

February 20, 2019

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

The most common response received when students are asked the question, “Why do we learn about the Holocaust?” is “So it never happens again.” This shallow answer reveals that when students learn about the Holocaust as an isolated event, and with a passive mindset, they ultimately fail to develop the knowledge and understanding necessary to recognize and prevent genocide. Rather than simply studying facts and learning about the history of the Holocaust, the curriculum under SB664 has the opportunity to be structured to provide students active opportunities to engage in critical thinking skills. At a time when students are more open-minded and receptive to learning about themselves, the curriculum will force them to confront their role in making society a safer, more inclusive, and just place.

Unfortunately, since multiple genocides have transpired since the Holocaust, it is imperative to think about the Holocaust as part of a wider history of events and experiences that occurred both before and after it. For this reason, Oregon needs a Holocaust and genocide curriculum in the schools that will focus on acknowledging and recognizing how unjust structures, mechanisms, and policies are implemented and how they reveal common threads across different genocides and systems of mass violence. It is the observation of these patterns that can contribute to a richer, more meaningful understanding of how genocide occurs and how to best prevent the discrimination and oppression that precedes them.

A common question Holocaust and genocide educators receive is, “How do you keep the content relevant?” A strong curriculum might look introspectively at Oregon’s history of discrimination and utilize tools of discrimination, such as scapegoating, intimidation, appropriation, segregation, exclusion, and dehumanization, all of which are used together in genocide. Looking at each of these six concepts, both individually and as a whole, students can examine the origin, intention and motivation of why these tools are being used, rather than focusing on comparing how they are being implemented. Students can also be exposed to the numerous ways individuals and groups have resisted oppression and discrimination. Tools of resistance—persistence, creation, celebration, protest, organization, and reform, are equally important, and provide a platform to teach students tangible skills to combat everyday injustices and ultimately provide a better approach to preventing genocide.

As more cases of prejudice, hate, mass violence and genocide continue to unfold in front of our eyes, it is our responsibility, and Oregon’s responsibility, to provide students with

the knowledge and skills to recognize and resist precursors of genocide, such as discrimination and oppression. Since OJMCHE is unable to be in every Oregon classroom, SB664 provides ALL Oregon students the opportunity to partake in engaging lessons and stimulating conversations that challenge their current knowledge about genocide and systems of oppression and provides them with the tools to go out in the world as adults with the ability to counter them and defend human rights.

Sincerely,

Amanda Solomon

Manager of Museum and Holocaust Education

Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education