

VERMONT HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL

HONORING LIVES LOST & STORIES OF SURVIVAL

...and you shall tell your children

Jan. 12, 2022 - Address to Senate Education Committee on S.189

Chair Campion - thank you for inviting me to testify today in support of Holocaust education in Vermont. Senator Terenzini thank you for initially sponsoring this essential bill. And Senate committee members thank you for taking up this important educational issue so promptly.

My name is Debora Steinerman. I live in Jeffersonville. I am blessed to be the child of fortunate Holocaust survivors; I am the relative of at least 23 victims of the Holocaust that I can name; and currently I am the president and a cofounder of the Vermont Holocaust Memorial – a nonprofit organization established in 2017 whose mission is Holocaust education in our state.

A recent survey found that students receiving Holocaust education are more open to differing viewpoints, more comfortable with people of a different race or sexual orientation, have a willingness to challenge incorrect or biased information, are more apt to confront intolerant behavior, and are more likely to stand up to negative stereotyping.

The rise of extremism and antisemitism in the U.S., and globally, including by those whose mission it is to deny, minimize, sanitize, rewrite, or mock the Holocaust, demonstrates why the need for Holocaust education is more urgent than ever before.

Based on information from the US Government Department of Justice - 2020 Hate Crime Statistics for Vermont show that the majority are motivated by religion, race, ethnicity, or ancestry bias. And those crimes have seen a dramatic increase here in the past year. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center one major contributor may be white nationalist hate group, Patriot Front, which has been tracked as operating in our state.

We all know antisemitism is sharply on the rise worldwide!

79% of Jewish college students are reporting fear of antisemitism on campus, not only from their peers, but from their professors.

That recent horrible Holocaust reenactment fiasco that took place in a D.C. school -- had already happened here in a Georgia Vermont school in 2017! And I'm sure you are aware of other such terribly disturbing instances that have occurred in our schools and neighborhoods.

So, you see, Vermont is not immune to antisemitism and Holocaust denial.

Senators, Vermont needs more than what this bill offers. Vermont needs to establish standards of Holocaust education for our school districts. My organization is standing by ready to help create those standards.

The *status* of Holocaust education in Vermont has already been researched for us. Why spend more time and money on a redundant report? Are you aware of the 2020, state by state, Claims Conference report on Holocaust knowledge among millennials and Gen Z?

I have submitted the link to that report for your information. But please allow me to summarize how Vermont students ranked in the survey:

42% of VT's youth couldn't name a single concentration camp or ghetto,
29% did not know what Auschwitz was,
29% believed fewer than 2 million Jews were killed,
65% did not know the actual number was six million,
43% have seen Holocaust denial or distortion on social media online,
52% have seen Nazi symbols on *their* social media platforms in the past 5 years,
7% think Jews caused the Holocaust,
And most importantly, 79% think it's important to teach about the Holocaust, in part, so it doesn't happen again.

To date, 23 states already have enacted Holocaust education requirements:

- Arizona
- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Florida
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Kentucky
- Maine
- Michigan
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- New York
- North Carolina
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Virginia
- Wisconsin

Let's add Vermont to that list!

However, even in states that have mandates, the results show that it's not enough to just pass a mandate and assume that teachers will get it right. Or in some cases, even try to get it right. We must support our educators with Holocaust education standards that make sure teachers are doing the work and doing it appropriately.

When studying the Holocaust, students are engaging with complicated moral questions, many of which do not come with simple answers.

Learning about the Holocaust:

- Encourages students to promote social justice, human rights, and genocide awareness.
- Supports the effective examination of basic moral issues.
- Provides reflections on the dangers of remaining silent, apathetic, and indifferent to the oppression of others.
- Helps students identify danger signals and to know when to take constructive actions.
- Supports students in understanding the roots and ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping in any society.
- Provides understanding about the responsibility of citizens in any society.
- Has the potential to encourage young people to think about how to make a positive impact through individual and group actions.
- Gives students the opportunity to develop an awareness of the value of diversity in a pluralistic society.
- Encourages sensitivity to the positions of minorities.
- Helps students to develop an expanded view of humanity.

As students gain insight into the Holocaust, they gain awareness of the complexity of the subject and a perspective on how a convergence of factors can contribute to the disintegration of democratic values.

Most students demonstrate a high level of interest in studying Holocaust history precisely because the subject raises questions of fairness, justice, individual identity, peer pressure, conformity, indifference, and obedience—issues that adolescents confront in their daily lives.

The Federal Never Again Education Act, which passed in 2020, provides money and resources to states needing help funding their mandates. That now *removes* funding as an obstacle to requiring Holocaust education here.

We can not let Holocaust education slip through the cracks!

The Vermont Holocaust Memorial has heard from hundreds of Vermonters - parents, administrators, teachers, students – who want Holocaust education properly taught in their schools. Students at Mt. Abraham Union High School even started a petition last year asking to Help Make Holocaust Education Required in All Vermont Public Secondary Schools – it received close to 1000 signatures and hundreds of offers to testify and help.

Our speakers have presented in schools across the state, from elementary thru high school, since 2017. We have professional development workshops for educators, we offer projects, exhibits, and many resources and lesson plans to help our educators teach the invaluable lessons of the Holocaust.

The call to us has been great. Especially lately – because of students’ loss of connection resulting from missed opportunities due to the pandemic. Learning is most impactful with repetition. Repetition at different grade levels and taught by professional educators. ..But our small volunteer organization cannot continue educating about the Holocaust on our own.

Senators, please skip the costly and unnecessary status report. The backing of your fellow committee members and Senate colleagues in sponsorship of this Act is clear and convincing.

Aid our teachers and students by establishing the standards needed for this important portion of their curriculum. The resources already exist. Our educators want it. That’s been proven by the registrations we’ve received to each of our annual workshops and the many requests to share our family stories of survival.

Let’s make sure our Vermont students properly learn what it means to be upstanders. Let’s educate them NOW on the lessons learned from the Holocaust, to bring about a more tolerant and caring world for them and for the future.

In commemoration of International Holocaust Remembrance Day later this month, I urge you to make it your obligation to ensure when we say “Never again” - Holocaust history is understood, learned, and accomplished!

Thank you for your support. I’m available to answer any questions.

Debora Steiner

President and Cofounder

Vermont Holocaust Memorial

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Stay tuned to our news and events on our [website](#) and [Facebook page](#).

The Vermont Holocaust Memorial is a registered 501(c)(3) organization.

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