

PRESS RELEASE



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Statement by Frank McPhillips at Mountain Brook City Council Meeting on June 28, 2021

My name is Frank McPhillips and my roots in Alabama go back at least 6 generations. For 30 years, I have lived and paid taxes in Mountain Brook. And 60 years ago, my father served as the rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church on Montrose Road, less than half a mile from here. I am a retired partner of a major Birmingham-based law firm and I am a founding board member of MB Listens, a nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to advancing the principles of diversity and inclusion in Mountain Brook.

I love Alabama and I love Mountain Brook. From the sugar white Gulf beaches to the rich bio-diverse marshes of the Alabama-Tensaw Delta to the purple sunsets at Lake Martin to the beautiful Cahaba lilies, I love this State. I also love the Crimson Tide. What I don't love is the legacy of hate and division that has shadowed my beloved State for most of my life.

We have a second chance to change that. And it starts right here in Mountain Brook. What Alabama lacked in the '60's is leadership. Leaders who would resist the loudest, most intolerant voices - yes, the racist voices - that dominated the public square.

60 years later, here we go again. As William Faulkner once wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." But, this time, there is a silent majority in Mountain Brook that disagrees with Mr. Faulkner. This silent majority believes that a strong self-confident community is one that listens to all voices and does not shrink from challenges. One that does not feel threatened by diversity, but embraces it.

MB Listens has more than 1,200 members and confirmed supporters, the vast majority of whom live in Mountain Brook. We believe it is better to listen to one another than to shout at one another. That is why we applaud the diversity initiatives of the Mountain Brook public schools, especially Goal #4, which honors diversity and commits to put structures in place to ensure that all who are associated with the school district are treated with respect. These are values that every American, indeed every moral human being, should hold dear.

Make no mistake, three interconnected issues on the City Council's agenda tonight are being orchestrated by a vocal minority backed by persons who promote a narrow agenda. This minority wants to abolish diversity initiatives in our schools, prohibit peaceful events that celebrate cultural diversity on public property, and censor or ban books expressing ideas they don't like. This campaign of intimidation and harassment is intended to silence the majority of decent, tolerant residents of Mountain Brook and its elected leaders.

This campaign is dangerous. When called out for what it is, the minority cloaks itself in the language of victimhood, claiming the protection of free speech while denying it to others. The First Amendment is not a sword but a shield. Ask yourself, who is seeking to prohibit art shows, ban books, and lower barriers to discrimination? Not us.

Before closing, I want to say a word about the Anti-Defamation League and its “No Place for Hate” program. The ADL has a long and storied history of combating anti-Semitism, and so they are experts on hate, whether the hate stems from religious prejudice, racial prejudice, or other forms of bigotry. One of the events that prompted the adoption of the diversity initiative in the first place was a swastika painted on the back of a student. Who is more qualified to lead diversity training in the aftermath of a shocking event like that than the ADL?

Putting the ADL aside however, the last 2 paragraphs of a petition signed by those opposed to the ADL goes further, insisting the school board “halt any further work in the area of [diversity initiatives and training] by administrators, the schoolwide diversity committee or individual schools”. In other words, stop everything in its tracks. That is unacceptable to MB Listens and is proof that this petition is not just about the ADL. It’s about tearing down the values of tolerance and mutual respect.

As one of the most educated and privileged communities in the State of Alabama, what we do here will set an example. Our children and grandchildren are watching us and they will render judgment based on our actions. How will you know what judgment they render? You will know when your child leaves the nest and never comes back.

As elected leaders, you should listen to all points of view and then do what is right, not what a few loud constituents tell you to do. Threats and harassment have no place in Mountain Brook, Alabama. There is no going back, no repeating the mistakes of the past. We are better than that.

Thank you.

About MB Listens

MB Listens is a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) nonprofit, grassroots organization that is striving to ensure that everyone is accepted, welcomed, and treated equally in Mountain Brook. To learn more about MB Listens, please visit us at www.MBListens.com or www.facebook.com/MBListens.