

Senate Committee on Education

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Testimony re HB 4493

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My name is Judith Kovach and I represent *Genocide and Holocaust Education Now!*, a collaboration of individuals and organizations who recognize and support the need for educating Michigan students about genocide, including the Holocaust.

The mission of *Genocide and Holocaust Education Now!* is to have legislation enacted in Michigan that ensures that all students in public schools are educated about genocide and the Holocaust, to make sure that the vital lessons of these events help them become compassionate, responsible and responsive citizens. It is only by educating future generations that we can prevent such atrocities from happening again.

Florida, New York, New Jersey, California, Illinois and Pennsylvania have laws that require public school curricula to include teaching about genocide and the Holocaust.

An additional 10 states recommend that genocide and the holocaust be taught in public schools and 14 states have established commissions. Michigan law is silent on the teaching on genocide and the holocaust.

A 2014 research study indicates that many young adults were taught at least a little bit about the Holocaust in public school in Michigan. Many know who Hitler was and know that Jews and others were killed but this is not what Holocaust and genocide education is about. Less than a third of the young people knew what the Final Solution was or learned about the German people's tacit support of Hitler. Michigan's future citizens need to understand not just the historical facts, but must learn the consequences of millions of people standing by silently and watching the systematic killing and dehumanization of people simply because of their religion, race or other characteristic.

We all know that millions of people have been killed in wars. Students must be taught about the differences between war and genocide or they will miss an irreplaceable opportunity for learning about social responsibility and moral development. The atrocities of genocide continue to occur in the world our young people are inheriting. Again, research indicates that currently, in Michigan, four of five of the young adults in the research sample reported that they were taught little or nothing about other genocides, including those occurring today. One of the universal lessons of the Holocaust is that national, ethnic, racial, or religious hatred can overtake any nation or society – unless the citizens of the society actively resist such efforts.

The same 2014 study interviewed 99 curriculum experts in Michigan school districts; nine in 10 curriculum experts understand these educational goals and support teaching the Holocaust and genocide as a required part of the curriculum.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (“Why Teach About the Holocaust,” 2013), “The holocaust was a defining historical moment. Examining this history can heighten the awareness of the danger of genocide in the contemporary world and bring to the fore an appreciation for individual rights and universal values.”

Given the fact that genocide, mass atrocities and human rights violations are historical and contemporary realities in the twenty-first century, a careful study of the Holocaust and other genocides will lead to a sharper understanding of the political, economic, social and moral ramifications of the many faces of prejudice. It is the natural extension of state anti-bullying statutes.

The importance of teaching about genocide and the Holocaust is highlighted by a study released in August 2015 which found that genetic changes stemming from the trauma suffered by Holocaust survivors are capable of being passed on to their children, the clearest sign yet that one person’s life experience can affect subsequent generations in fundamental biological ways. We now have scientific proof that the sins of the perpetrators are visited upon the children of the victims – right down to their DNA. Only education and the public moral outrage of present and future generations can end this shameful cycle.

I urge you to make the education of Michigan’s children more complete and take one step towards ending genocides by supporting HB 4493. It is a moral imperative that all of our children say “Never Again!”

Thank you.