

**Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 452**  
**An Act Concerning the Inclusion of Holocaust and Genocide Education and**  
**Awareness in the Social Studies Curriculum**  
**Anti-Defamation League - Steven Ginsburg, Director**  
**March 14, 2018**

Chairman Fleischmann, Chairman Slossberg, Chairman Boucher, and Members of the Education Committee, my name is **Steve Ginsburg**, and I am the Director of the Anti-Defamation League's ("ADL") Connecticut Regional Office. I submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 452, *an Act Concerning the Inclusion of Holocaust and Genocide Education and Awareness in the Social Studies Curriculum*. This bill would include Holocaust and genocide education and awareness in every school district's social studies curriculum, teaching the next generation about the nadir of humanity, in order to do all we can to prevent similar future tragedy.

Since 1913, the mission of ADL has been to "stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all citizens alike." As Holocaust educators, first responders to incidents of hate and as a 100+ year old organization, the Anti-Defamation League has a unique and valuable perspective on the importance of Holocaust education.

Since 2005, ADL's *Echoes & Reflections* Holocaust education program has directly trained more than 40,000 educators, reaching an estimated 4.2 million students across the United States. Our very own Senior Associate Regional Director Marji Lipshez-Shapiro has personally trained over 1,000 teachers in Connecticut alone. Through our programs and resources, educators gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence to teach this topic effectively. To create and keep *Echoes & Reflections* state of the art, ADL partners with the USC Shoah Foundation and Yad Vashem World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem. The program helps educators introduce students to the complex themes of the Holocaust and enables them to understand its impact on the world. ADL also partners with the US Holocaust Memorial Museum with our Law Enforcement and Society Program. This program enables law enforcement officers to examine the role their profession played in the Holocaust and challenges them to reflect upon their professional and personal responsibilities in a democracy today. We have, year after year through participant surveys and evaluations, that how Holocaust education changes the lives of those with the chance to experience it, both young and old.

The specter of genocide informs many of the ADL trainings through the use of the "pyramid of hate." Our trainers use the pyramid to show how while jokes and bullying are the ground level harmful effects of prejudice, when left unchecked and unanswered they can lead to violence, the unraveling of societal norms and to the point of the pyramid: genocide. We teach students all over the state to be "upstanders or allies", not bystanders and to speak up when they see bias around them. Education about the Holocaust and importantly other genocides people can bring home the message to students that their words and actions matter and that we are all part of this problem and its solution.

The need for Holocaust education feels as urgent as ever. We also see it as a proactive step to stem a rising tide of anti-Semitism in Connecticut and around the country. Incidents of anti-Semitism were up 57% around the country last year and up 94% in K-12 schools. This is mirrored by what we have seen in Connecticut, with steep rises in the reports of both overall and school based incidents in the last two years. Many of these incidents at schools involve Holocaust based imagery or language. Making sure that children know the gravity of their words and actions could prevent some of them from drawing swastikas or saying things like "Hitler was right". Often, we are called in to educate after an incident has occurred. Hopefully in the future, we can supply the education first to prevent a larger percentage of these incidents from occurring in the first place - and to prepare students and communities to react appropriately when the inevitably do occur again.

As the Committee is aware, the eyewitnesses to the Holocaust will soon no longer be able to tell their stories. We are also at a time where the denial of the Holocaust is seeing a resurgence. Just last month ADL expressed deep concern when Holocaust deniers began to enter mainstream politics. In Illinois's 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional District, Holocaust denier Arthur Jones was on the ballot, and last year, Holocaust denier Charles Johnson was invited for a meeting with lawmakers on Capitol Hill in Washington DC.

Finally, this is not an abstract historical issue for many of the staff and leadership of the ADL. For me personally, as a young lawyer in the late 1990s, I moved to Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina in the wake of ethnic cleansing and a years-long genocidal war. I worked for the US government and American Bar Association helping to establish a strong independent Bosnian judiciary, but I learned far more than I was able to teach. Listening to and forming friendships with those who lived under siege and in fear - and learning how the foundations of society can crumble and lead to horror is what inspired me to myself become an upstander and not a bystander. While living in Eastern Europe I had the rare chance to visit Poland and the Auschwitz death camp with then US Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. She was so overwhelmed with what she saw that halfway through our visit I had to walk her back to the tour bus so she could rest. On our walk she said to me, "we need to do everything we can to make sure this is never forgotten and never repeated." Learning about genocide set the course for the remainder of my career - and I hope that by ensuring Connecticut students have that chance, we will help create generations of upstanders who can ensure that Never Again is not just a catch-phrase.

Senate Bill 452 would send an important message to victims of genocide and targeted communities that Connecticut recognizes the unique intergenerational harm and historic significance of these atrocities, and acknowledges that those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it. ADL looks forward to providing the needed tools and resources to helping school boards, administrators and teachers engage with the curriculum makethis a meaningful experience for them and the students. The Bill would make Connecticut a leader in living the promise of "Never Again". Education is the most vital instrument in our continuing efforts to counter bigotry in society.

We urge the Committee to report the Bill out favorably as well as to consider additional recommendations separately provided to the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your consideration.