



We ARE The People Rally Speech Transcript

I want to start by thanking the organizers of today's rally. My name is Karin Emery and I'm the secretary of the Progressive Democrats of Howard County. We are proud to stand here today to show solidarity with our friends and neighbors and especially with the LGBTQ+ community.

At a time when our communities face complex and life-threatening challenges, including a pandemic that continues to cost lives, an astroturfed group invaded our county to stir up trouble. With no intention to do good or to improve our community for all, they have decided that because they have no real agenda, they will use hate to divide us from one another.

It's their way of 'getting votes' and its end game is power for the sake of power and it does real and lasting harm if we let it. It puts members of our community not just in physical danger, but it also prevents us from achieving true equity.

First and foremost, we must stand up to the hate and stop it in its tracks. We are not a hateful community. We reiterate that hate has no place here and to all of our friends and neighbors in Howard County, and especially our friends and neighbors in the LGBTQ+ community: We stand with you.

Second and just as important, we must beware of not only opponents of the LGBTQ+ community who are very overt and explicit about their toxic hatred, but we must also beware of another type of opponent who does real harm to that same community: this second group that I'm referring to are fake, performative allies.

Yes, there are some who will very loudly and openly announce themselves as enemies to LGBTQ+ people, but there are others who are in real positions of power in our Community to help LGBTQ+ youth, and who say all the right-sounding words, and *claim* to be champions for LGBTQ+ causes, yet time and time again, they routinely vote against the interests of the LGBTQ+ community.

Whether talking about homophobia, transphobia, or any other type of bigotry, it is important to take an intersectional approach that views all different types of dimensions through which

oppression is carried out. While the vile language towards transgender people used at this recent astroturfed event is unacceptable and a real threat to transgender youth, it is sadly just one of many different ways in which the LGBTQ+ community, and particularly young people, are harmed in our County on a daily basis.

So I want to take some time to speak about these more subtle forms of oppression carried out against the LGBTQ+ community in Howard County, many of which are carried out by so-called “allies”. There were a few different reasons today’s rally was called, but I want to focus on one of the advertised purposes specifically, which is: “supporting equitable practices in schools”.

A lot of people like to throw around the word “equity” and proclaim themselves to be its champion, but what does being a champion of equity actually look like? Equitable policies are critical for LGBTQ+ youth, as they face unique mental and physical health challenges, and often are faced with employment and housing discrimination barriers that other groups do not experience. Due to rampant transphobia, anywhere from 30-50+% of trans and non-binary youth have attempted suicide at some point, LGBTQ+ youth are 120% more likely to be homeless than their cisgender peers, and 27% of LGBTQ+ people face food insecurity.

All of that is to say that in order to be a true ally to LGBTQ+ people, it is not enough just to *say* we support them, but we also need to support equitable policies that will address these economic, housing, healthcare, and educational needs that are disproportionately faced by LGBTQ+ youth. Unfortunately, we have too many performative fake allies in positions of power in this County who say with a smile on their face that they support LGBTQ+ people, yet consistently vote for inequitable policies that leave LGBTQ+ youth priorities unresolved.

Howard County is the third wealthiest county in the country, and is one of the few counties in the country that has the resources to truly address most of the needs of LGBTQ+ people, *IF WE WANTED TO!* But unfortunately, on an almost monthly basis, our County government votes to give our taxpayer money away through large corporate subsidies to incredibly profitable development corporations and other businesses who donate large sums to their campaigns - many of these corporations are even guilty of discrimination themselves.

When taxpayer funds are diverted to large corporations due to pay to play corruption, it means our schools and other public services and infrastructure do not get the full funding they need, leading to extreme inequities that disproportionately harm LGBTQ+ youth.

This inequitable allocation of resources and unchecked political corruption has led to:

- Less school counselors and mental health professional to help LGBTQ+ youth cope with their unique mental health pressures and depression due to the rampant bigotry they face
- Inadequate funding for the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to meet LGBTQ+ student needs
- A lack of affordable housing for LGBTQ+ members

- A mere \$1 wage increase instead of a true living wage that would help lift LGBTQ+ people out of poverty, and
- Other numerous inequities that harm LGBTQ+ community members

So while we need to stand up to those who openly spew hatred towards LGBTQ+ people, we also need to recognize that simply saying the right things is not enough for someone to truly fight for LGBTQ+ needs, and we must look a little bit under the surface to see not just what people *say*, but what people *do*!

Talking the talk on LGBTQ+ equity is one thing, but walking the walk is something completely different, and we have too many performative allies saying *all the right things*, but quietly voting time and time again for inequitable policies.

The time for talking is over, we need ACTION! Stop exploiting serious LGBTQ+ pain and suffering as a campaign tool, and use your power to pass policies to help these communities, and protect them from this bubbling transphobia and homophobia we are now witnessing! We can't afford to let these hate groups steal our focus from building an equitable and just society for LGBTQ+ people, and we should insist on *real* equity and intersectionality, rather than settling for so-called community leaders and allies and elected officials who just performatively use those words, while actively working against those values.

Thank you very much for your time and attention today.