

Testimony by Bob Horenstein, Director of Community Relations and Public Affairs, Jewish Federation of Greater Portland, in support of Senate Bill 664, February 20, 2019

It has been only three-quarters of a century since six million Jews and countless others were murdered in what was, arguably, the worst genocide the world has ever known. Yet, according to the results of a sobering survey conducted by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany released last year, one in five millennials in the U.S. ***haven't heard of the Holocaust*** or aren't sure whether they've heard of it. Thirty-one percent of American adults (41 percent of millennials) don't know how many Jews were killed in the Holocaust. Forty-one percent of Americans (two-thirds of millennials) can't identify what the death camp Auschwitz was.

And it's not just Americans. A similar study indicated that more than half of Canadians did not know that 6 million Jews were killed during the Holocaust and nearly half could not name a single Nazi concentration camp. A recent CNN poll in Europe revealed that about a third of the 7,000 respondents across seven countries knew "just a little or nothing at all" about the Holocaust. Most shockingly, in France, which was occupied by the Nazis, nearly 20% of young adults between the ages of 18 and 34 said they had never heard of the Holocaust.

These studies paint a disturbing picture of widening gaps in the knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust. The problem, however, isn't merely that the Holocaust is fading from memory with the passage of time and with the natural decline of our survivor community. Rather, it's that lessons that can be applied today to provide students the tools to combat hate, bigotry, human rights abuses and threats to democracy ***are also being lost.***

As awareness of the Holocaust decreases, we are now witnessing, perhaps not coincidentally, a surge in anti-Semitism. According to the 2017 FBI hate crimes statistics, Jews were the victims in an alarming ***60 percent (938)*** of all faith-based hate incidents in the U.S., and there was a 37% increase in anti-Jewish hate crimes compared to the previous year. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the vast majority of the near-900 hate groups in the U.S. are anti-Semitic. I'm sure I don't need to remind anyone that last October, 11 Jews were massacred at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, the deadliest attack on Jews ever witnessed in this country.

But make no mistake—this isn't just a "Jewish issue." Holocaust and genocide education also serves a broader purpose since it can provide a historical context to understand other atrocities and, hopefully, prevent future ones from occurring. Furthermore, the Holocaust began with racial stereotyping and demonization—the very tactics that white supremacists and other extremists employ today to denigrate, bully and dehumanize African-Americans, Muslims, immigrants, LGBTQ people and other minorities.

In the preface to the UN resolution establishing International Holocaust Remembrance Day, it states: "The Holocaust, in which a third of the Jewish people were annihilated, will forever serve as a warning to all mankind against the danger of free hatred, racism and prejudice." A mandate to teach about the Holocaust and other genocides will help students recognize the dangers of racism, demonization and incitement, thereby enlisting the next generation in efforts to safeguard human rights, confront bigotry and strengthen our core democratic values.

The Jewish Federation of Greater Portland therefore urges you to support Senate Bill 664. Thank you.