



NEVER AGAIN COALITION

February 19, 2019

To: Members of the Senate Committee on Education

Via Email: sed.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov

Re: Hearing on SB 664

Dear Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Thomsen and members of the committee,

My name is Lauren Fortgang. I am the director and co-founder of Portland's Never Again Coalition and I am also a constituent of Senator Wagner. I am writing in support of SB 664, requiring Oregon school districts to provide education on the Holocaust and genocide. The Never Again Coalition takes the phrase "never again" quite seriously. Our mission is to promote awareness, through education, of genocides and crimes against humanity around the world.

We applaud Senator Wagner and Lakeridge High student Claire Sarnowski, for their efforts to promote the concept of a genocide curriculum in Oregon schools. We are also deeply saddened of the passing of Holocaust survivor Alter Wiener, who was also a supporter and inspiration for this bill. As much as we would all like to believe that genocide will "never again" happen, a look at current events involving people from Darfur, the Rohingya from Burma, and the Yazidis in Iraq tells a story of continued genocide. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet recently said, "We must take stock of the gravity of recent acts perpetrated against the Rohingya and Yazidis, and we must do everything possible to hold those responsible to account."¹

In 2013, Rhonda Fink-Whitman visited college campuses to find out what students knew about the Holocaust. She discovered a severe lack of knowledge of the Holocaust and World War II. Fink Whitman said, "'You can't blame the kids. Nobody's teaching it to them. By the time they get to college, they should know a thing or two about the Holocaust and other genocides so when the plague of denial creeps onto their campus they're armed and ready with the truth.'"²

A curriculum about genocide would give Oregon teachers the resources they need to teach their students about the consequences of the Holocaust, and other genocides throughout history. Diane Koosed, the other co-founder of the Never Again Coalition, and a retired teacher, taught about the Holocaust some 25 years ago when teachers were free to supplement and enrich social studies curriculum. To this day, she has students contacting her to tell her how meaningful that was to them.

¹ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations. Genocide: "never again" has become "time and again", Sept. 22, 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Genocide0918-7808.aspx>

² Sharona Schwartz, The Incredibly Depressing Answers College Students Gave When Asked What the Holocaust Was and Where it Began, The Blaze, October 16, 2013, <https://www.theblaze.com/stories/2013/10/16/the-incredibly-depressing-answers-college-students-gave-when-asked-what-the-holocaust-was-and-where-it-began>



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By learning lessons from these past genocides, with their legacies of intolerance and hate, we can hope that today's students will become the leaders of tomorrow, and that they can help find solutions to end mass atrocities and genocide in the future. I ask you to please support SB 664.

Sincerely,

Lauren Fortgang

Co-Founder and Director, Never Again Coalition