

House Finance Committee
House Bill 606
Proponent Testimony
Jackie Congedo, The Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center
June 20, 2024

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chairman LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of House Bill 606. My name is Jackie Congedo, the Chief Community Engagement & External Relations Officer at The Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center in Cincinnati.

The Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center (HHC) exists to ensure the lessons of the Holocaust inspire action today. HHC educates about the Holocaust, remembers its victims and acts on its lessons. Through innovative programs and partnerships, HHC challenges injustice, inhumanity and prejudice, and fosters understanding, inclusion and engaged citizenship.

HHC was originally formed by Holocaust survivors who made Cincinnati their home after the war. Moved by their shared experiences of loss and survival, they built an organization that would inform the community about the events of the Holocaust and its lessons. In 2019, HHC relocated its museum to prominent Cincinnati landmark, Union Terminal, the very train station where Holocaust survivors arrived and took their first steps towards rebuilding in the Cincinnati community. This unique partnership is the first of its kind in the United States, putting Cincinnati on the map for bringing the lessons of the Holocaust into the civic conversation.

Today, HHC is the only organization in Greater Cincinnati with a holistic approach to Holocaust education, offering a plethora of resources including a 7,500 square foot museum, library & resource center, classroom materials, workshops and professional development for educators, traveling exhibits, leadership training, and public programs. What makes HHC truly unique is that all of the aforementioned resources focus on the experiences of local Holocaust survivors and eyewitnesses. With a staff with advanced education and history degrees, HHC engages more than 2.5 million people every year through mission-driven digital and in-person events, museum tours, educational experiences and school partnerships, social media and virtual content. From Australia to India, individuals from more than 25 countries and 30 states engage with our mission.

In the wake of the October 7th attack on Israeli citizens and resulting conflict between Hamas and Israel, antisemitic incidents in the U.S. reached the highest number during any two-month period since the Anti-Defamation League began tracking in 1979, according to preliminary data released in December. Recent data from The Economist also showed that one in five Americans believe the Holocaust is a myth.

HHC is focused on programming that promotes awareness, education, and dialogue around the universal threat of antisemitism and the importance of Holocaust remembrance. Our hope is to foster a more resilient, empathetic, and inclusive community, ultimately safeguarding democratic values and promoting social cohesion.

We are a resource for educators, students, universities, businesses, civic groups, and other diverse audiences to help them understand the universal threat of contemporary antisemitism and to provide resources to stand up against it. We are continuously looking at the resources we have at our museum, how historic and contemporary antisemitism and hate are communicated in the museum's exhibits, and how we can be a resource in the community. With the creation and deployment of workshops, trainings, and curriculum materials for a range of audiences, we equip individuals with the knowledge and tools to recognize and combat antisemitism in all its forms. I would be remiss if I did not also note that HHC is actively pursuing a new partnership with the University of Cincinnati to enhance our research and expertise with the establishment of a new Scholar-in-Residence position focused on Holocaust and genocide studies.

During this unprecedented time of Holocaust denial, rising antisemitism and hate, in particular on college campuses around the country, we thank the sponsors for introducing this legislation. It establishes procedures and protocols for students to file complaints, for those complaints to be properly investigated, for faculty and staff to be properly trained on how to respond, and for law enforcement to be appropriately engaged to protect students. We stand ready to support this work however we can with workshops and trainings on antisemitism and how it manifests in contemporary situations. Finally, we thank the students, faculty, staff, trustees, parents, alumni, administrators, the Department of Higher Education, and Ohio's college and university associations for working collaboratively to craft this legislation. I strongly encourage you to pass it. Time is of the essence.

Thank you again for your attention to this matter. We stand ready to assist the Chancellor and other state agencies as necessary. I would be happy to take any questions at this time.