



Fostering a culture of courage and social action
against hatred, bigotry, intolerance and indifference

State of Connecticut
Senate Hearings

March 14, 2017

Re: SB 452: THE INCLUSION OF HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE EDUCATION AND AWARENESS IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM.

I am Peter Fishman, President of Voices of Hope a privately funded nonprofit organization dedicated to Holocaust and Genocide Education. Seldom do we have the opportunity to enrich the lives of our students with a single act. Please support senate Bill 452. Unfortunately, we live in a time where hate crimes and bullying are on the rise.

The objective of teaching is to engage the intellectual curiosity of students to inspire critical thinking and growth. When students can think critically, they can examine their own belief systems and can decide why they think as they do and question their own assumptions about life. We need to empower our students to speak up when they witness or are victims of biased acts and to recognize and understand their own biases so that they are more self-aware and conscious in their own interactions. Not standing up or speaking out about the suffering, or the violations of civil rights, leads to the spread of these issues. We must change the lens which students use to view their world, we must meet the challenge of making schools safe nurturing places where differences can exist, and no one is singled out for being different.

Most significantly genocide education demonstrates man's inhumanity to man and the circumstances that lead to horrific acts, giving it the power to connect the past with current events. When students understand that hate, intolerance and indifference start with small acts that lead to horrendous actions, they begin to comprehend why they need to stand up for what is right and how it affects their own daily lives. Students will develop empathy for others who may be different from them and recognize the implication that stereotyping, prejudice and racism create the platform to understand and accept diversity. Now more than ever we live in a world of vast differences and we need to teach students how to live in that world and be able to accept those differences. Students need the tools to create their identity and to learn that they have the responsibility to be better citizens in whatever community they reside.

Freedom and equality are not naturally maintained, they need to be understood, encouraged and protected. Genocides are not an accident, they occur because groups, governments and individuals can cause and accelerate actions of bias and hatred, that ultimately end tragically, especially in this day of social media. Genocide is responsible for the murder of millions of people who did nothing more than have a noticeable difference from the those around them.

All the information and curriculum are free and available on our website and many others. It will not require any funding to make senate bill 452 possible. Voices of Hope is committed to continue to work with the state department of education to create additional webinars in addition to the one created this fall entitled "Why Teach the Holocaust".

I would like to leave you with a quote from a student from Wilcox Technical High School in Meriden CT after taking part in holocaust program with a survivor, "This story has brought to light the true meaning of perseverance, courage, compassion and hope. It shows us the ugliness of hatred and the consequences of it. For the truth behind your story, I too promise to speak out against the bad in the world to ensure I work towards making it a better place."

Respectfully submitted



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Some additional quotes from students at the Wilcox Technical High School in Meriden CT

" . . . [a Holocaust survivor] spoke about the importance of speaking out against hate in the world. . . This message acts as a warning, portraying to us what could be created from prejudice and hate. This horrific story cannot happen again and it is up to us to ensure it doesn't." — Marangelis

" . . . I now understand the general importance of the Holocaust. This left me to reflect on myself and my actions because no one is lesser than me because of their race/ethnicity/color/religion. [The Holocaust survivor's] visit will always remain in my memory as a symbol of remembering to be kind." — Karina

" . . . the most valuable information that was gained was the message . . . that one should not allow for hate to fuel and run their life." — Anthony

" There's so much wrong in the world and seeing someone who got through one of the worst events shows that things do get better. It may not always feel like that, but as long as we don't give up anything can be accomplished." — Laurie

"After finishing the story [about the Holocaust] the reader can truly realize the importance of equality, for once we [see] someone as less than us, we as a society will begin to fall. Equality can end genocide." — Ashley