

# Editorial Writing

District Meet • 2022



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown **Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School. From the given information, write an **editorial** as you would for the high school newspaper. Remember that as an editorial writer, you should support or oppose **policy or action**; you should not sermonize.

You have **45 minutes**.

Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School has 2,200 students enrolled in grades 9-12. Last month Principal Heather Hill told English teacher Mary Villa to take down her Thin Blue Line flag from her classroom.

The Thin Blue Line flag was created to show support and pay tribute to law enforcement. The flag is a field of black and white stripes separated by a thin blue line. The symbolic meaning of the blue line is representative of law enforcement officers. In recent years, though, the flag also has been co-opted by hate groups and carried by rioters during the Jan. 6 attacks on the Capitol.

Villa said she displayed the flag for her brother, who was a local police officer and was killed in the line of duty in 2018. Villa also has a Pride flag hanging in her classroom to honor her sister, who is part of the LGBTQ+ community. Hill said the Pride flag does not need to be removed from the classroom.

Hill said students expressed concerns about the Thin Blue Line flag and said it made them feel uncomfortable.

Villa took down the flag, but last week, she asked the school board for permission to hang the Thin Blue Line flag to honor her brother. The board will meet Thursday, March 31. Villa's request is on the agenda. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Tuesday, March 29.

## **THOSE OPPOSING HILL'S DECISION**

If Villa can hang the Pride flag, then she should be allowed to hang the Thin Blue Line flag. Clearly, Villa is hanging the flag to show tribute to her brother and support of the police. She does not have a personal message, a political agenda or an ulterior motive. That's quite obvious if she also has a Pride flag in her classroom.

## **THOSE SUPPORTING HILL'S DECISION**

While Villa hung the Thin Blue Line flag to honor her brother, not everyone grasps that message when they see the flag. Unfortunately, it has taken on a different meaning for many students, and if it makes students feel uncomfortable, it should not be displayed in the classroom.

## **■ HEATHER HILL, principal**

"Asking Ms. Villa to remove her flag was not a conversation I wanted to have, but being principal means that sometimes I am forced to have tough conversations. I know why Ms. Villa hung that flag in her classroom. All of the staff does. Her brother, Hector, was a Leaguetown graduate and a big part of our community. His death devastated this town. He was a dedicated police officer, a dedicated father and husband and a great role model for our students. He deserves a tribute. Unfortunately, though, we need to find a different way to honor him.

"The Thin Blue Line flag has become too political. The flag cannot be

### ■ HEATHER HILL (cont.)

divorced from the political meanings that have been attached to it. As a result, it may send a disruptive message to staff, students and families. When the students came to me, they said a few classmates were discussing how the flag represented white supremacy, and every teacher needed one in his or her classroom. We can't have symbols of that in our classrooms, even if that is not the original intent of the symbol. If we allow the flag, I worry about what someone will hang next."

### ■ MARY VILLA, English teacher

"That flag honored my brother, who gave his life protecting this town. I understand that the flag has taken on a different meaning for some, but not for me. Every one of my students knows why the flag is hanging in my room. If they want to read something different into it, I can't help that. I shouldn't have to take it down just because some students are distorting its message. That's not fair to me or my brother. Plus, it gives those students and those who carry the flag for the wrong reasons too much power. If I can't put the flag up in my classroom, they win. That's why I asked the school board to intervene.

"My classroom is a safe place, and I will not tolerate hate. That's one of the reasons I also hung the Pride flag. If students are misinterpreting my message with the Thin Blue Line flag, then I want to deal with that specifically. I want to have those discussions. Taking the flag out of my classroom doesn't end hate talk. In fact, I think it will only give those students a larger platform. We need to deal with this issue and not run from it."

### ■ ZANDER ROSCO, junior

"I am one of the students who talked to Ms. Hill about the flag. I know why Ms. Villa hangs it, but I've heard too many students make inappropriate comments about it. One student even gave it a Hitler salute. It was disgusting. Hanging the flag in the school has emboldened those students. The school board needs to support Ms. Hill's decision, and if it does, my friends and I would be happy to help Ms. Villa make something else to honor her brother."

### ■ JAMES BUNDY, junior

"Ms. Villa has a Pride flag hanging in her classroom. It's hypocritical to demand she take down the Thin Blue Line flag. Ms. Villa had a big picture of her brother in his uniform next to the flag. We all knew why she was hanging it. She's not a racist."

### ■ ARTURO CHAVEZ, school resource officer

"This is a hard situation. I worked with Hector Villa when I first started on the force. He was a great police officer and an even better man. Every time I walked into Ms. Villa's room, I would remember him when I saw the flag. That said, I also know what the flag has come to mean for many Americans. It makes me angry that it has been used by hate groups. That was not the original intent at all. That flag is meant to symbolize protection, security and love. That's what we do as law enforcement."

### ■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The American Civil Liberties Union contacted Mary Villa and said it would represent her at the school board meeting. Villa declined and insisted that she is trying to "take the politics" out of this situation.

**DO NOT PASS OUT TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST****EDITORIAL WRITING DISTRICT • 2022  
CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE EDITORIALS**

*Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critique/judging. Also, staple one copy of the contest and one copy of the contest tips to each student's returned entry. The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. However, it is not meant to replace written comments from the judge.*

1. Lead with a statement of the situation and then take a clear, definite staff stance. The situation is the board will vote on whether a teacher can hang a Thin Blue Line flag.
2. As a general rule, use third person. If you must use a pronoun, use first person plural (we, meaning "we, the newspaper staff"). Do not use first person singular (I, me, mine) or second person (you). Avoid unnecessary use of pronouns. Rather than "We believe the board should...", write instead, "The board should."
3. Don't waddle into the editorial. Get right to the point and, as a general rule, don't ask a lot of questions. An editorial should answer questions, not ask them. Above all, remember that your purpose is to make thoughtful, logical arguments in support of your position, not to engage in a tirade. The editorial should not be long — 450 words at the most. Although it's not recommended all the time, sometimes a writer could use a feature opening to grab the readers' attention and get them into the story.
4. Look for the future angle. Your paper comes out before the vote.
5. Once you've stated your position/stance, the body of the story should support your stance and refute the opposition.
6. After the body of your editorial, complete the editorial with a specific solution.
7. Avoid direct quotes unless the quote adds substantially to the editorial. You can pull information from these quotes, as has been done here, but it's not necessary to attribute that information unless the person has a lot of credibility toward the story itself.
8. Watch for factual errors. Pay attention to minor details. Also, stay focused.
9. Don't clutter up the editorial with clichés or trite phrases such as "the principal is stupid" or any variation thereof. Also, edit out the name of the school unless it is necessary for clarity. It isn't necessary to say "Leaguetown Independent School District" or "Leaguetown High School." Students know the name of the school. They don't need to be reminded.

### **SAMPLE EDITORIAL/OPPOSING HILL'S DECISION**

After Principal Heather Hill ordered English teacher Mary Villa to remove a Thin Blue Line flag from her classroom, Villa asked the school board for permission to return the flag to her wall. Villa had hung the flag to honor of her brother, a local police officer who was killed in the line of duty.

When the board addresses this issue Thursday, it should support Villa and allow her to display the flag.

Hill contends the Thin Blue Line flag is too political and made some students feel uncomfortable because the flag has become a symbol for some hate groups.

But Villa also has an LGBTQ+ Pride flag in her room to show support for her sister who is a part of that community. The administration can't allow one flag and not the other.

Plus, if Villa has a Pride flag in her room, she clearly has no ulterior motive or negative agenda associated with the Thin Blue Line flag.

It is unacceptable that just this one type of display be removed. Villa's display had nothing to do with politics or white supremacy. Her brother was a Leaguetown graduate and local law enforcement officer who was killed in the line of duty. She displayed a portrait of him next to the flag, and students were well aware of the meaning.

It is sad and unjust when a teacher cannot express support for law enforcement — public servants who risk their lives to protect communities.

Some students told Hill that they felt uncomfortable about the flag due to its use by hate groups and by rioters at the Jan. 6 attacks on the Capitol. But that was not the original meaning of the flag, and removing the flag from Villa's classroom is not going to stop students from making inappropriate comments or end the hate talk. In fact, it will only give those students a larger platform. The issue needs to be dealt with directly, not by hiding it away.

The Thin Blue Line flag was designed to pay tribute to law enforcement, and Villa is displaying it in her classroom to do just that. Hill was wrong for asking her to remove it, and the school board should reverse that decision and allow Villa to display the flag in her room again.

### **SAMPLE EDITORIAL/SUPPORTING HILL'S DECISION**

After Principal Heather Hill ordered English teacher Mary Villa to remove the Thin Blue Line flag from her classroom, Villa asked the school board for permission to return the flag to her wall.

The board must deny the request and support Hill's decision at its Thursday meeting.

While Villa was displaying the flag to honor her brother, the Thin Blue Line flag has taken on a negative meaning for many students and should not be displayed in a classroom for any reason. The Thin Blue Line flag no longer represents police officers alone. After being co-opted by hate groups and carried by rioters in the Jan. 6 attacks on the Capitol, the flag represents the message of those white supremacists — hate and violence.

Displaying the flag in a classroom has emboldened some students with similar views. One student even gave the flag a Nazi salute while it was still hanging in Villa's classroom.

It is impossible to excise the Thin Blue Line flag from its new political meanings. It sends a disruptive message to students, staff and their families, and it creates a slippery slope. If the board allows the flag, other teachers and students could feel empowered to display more symbols of hate.

While it is not Villa's fault that some students are distorting the message and symbolism of the flag, it is her responsibility to remove items like flags or posters that create a hostile environment.

Villa says she has no ulterior motive for hanging the flag, and no one thinks she does. But not everyone views the flag in the same way she does. And that is the problem.

Villa deserves to be able to create a tribute to her brother in her classroom. However, there are better ways to do that. Students have even offered to help her make something else to honor him. Pictures or some other type of memorial would be appropriate without raising the same negative feelings that the flag does for so many students.

Despite the intention of Villa to honor her brother with the Thin Blue Line flag, the flag is disruptive and offensive. Hill was right to ask her to remove it, and the school board should not reverse that decision.