

Debora Steinerman
Vermont Holocaust Memorial
House Education Committee – April 26, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Section 4 of S.167. My name is Debora Steinerman. I live in Jeffersonville. I am the daughter of Holocaust survivors and the president and founder of the Vermont Holocaust Memorial – an educational, virtual “museum without walls.”

Although Section 4 contains data collection provisions, I would like to take a few minutes to talk about the importance of Holocaust education in Vermont schools.

Antisemitism and challenges to fact-based education have escalated globally, including in Vermont. According to the [Anti-Defamation League’s recent report](#) **43 reported antisemitic incidents were tracked in Vermont in 2023 --up from 6 in 2022.** That’s roughly a **617% increase year over year.** On a per capita basis Vermont had the **second highest concentration of antisemitic incidents** after New Jersey. Promoting the truth of this history and reaching more young people from diverse backgrounds has never been more crucial.

Parents, teachers, and students have shared with us how invaluable the lessons of the Holocaust are, and how they must be included as a part of their school’s curriculum. A teacher from Wolcott mentioned how she met a guidance counselor who confided in her that she did not know anything about the Holocaust and wanted to educate herself, as it wasn’t taught in Vermont schools. A parent from East Hardwick told us her oldest child, a sophomore in H.S., had never studied the Holocaust.

Especially alarming is a December 2023 [poll by The Economist/YouGov](#), which found **half of young adults (ages 18 – 29) believed the statement "The Holocaust is a myth."** This shocking statistic underscores the need for meaningful, immersive Vermont Holocaust education. It is vital that current and future generations understand our collective responsibility to combat antisemitism and hate in all forms.

Vermont is the only state in New England that does not have legislation regarding Holocaust education. VT Holocaust Memorial is currently the state’s only resource for secondary schools to Holocaust information. We have grown our collaborations with many like-minded organizations – helping us bring these lessons across the state through speaking engagements, professional development workshops, and more.

The AOE has “sponsored” VT Holocaust Education Week efforts that VTHM has introduced, organized, and distributed. VTHM is a tiny volunteer run organization funded solely by individual donations and small grants. We are not educators. We supplement what should be comprehensively taught in the classroom. However, our organization’s volunteer members are ageing, and we will not be able to continue this invaluable work ourselves much longer.

This morning, Mr. Fisher said clearly that he cannot say with certainty that all students are being taught about the Holocaust. He said student self-report is inaccurate and that asking the supervisory unions to report is inaccurate because they might not do it. He basically said that the AOE has no idea what is actually being taught in Vermont’s schools. This report data is crucial and must be done properly. The Holocaust is factual history. Nothing partisan about it.

There must be assurances that the Holocaust will be properly included in VT schools' curriculum in perpetuity. The crosswalks don't guarantee anything.

Despite the importance of requiring Holocaust education in schools, and our advocacy to try to make that happen, the Senate chose to address this issue via data collection in S.167 as, what we hope is, a first step. If this committee is also not ready to set forth standards to require Holocaust education in Vermont schools, then we ask for your support for Section 4 of S.167.

We would like to offer the following amendments to shorten the timelines in each subsection:

Sec. 4. HOLOCAUST EDUCATION; DATA COLLECTION; REPORT

(a) On or before ~~December~~ September 1, 2024, the Agency of Education shall request from all supervisory unions a report containing information regarding whether and where Holocaust education is taught in the prekindergarten through grade 12 supervisory union-wide curriculum. The request required under this subsection shall be developed in consultation with the Vermont Holocaust Memorial.

(b) On or before ~~September 1, 2025~~ December 1, 2024, Supervisory unions shall report back to the Agency with the information requested pursuant to subsection (a) of this section.

(c) On or before ~~January 1, 2026~~ February 1, 2025, the Agency shall submit a written report to the Senate and House Committees on Education with information, organized by supervisory union, regarding the inclusion of Holocaust education in curriculum across the State. Additionally, the report shall include an explanation of how curricula are developed, including an analysis of how Holocaust education fits into the standards for student performance adopted by the State Board of Education pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 164(9).

(d) On or before ~~January 1, 2026~~ November 1, 2024, the Agency shall provide all supervisory unions with Holocaust education resources, which shall be developed in consultation with the Vermont Holocaust Memorial

Explanation for the date changes –

Subsection (a) – We ask you to change the date to September 1, 2024, as we can work with AOE to develop the request to schools by then.

Subsection (b) – We ask you to change the date to December 1, 2024: 3 months should be sufficient time for schools to report back to AOE.

Subsection (c) – We ask you change the date to February 1, 2025: 2 months should be sufficient time for AOE to put the reports together and prepare a report for the Legislature.

Subsection (d) – We ask you to change the date to November 1, 2024, as we can work with AOE starting now to develop the resources for supervisory unions. It is important to get these resources to the schools as soon as possible so that they may use them as they like in their teaching of the Holocaust.

If I may, I'd like to end with one last point:

Holocaust Survivor Bat-Sheva Dagan who witnessed unimaginable horrors, including the loss of her entire family, dedicated her life to Holocaust education offering the following unique perspective to students:

***"Ask today to hear my story, because today is the future's yesterday.
Ask today, because tomorrow you will discover it is already too late.***

Ask today, because tomorrow it will only be hearsay."

We cannot expect Vermont students to ask about the Holocaust if they are not taught about the Holocaust. If we wait it will be too late. We cannot let misinformation and Holocaust denial spread. The last of the survivors and witnesses to the Holocaust are aged. Many have died. Bat-Sheva Dagan passed away this year at 99. Current and future VT students must receive fundamental lessons about the deadly consequences of unchecked antisemitism and hate that Holocaust education will supply.

The alarming rise of antisemitism across our country is a stark reminder we need to do more than just simply say 'never again. Educating about the horrors of the Holocaust is more important now than ever before.

Thank you.

For your consideration: May 6th --in just over a week-- marks the internationally recognized date for Holocaust Remembrance Day. We think it would be most fitting to be able to announce the passing of this timely legislation in connection with that date.