



September 3, 2020

Michael Hanlon, Jr. Ph.D.
Superintendent
Chardon Local Schools
428 North Street
Chardon, OH 44024

Dr. Hanlon,

On behalf of 25,000 Ohio law enforcement officers, I'm writing to you today to ask your reconsideration of your ban on the use of the "Blue Line Flag" for two reasons:

First, any suggestion – ANY suggestion – that the "Blue Line Flag" could even be interpreted as racially motivated is ill-considered.

Second, to find that the feelings of one class of people is more valid than the free speech rights of another class of people isn't acceptable.

The "Blue Line Flag" is used as a sign of support for law enforcement. There are also red line flags in support of fire, yellow line flag for dispatchers, white and blue for EMS, red and white for nurses, and green or camouflage for military.

Let's briefly consider circumstances that might cause the blue line flag to become associated with white supremacy.

I don't know of examples of white nationalists choosing to carry the blue line flag, but if such a thing happened it would not be the fault of the blue line flag. Making such a connection means anything a white nationalist carries becomes an instrument of racism. Besides giving tremendous power to white nationalists, such consideration is just illogical.

Certainly, counter protestors have carried the blue line flag, but that doesn't make them racist. It makes them passionate about first responders who are facing increasing danger each and every day because of the protests and riots.

Travel through any Ohio community and you'll see vehicles with blue line stickers, flagpoles with blue line flags, and even yards with blue line signs. These aren't racists. They're our neighbors. They're showing support for police. That support is much appreciated by police.

We live in an era where it's in fashion to wear "Black Lives Matter" apparel and to paint "Black Lives Matter" on streets. We live in an era where an organization called Black Lives Matter has called for the defunding of police. THAT'S political. Waving a flag supporting police isn't political just because an angry mob has tried to make it so.

Despite that, we're not calling for the ban of BLM material in school. We understand restraint. Restraint dictates that if we're going to fight for the "Blue Line Flag," we must accept that people with whom we disagree have the same rights.

We can call for education, and that – frankly – is what should have happened here. Banning a flag that supports first responders is a slippery slope.

If the "Blue Line Flag" can be considered racially-motivated, anything can be so considered. What if the mob suddenly decides wearing pants is racially-motivated? Surely pants will still be acceptable in the school community. You might think that is a crazy example, but over the last few months the mob has defaced the memorial to 54th Massachusetts regiment. That was the first all-Black regiment to fight in the Civil War. They also demanded removal of a statue of Benjamin Franklin who founded the first abolition society in the United States.

These are arbitrary decisions to build and advance political messaging. We live in a world where the mob rules the day, resulting in yelling and screaming. In absence of real change, they rack up wins against inanimate objects like flags. By your decision, you've handed a defeat to the Constitution and a win to the mob.

As a school superintendent, there's clearly a better choice. Call a school-wide assembly. Let a police officer explain the meaning of the "Blue Line Flag." Let an activist explain "Black Lives Matter." Let an attorney explain the First Amendment. Then tell your students that they – each and every one of them – have the right to express themselves in a responsible manner. Students, just like adults, who can disagree and still co-exist would be a proud symbol to the country during these tumultuous times. That's a legacy worthy of the Hilltoppers.

There's still time to reverse course here and to achieve a result that would be positive. We encourage you to fix this situation.

Sincerely,

Gary Wolske

Gary Wolske
President, Ohio Fraternal Order of Police