



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senator Alberta Darling
Members, Senate Committee on Education

FROM: Kim Vercauteren, Executive Director, Wisconsin Catholic Conference *Kim Vercauteren*

DATE: February 22, 2021

RE: Support for Senate Bill 69, Holocaust and Genocide Education

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony on behalf of the Roman Catholic bishops of Wisconsin in support of Senate Bill 69. This bill incorporates the Holocaust and other genocides into the state's model social studies standards for education and requires Holocaust and genocide instruction for certain grades at public, charter, and private schools participating in the parental choice programs.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that:

Actions deliberately contrary to the law of nations and to its universal principles are crimes, as are the orders that command such actions. Blind obedience does not suffice to excuse those who carry them out. Thus the extermination of a people, nation, or ethnic minority must be condemned as a mortal sin. One is morally bound to resist orders that command genocide. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2313)

It continues, "[e]very act of war directed to the indiscriminate destruction of whole cities or vast areas with their inhabitants is a crime against God and man, which merits firm and unequivocal condemnation." (CCC, no. 2314)

While we appreciate that the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction has revised the current model academic standards to incorporate instruction on human rights, the Holocaust, and other genocides, the WCC takes this opportunity to acknowledge its support for the continued inclusion of these subjects in our state academic standards as required under SB 69.

Under the bill, a school board, independent charter school, and private school participating in a parental choice program must include instruction on the Holocaust and other genocides at least once in grades 5 to 8 and once in grades 9 to 12. While the WCC does not generally support mandates imposed upon private schools, in this instance, the subject matter is of such great importance that our duty to educate and condemn genocide compels our support for SB 69. We appreciate that this bill allows for the school to utilize discretion in developing its curriculum based on the model provided.

We urge your support for Senate Bill 69. Thank you.

**Speaker Testimonies for Senate Committee on Education
Public Hearing, SB-69**

Tuesday, February 23, 2021, 10:30 am
Wisconsin State Capitol
2 E Main Street – Madison, WI

Introduction for SB-69 Testimony Presented by Beverly Greenberg

Thank you Chairman Darling and Vice Chairman Bernier and committee members of the Education Committee of the Wisconsin Senate. I am Bev Greenberg, Chair of the Taskforce on Holocaust Education in Wisconsin, and I am here today in support of SB-69, Holocaust and Other Genocide Education in Middle and High Schools. I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the author of SB69, Senator Alberta Darling. Her tireless leadership has been inspirational every step of the way. Thanks also goes to the authors of AB-55 in the Assembly, Rep. John Plumer and Rep. Lisa Subeck. Their testimony has said it all passionately. I would like to thank Speaker Robin Vos for his support and leadership in this effort.

I am a proud lifetime resident of Wisconsin. By way of introduction, I was a middle and high school teacher, an Associate Executive Director of the Zoological Society, and a 20 year executive at Time Warner Cable, serving 130 franchises throughout our state. In addition, I was Chair of the Board of Aurora Health Care, and President of the Aurora Health Care Foundation. I hold an honorary doctorate from Cardinal Stritch University. Today, I am executive producer of the local TV show on ABC called Project Pitch It, a local shark tank like show, dedicated to making Wisconsin an entrepreneurial destination. I have tried to make a positive impact in our State whenever possible.

But, nothing, nothing, I have ever done comes close to being more significant and critical for our present and future generations than helping to pass SB-69.

Many of us grew up in a home where we learned the values of tolerance and diversity, dignity and respect for all human beings. SB69 will ensure that all Wisconsin middle and high schoolers will learn about the Holocaust and events leading up to and encompassing the most hideous genocide in modern history. It is the only time when one government set out to annihilate an entire population of people throughout the world—and nearly succeeded.

We all know that we must remember history or be doomed to repeat it. Yet, here are the facts: Recent research shows the memory of the Holocaust is fading. 22% of Millennials surveyed said they hadn't heard of the Holocaust! The recent audit of antisemitic incidents in Wisconsin showed a 329% increase in anti-Semitic incidents since 2015. Middle school activity of hate, harassment and threats is up 250%. Almost 25% of recorded hate incidents take place among middle schoolers or on college campuses. 93% of people surveyed said students should learn about the Holocaust in schools. And, this same study suggested that 8 in 10 Americans believe that government should play a role in combating antisemitism. There is power in education.

There is no risk to adopting SB69, only benefit to our state's most valuable resource, our children. The Nathan and Esther Pelz Holocaust Education and Resource Center (HERC) in Milwaukee is prepared to provide the help and resources needed through teaching materials, curriculum guides, and speakers to assist teachers state-wide at no charge or cost. Our task force, many of whom are here today, including Task Force Co-Chair, Jodi Majerus and Frank Busalacchi, have all worked tirelessly to research what other states have already done regarding Holocaust education.

Please act NOW, and join the 16 other states, including Illinois, Michigan and Indiana, who have already passed mandated Holocaust education. 17 other states currently have pending legislation.

Today, you will hear from students, teachers, school administrators, and community leaders explaining the impact of Holocaust education. You will also hear from a second generation speaker who shares her dad's story so that students will have the truth about the darkest days in modern history. A brave, brilliant, and virtuous Holocaust survivor, Eva Zaret, is an invaluable resource to our state. Eva also answered Baraboo High School's call for help and spoke to their students, giving of her precious time and health. Today she will provide her firsthand account of history. You will also hear from the Nathan and Ester Pelz Holocaust Education Resource Center's new Executive Director, Samantha Abramson. She brings more than a decade of dedication to non-profits and museums, including the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Smithsonian Institutions. She passionately joins HERC to connect all generations with history to inspire change for a better tomorrow. Each speaker has his or her own story to tell providing compelling testimony to the power and necessity of Holocaust education NOW! Most importantly they have all observed the transformation of others after studying the Holocaust.

"For evil to flourish, it only requires good men to do nothing..." – Simon Wiesenthal, Holocaust Survivor. And, Elie Wiesel said "a destruction, and annihilation that only man can provoke – only man (or woman) can prevent."

Thank you for listening, and thank you for nobly serving our great state. Please support SB69.

Respectfully submitted,
Beverly Greenberg
9429 N. Broadmoor Rd.
Bayside, WI 53217

[Eva Zaret]

Testimony on SB-69 Presented by Sarah Gesner

Hello — My name is Sarah Gesner, and a year ago I came to you as a senior at The Prairie School in Racine, WI. Today, I am testifying as a freshman at UW-Madison. I am here to speak in support of SB-69/AB-55. Thank you very much for allowing me this opportunity. I am here as a student who learned, fortunately, about the Holocaust in my 8th grade English class.

After learning about the horrors and indignities of the Holocaust, I can speak not only to a shift in knowledge among my classmates over the years — many of whom were unaware of the Holocaust at all before this unit was taught — but also a shift in their behavior. In school and throughout the greater community, my classmates became more aware of prejudice, of bullying, and of how devastating those kinds of oppressive behaviors can be. One specific impact receiving a Holocaust education had was on me personally. I felt more comfortable and safe in my school knowing that my classmates were more informed and aware. I was also blown away by the Assembly and Senate committee meetings that I participated in last year — which were incredible lessons in themselves about the educational power of the Holocaust.

Treating all people with dignity is not only the best way to be, it's actually the easiest way to be. Bullying may not seem as significant as the Holocaust, but it matters a lot in our everyday lives. After the Holocaust unit in middle school, my classmates became noticeably more tolerant. The bottom line is that we need Holocaust education so that not only do we never forget the Holocaust, but also so that this kind of intolerant behavior is never repeated on any level.

I have a personal connection to the Holocaust. This is a biography of my Great, Great Uncle Eli Rochelson who suffered in Holocaust concentration camps. It's called Eli's Story. But just because I have a personal connection to the Holocaust does not mean that the lessons of the Holocaust should matter more to me. They're lessons everyone should value, understand, and act upon.

This Bill was important to me a year ago as a high school student, it's important to me today as a freshman in college, and I'm quite sure it will be important to me for the rest of my life.

Thank you again for allowing me to speak in support of SB-69/AB-55.

Testimony on SB-69 Presented by Jody Fuller

Good afternoon,

I wanted to thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts today regarding Holocaust education in the state of Wisconsin. I am a middle school teacher at Salem School in Kenosha County. I have been involved with teaching the Holocaust to middle school students for the past twenty-five years, and it has truly changed my life, as well as the lives of many of my students.

A paperclip-how many of you use this simple item throughout your day? As a middle school teacher, I admit to having them in every color and size. But for me, the meaning behind this simple piece of metal is much more than an item used to hold things together. This paperclip symbolizes the past as well as the future. Did you know that during WWII, many Norwegians wore a single paperclip on their lapels as a form of silent protest against the Nazi occupation? I share this story with my middle school students because I know that history speaks to us, and all of my students can relate to the importance of learning about our past to help shape our future.

1996 was the year that I met a Holocaust survivor, Walter Peltz. It was a moving experience that has forever changed how I see that time in history. Walter's story always talked about empathy and survival. As an educator, I believe that history improves our decision making, and it helps us understand change and the development of our society. If we do not provide our students with the tools needed to stop hatred, the past will repeat itself.

Holocaust education provides our students with the needed armor to stop the spread of hatred, and it engages our students in meaningful discussions to understand the complexities of the Holocaust. That is a powerful tool in equipping our students for their future. I personally have educated over 3,000 students, and the knowledge of how Holocaust lessons have impacted their lives is powerful.

Education is the key to making sure the past does not repeat itself. If we want to make changes in our society, then we need to educate our citizens, and this bill will help ensure WI students are educated on the Holocaust and other genocides. One of my former students told me that she sees the world differently after studying the Holocaust. She said that it is important for us to learn about our history so that when an election comes, we search carefully for our candidate so that we never have to go through something like that again.

Kiana, another one of my students, shared her feelings on Holocaust education. "Learning about the Holocaust affected me greatly. At first it was almost hard to believe something so horrific actually happened and was allowed by the world to take place. I view the world differently, but surprisingly not in a negative light. The hero's we learned about like Anne Frank and Elie Wiesel showed how much love and faith will always be stronger than hatred and fear, even when it seems incredibly strong. The way Anne Frank still believed that people were truly good is amazing and I believe it's the way we should all see the world." Anne Frank stated,

“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.”

This is the real reason for educating our youth and supporting Holocaust education in our state. Please senators, do not wait another single moment. Vote to support this bill. Thank you.

Testimony on SB-69 Presented by Nancy Kennedy Barnett

Good Morning. I am the child of a Holocaust survivor from Budapest, Hungary and am a second-generation speaker teaching my father's story of survival. My name is Nancy Kennedy Barnett and reside at 7936 N Fairchild Road in Fox Point, Wisconsin. I am an active community volunteer and leader, a past president of my synagogue and the current Chair of the Harry & Rose Samson Family JCC. I was an auxiliary policewoman of the Fox Point Police for 12 years and currently sit on the board of the Holocaust Education Resource Center in Milwaukee. My father, now deceased, was in a concentration camp in Europe. When alive, he taught about the Holocaust, speaking to hundreds of people in our State. We have lost witnesses to this horrific time in history, but the lessons and messages cannot be forgotten. When I teach, I not only speak about the atrocities and the past, I use it as a lens to illustrate what can happen when hatred and bullying is left unchecked. The dehumanization at the center still exists today!

I am here to ask you to pass SB-69 and I want to tell you about an interaction with a student that transpired on May 19, 2019, when I was asked to speak to 130 8th grade students at North Shore Middle School in Hartland, Wisconsin.

These students had traveled to the Illinois Holocaust Museum in Skokie, Illinois the day before. After I had spent an hour with them, telling my father's story, during the question-and-answer time, an 8th grade girl raised her hand and clearly troubled, said to me, 'so...I was talking to my mom last night, and my mom says that she has a friend that says the Holocaust never happened...but should have!'

Clearly, this student, now equipped with factual information from the museum and my presentation, was questioning the information received from her mother the night before. She had not been taught the truth before this week. And she wanted to know! We must teach the truth! As the decision makers of tomorrow, students must understand the consequences of indifference and hate. They must not be bystanders, they can be an upstander instead by being someone who gets involved; they can be proactive and have the courage to speak up and care.

Holocaust education not only teaches the history of one of the most violent periods in all mankind, it teaches an understanding of the ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping, and an examination of what it means to be a responsible and respectful person today. We must teach tolerance of diversity in a pluralistic society and how to nurture and protect democratic values and institutions.

This bill, once passed, will ensure that we **do** teach a painful part of humanity's past while preparing citizens to live respectfully today. Thank you very much.

Testimony on SB-69 Presented by Frank Busalacchi

My name is Frank Busalacchi. I have spent the majority of my professional life serving the people of Wisconsin. I was a long-time labor leader and was Wisconsin Secretary of Transportation for eight years. Now retired, I serve on the board and am Chairman of the Operations Committee for the Southeast Wisconsin Professional Baseball Park District Board. Today I ask your support for The Holocaust Education Act.

Since leaving state government, my wife Robin and I have traveled extensively around the world. We have seen beautiful places, met incredible people and had wonderful experiences. Our tours in Berlin left me speechless as we explored the many memorials to Holocaust victims, constructed to remind people to "Never Forget" the atrocities of their not-so-distant past.

We left our share of museums, cities and whole regions with sad, heavy hearts after witnessing the chaos and destruction caused by hatred and racism. It becomes even more disturbing when you see that our world isn't evolving. Every time you open the computer, there are stories involving violent personal or mass attacks throughout our country and in Wisconsin.

What does it take for people to realize we are one human family? What can we do to encourage respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures? How can we make sure history doesn't repeat itself? Learning the lessons of the Holocaust does open eyes and can change behaviors.

Education is the key. Our children need to know where intolerance can lead. It's important that our young people explore the horrors of the past. We can't change history but hopefully we can learn from it. The Holocaust Education Act is an important step. A number of states have passed this legislation and many are in the process of doing so. It is important for Wisconsin to join them now. Please support SB-69.

Testimony on SB-69 Presented by Jodi Habush Sinykin

Good morning Chairman, Committee members, I too thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today and ask for your support of SB-69.

I am Jodi Habush Sinykin, a practicing attorney of close to 30 years specializing in environmental law and policy matters. Born and raised in Wisconsin, my love for our state runs deep. It is in Wisconsin where I raised my family, established my law practice, and strive to make a positive impact in my lifetime. Like those who spoke before me, I see SB-69 as a rare opportunity—for all of us—to convey a lasting, valuable benefit to current and future generations of Wisconsinites.

For years I've served as cochair of the Holocaust Education Resource Center's Education Committee, which draws an exceptional group of educators from across the greater Milwaukee-Waukesha metropolitan area, all of whom share a commitment to teaching the lessons of the Holocaust to their respective students enrolled at Marquette University High School, Milwaukee Public Schools, Divine Saviors Holy Angels, Catholic Memorial High School in Waukesha and more.

I've learned from these educators that when students are given the opportunity to learn about the Holocaust, they develop a greater acceptance of diversity, a richer understanding of America's role in World War II, and an enhanced intolerance to bullying. With the benefit of Holocaust education, young people are taught to stand up, not stand by, in the face of intolerance and hate.

As you heard and saw for yourselves this morning, Eva Zaret, a Holocaust survivor and incredible person, absolutely epitomizes bravery and goodness and concern for future generations in her unwavering efforts to confront antisemitism and Holocaust ignorance here in Wisconsin.

Yet, survivors like Eva can only drive so far, only do so much. Children of survivors, like Nancy Barnett, can only reach so many, no matter how passionately they care or how extraordinary their efforts. Same goes for the teachers and Holocaust educators you'll hear from today.

There is no escaping the fact that without SB-69's educational mandate, school age children and teens in most parts of Wisconsin will have little opportunity to learn about the Holocaust or the world events and human actions that allowed its atrocities to take place. A survey published by the Pew Research Center last year, revealed that fewer than half of American adults know even a modicum of facts about the Holocaust. As other state legislatures around the nation have recognized, an educational deficit of this magnitude can be surmounted only through an initiative like Wisconsin's SB 69. But we need your leadership to make it happen.

I end with these words written in April 1945 by one of our nation's most celebrated generals and statesmen, then General Dwight D. Eisenhower, after he toured a German concentration camp during World War II:

“The things I saw beggar description. ... The visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were so overpowering as to leave me a bit sick... I made the visit deliberately, in order to be in position to give first-hand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops tendency to charge these allegations merely to 'propaganda.’”

With SB-69, we in Wisconsin have the opportunity, in the here and now, to uphold and stay true to this great man’s belief in the power of truth and education to maintain a collective memory of the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust. Wisconsin can and should join the states leading this important effort. Thank you for your support of SB-69.

Respectfully submitted,

Jodi Habush Sinykin

Whitefish Bay, WI

(414) 507-0004

Testimony on SB-69 Presented by Bruce Varick

Thank you for the honor of addressing the Senate Committee on Education. On behalf of the Superintendent of Schools of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and our 102 schools, I would like to state our strong support for the passage of Senate Bill 69 to require the state superintendent of public instruction to incorporate the Holocaust and other genocides into the model academic standards for social studies and to develop model curricula and instructional materials on the same subject.

The Holocaust, or Shoah, is a seminal event in the history of mankind. More than six million men, women, and children were intentionally, systematically, and ruthlessly exterminated for the singular reason that they were Jewish. Millions of others were also put to death. While we cannot change what happened, we must acknowledge that the Holocaust was not an inevitable event. Through a thorough and comprehensive study of the Holocaust and other genocides of history, we can learn valuable lessons and insights applicable to contemporary times that must be passed on to today's students...our leaders of tomorrow...so that history does not repeat itself. So that groups of people are not targeted for death due to their race, ethnicity, or religion.

We believe in the necessity of Holocaust education, in our schools taught with a recognition and understanding of the history of our Church, taught through the lens of the Catholic worldview, and taught in accord to the principle of solidarity that "highlights in a particular way the intrinsic social nature of the human person, the equality of all in dignity and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples towards an ever more committed unity." (Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (2005), No. 192)

We appreciate that while the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction will establish the base standards, individual school districts will have the flexibility to decide when Holocaust Education is most appropriate in their community.

We enjoy a genuine, growing partnership with the Nathan and Esther Pelz Holocaust Education Resource Center that allows our schools direct access to reliable, authentic instructional resources. We further partner with HERC to provide direct teacher training. We look forward to our continued journey together on this shared mission.

In closing, please let me reiterate: just as we support the requirements of Act 143 for all schools, the Superintendent of Schools of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee supports requiring Holocaust education in all schools in the State of Wisconsin.

Thank you,

Bruce Varick

Associate Superintendent

23 February 2021

Testimony on SB-69 Presented by Jodi Majerus

I wish to thank the authors of the Bill AB-55 in the Assembly, John Plumer and author of Senate Bill SB-69, Senator Alberta Darling.

I am Jodi Majerus. My parents Ray and Alyce Majerus raised three children, Rick, Tracy and me. My parents valued education and impressed upon us the learning of history to understand the present. History provides more than dates and events; history shows why and how things happen. I remember many discussions about the meaning and lessons of the Holocaust – bias, bigotry and hate.

We were raised to respect all individuals and live by the Golden Rule. We were fortunate to have parents like Ray and Alyce that lived these values and instilled them in their children. Not everyone is as fortunate to have parents like Ray and Alyce.

I stand before you today, asking for your support of Bill AB-816, as all children in Wisconsin need to learn about the lessons of the Holocaust, so it will never be repeated again.

Recently retired, I was asked to serve on the Nathan & Esther Pelz Holocaust Education Resource Center's Board of Directors and the Education Task Force to develop a plan to include Holocaust and genocide education in the middle and high schools throughout Wisconsin. I always emphasize the importance of incorporating the Holocaust and other genocide education into the state model social studies program. I then expand on the reasons why it is necessary. I talk about the topic so frequently one of my friends asked: So, Jodi, are you converting to Judaism?

The answer is no, I am not. But this is not a Jewish, Hmong, Serbian, Catholic, Muslim, Hispanic or green hair issue.

This bill is for all children and people in Wisconsin to learn about the atrocities of the Holocaust so our world will be a better place. Thank you for consideration of this important legislation.

Jodi Majerus
6421 Betsy Ross Place
Wauwatosa, WI 53213

Conclusion for SB-69 Testimony Presented by Samantha Abramson

My name is Samantha Abramson, and I am the newly appointed Executive Director of the **Nathan and Esther Pelz Holocaust Education Resource (HERC)**. I grew up in Wisconsin, and it was my passion for Holocaust education and the transformative power of history to shape lives that led me to pursue a museum career in Washington, DC. And it is that same passion that has brought me back to Wisconsin.

I am returning with my husband and daughter, who is the great granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor named Gizella, a Jewish woman who at the age of 13 worked for the resistance during the Holocaust, survived torture and imprisonment at Majdanek, and emigrated to the United States and dedicated her life to educating students about the Holocaust.

When I think about Gizella's story, I can't get over the incredible resilience of this 13-year-old girl to fight for her own survival as well as others. Where did she get that strength? And then I think about the students we hope to reach through this Holocaust Education mandate – many the same age as Gizella. And I think about how this bill would empower our state's students to find the strength within themselves, to be kind to one another, to stand up for what is right, and to become "Upstanders" within their communities. The world surely needs more of those.

Today, you heard from Holocaust survivors, educators, students, and citizens advocating for a swift passage of SB-69 for Holocaust Education. We have shared compelling personal stories and startling statistics that **convey an urgent need for teaching young people the lessons of the Holocaust and other genocides.**

As the only organization solely dedicated to promoting Holocaust Education, HERC is committed to supporting the needs of Wisconsin's students and educators. Our team has been working tirelessly to create innovative resources, including a **new, cutting-edge Holocaust Education Map website** that will be offered at no cost to all Wisconsin educators. With over 100 lesson plans, this site will allow educators to filter and sort by Wisconsin Social Studies standards, class duration, grade level, and theme to custom-build learning experiences for their classrooms.

SB-69 is a promise to educators and students throughout the state that they will all have access to this knowledge, in the hopes that they learn these lessons and become Upstanders that promote a more just, compassionate, and empathetic society.

It is a promise to parents like me that Wisconsin, with its motto "Forward," is THE state to raise our children as informed, compassionate citizens and future leaders within our democracy.

As the executive director of HERC and as a parent, I beg you to vote yes to SB-69.

Sincerely,

Samantha Abramson
Executive Director
Nathan and Esther Pelz Holocaust Education Resource Center



WISCONSIN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION COUNCIL

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 23, 2021

TO: Members, Wisconsin Senate Committee on Education

FROM: Ron Martin, President, Wisconsin Education Association Council
Bob Baxter, Executive Director, Wisconsin Education Association Council

RE: **Support for Senate Bill 69, relating to incorporating the Holocaust and other genocides into the state model Social Studies standards and requiring instruction on the Holocaust and other genocides**

The Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) represents teachers and other public-school employees across the State of Wisconsin. WEAC is pleased to support Senate Bill 69, designed to add Holocaust education to the model academic standards for social studies. SB 69 guarantees that Wisconsin students will learn about the Holocaust and other genocides at least once during grades 5-8 and again in grades 9-12. WEAC further supports the development of curricula and instructional materials as a requirement of SB 69. The Holocaust tore through Europe during the 20th century causing the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and mass murder of millions of people. We can not let this happen again.

Anti-Semitism and religious bigotry are currently on the rise in the United States and around the world. We have an obligation to teach students of Wisconsin's public schools the important lessons of the Holocaust and other genocides. Solidifying Holocaust education in Wisconsin's social studies standards will provide opportunity for students to reflect on the history of this tragic event as global citizens. It will also encourage students to view local and state history both in context and in comparison to the events of the Holocaust. It is a first step to assure such tyranny does not repeat in the United States or elsewhere.

It is alarming that two-thirds of American millennials, in a 2018 survey, could not identify what Auschwitz was and 22% said they had not heard of the Holocaust.* Many states have already enacted requirements similar to those in SB 69, and other states are advancing similar legislation. Wisconsin should follow suit.

While we at WEAC are always concerned about the state mandating too much curriculum, this is a case where it was an easy decision to support another statutory requirement. We must never forget the important lessons of history and how they can easily and quickly destroy our democracy.

Ron Martin, President
Bob Baxter, Executive Director

We commend Senator Darling, Representative Plumer and the many co-sponsors of SB 69 for your leadership on this legislation. We look forward to working with you to ensure the bill is passed and signed into law.

Thank you for considering the views of WEAC and its members across Wisconsin.

* Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. Published, April 2018.



JON PLUMER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 42nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony – **Senate Bill 69** – The Holocaust Education Act

Senate Committee on Education

February 23, 2021

Thank you Senator Darling and members of the Senate Education Committee for your consideration today of Senate Bill 69.

Senate Bill 69 adds Holocaust and other genocide curriculum to the model academic standards for social studies education in Wisconsin’s public, charter, and certain private schools. Students would be required to receive instruction in these topics once in grades 5 to 8 and again when they are in high school.

This legislation is needed to combat the rising lack of knowledge about the Holocaust by American youth. A survey from 2018 found that two-third of millennials did not know what Auschwitz was and almost a quarter of millennials didn’t even know what the Holocaust was. That is simply unacceptable. To counter this disturbing trend, it is essential that we teach our students about the atrocities of the Holocaust and honor the memories of those who lives were taken during that horrific period and those who survived. “Never Again” is a phrase often used in conjunction with Holocaust remembrance and the first step in ensuring it never happens again is to make sure that we never forget what happened. This is even more imperative as the number of Holocaust survivors dwindles further each year.

Sixteen other states already require Holocaust education and similar legislation is pending in many others. Wisconsin has long been a leader in education and it is time we join with these states as an example to the country.

In Wisconsin we are fortunate to have excellent partners at the Nathan and Esther Pelz Holocaust Education Resource Center. They have already committed to providing educational materials and professional development on the subject as no cost to schools.

There are more speakers who are going to follow me today, with stories much more compelling than my own. I urge you to listen carefully to their testimony. Thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony today and I look forward to your support of Senate Bill 69.

Senate Committee on Education
February 23, 2021

**Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Testimony for Information on Senate Bill 69**

Background

Learning about the Holocaust is currently part of Wisconsin academic standards for social studies. These standards were most recently revised in 2018.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has a transparent and comprehensive process for reviewing and revising academic standards. The process begins with a notice of intent to review an academic area with a public comment period. The State Superintendent's Academic Standards Review Council examines those comments and recommends whether or not to revise or develop standards in that academic area. The State Superintendent then authorizes whether or not to pursue a revision or development process.

Following the State Superintendent's authorization to revise or develop standards, a state writing committee is formed to work on revision or development of those standards for all grade levels. That draft is then made available for open review to get feedback from the public, key stakeholders, educators, and the Legislature with further review by the State Superintendent's Academic Standards Review Council. The State Superintendent then determines adoption of the standards. Additional information on the standards review process can be found at <https://dpi.wi.gov/standards/council>.

The most recent revisions to social studies standards call for all students to learn about historical genocides. In fact, there is specific language related to learning about the Holocaust or Shoah. This language can be accessed on page 43 of the standards, located at https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/standards/New%20pdfs/2018_WI_Social_Studies_Standards.pdf and is copied below. Please note that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights referenced below was established in large part after World War II because of the Holocaust.

Historical Eras and Themes Students in Wisconsin will learn about the history of Wisconsin, the United States, and the world. When teaching Wisconsin, United States, or World History, the following are topics for exploration:

- (7) April 22, Environmental Awareness Day.
- (7g) The last Friday in April, Arbor Day, except that if the governor by proclamation sets apart one day to be designated as Arbor and Bird Day under s. 14.16 (1), that day shall be appropriately observed.
- (7r) June 14, if school is held, Robert M. La Follette, Sr. Day.
- (8) September 16, Mildred Fish Harnack Day.
- (9) September 17, U.S. Constitution Day.
- (9g) Wednesday of the 3rd week in September, as part of Wonderful Wisconsin Week under s. 14.16 (8), Wisconsin Day.
- (9r) Friday of the 3rd week in September, POW-MIA Recognition Day.
- (9t) Wednesday of the 4th week in September, Bullying Awareness Day.
- (10) September 28, Frances Willard Day.
- (11) October 9, Leif Erikson Day.
- (12) October 12, Christopher Columbus' birthday.
- (13) November 11, Veterans Day.



Alberta Darling
Wisconsin State Senator · District 8

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Education
Senate Bill 69: Holocaust Education
February 23, 2021

Thank you committee members for hearing testimony today on Senate Bill 69.

Senate Bill 69 adds Holocaust education to the model academic standards for social studies. Also, it guarantees that Wisconsin students learn about the Holocaust at least once during middle school and once during high school.

This legislation is becoming more urgent every day. Seventy-seven percent of Holocaust survivors are over the age of 80, and the average age of all survivors is nearly 84.

As the number of living Holocaust survivors and witnesses dwindle, it is up to us to ensure that the unforgivable events of the Holocaust are never forgotten and never repeated.

The need is great. Nearly two-thirds of millennials and Gen Z'ers are unaware that six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust and almost half can't name a single concentration camp. We can't let that ignorance continue.

Our goal is to ensure that Wisconsin students understand the important lessons of the Holocaust and the dangerous consequences of rising anti-Semitism and religious bigotry.

The Wisconsin-based Nathan and Esther Pelz Holocaust Education Resource Center are committed to providing materials, programming, and professional development necessary to implement this requirement at no additional costs to schools.

I'd like to thank Bev Greenberg and everyone at HERC for their dedication to making sure this bill becomes law. It is my hope Wisconsin will join the 16 other states who have similar legislation on the books.

Thank you for taking the time to hear Senate Bill 69. I hope to count on your support for this important bill.

Lisa Subeck

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

February 23, 2021

Chair Darling and Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

Thank you for your consideration today of Senate Bill 69 which requires that the state Superintendent of Public Instruction incorporate the Holocaust and other genocides into the model academic standards for social studies and to develop model curriculum and instructional materials.

Sixteen states currently require Holocaust education, and legislation is pending in several others. I had hoped that Wisconsin would have joined this growing list of states by now, as this same bill was introduced last session, passed the Assembly, and had a hearing in the Senate. Unfortunately, like so many other good pieces of legislation, it was stalled with the start of the pandemic.

I can remember interviewing Holocaust survivors when I was a teenager as part of a youth group project to preserve their stories. While they shared survival stories that were nothing short of heroic, their stories were also those of tragic loss. While they survived the horrors of the Holocaust, they also told of those who did not make it. It was not unusual to talk to survivors who had lost their entire families - who were separated from their parents, siblings, or children as they were led to their deaths.

As the number of Holocaust survivors shrinks, it is up to us to ensure that their plight is never forgotten and that the unforgivable events of the past never happen again. Today's children will likely never meet a Holocaust survivor. While they will not have a chance, as I did, to listen to their firsthand stories, it is incumbent upon us to make sure this history is never repeated.

As a young adult, I visited the Anne Frank house in Amsterdam and a concentration camp in Belgium during a youth group trip to Europe. And a couple of years ago, I visited Stutthof concentration camp in Gdansk, Poland, with my family. It is hard to explain the overwhelming feeling of loss and sadness – and fear – visiting these camps invokes. 65,000 people of more than 30 nationalities died there. Some died from the terrible living conditions, slave labor, or disease. Others were tortured or executed by shooting, hanging, or in the gas chambers. I saw large glass cases of their belongings – shoes, clothing, and more – left behind by those who were killed. There was a wall where some of those were held there carved their names. My dad scanned the wall looking for names of our ancestors who lost their lives there. While facing this history is horrifying, it is critical we never forget so these atrocities never happen again.

Anti-Semitic incidents are on the rise in our state and our nation, and more than a quarter of all recorded anti-Semitic incidents in Wisconsin took place among students or on campus. In a recent poll, 22% of millennials said they had never heard of the Holocaust – double the percentage of US adults who said the same. This highlights the need for Holocaust education in our schools. And as a Jewish woman whose family was directly impacted by the Holocaust, this terrifies me. Ensuring such atrocities never happen again requires knowledge and recognition of our past.

The time to add Wisconsin to the growing list of states requiring Holocaust education is now. I urge you to pass Senate Bill 69 to do our part in ensuring these atrocities are never again repeated.

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