



Statement from Professor Avinoam Patt, Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies, University of Hartford in reference to Senate Bill 452

I am pleased to submit this written testimony on behalf of the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Hartford and on behalf of the newly created HERO Center – the Holocaust Education Resource and Outreach Center – a strategic partnership in Holocaust and Genocide education between the Greenberg Center and Voices of Hope.

By way of introduction, I am the Associate Director of the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Hartford where I serve as Philip D. Feltman Professor of Modern Jewish History and as Director of the Museum of Jewish Civilization, which houses the *Hartford Remembers the Holocaust* exhibit. Previously, I served as the Miles Lerman Applied Research Scholar for Jewish Life and Culture at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), where I worked from 2004-2007. I coordinate the existing programs in Holocaust and genocide education at the Greenberg Center, and have organized several recent programs at the University of Hartford with the USHMM (the HERO Center is now a recognized Holocaust Education Center supported by the USHMM). As Director of the Museum of Jewish Civilization I have curated numerous exhibitions related to Holocaust and genocide education over the past ten years. I have written two books on Jewish displaced persons in the aftermath of the Holocaust, published numerous articles and encyclopedia entries in Holocaust studies, and am co-author of a source volume on *Jewish responses to the Holocaust* published by USHMM and AltaMira Press. I am presently co-authoring a new book called *Understanding and Teaching the Holocaust* for University of Wisconsin Press and completing a monograph on the postwar memory of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

My purpose in presenting here today is to provide my full support for the proposed legislation to require Holocaust and genocide education in Connecticut schools. Currently, eight states have varying forms of legislation requiring Holocaust and genocide education. Three states — Florida, Illinois and New Jersey — require genocide education from grades K-12, and have a state commission or task force to keep genocide education comprehensive and up to date. California and Michigan require genocide education from grades 7 or 8 through 12, and have a state commission or



task force. Indiana, New York and Rhode Island mandate genocide education from grades 7 or 8 through 12 but do not have a commission or task force.

Thanks to the efforts of various institutions of higher education and non-profit entities in our state, we have all of the elements needed to provide curricular support for teachers in our state to provide top-level Holocaust and genocide education. The Greenberg Center at the University of Hartford is committed to utilizing all of the resources at its disposal to ensure that teachers from around the state have necessary curricular materials, annual training workshops provided on professional development days, free and open access to the *Hartford Remembers the Holocaust* exhibit and museum at the University of Hartford, meetings with Holocaust and genocide survivors, and educational outreach materials provided by the HERO Center.

The Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies has been a center of excellence at the University of Hartford since its founding in 1985. We have recently moved into a 5000 square foot new office space on campus equipped with a research library, housing the 5000-volume the Hatikvah Holocaust Library, four new faculty offices, two state of the art seminar rooms, and a special collections room. In 2016 we opened the new *Hartford Remembers the Holocaust* exhibition in the Museum of Jewish Civilization, which introduces students, educators, and community members to the history of the Holocaust through the life stories of six local survivors of the Holocaust. Working together with Voices of Hope, our two organizations have managed to bring over 2000 students through the Museum on field trips to the University of Hartford – each visit punctuated by the most powerful experience of all for each of the students – the encounter with a Holocaust survivor. Through the voices of survivors, students and others connect to individual experiences during the Holocaust and are inspired to stand against oppression and hatred today.

The newly created HERO Center represents a strategic alliance between the Greenberg Center and Voices of Hope in the realm of Holocaust education, which will ensure that programs are not duplicated and resources will impact the maximum number of students and educators in the region. Leveraging the strengths of the two organizations: the passion of the next generation for Holocaust education and the academic rigor and prestige of an institution of



higher learning will enable Voices of Hope and the Greenberg Center to develop a unique partnership that can become a model for 21st century Holocaust education and scholarship nationally and internationally.

The HERO center serves as a community resource both on the University of Hartford campus and in schools and in the community throughout Connecticut, providing resources for educators, students, and community members with a focus on Holocaust and genocide education. The HERO Center will host Holocaust scholars, noted authors and survivors for public programs, educational opportunities for students and teachers around the region, and coordinate school visits to the Hartford Remembers the Holocaust exhibition at the Museum of Jewish Civilization at the Maurice Greenberg Center of Judaic Studies. The HERO Center maintains a library of Holocaust resources including books, original sources, videotapes and testimonials of Holocaust survivors, all of which are available to students, faculty, educators, visiting researchers and community members.

The program director of the HERO Center, Kimberly Ballaro, will be participating in the USHMM Conference of Holocaust Education Centers in May 2018 and will become an official educational ambassador of USHMM for our region.

Since 1999, the University of Hartford has hosted an annual Holocaust Educators Workshop for Middle and High School Teachers. Today, the Holocaust Educators Workshop and Awards Program is one of the largest programs dedicated to furthering Holocaust and genocide education in the Northeast. At this day-long workshop, area teachers learn about ways to teach about the Holocaust in middle and high school curricula in social studies, language arts, art, history, and other disciplines. Our distinctive approach combines academic expertise from the University of Hartford's College of Arts and Sciences (from disciplines as diverse as Politics and Government, History, Art History, English, Communications, Philosophy, and Psychology) and the College of Education, Nursing and Health Professions, together with the University libraries, and the involvement of major museums in New York and Washington, DC.

Educators who attend this workshop, who are already using cutting-edge technology and the highest standards of pedagogy, learn important methods of teaching their students the lessons of the Holocaust. Our ambition is to give teachers the tools to study the past so that students have a better



understanding of the challenges of our time in places like Bosnia, Rwanda, Sudan, Syria, and Myanmar while also equipping them to meet the demands of the future. Since the Holocaust Educators Workshop almost 20 years ago, hundreds of teachers from more than 100 different schools in five states, Israel, and Europe have attended our workshops and thousands of middle and high school students have benefitted from what their teachers have learned. Working together with State Department of Education, Prof. Patt also provides webinars on how to teach about the Holocaust for teachers in the state of CT.

Along with the workshop, the Greenberg Center annually presents awards which honor two prominent Hartford survivors of the Holocaust — Joseph Zola and Joseph Korzenik — who devoted their lives to the understanding of the Holocaust by middle and high school students, both locally and regionally. Award winners are selected following reviews of extensive recommendations, documentation on their courses, their teaching philosophy, and bibliography.

As the state of Connecticut explores legislation to mandate Holocaust and genocide education statewide, the need for this workshop will continue to grow. Anticipating this demand, the Greenberg Center is one of the founding members of the Connecticut Consortium on Holocaust and Genocide Education, a project to coordinate and collaborate on education initiatives in Connecticut. We are at the forefront of efforts to organize this Consortium which encourages the sharing of resources between various programs in Holocaust and genocide education around the state. Such coordination will ensure that programs are not duplicated and resources will impact the maximum number of students and educators in the state.

The University of Hartford also collaborates with the University of Connecticut's Dodd Center, Center for Judaic Studies and Contemporary Jewish Life, and Neag School for Education in its Holocaust and Genocide Education efforts. The ADL (Anti-Defamation League) also offers an excellent Holocaust education curriculum and workshop (Echoes and Reflections) and we work closely with Marji Lipshez-Shapiro to coordinate educational efforts. We also partner with Facing History and Ourselves to develop curricula in Holocaust and genocide education.

As we gather here today to discuss the importance of requiring Holocaust and genocide education in our schools, let us reflect on the power of memory.



- Why do we remember? We remember because we believe that we have a role to play in learning from the past in order to engage in the act of repairing the damage that exists in our world
- We remember on behalf of those who asked us that we not forget their names, that we not forget that they were murdered in the name of racial supremacy and state power
- We remember that it is our obligation to speak out when we witness racism, anti-semitism, xenophobia, sexism, homophobia, and all forms of discrimination and hate speech – this is the obligation of memory
- We remember because we want to give our students the tools to confront bullying and hate speech when they confront it, while also teaching them empathy, to understand it means to stand in the shoes of the “other”
- We remember because we live in a time when history can be re-written to suit political purposes, when denial and the whitewashing of history go hand-in-hand
- We remember that because evil exists in our world, all of us must play a role in confronting it; we do not forget that it exists, but we do not allow it to define our existence
- We remember that in the aftermath of the Holocaust and genocide, those who managed to survive asked that we never stand idly by again, that we never abandon those being persecuted in their time of need, and that we share their memories to ensure the next generation learns from their experiences
- We continue to fulfill this commandment through education, through united action, and through the strength of a community and a state united to remember the past in order to build a better present and a better future

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