



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Loch Raven Technical Academy students cited as catalyst for posthumous pardons of 34 Maryland lynching victims**

*Also eight BCPS high school students honored for essays on racial justice*

Towson, MD – When Governor Larry Hogan last Saturday announced posthumous pardons for 34 lynching victims in Maryland, he credited teacher Michelle St. Pierre’s students from Loch Raven Technical Academy for inspiring his action.

For more than a year, students at Dumbarton Middle School, Loch Raven Technical Academy, and Towson High School have been studying the lynching of 15-year-old Howard Cooper in Towson in 1885. ([A 15-minute video](#) about the lynching is available online.) Some students drafted possible language for a planned memorial marker for the site.

A petition to have Cooper’s conviction overturned was one of the projects that came out of Loch Raven Technical Academy law and finance magnet students working with the [Maryland Lynching Memorial Project](#). The initial request for a posthumous pardon was sent from the Maryland Lynching Memorial Project to the governor based on student ideas. Then a digital petition was created by students to collect signatures.

On May 8, a historical marker identifying the site of Cooper’s lynching was unveiled, and, at the unveiling, the governor made his pardon announcement – which made both national and international news. The story was covered by NPR, CBS, NBC, CNN, Rolling Stone, Politico, The Washington Post, New York Post, and by outlets as far away as Australia.

"I was so inspired by that group of young middle school students, because we have no greater responsibility as leaders in a democracy than preserving for future generations the importance of clearly differentiating the difference between right and wrong, and the power of speaking out in the face of injustice," Hogan said.

"...(I)n the interest of equal justice under law, I have made the decision to grant a posthumous pardon today for Howard Cooper," Hogan continued. "And studying this case led me to dig deeper... Today I am also granting pardons to all the 34 victims of racial lynching in the state of Maryland which occurred between 1854 and 1933."

According to the governor's office, these pardons are the first of their kind in the nation by a governor.

The Cooper memorial was developed by the Baltimore County Coalition of the Maryland Lynching Memorial Project in partnership with the national [Equal Justice Initiative](#) and Baltimore County government.

In conjunction with the unveiling ceremony, the Equal Justice Initiative hosted an essay contest on racial justice. The contest challenged Baltimore County Public Schools high school students to examine the history of a topic of racial injustice, discuss its legacy today, and imagine solutions. The first-place winner was announced and read his essay at the event. The following students were honored through the contest:

- 1<sup>st</sup> place: Tyrell Taylor, Grade 9, Woodlawn High School, "It is More Than Just a Vote," \$2,500 scholarship
- 2<sup>nd</sup> place: Fiona Sinphavong, Grade 11, Kenwood High School, "COVID-19 Is Not the Only Disease We're Fighting: Racism We Fight Too," \$1,250 scholarship
- 3<sup>rd</sup> place: Avery Butler, Grade 11, Western School of Technology and Environmental Science, "Voter Suppression: The Silencing of African American Votes," \$1,000 scholarship
- 4<sup>th</sup> place: Cianna Franklin, Grade 9, Perry Hall High School, "Racial Injustice," \$750 scholarship
- 5<sup>th</sup> place: Aniah Johnson, Grade 10, Chesapeake High School, "Health and its Relation to Race," \$500 scholarshp

Honorable mentions were awarded to:

- Breana Clarke, Grade 10, Chesapeake High School, "Colorism"

- Leslie Mbiakop, Grade 11, Chesapeake High School, “Police Brutality in America”
- Luxel (James) Moliko Djouba, Grade 11, Randallstown High School, “Racial Terror Lynching and Violence”

“Judging these essays was no easy task,” said Elliott Spillers, project manager for Equal Justice Initiative. “Overall, we appreciated each essay and valued their participation in this contest despite the external forces they have been forced to battle through over the last year. Our final rankings were reviewed through this lens in addition to other factors, but in the end, our top essays not only answered the essay prompt but also offered distinct narrative features that amplified their voice.”

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