

**Statement of Avery W
Student: Lewis S. Mills High Sc
to the Education Committee, Conn
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Public Hearing Testimony

Speaker:

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Doninger

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Chairman Senator Gaffey, Chairman Representative Fleischmann, and Members of the Committee, I deeply appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today at this hearing on the Genocide Awareness Education bill.

In late 2007, I attended a Leadership Conference where I saw the Danbury High School film on the genocide in Darfur. This was the first I knew of current genocide. I'm 17, I take honors and AP classes, how is this possible? I remember learning about the Holocaust in elementary school, but it seemed like ancient history. At no time in middle school or high school have I been taught about any genocide other than the Holocaust, not Cambodia, not Darfur, not Rwanda. This is not acceptable. In fact, I did not know about genocide in Cambodia until a week ago when I came to the Teach Against Genocide Lobby Day at the capitol.

When I became aware of the situation in Darfur, I wanted to help and I wanted other students at Lewis S. Mills High School to become informed. I prepared a proposal to present to Student Council. I included a long explanation of what was occurring in Darfur. I presented some ideas about what we could do about it, such as donating proceeds from events, showing the Danbury High School film, and opening discussion.

I wanted to pass the proposal out at a Student Council meeting, but beforehand I showed it to my two advisors. I was utterly shocked when I was told by my advisors that I was not allowed to hand out my proposal to Student Council because the cause was "too controversial". I was told that if students took the material I passed out home to their parents and their parents didn't approve then the school could get in trouble. We need funding for teacher trainings so that teachers are better equipped to respond to genocide and to teach about it.

This is a very sad commentary. How are we suppose to prevent future genocides from occurring if students don't even know about the genocide going on today? We are supposed to learn from past mistakes so that they aren't repeated, but if we don't know about them then we are doomed to repeat them. I believe that, like me, if others become informed they too will want to take action. Active citizens are good citizens and this type of education can fan the flame of activism among students, the next generation of leaders.

Despite the barriers initially presented by Student Council advisors, I found a teacher willing to serve as a club advisor and started a Save Darfur Club at LSM. There has been overwhelming interest by students. We have 30 members, are raising money by selling breakfast twice a week; are planning a benefit concert and a video game tournament for the spring, are currently doing 'Penny Wars'; and we are working on bringing guest speakers to our school. We can and are making a difference!

PLEASE, expand this bill so that it makes genocide education a permanent and sustainable part of secondary school curricula; it is a moral obligation. Please expand this bill to provide funding for teacher trainings; we can't afford not to.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am prepared to answer any questions.