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Jewish Federation of Greater Portland

Jewish Community Relations Council, Immediate Past Chair

Michelle Bombet Minch

Testimony in Favor of HB2905

For the record, my name is Michelle Bombet Minch, representing Jewish Federation of Greater Portland. I am in support of House Bill 2905 which amends academic content standards for social studies to expand the list of individuals to include those of Jewish descent.

In 2017 House Bill 2845 was passed so that ethnic and social minorities would be represented by **their own voices to teach and learn about their histories, challenges, and contributions**. As a Jewish community, and certainly a marginalized minority, we understand and supported the bill; however, we have some concerns that the bill currently overlooks Jews as a minority that should be included in ethnic studies.

“Jews are a unique group connected through shared history, ancestry, culture, religion, sacred texts, and more... we are diverse in appearance, skin colors, ethnic subgroups, and religious practices...”.* We are only roughly 2% of the U.S. population yet have made a strong contribution to our country that can inspire people of all backgrounds.

We have a strong tradition of political activism against inequities in America. From the US labor movement and speaking out against working conditions in the garment industry, to the feminism movement and women's rights, and the Civil Rights Movement where we marched arm in arm with African-Americans. In fact, Jews played a significant role in the founding and funding of the NAACP, the Rosenwald Schools, Southern Poverty Law Center, and nearly half of our country's civil rights lawyers were Jewish including two who were murdered.

A basic tenant of the Jewish people is tzedakah translating to "doing the right thing" and as such philanthropic Jews both historically and currently continue to help lead causes such as the social safety net, access to medical care for all, and affordable housing.

In modern times, despite our small percent of the population, we continue to work our way to the forefront of humanitarian values such as advocating for LGBTQ and access to healthcare. All this in addition to technological advances in medical research, cybersecurity, agritech, as well as leadership in the arts and culture. Examples in the medical field such as the polio vaccine, measles vaccine, the mammogram, and the heart defibrillator save millions of lives each year.

While Jews have faced opportunities, we have also faced challenges of discrimination. Overcoming obstacles has been a careful balance of not losing our identity while assimilating as an American.

While we began to find our place in America, we also experienced prejudice like other minorities. From the lynching of Leo Frank, a prominent Jewish businessman in Atlanta who was falsely convicted in 1913 of murdering a worker, to the revitalized KKK occurring by the mid-20s, to modern-day domestic-terror attacks on Jewish synagogues in Pittsburg, Texas and California.

Our vulnerability has also been overlooked. Consider this - recently, I was speaking to an educator who was praising Henry Ford. Sure, he revolutionized manufacturing, yet this educator knew absolutely nothing of the power Ford held in spreading conspiracy theories and fostering antisemitic tropes and publications still being used today.

In summary, don't we want the children today who become adults tomorrow to know the history of obstacles that we overcame and continue to overcome as well as our positive contributions regardless of these hardships?

We hope that you will support this amendment that specifically includes the Jewish community as an historically marginalized minority. Teaching our history, challenges, and contributions gives additional perspectives on how people can rise above challenges for the greater good.

*(icsresources.org)