



State of Connecticut
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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Dear Chairpersons Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischman and Members of the Education Committee,

I am here today to support HB 6499 which encourages school districts to include Holocaust and Genocide studies in their curriculum. While I believe that this should be mandatory, I understand that its inclusion in CGS Section 10-16b identifies it as a priority topic that can be instructive and helpful to Connecticut students. I hope however that this is a first step toward making it a permanent study requisite.

The States of Florida, New Jersey, Illinois, California, and New York already mandate Holocaust and Genocide studies as part of their curriculum. Reasons given for this required instruction include the following:

The Holocaust was a watershed event that impacted the course of human history, involving unimaginable atrocities that resulted in the murder of six million Jews and over five million others based on prejudice and racism;

Holocaust studies help students understand the roots and effects of prejudice and racism;

The Holocaust provides lessons of man's inhumanity to man, and the dangers of remaining silent, apathetic, and indifferent when people are oppressed or subjected to genocide;

Indifference to genocide and suffering violates our moral obligations and undermines our institutions of democracy and freedom;

The Holocaust and incidents of genocide illustrate how governments and political leaders can manipulate hatred and prejudice and use such emotions to justify discrimination, thereby inciting society to foster acts of hatred, murder, and discrimination;

Holocaust studies teach us why modern nations must work to promote tolerance, pluralism, and diversity as inherent principles of a free and democratic society;

Students can apply the lessons of the Holocaust to modern day incidents of genocide, such as Darfur, to reinforce their duty to speak up and become advocates in stopping all such acts of genocide;

Studying the Holocaust and genocide can teach students the importance of identity and self esteem, so that they are comfortable in speaking against all forms of racism and discrimination, so that they can identify genocide and work to prevent it, so that they can strengthen their own sense of responsibility and moral obligation;

Several school systems in Connecticut have already implemented Holocaust and Genocide Studies. My home town of Bloomfield is a prime example. Through the efforts of our

Performing Arts & Music Director, Dr. Joe Olzacki, a program for his music and arts students called the Identity Program was instituted several years ago. This program includes assigned reading, lectures by outside authorities and Holocaust survivors, a visit to the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC, and written assignments. At the Holocaust Museum, not only do students witness past genocide targeted against Jews, but they are lectured about ongoing genocide in Darfur and other places throughout the world. These studies inspired a young African-American student from Bloomfield, Raymond Clark, to create a musical composition about the Holocaust, which has been played by many musicians including the Yale Orchestra. The Bloomfield experience is a remarkable accomplishment that has been written about in the Hartford Courant and Hartford Magazine.

Mandating Holocaust and Genocide Studies should be our goal. The cost is minimal if anything, as curricula already exists in the five states mentioned above, in several Connecticut school systems, in organizations like the ADL that fight intolerance and racism, and even at the Dodd Center at UConn which houses the Nuremberg Papers of Thomas Dodd donated by Senator Chris Dodd and his family.

The importance of Holocaust and Genocide Studies has been discussed extensively by Holocaust survivor, author, lecturer, and Nobel Peace Prize Recipient Elie Wiesel. One of his well known quotes says:

"I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

I respectfully ask that you support the addition of Holocaust and Genocide Studies to public school curricula and hope that you can ultimately find a way to make this subject matter mandatory in CT Public Schools.

Respectfully,

Representative David Baram