

Geoffrey Slack  
Portland

Dear Representatives and Senators

I am writing to encourage you to create the Office of the Education Ombudsman AND to commission a Study of the Reporting and Response System to assist public schools to respond and address incidents of bias and discrimination.

My wife and children are residents of Portland, formerly of Kennebunk. We lived in a beautiful house and had many friends in Kennebunk. My two children went to school in the public schools of RSU 21 and my wife, Rosa Slack, was a high school history teacher at Kennebunk High School. My wife, who is African American, is a highly skilled and experienced educator. She has two masters degrees, one from Columbia University. In addition to her teaching credentials, she was an acting Assistant Principal in both New York City and Old Orchard Beach HS before taking a job teaching at Kennebunk High.

Unfortunately, my wife was the victim of a biased based incident of hate while she was teaching at KHS. She, of course, reported the incident to school safety and administrative personnel. She was subsequently retaliated against by district administration at the highest of level. All retaliation was based upon her race. We spent three years as a family working to explain, prove, educate and negotiate in this hostile work environment.

Eventually, faced with raising our children in community whose leadership chose to silence my wife's lived experience rather than to educate, we sold our home and moved to Portland. My wife continued to teach at KHS until she was able to find employment as a history teacher here in Portland.

My wife hired a Civil Rights Attorney. She filed a complaint with the Maine Human Rights Commission. She attempted to protect herself from further retaliation and discrimination. By the time she was in a position to make a complaint to the MHRC, she was working in a hostile environment for over two years. The MHRC responded to her complaint with a timeline of many many months before a decision would be rendered. The MHRC recommended that my wife and the Kennebunk School District, RSU 21, use a free mediator provided by the MHRC to address the allegations. My wife agreed to the free mediation. RSU 21 refused to cooperate with the MHRC.

In fact, RSU 21 was under no obligation to address any complaint through the MHRC. An Office of an Education Ombudsman would have helped our family and the community of Kennebunk, immensely. The MHRC simply did not have the capacity nor authority to require any action or accountability for the perpetrators of discrimination.

My wife suffered emotional trauma that affected her physical health. Our family was forced to move from the community. In fact, another African American family suffered from acts of discrimination and bias in the same school setting, RSU 21, prior to our experience. That family requested meetings and education and action by school administrators to combat the hate and they were silenced as well.

After all of the work that my wife did to take a stand and educate a community, at her personal expense, members of the Kennebunk/ RSU 21 community demanded accountability, once they became aware of her situation after an interview with my wife was conducted and published by the Portland Press Herald. The community commissioned an independent investigation and report. The eventual report did in fact verify that my wife suffered discrimination and was retaliated against by district administrators, at the highest of levels.

Clearly, this is not the way that our schools and communities should function. Nor is this how actual residents want our neighbors to live. Accountability is crucial. When people in power have zero accountability, beyond public scrutiny, they will sacrifice the needs of the town for their own personal gain. Between legal fees paid for by

RSU 21 as part of a settlement based upon my wife's request (both her legal fees and the district's personal lawyer), the hiring process required to find a new employee after my wife left the district, the mandated district anti-bias training that went far beyond anything that my wife had initially requested, an independent lawyer that acted as an ombudsman to help the school district work through this process and the independent law firm that investigated my wife's case, I can conservatively estimate the total cost to the people of Kennebunk to be approaching \$400,000, if not greatly exceeding that.

We believe that the State of Maine can do better and the people deserve better.

Sincerely,  
Geoffrey and Rosa Slack  
Portland, Maine  
(formerly of Kennebunk)