

The Office of Attorney General Maura Healey
One Ashburton Place
Boston, MA 02108



Dear Madam Attorney General Healey:

We, the undersigned, request that your office conduct an investigation into whether civil rights and/or criminal statutes have been violated as a result of the events that we describe below.

The Martha's Vineyard Times reported on June 1, 2017 that "a beloved...Regional High School history teacher" resigned amid allegations that she worked in a "divisive" school environment and that she was "bullied" by the administration at the high school. Dr. Elaine Weintraub has long been known as a champion for diversity and equality. She was one of only two Ph.Ds. at the school and was chair of the history and social studies department. She also serves on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Bias and Sensitivity Committee, and on the Teacher Advisory Committee of Facing History & Ourselves. During her tenure at MV Regional High School, Dr. Weintraub developed programs designed to celebrate African -American History, Brazilian History, and Irish History. One of her key accomplishments was to work with high school students to create murals along the walls of the high school. One mural depicted Brazilian, African American, and other indigenous heroes and heroines who made a significant contribution to the culture and history of Martha's Vineyard. Two of these murals were part of the African American Heritage Trail of Martha's Vineyard and were a source of pride for the student artists and those members of the public who regularly came to view it. The African American Heritage Trail of Martha's Vineyard is a physical entity of 26 sites celebrating the lives of people of color on the Vineyard and was developed by Dr. Weintraub and her students. Today it employs former students as tour guides and gives scholarships to students of color in the graduating class. One student artist is Margaret Joba-Woodruff who has signed this letter.

Dr. Weintraub announced her plan to return to her classroom on June 15th to complete the school year. She had been absent from her job for six weeks prior to this day dealing with a serious medical situation. When she arrived at the school she discovered that someone had painted four murals over in white paint. The door to her room had been stripped of the student work that decorated it, and a photograph of President Lula with President Obama given to her by a student had been removed. Every item on the door had been removed and discarded including a statement that "those who can get you to believe absurdities can get you to commit atrocities," and a photograph of an animal adopted in Ireland by the Irish History class. Further investigation by school administrators revealed that a white male teacher, Andrew Vandall and another person whose name has not been revealed but who is not employed by the school, entered Martha's Vineyard Regional High School on the night of June 14th around 8:30PM and painted over the murals without

permission. Mr. Vandall's actions were deliberate and have resulted in students of color feeling intimidated and unwelcome in Martha's Vineyard Regional High School. The murals painted by the Brazilian History & Culture class were completely obliterated erasing all evidence of their work. This class was created by Dr. Weintraub to build cultural bridges between school communities following well publicized issues of discrimination as far back as 2010. This action was allegedly done without the permission of school authorities, but to date, no school authority has done anything to ensure that such action does not occur again. There is also no indication of employment or civil consequences for the two perpetrators of this act. The larger community of Martha's Vineyard is outraged.

It is notable that since Dr. Weintraub's departure the Irish History & Culture class has been cancelled despite its high student enrolment and the Brazilian History & Culture class has been removed from the department. The African American Heritage Trail project is no longer a part of the history department curriculum.

These actions are indicative of a pattern and practice of intimidation and inaction by school officials when children of color are harmed in school. A letter drafted by an advocacy group, We Stand Together, also supports this contention (see, Martha's Vineyard Times Article dated March 2, 2017). Their letter describes in detail a pattern of intimidation and inaction with regards to matters of race in Martha's Vineyard Schools.

Given this pattern of abuse and continued inaction by school officials, we respectfully request that your office conduct the appropriate civil and/or criminal investigations.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned (see attached signature pages)

Cc: The Boston Globe
The Boston Herald
Martha's Vineyard Times
Martha's Vineyard Gazette
The Federal Bureau of Investigation, Hate Crimes Unit

Attachments: Martha's Vineyard Times Article dated March 2, 2017
Martha's Vineyard Times Article June 1, 2017
Martha's Vineyard Times Article dated June 8, 2017
Martha's Vineyard Times Article dated July 22, 2017

Signatures in support of the request for an investigation into the matters described in this letter

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NAT BENJAMIN

Pamela S Benjamin

Pamela S Benjamin

Howell E Begle

HOWELL E. BEGLE, JR.

Lara Obici

Lara Obici

Chuck Robinson

Chuck Robinson

Tabitha Andrews

TABITHA ANDREWS

Duncan Schilcher

Duncan Schilcher

Kendall Robinson

Kendall Robinson

Katharine Lavanagh

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Ellen M Gaskill

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Annemarie Donahue

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JAMES W. JENNINGS

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Andora Aquino Avampini

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Signatures in support of the request for an investigation into the matters described in this letter

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