

ADVOCATES FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

UNION CHURCH IN WABAN
14 Collins Road
Waban, MA 02468

April 23, 2023

House Speaker Cameron Sexton
425 Rep. John Lewis Way N.
Suite 600, Cordell Hull Bldg.
Nashville, TN 37243

Re: Expulsion of lawmakers for participating in non-violent demonstration against gun violence

Dear House Speaker Sexton:

The words from Justice Harlan in his dissent in Plessy v Ferguson remind us that actions by the state devised to defeat equality fought for in the Civil War and guaranteed by the 14th amendment, “can have no other result than to render permanent peace impossible and to keep alive a conflict of races the continuance of which must do harm to all concerned.” Harlan condemns legislators that use: “power in the States, by sinister legislation, to interfere with the full enjoyment of the blessing of freedom to regulate civil rights common to all citizens, upon the basis of race.”

Is this “sinister legislation,” the very House rule under which you banished the two courageous legislators from Memphis and Nashville who were exercising their civil right to speak up to protect our children from rampant gun violence?

Mirroring action taken against Julian Bond in 1966 who was expelled from the Georgia House of Representatives for opposing the War in Vietnam, you defied the Supreme Court decision in Bond v. Floyd which protects legislators’ rights to speak on controversial subjects. Here, the controversial speech was considering how to take

deadly weapons off our streets to end the mass killings plaguing American society and threatening our very democracy.

This is not a political issue. This is a moral and ethical issue. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus challenged us to be peacemakers, and yet the Tennessee House would not hear the voices of hundreds of peacemakers in their halls demonstrating to end the evil proliferation of guns, instruments of war, in American society.

We implore you to lead the members of the Tennessee House to become instruments of moral conviction by listening to James 1:22 which reminds us to be “doers of the word.” Can you challenge your colleagues to begin being doers of the word, peacemakers, and instruments of ethical and moral action as you work toward protecting the civil rights of all you labor with, no matter their race, and act to bring peace for the children and adults in Tennessee who are crying out for your protection?

You have an opportunity to lead the legislature in a way that upholds the best values and traditions of Tennessee. We hope you choose a path to better race relations and prudent gun control. You will have our support every step of the way.

With respect and gratitude for your service,

Undersigned members of the Union Church in Waban and its

Advocates for Racial Justice