

Members of the Oregon House Education Committee:

I am writing as an attorney from La Grande, Oregon, in support of SB 664.

Although I am not Jewish, I was exposed to the horrors of the Holocaust from an early age. Very young, I learned how entire groups of people can be scapegoated, how hatred and political expediency can transform into systematic brutality, into mass murder, and into the complete destruction of entire cultures and communities. It would be comforting to believe that the Nazis' murder of perhaps 17 million people was an isolated incident that could never happen again. Sadly, however, we have learned repeatedly since the 1940s--from the Cultural Revolution, from the Khmer Rouge, from Burundi and Rwanda, from Bosnia-Herzegovina, from Chechnya and from Myanmar (to name just a few)--that if we do not learn from our past mistakes, we will continue to repeat them, over, and over, and over again.

Our own history, in America and in Oregon, demonstrates that we are not immune from racial and ethnic hatred and violence. The destruction of American Indian cultures as people of European descent spread across the continent, slavery and subsequent efforts to suppress African-Americans, and discriminatory laws against African Americans, Asians and Hispanics underlie our national history and culture. In Oregon, such ethnic and racial hatred is demonstrated by the displacement and cultural decimation of all of our Native communities, by the 1887 massacre of 34 Chinese miners on the banks of the Snake River, by the active role of the Ku Klux Klan during the development of our state, and by legislation requiring blacks to be out of town before sundown or excluding people of color from owning land. All form a part of our common history as a state.

And unfortunately, such racial and ethnic hatred is not a thing of the past. We live in an time where hate crimes abound. The FBI reports that hate crimes are on the rise, showing a steady increase during the past four years. In the worst instances, nine churchgoers were murdered in South Carolina in a racially motivated shooting in 2015. Eleven people were killed during a synagogue service in Pittsburgh by an anti-Semitic killer in 2018, and another shooter attacked another synagogue in California just three days ago.

America is a diverse society, including people from every continent and every country, who come from different heritages and speak different languages, who share different religions and outlooks on the world. Teaching our children about the holocaust and about other acts of bigotry, violence and discrimination is critical to helping them understand where attitudes of hatred and intolerance can lead. In a diverse world, nothing is more essential than helping our children learn that we have no choice but to live together peacefully with people from different backgrounds. I believe that education about the Holocaust is a significant step in accomplishing that goal, and that such education should be mandatory for all students.

For all of the above reasons, I strongly support SB 664. I urge that it be supported by each and every member of the House. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Thank you.

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