

Legislative Testimony – Dr. Joseph A. Olzacki

My name is Kathy Fishman, and I am the Director of Voices of Hope. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to address this committee and read the following testimony from Dr. Joseph Olzacki who can't be here today.

I have over 18 years of classroom and administration experience and now direct a partnership between the Republic of Rwanda's Ministry of Education and the University of Hartford's College of Education.

One day while working at a Bloomfield school, I was discussing an article with students about Hate Crimes and how Americans did not pay attention to the mass murder in Europe until after 1940, I quickly realized that my students had little knowledge of Genocide. I questioned the Social Studies department and found out that they only "briefly" examined World War 2 and the Holocaust, and did not cover any of the OTHER United Nations recognized Genocides. **I was told "there are too many other things to cover" and "we have to choose."** I learned that the text books we were using only gave 3 paragraphs to the Holocaust." It troubled me that these students are going out into a world where hate breeds in the darkness of the mind, and we don't provide students education in genocide ideology, loss of identity or a vibrant history of the world.

As a result, we began the **IDENTITY PROJECT in Bloomfield**. In the course of 6 years, we took students through an interdisciplinary course of study that had them read, experience and listen to survivors of many of the present world Genocides and then, after writing their thoughts, provided them with a trip to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington – free of charge.

At the end of each unit, we always heard the same questions and comments from the students, "Why didn't we know about this? "Why isn't this on TV?" and "Damn, this IS true". We even learned that a local gang in Hartford used the same colors as the Nazi flag." **Now that was a reality check.**

We are fortunate that in Connecticut that we have groups who have stepped up to attempt to assure that **we never forget**. The HERO center, a partnership with Voices of Hope and the

Greenberg Center at the University of Hartford, offer similar free museum trips and **they**, along with the Yale Center for Genocide Studies and the Dodd Center offer **FREE** resources to schools. The problem is, not every school teaches about the Holocaust and Genocide.

Why should we include the Holocaust and Genocide as a graduation requirement?

-Because the objective of teaching is to engage the intellectual growth of students in order to inspire critical thinking to help students make good decisions. Knowing the signs of hatred's root is an important skill for our students.

-Because if **NEVER AGAIN** is to truly be **NEVER AGAIN**, then we must have current generations be informed in **what defines a Genocide**. The World War 2 generations that protected us so valiantly are passing on and the memories of other Genocides like that in Cambodia, Sudan and Rwanda are fading and not being used as teaching tools.

- And because at this present time, BUSINESS INSIDER Magazine recently stated that, in 2018, there are 5 active Genocides in parts of the world that many people have never heard of yet.

I strongly urge this committee and the Connecticut Legislature to support this legislation which will include HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE as a GRADUATION REQUIREMENT. Thank you.

Dr. Joseph A. Olzacki