July 8, 2020

Charles A. Stacy, Esq., Chair
Board of Supervisors
Tazewell County, Virginia

Re: confederate statue

Dear Chairman Stacy:

“Equal Justice Under Law”. This is the short but profound statement chiseled into the frieze over the front steps of the Supreme Court of the United States. The way into the Supreme Court is steep, but the path is clear. We pass by no monuments, only those words, which serve to remind the lawyers and judges, and reassure the persons involved in a dispute.

I am asking the Board to decide to remove and relocate the statue of the confederate soldier that is currently sited at the entrance to the Tazewell County courthouse.

Friends and neighbors who disagree respond, in unison, “but this is our history.” Yes, unfortunately, it is. "Our new government[’s] foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man.” *Alexander Stephens, Confederate Vice President (March 21, 1861)*. The statue of the confederate soldier represents our history of Virginians who seceded from the Union, helped begin a civil war, and fought to the death for slavery and oppression. For that reason alone, it should be removed.

Be strong, and be brave. Do not shirk your responsibility and put this to a referendum. You may offer the option for private citizens to relocate the statue to private property where descendants of the Lost Cause may contemplate the efforts of their forebears. One possibility is Jeffersonville Cemetery, founded during the antebellum era.

When we enter the courthouse, let us not be reminded of the horror of our past mistakes. Let all who enter be confident of equal justice under the law.

With Best Regards,

KB Ryan

Karel Brown Ryan

c: Board members

C. Eric Young, Admin.
Southern District Supervisor Mike Hymes,

I am writing this email to you regarding the Confederate statue placed in front of our courthouse. As you know, it has become quite divisive in our community. Many are in favor of its destruction, while many are in favor of keeping it where it has stood for decades.

I come to you with a proposal that will appease both sides: relocation to the Jeffersonville Cemetery. The Jeffersonville Cemetery is widely-known as a Confederate cemetery and already welcomes a Confederate memorial. This way, the statue is removed from government property, AND it is protected from any harm.

I hope you consider my suggestion regarding its immediate relocation. This oppressive and divisive symbol does not represent the Tazewell community I know and love.

Thank you,

Hadrian Reeves
Mike Hymes,

I’m sure you are aware of the statue of the Confederate soldier placed in front of the court house, in Tazewell VA. This statue honors not only slavery, but racism. This is something we should choose not to honor anymore. For example, in Germany there would be no statues placed of Nazi soldier as I am 100% sure this would make the citizens very upset. Instead of demolishing it, as I’m sure tons of people would very much enjoy hearing, we should move it somewhere else.

I believe putting it at the Jeffersonville Cemetery would be a good idea. As it is a confederate graveyard, I feel it would be a lot more appropriate than having it in front of the Court house. I hope you, and the board of supervisors can agree on moving this, as this statue stands for racism and slavery.

Thank you, Kayleigh Wills.
To Southern District Supervisor Mike Hymes,

I am writing this email to you in regards of the Confederate Statue outside of the Main Street Court House. This statue represents unethical morals and glorifies the dehumanizing of a race, and should not be placed in front of a building of justice.

While the demolition of this statue is unlikely, I believe that relocating it to the Jeffersonville Cemetery would be fitting, as this cemetery already houses one confederate statue.

Thank you for your time,

Emily McFarland
Salutations to the Tazewell County Board of Supervisors, I’m writing to you all today as a concerned citizen of Tazewell County. My name is Brittany Davis, and I’m a resident of the Carline/Shakerag Community, I’m not writing on their behalf or anyone else’s, just my own.

My concerns going on within Tazewell County is the division of our community over the Confederate Statue in front of the court house. Yesterday bills passed by the Virginia General Assembly and signed by Governor Northam went into effect and one of them passed stating that “Local governments across Virginia will officially have the authority to remove or contextualize Confederate Monuments”. I know that many have had opinions on whether it should or shouldn’t be relocated. I also am aware that the meeting on July 7th will determine its fate and I want what is best for Tazewell, the same as you all.

Truthfully I’d like to see it moved but I don’t believe it should be destroyed. It is no longer a representation of what it once stood for, heritage. It’s now a symbol of anger, hate, and hurt. Many may not see it this way but actions speak louder than words. Some previous events come to mind when I think of this statue. In 2019, Bill Bunch organized a Juneteenth march from Main Street to Nuckolls Hall after a brief prayer at the courthouse. Those who were honoring and supporting the event were met by counterparts who believed it to be a protest and guarded the Confederate Statue. Then, this Juneteenth Celebration held on Main Street in the mini park was met this year with a petition to keep the statue and citizens of Tazewell wearing guns and bullet proof vests right down the street from the celebration. Both years have been a slap to the face to the community within Tazewell.
Many want to say they are saving their heritage, but when in reality it is a disgrace to the town of how divided we are. When scrolling through social media and seeing the different reactions and the way that others were trying to defend it, there were really no valuable arguments as to why we should keep it, well in front of the courthouse anyway. While scrolling through the comments I read many that stated, “this is why I left Tazewell” or “this is why I’m never moving back, they are stuck in their ways, there will never be change” and etc. Not only have I read these comments, but I have also heard them in casual conversations as well.

Being a younger adult in Tazewell I know there are plenty of job opportunities and this is a nice place to get started, but it’s hard to keep the people here or even get them here especially when there is no respect given to those in the community who try and make a difference or change that goes against the normal routine ways. I know in this town we don’t like to “stir the pot”, but at some point change has to come, the time to make change is now. I’ve watched this town and the people within it work too hard to make it a great place, but truthfully it will never live up to its full potential with the division of the community. The division of the community needs to be stopped and unified once again.

When I was eligible to vote, I voted to show my town and community support, but it’s hard to continue to support a town and community that doesn’t value me and my feelings, those who look like me, or those who have the same beliefs as I do when I have valued and supported this town and was once very prideful of it.

It hurt me to read the response that was printed in the newspaper about the statue. Granted some may not have directly come to you and said that the statue was offensive, but I know you all are aware of the political climate in this area, I know that you all are aware of what is going on around us, and no one should have to
tell someone to be a good person. No one should have to
tell someone what the right thing to do is; we are all
adults and have to be accountable.

We voted for each of you to be in your position to be
our voice, to make the best choices for all of Tazewell,
not to cater to just a few. We cannot keep living in the
past and making up excuses for a Lost Cause, we need to
think of the present and our future. Will Tazewell even
have a future if the statue stays? There are many things
to debate and go into detail about, and I believe that
those who care for it should decide where it goes and be
in charge of the maintenance and security. I for one
would not like my tax dollars to keep funding something
that I do not believe in and it’s not fair to the others
who also want it removed. Since you all have the power to
do something about it, it is time to do it now, not put
it off and have it on the ballot to vote on it in
November. I would like to suggest coming up with a
committee and board made up of members from the town who
wish to preserve it, or placing it in the Jeffersonville
Cemetery on Fincastle Road since it is a Confederate
cemetery.

Thank you all for reading my concerns and I truly
hope and believe that you all will do the right thing for
all the citizens of Tazewell County and the future of
Tazewell as well.

Sincerely,
Brittany J Davis
Mike Hymes or Whom It May Concern,

I am speaking out about moving the statue of the unforgotten solider with the Robert E Lee emblem from in front of the courthouse to possibly the Crab Orchard Museum or another desired location. I feel like everyone’s heritage deserves to be respected and heard. I am a black man and citizen of Tazewell County when I pass through Main Street and see this statue I am reminded of the years of oppression People of Color have went through and continue to go through. Governor Northam has made a big step in the right direction for the Commonwealth by agreeing that these such said statues be removed and placed in a place that citizens who want to see them can and not put in places like in front of courthouses. When I have to walk in the courthouse and walk passed the statue I feel defeated before I even walk in that building. This is a building all citizens of this county must walk into or at least drive by at some point. I just hope you take what I say in consideration and try to understand where I am coming from as a black man and remove the statue to a more appropriate place.

Thank You,
Carl “Scooby” Davis Jr
PO Box 1253
North Tazewell Va 24630
276-329-8756
Mr Hymes,

I feel like the statue of the forgotten soldier with the Robert E Lee emblem on it in front of the courthouse needs to be taken down and placed possibly at the Crab Orchard Museum or somewhere where people can see if they like as part of their heritage. I feel like this statue oppresses People of Color and is a constant reminder of what their ancestors endured and all the trauma that have been through. I can’t imagine how a Person of Color feels walking in the courthouse walking past that statue and feeling like they are already deemed guilty before they stand before the judge. The statue represents white supremacy to so many people I think we as citizens of Tazewell County need to be mindful of each other’s ideas and history and traumas and struggles we have been through. I have no desire to see the statue be destroyed but just moved to another location. We need to realize if this statue offends a marginalized group who are citizens of our county there should be no question in removing it from in front of the courthouse.

Thank you for allowing me to express how I feel about the statue we live in a wonderful community where everyone deserves to feel validated and heard!

Thank You,
Heather Smith
PO Box 86
North Tazewell Va 24630
Hello. My name is Morgan Watkins. I just wanted to reach out to you to tell you how I feel about the statue that stands y’all in front of the Tazewell Co Court House in VA. We should be uniting as a community and present ourselves in some way that is welcoming for all races. Somethings are offensive plain and simple. We are all created equal and were each made in a unique way to have different views and opinions. If something such as the statue is offensive, why not take it down? I’m asking that the statue please be removed and placed somewhere different than on Main St. I’m only one voice, but I know many feel the same way I do. Thank you for taking the time to hear me out about the matter.

Morgan Watkins (resident of tazewell county)
Mr Hymes,

My name is TJ Taxley and I lived in Tazewell for the first 23 years of my life. First and foremost, I am proud of where I am from and I love Tazewell with everything in me. Within saying that, I am also a black man that grew up in Tazewell, Va. I am one of the children that grew up in the shadows of this statue in front of our courthouse. For me and many others, it was and still is a symbol of the hidden, sometimes not so much hidden, oppression that people like me have to go through there.

For you, Mr. Hymes, that statue may not seem like much. It may be “just a part of history”. For me and many, many others, it represents oppression, hate, and a heritage that I don’t agree with. A heritage, that I may add, that went against everything that this country was supposedly built on. The statue of the confederate soldier represents the history of Virginians who seceded from the Union, helped begin a civil war, and fought to the death for slavery and oppression. For that reason alone, it should be removed. It is INTIMIDATING as a young black man to have to see that any time I step foot on main street.

Sir, I am a college graduate who currently does HR at the largest Toyota manufacturing plant in the world, I know that I have so much to offer my hometown. I would love nothing more than to represent, stand up, and contribute to the bettering of the place that I will always call home. But, the sad reality is, myself and many other people of my generation will NEVER move back home. Some peoples reasons may be different than others, but I can guarantee that will all connect with one medium: the silent oppression that people of my color have to endure. I have no criminal record, so anytime I have ever visited the courthouse it was never in a moment of malice, and STILL walking past that statue provides an aura that is unmistakable. Mr. Hymes, do you know how it feels to feel unwanted in the place you call home? To feel looked down on? Less than? That statue is just another example of the systematic oppression that WE MUST FIX. It is a small step that will go a long way.

In closing, thank you for reading this letter and thank you for representing Tazewell. I know these are tough issues to tackle, but I pray you will do the right thing. I am not asking for destruction of a historical
statue, but relocation. It is a black eye in our community. If this statue is hurting as many people as you and I both know it is, I simply don’t understand what could be the issue. Do the right thing, for your community. Do the right thing for the future. Make Tazewell the town that I know it can be, one filled with love and acceptance, not one that proudly displays bigotry in front of its most important building.

Sincerely,

TJ Taxley
Kelly Services
On-site HR Rep-TMMK 2nd shift
Assembly 2 & Lexus Assembly
Cell: 502-642-9747
Fax: 502-570-6619
Email: tj.taxley@toyota.com
Dear Board of Supervisors, Honorable Judge, Mayor, and City Council Members,

I hope you are well. While this is in the jurisdiction of the county, I think it makes sense to address the letter to all of you, since it is a general matter. I'm writing because as elected officials you have the duty and power to serve the interests of the community. I'm writing to you as a regular citizen, who thinks about how policy affects our lives and how we engage with each other, not as a Republican or democrat.

The reason for my email is the Confederate Monument in front of the county courthouse. Monuments, statues, schools, seals, and even road names celebrate people, and put them on a pedestal (sometimes literally). The Confederacy was many things, and Southern history is a proud one. But the Confederacy also fought to preserve the enslaving of Americans, and the oppression and murdering of many African-Americans. I believe these actions do not reflect the values of the community, and are deeply hurtful to decent people everywhere. It is also important to remember that many Confederate monuments and names were dedicated in the first half of the 1900s during the Lost Cause movement. Many of these monuments were erected because people wanted to reframe history and try to remember the Civil War as a valiant effort to defend state’s rights. In reality, of course, the Civil War was fought to preserve slavery. For those whose ancestors were enslaved, these are symbols of oppression. By placing them on courthouse lawns, or naming schools or roads after them, we continue to give them moral legitimacy.

We should remember our heritage in the right way, and find ways to celebrate the parts of it that are beautiful - brotherhood, courage, sacrifice, valor, among others - while making it clear that the Confederacy also stood for evil that we need to remember, as to not repeat it. Monuments gloss over the nuances. They idolize confederate leaders while whitewashing the full picture of their roles and deeds. You wouldn't be able to tell from looking at a soldier or general high up on a stone foundation.

If we want to remember this part of Southern history, we should do it in a museum, where people can learn about
it while understanding the context of time. Tazewell, and Tazewell County for that matter, should continue to be a welcoming place for businesses and all people, and I think it is of utmost importance to remove and relocate the monument. If you look at my generation’s apps, like Instagram or Tiktok, you’ll find that people are lightyears apart from the current reality as it relates to confederate monuments. Once my generation takes control of the political system, as your generation has, and as any generation does, I’m concerned that we won’t have the same desire to critically engage with our heritage as your generation does, because you still feel more closely connected to it. So in a way, this is also about using your perspective and influence, to make sure that these monuments go to places where they’re used to teach people about the good and the bad (like a museum), and where they can find their final, safe, resting place. Mark my words: My generation will vote to remove these monuments when the time comes, and naturally, as time progresses, people forget about the value of learning from the distant past.

I’m not passing judgement on anyone in the community, please believe me. I also believe in the 1st amendment, and people being able to voice their opinions. This is about government-sanctioned honoring of these people. This isn't about erasing or hiding history, it's about finding the right way to remember it.

Thank you for your attention, take care.

James Morton
July 1st, 2020

Dear Tazewell County Board of Supervisors:

I write to you today as a landowner in Burke’s Garden and 21-year resident of Tazewell County, with a recommendation to relocate the Confederate statue positioned in front of the Tazewell County Courthouse. The issue of Confederate statues has been discussed in many forums in which I participate, including among Virginia museum and preservation professionals and former colleagues. As I retired in December 2019 as Executive Director of Crab Orchard Museum, I do not represent that organization or any other, only myself and other concerned citizens of my acquaintance.

Until now I’ve discussed the issue abstractly with colleagues since the tragic KKK rally incident in Charlottesville, VA in 2017, as museum professionals concerning ourselves with putting the statues into post-Reconstruction interpretive context, the pros and cons of moving them, and to what locations would be best. However, with the recent spotlight on race relations in our country precipitated by the brutal death of George Floyd, coupled with the new Virginia law effective today, July 1st, 2020, empowering local communities to relocate their statues, the time to decide the future of the Confederate statue in Tazewell County is now.

The recently released statement from the National Trust for Historic Preservation asserts, “Although Confederate monuments are sometimes designated as historic, and while many were erected more than a century
ago, the National Trust supports their removal from our public spaces when they continue to serve the purposes for which they were built—to glorify, promote, and reinforce white supremacy, overtly or implicitly. While some have suggested that removal may result in erasing history, we believe that removal may be necessary to achieve the greater good of ensuring racial justice and equality. And their history needs not end with their removal; we support relocation of these monuments to museums or other places where they may be preserved so that their history as elements of Jim Crow and racial injustice can be recognized and interpreted.”

Some may argue the Confederate statue does not symbolize white supremacy. For some it may connote Southern pride in a benign way, offering honorific validation for the military activity of their ancestors. Our county has a relatively small minority of people of color, so many may not recognize the presence of the statue as a problem because it’s not a problem for most white people. But for many the presence of the statue at the courthouse sends a hurtful message to people of color, to the point where they may have no confidence that there can be true justice found within the courthouse.

As a Rotarian, I have measured the statue’s continued presence at the Tazewell County Courthouse against the Rotary Four-Way test. First, is it the truth? The original honorific presentation of the statue is no longer a truthful representation of how the statue is perceived by many now. Like it or not Confederate statues have become symbols of racial injustice and oppression, no matter what the donors’ original intent was. We don’t know if the original intent was to shame or intimidate people of color, but that is the role it has played and continues to play now. Second, is it fair to all concerned? Its continued placement on public property is a message to people of color that honoring the Lost Cause is more important to the government of this county than their valid concerns of racism, and
therefore unfair. **Third, will it build good will and better friendships?** On the contrary, the statue staying where it is will be an ongoing impediment, a daily deterrent to the healing necessary to put the “unity” back in the Tazewell community. **And fourth, will it be beneficial to all concerned?** Surely not. Keeping it in place only benefits those who want to continue tacitly informing people of color that they are not considered valid citizens.

There may be some who dislike the idea of moving the statue, but may be able to accept such a change if a suitable relocation site and plan were thoughtfully determined. I do not want to see the statue destroyed or defaced, and I’m sure you don’t either. My suggestion is that you **form a Statue Relocation Task Force** to determine a plan for relocation, so that a variety of community citizens may offer their input into the relocation process. I urge you to form this task force immediately, as any deferral may be perceived as a stalling tactic. This issue won’t be put off, even until November, with the law in effect now. Doing nothing just guarantees the deepening of the wound that divides the community. But a task force can investigate options such as offering the statue to the Sons of Confederate Veterans for placement on private property, offering it to Jeffersonville Cemetery or another historic cemetery for placement near Confederate graves, or offering it to a museum with appropriate security, space and the ability to contextualize it as a “Lost Cause” monument that has become a modern artifact in the story of race relations in our nation. There may be other options to explore as well.

This is a chance for the Board of Supervisors to take the lead in how the statue is relocated, where it should go, how it is secured and interpreted, to begin the healing process in Tazewell County. Beyond the reasons I’ve offered for relocation as the right thing to do, here are some practical concerns as well:
Security to Deter Potential Defacement or Violence: We are all watching what is happening to monuments in the state capital. No one wants to see something ugly happen to the statue here, but ongoing taxpayer-funded security to prevent incident and protect all citizens from injury will be a drain on county resources.

Negative Public Image: For all the efforts of Tazewell Today, Tazewell County Tourism, our local realtors, restaurants, VCEDA, etc. to promote our area as a beautiful, well-restored, fun place to live, work, relocate, or visit, the public image of our area has been damaged by this issue, leading many to perceive us negatively. This adversely affects business and business recruitment, which adversely affects all of us.

Loss of Young Tazewell Natives: The saddest part of the recent activities near the statue on Juneteenth, were the photos flying across social media with comments from the grown children of Tazewell citizens declaring this backwards situation is why they left and will not move back to Tazewell. The Board of Supervisors has invested thousands of dollars and countless hours in job creation, but our kids don’t stay away because there are no jobs. They stay away because they perceive us to be insular and out of touch with their values: fairness, equality, and acceptance of everyone despite differences. They are not proud of their home community as we wish they were. We should be able to come together to do better. Relocating the statue won’t solve the larger issues of racism in our community, but it’s a visible start and a way to create a better future together.

It will take courage on your behalf to make this decision. It would be easier and more politically prudent to say, “let’s put it on the ballot in November and let the people decide.” But the majority of the County will not vote for a change to the status quo because they don’t see a problem unless it’s a white problem. The people of color in this community, especially those who have been conditioned all their lives to “not ruffle any feathers,” along with those who
want to see a better, fairer, more-welcoming-for-all Tazewell County are counting on you to do the right thing on their behalf, to make room for them so they can have the same rights as the rest of us.

The citizens of Tazewell County were not polled about whether the Confederate statue should be accepted and placed on public property when it was erected. The decision to relocate or “deaccession” such a gift should lie with you, our County representatives. But how and where it should be relocated should involve community input, so that we have proactive engagement with those who are interested in determining those details. Because even if Tazewell County voted this November to keep the statue where it is, just as it is, this issue will be on the ballot every year until it is reversed. The perception of the statue as a reverent honorific is not going to come back in five years or fifty years. The question of removal is no longer “if” but “when and how.” And the Tazewell County Board of Supervisors should be empowered to say “when and how.”

Thank you for welcoming diverse opinions on this subject.

With sincerity and respect,

Charlotte G. Whitted

Charlotte G. Whitted