

My name is Karen Twain. I come to you today wearing several hats. I am the Assistant Superintendent in the Tigard-Tualatin School District, a member of the Jewish community and a mother of two. I have several friends who survived the Holocaust; one of them was the late Alter Wiener. I have brought in speakers, including Alter, to talk to students about the Holocaust and it has been life-changing for the children who have been able to hear personal testimony. My own kids have experienced anti-semitism in the K-12 system as well as in college. Sadly, I have personally witnessed it as an adult.

For some time, I have been pushing for some movement from the Legislature in making sure that our Oregon students have an understanding of what occurred in the Holocaust – what led up to it, what happened, and what occurred after and up to the current times.

I want to tell you a story that happened in my district a little over a year ago. A student started a community snapchat that went out to countless other students at one of our high schools. It was called “Little Jewish girls.” The pictures and comments started coming in and they included photos of the gas chambers that said things like “Hitler really knew how to use an oven.” There were also pictures and harassing words towards people of color, women, and varying gender identity and sexual orientation. Beyond the obvious horror of these social media posts, the worst came afterwards when I sat down to talk to each and every student and their parents. When I asked them if they knew the gravity of the posts and what kind of hurt it may have caused, the answer was overwhelming ignorance. Many of the students and their families knew nothing or little of the Holocaust and the kids thought their posts were “just jokes.”

In my 33 years of education, I have had many conversations with teachers and students, and it is clear that we have a hole when it comes to this piece of history. As we lose the last of our Holocaust survivors, it is imperative that we teach our youth to understand the term genocide. Our children must also understand their role and responsibility in fighting discrimination of any kind. I have great faith in our young people, but they must be taught history in order to have any idea as to how to ensure that atrocities like this never happen again.

I want to end with a quote from Dan Gillerman (a representative to the UN):  
“As the generation of Holocaust survivors and liberators dwindles, the torch of remembrance, of bearing witness, and of education must continue forward.”

I urge you to vote yes on SB 664.