Date : 9/28/2017 1:32:27 AM
From : "Laura Eshelman"
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Subject : Bree Newsome and Asheville Middle School
Attachment : bree new.jpg;

To the board members of the Asheville Board of Education,

As a longtime Asheville resident, an MSW who works with adolescents, and an activist, I was dismayed to learn that the invitation to Bree Newsome to speak at Asheville Middle School was withdrawn.Â I have had the honor to hear Ms. Newsome speak, and believe Asheville Middle School is doing its students a disservice.Â To rescind Ms. Newsome's speaking engagement because of her arrest sends a message that is at best inconsistent, and furthermore hypocritical. The school has hosted Senator Terry Van Duyn, who was arrested at the Moral Monday protests in 2013; all city schools honor a day for the Revered Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a man who was arrested for civil disobedience 29 times.Â This discrepancy is certainly puzzling, as is the fact that Ms. Newsome was invited to speak in the first place if her so-called "criminal record" (the very reason she is a public figure) is suddenly a concern.
Sitting in the same room with Bree Newsome as a speaker was an inspiring experience when she attended a panel discussion at Warren Wilson in 2015.Â It was a genuine honor to listen and learn from a woman who is eloquent, educated, and spiritual, with a warm personality and the kind of deep conviction to which one would hope our youth can and will aspire.Â In fact, the people who may be harmed most by this exercise in poor judgment are the youth themselves-- particularly the young people of color, who are robbed yet again of an opportunity for a positive portrayal of black and brown people.Â Is it not enough that, in their social studies curriculum, they must endure lesson after lesson of the centuries in which people of color were enslaved and dehumanized, of assassinated and/or falsely imprisoned leaders, while uplifting white (mostly male) figures across history?Â Forgive my brief deviation from professionalism, but for crying out loud, give those kids a break!! Â
I certainly hope that the board and Asheville Middle School will consider the best interests of its students and reverse this decision with most sincere apologies to Ms. Newsome.Â While I am skeptical that this will be the outcome, I am nevertheless sending an attachment with a photo taken at Ms. Newsome's 2015 speaking engagement at Warren Wilson.Â The young girl she is embracing was 13 years old at the time (the daughter of one of my friends), and her expression is a mere hint of how meaningful it was to be in Ms. Newsome's presence.Â This is what you will be denying Asheville Middle School's students by un-inviting her.Â Please let our community know you can do better.

Respectfully,
Laura Eshelman