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Representative, District 94



MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS

August 15, 2017

The Honorable Phil Bryant
Governor of Mississippi
Post Office Box 139
Jackson, MS 39205

HAND DELIVERED

Dear Governor Bryant:

The deaths and acts of terror in Charlottesville are the latest evidence of a rising tide of white-nationalism and hatred in America. The images out of Virginia were another clear reminder that Confederate symbols have no place in Mississippi's state flag.

Governor Bryant, the Mississippi Legislative Black Caucus, strongly urges you to call an immediate extraordinary session of the Mississippi legislature to change the state's flag.

If a pending economic development deal required legislation, you would rightly call representatives and senators back to Jackson to do their job. Simply, there is no legislation that lawmakers could pass that would do more for improving the image and economy of Mississippi than changing the flag.

In 2015, a 21-year-old white supremacist named Dylan Roof sat through a prayer service at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Roof brought an end to their bible study by gunning down and murdering nine people, including the senior pastor, State Senator Clementa C. Pinckney.

Roof, whom posed on in photos with the Confederate battle flag and other emblems of white supremacy, stated that he hoped the shooting would ignite a race war. South Carolina's white and black lawmakers set out to prove him wrong. Their legislature took action to remove the Confederate flag from the state capitol grounds, where it had flown for over 50 years.

Mississippi's political, religious and business leaders also spoke of a new urgency to change our state flag- that prominently features the Confederate battle emblem. There was hope that Roof's murderous acts would be the catalyst for a new flag and greater racial reconciliation with our state.

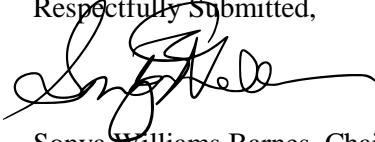
That did not happen. In 1861 Mississippi followed South Carolina in succeeding from the Union in order to preserve the institution of slavery. But in 2015 our leaders did not have the courage to follow South Carolina's lead in abandoning the official state use of the Confederate banner.

2 years later, more blood has been spilled. Like it or not, Charlottesville was just further proof that the Mississippi state flag resonates with bigots and racists. Hate groups love the flag because it is a symbol of holding an entire race of people down. Governor, you can send a clear message that our state rejects those beliefs.

Black Mississippians deserve a flag that doesn't symbolize racial inferiority. White Mississippians deserve a flag that doesn't unfairly cast upon them a shadow of hate and intolerance. Mississippians of all stripes deserve better.

Your leadership is needed today. We cannot wait any longer. We await your response.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sonya Williams Barnes', with a long, sweeping underline.

Sonya Williams Barnes, Chairwoman
House District 119