making America Great. This Mountaineer does NOT feel FREE.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Danielle Walker', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Delegate Danielle Walker

cc: The Honorable Roger Hanshaw, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Mitch Carmichael, President of the Senate
The Honorable Tim Miley, House Minority Leader
The Honorable Roman Prezioso, Senate Minority Leader
Jill Upson, Executive Director, Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs