

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-452

AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE

Title: EDUCATION AND AWARENESS IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM.

Vote Date: 3/19/2018

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/14/2018

File No.: 340

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

Co-Sponsors:

Sen. Beth Bye, 5th Dist.

Sen. George S. Logan, 17th Dist.

Rep. Patricia A. Dillon, 92nd Dist.

Rep. Andres M. Fleischmann, 18th Dist.

Rep. Bobby G. Gibson, 15th Dist.

Rep. Derek Slap, 19th Dist.

Rep. Juan R. Candelaria, 95th Dist.

Sen. Gary A. Winfield, 10th Dist.

Rep. Caroline Simmons, 144th Dist.

Sen. Eric C. Berthel, 32nd Dist.

Sen. Carlo Leone, 27th Dist.

Sen. Paul R. Doyle, 9th Dist.

Sen. Art Linares, 33rd Dist.

Rep. Rick Lopes, 24th Dist.

Sen. Catherine Osten, 19th Dist.

Sen. Steve Cassano, 4th Dist.

Sen. Tony Hwang, 28th Dist.

Sen. John A. Kissel, 7th Dist.

Rep. Arthur J. O'Neill, 69th Dist.

Sen. Toni Boucher, 26th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

The purpose of SB 452 is to include the Holocaust and genocide education and awareness in the social studies curriculum, beginning with the 2018-19 school year.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Diane Wentzell, Commissioner State of Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE):

Commissioner Wentzell testified on behalf The Connecticut State Department of Education in support of SB452. She recognized the importance of this topic and recommended that the curriculum be broadened to include Armenia, Rwanda and Cambodia.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Representative Themis Klarides, 114th Assembly District, House Minority Leader, House Republican Caucus:

House Minority Leader Klarides submitted testimony in favor of SB 452, but with concerns regarding the bill being an unfunded mandate on towns and municipalities. Although, she is in agreement of the importance of providing students with awareness of the Holocaust and of genocide, she believes adopting language from her proposal on expending the social studies curriculum would solve her concerns. She urged the committee to pass SB with the suggested edits, found in her proposal, to both provide an educational opportunity to students and provide towns and municipalities the independence and flexibility to do so.

Representative Derek Slap, 19th Assembly District

Representative Slap submitted testimony supporting SB 452. Rep. Slap conveyed the importance of teaching this horrific history to avoid if from happening again.

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff, ED. D. Executive Director, Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS):

Dr. Niehoff submitted testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Association of Schools in favor of SB 452. She shared her concerns about the increasing number of mandated courses and the resulting impact. She also asked for the Legislature to work more closely with key curriculum stakeholders prior to mandating curriculum.

Alan Lazowski, Chairman and CEO of LAZ Parking, CT

Alan Lazowski testified in favor of SB 452 with additional language suggestions. He testified as the son of two Holocaust survivors who bore witness to this horror. He shared his professional connection with Holocaust education and awareness as a board member of the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, the Anti-Defamation League CT and Founding Chairman of Voices of Hope.

He affirmed that acts of racism, Anti-Semitism, hatred and bigotry are on the rise in Connecticut and across the country. For example, in 2017, Anti-Semitic incidents increased by 57% the largest single year increase. Additionally, Similar incidents in K-12 schools have

doubled for the second year in a row. Given these facts, Mr. Lazowski asked the Committee to strengthen SB 452 by making Holocaust and genocide study a requirement for graduation.

Adele R. Jacobs, West Hartford, CT resident:

Adele testified in favor of SB 452. She shared her personal story as the daughter of two Holocaust survivors who experienced the hatred, torture, and starvation perpetrated by Nazi's. They survived concentration camps and death marches. Adele Jacobs then shared her father's biggest fear "Once the survivors are all gone, the Holocaust will be relegated to possibly a paragraph in a history book somewhere." She stated that our children must be educated on the Holocaust which will give them the understanding and knowledge to fight against hatred, bullying and evil.

Michael Bloom, Executive Director, JFACT

Mr. Bloom testified on behalf of JFACT in support of SB 452. He provided numerous reasons why this topic should be taught in schools especially in today's world. To demonstrate the importance of educating students about the Holocaust and Genocide, he shared the following nationwide incidents:

- 1) The ADL has reported that in CT there were twice as many anti-Semitic incidents reported in late 2017 than the same period in 2016.
- 2) Holocaust deniers running for Congress
- 3) Jewish students are hearing from others that the Holocaust did not occur
- 4) In 2017, there were 5 active genocides happening in the World.

In addition, he made the argument that this bill would have no additional cost and is a neutral budget. Lastly, he provided a number of organizations in Connecticut that offer free training, free curricula, free media links and free materials to schools and teachers.

Steven Ginsburg, Director Anti-Defamation League (ADL) Connecticut Regional Office:

Steven Ginsburg testified on behalf of ADL in support of SB 452. Steven testified about the positive impact of their Echoes & Reflections Holocaust education program that has trained more than 40,000 educators and reached an estimated 4.2 million students across the United States. He explained that Holocaust and Genocide education must occur in today's world because of the increased incidents of anti-Semitism, 57% around the country and 94% in K-12 schools. These statistics are also mirrored in Connecticut. Furthermore, He highlighted the number of Holocaust survivors continue to shrink across the world, while the number of individuals denying the Holocaust has grown.

Peter Fishman, President of Voices of Hope (VoH)A privately funded non-profit organization dedicated to holocaust and Genocide Education:

Peter Fishman testified on behalf of Voices of Hope in support of SB 452. Peter expressed the importance of teaching our students that small acts of hate, intolerance and indifference can lead to unspeakable acts. He stated that Holocaust and Genocide resources and curriculum are free and available via multiple legitimate sources. As a result, SB 452 does not create additional financial burdens to districts and schools.

Charles Chotkowski, Director of Research for the Holocaust Documentation Committee of the Polish American Congress. (HDCPAC):

Charles Chotkowski submitted testimony on behalf of HDCPAC in support of the intent of SB 452, but with some reservations of the language. He was in agreement the importance of including Holocaust and genocide education and awareness in public schools but emphasized the additional curriculum should include the experience of Poland and the Poles under German occupation as well. He believes adding an encompassing historical perspective to the curriculum will not only combat anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial, but also anti-Polish prejudices and stereotypes.

Jack Krikorian, Chairman, Armenian Genocide Commemoration Committee of Connecticut (AGCCC):

Jack Krikorian submitted written testimony on behalf of AGCCC in favor of SB 452. Jack firmly believes this education is vital to preventing future genocides and similar atrocities. He used 1915 Armenian genocide as a prime example of how genocide and Holocaust denial is a genocide and Holocaust condoned.

M. Saud Anwar, M.D, M.P.H, F.C.C.P, Co-chair American-Muslim Peace Initiative, Mayor of the Town of South Windsor:

M. Saud Anwar submitted testimony on his own behalf and supports SB 452. He tied on today's current systematic genocide in Myanmar, and closer to home to humanity forgetting our pledge to "Never Again". He underlined that we must not only learn from history, but through actions to ensure genocides do not happen again. He went on to say, that educating individuals about the past will shape responsible citizens to be capable to address present and future challenges.

Professor Avinoam Patt, Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies, University of Hartford HERO Center for Education Resource and Outreach Center (HERO)

Professor Avinoam testified on behalf of the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Hartford and newly created Hero Center in full support of SB 452. He shared his professional experience which established his credentials as an expert in this field. He mentioned that eight states have legislation require Holocaust and genocide education.

Specifically, three states -Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey- out of the eight begin Holocaust and genocide education at kindergarten until 12th grade and created a task force to keep curriculums comprehensive and up to date. While, California and Michigan require Holocaust and genocide education from 7th- 12th grade and created a state commission or task force to oversee the curriculum, Indiana, New York and Rhode Island do not have a state commission or task force. He went on to say that due to the efforts of various high education institutions and nonprofit entities, Connecticut has the resource to carry out a top-level Holocaust and genocide education and able to provide support to teachers teaching such a sensitivity topic. He pointed to The Greenberg Center at the University of Hartford, which has been working on the issue with other Holocaust educators since 1999, and the newly created HERO Center, who is in partnership with Voices of Hope and Greenberg Center, both whom are community resource and can extend their resources to the state.

Dr. Ellen Stoltz, Educator:

Dr. Stoltz testified in support of SB 452 and added a suggestion for consideration. Dr. Stoltz noted that the Holocaust is already part of Connecticut's 2015 Secondary Social Studies framework and suggested that this class should be a mandated requirement for graduation to combat against intolerance and promote cultural acceptance.

Kathy Fishman, Director of Voices of Hope:

Kathy read testimony on behalf Dr. Joseph Olzacki who strongly urged passage of SB 452 with added language. Dr. Olzacki briefly mentioned his 18 years of classroom and administration experience, as well as his current director position overseeing the partnership between the Republic of Rwanda's Ministry of Education and the University of Hartford's College of Education. He went on to say that as a teacher in a school in Bloomfield, he experienced first-hand the lack of effort the Social Studies Department placed on Holocaust and Genocide awareness as the department felt there were too many genocides to pick from. Moreover, the available resources were very limited, all which resulted to his students having little knowledge about current and past genocides.

As a result of this incident, Dr. Olzacki started The IDENTITY PROJECT in Bloomfield, CT, a six-year course, where students learn about genocide ideology, loss of identity and a vibrant history of the world. Moreover, students that participate in this course go on a free of charge fieldtrip to the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C.

He went on to highlight institutions, such as University of Hartford's Hero Center and Yale Center for Genocide Studies and the Dodd Center offer whom make courses like IDENTITY PROJECT possible because these institutions offer free resources, support, and field trips to increase Holocaust and genocide awareness in order to "never forget". Additionally, he stressed that it is not the lack of resources that is the problem, but that not every teacher wants to teach about Holocaust and genocide. For this reason, Dr. Olzacki urged the State to mandate Holocaust and genocide education and add language making the program a graduation requirement.

Jake from Fairfield, CT

Jake testified in favor of SB 452. He shared his experience growing up as the grandson of two Holocaust survivors who had suffered greatly at the hands of the Nazis. He shared that he grew up in Fairfield, CT an affluent town where bullying, vicious attacks and anti-Semitic slurs occurred. For these reasons SB 452 struck a chord with him and he expressed that children must be educated about the effects of evil and bullying, which this bill would accomplish.

Leah C. Katz, Avon, CT

Leah Katz testified in favor of SB 452. She shared her personal history as first generation American and child of two German Jewish immigrants. Leah shared that her parents instilled in her the importance of tolerance and acceptance, and later on learned the importance of telling her parents story to never forget the lessons of the past. She believes this bill is important for students, so they can learn about the Holocaust and genocide history in order to engage in meaningful dialogue to prevent the repeat of history.

Eitan Ehrlich, Sophomore University High School of Science and Engineering.

Eitan testified in favor of SB 452 because he believes that Holocaust and genocide education can play a crucial role in preventing future genocide and promote values and skills that can prevent modern day violence. He shared his personal experience as a practicing Jew. He revealed that he has experienced anti-Semitism just because he wears a yarmulke. He believes that prejudice is a result of ignorance.

Josh Pinsky:

Josh testified in favor of SB 452. He outlined that the Holocaust occurred because individual, organizations and governments made choices that legalized discrimination and allowed prejudice, hatred and annihilation of millions of people. According to Josh, the proposed curriculum will teach about the horrors and about those people who risked their lives to save strangers. Moreover, this bill will educate future generations about diversity and inclusion. Josh ended his testimony with the following powerful Elie Wiesel quote: "To forget the holocaust would be killing twice."

Alisa Sadka, West Hartford, CT Resident:

Alisa Sadka testified in favor of SB 452. She noted that 6 million Jews died during the Holocaust, multiple generations of families were lost. She highlighted this point using grandmother's family as an example. "Before the war, my grandmother had over 100 first cousins and after the war there were only a handful left." She urged the legislators to mandate Holocaust education and pass the bill to prevent the past from repeating itself.

Stuart Abrams, Teacher Avon High School , Resident of West Hartford, CT:

Mr. Abrams testified in full support of SB 452. He shared his experience of teaching about Genocide and Human Behavior at Avon High School for over 15 years. He discussed the power and influence of having Holocaust Survivors share their stories with his students. In addition, he emphasized that this sensitive topic positively changes his students. Moreover, he stated that his students will become the change that will make our world more civilized.

Julia S., Senior Avon High School, resident of Avon, CT:

Julia testified in person to support SB 452. She shared how much Mr. Abrams class impacted her on many levels. One of the ways included getting to know a 90-year-old Holocaust survivor named Bea. Instead of focusing only on the horrors of the Nazi regime, Bea shared storied of kindness, acceptance and courage that she experienced. Julia stated how important it is to actively remember, learn from survivor memories and listen to their stories.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE)

CABE testified in opposition of SB 452. While CABE acknowledges the importance of the issue, but respectfully asks the committee to refrain from adding a specific topic to the school curriculum. CABE expressed that avail resource regarding the Holocaust and genocide are available on the SDE website already to encourage and supply school districts who chose to add this issue to their curriculum, therefore a specific mandate is not needed.

Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (C.A.P.S.S):

Fran submitted written testimony on behalf of C.A.P.P.S. in support of the intent of SB 452 but opposed the mandate that this program be included in social studies curriculum. Fran expressed that the current language was confining and can lead to the teaching of holocaust and genocide in a specific course and grade. According to a recent survey taken by Superintendents, Holocaust and genocide education is already included in the school curricula. She went on to say that in some districts such education starts as early as second grade, but certainly an essential part of the social studies curriculum of middle and high school. Moreover, some districts are also including Holocaust and genocide education through the arts not just social studies class, which further reaches out to students. Based on this information, Fran believes the mandate is limiting, there is in opposition to the bill.

Daniel C. Giunqi, Senior Legislative Associate for CCM

Daniel testified on behalf of CCM with concerns about SB 452. Daniel believes the new curriculum places unrealistic burdens on districts and schools. From a resource perspective, the bill would require additional resources and would minimize instruction time in social studies. Furthermore, while he appreciates that the bill allows for the use of existing public or private materials and permits local or regional boards of education to accept gifts, grants and donations to assist in the development of the curriculum, these opportunities are not always available. Lastly, he mentioned that there are current school districts where this topic is already included in the curriculum.

Reported by: Kay O. Christopher

Date: April 5, 2018