

Testimony for Public Hearing

Education Committee

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An Act Concerning the Inclusion of Holocaust and Genocide Education and Awareness in the
Social Studies Curriculum

Good afternoon Education Committee members. My name is Melissa Torrente and I am a board member of Voices of Hope where I serve as co-chair of the educational materials sub-committee. I have been a Connecticut educator for twenty-one years. I have been active in Holocaust education for most of my teaching career. Now, more than ever, it is critical that Holocaust and genocide education and awareness become an integral part of our educational system in Connecticut schools. There are very few Holocaust survivors left to share their testimony with our students. In the next few years we will have a generation of students without a generation of survivors. We must tell their story.

Within the last week, multiple news sources stated that the Anti-Defamation League reported the highest single year increase in anti-semitic acts since it's first audit in 1979. Shockingly, of the 1,986 incidents that occurred in the United States, 457 of them occurred in K-12 schools. This was a 94% increase from the previous year. There were 204 incidents on college campuses.

This was an 89% increase from the previous year (Sullivan). Many of these incidents were in our neighboring states of New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts.

Worldwide, anti-semitic acts are generally declining according to the Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University (Brennan). However, this report also stated that they predict an uptick in verbal and visual anti-semitic acts in English speaking countries due to social media use (Brennan). Take a look around any Connecticut middle or high school and you would be hard pressed to find a student who did not own a mobile device or who does not have at least one social media account. Our teens are highly influenced by social media. It is our obligation as educators to be just as influential, hopefully more influential, than social media. Education is prevention. By teaching our current and future generations about the worst part of humanity we have the power to prevent the Holocaust and other genocides from happening again.

I am very fortunate that in my twenty-one years of service I have never experienced a student, teacher or parent deny that the Holocaust occurred. Not all of my colleagues have been so fortunate. I have however encountered students who have committed acts of anti-semitic vandalism on several occasions. My belief is that these incidents occurred from lack of enlightenment rather than malicious intent. Having a Holocaust and genocide curriculum in place would have prevented these acts from occurring. I have also worked with staff who were simply uninformed or misinformed and then relayed that information to students. Having guidelines in place for the teaching of the Holocaust and genocide will help to guide teachers towards the appropriate resources for teaching.

This act will not pose any financial burden to the State of Connecticut or local municipalities because the following resources are all vetted and free of charge to educators.

- Echoes and Reflections (Joint project of ADL, USC Shoah Foundation and Yad Vashem) offers full curriculum for middle school and high school students
- USC Shoah Foundation iWitness testimony
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum www.USHMM.org website
- Yad Vashem www.yadvashem.org website
- Facing History and Ourselves www.facinghistory.org
- HERO Center at the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Hartford - free field trips for students to small museum of Jewish heritage in Hartford, teacher resources and materials

This is just a sampling of resources that are available free of charge to teachers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Melissa Torrente

Brennan, David. "Vandalism, Bomb Threats and Abuse: Anti-Semitism in America Is Worst since 1994." *Newsweek*, Newsweek Media Group, 27 Feb. 2018, www.newsweek.com/us-anti-semitic-incidents-57-2017-821549.

Sullivan, Emily. "Anti-Semitic Incidents See Largest Single Year Increase on Record, Audit Finds." *NPR Connecticut Public Radio*, NPR, 27 Feb. 2018, 3:11,

[www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/02/27/589119452/anti-semitic-incidents-see-largest-single-year-increase-on-record-audit-finds.](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/02/27/589119452/anti-semitic-incidents-see-largest-single-year-increase-on-record-audit-finds)