



# Holocaust and Genocide Memorial and Education Commission

Written Testimony on FY26-27 Appropriations  
Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee

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Ohio Holocaust and Genocide Memorial and Education Commission

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Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Timken, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee:

My name is Andrea Brookover, executive director of the Ohio Holocaust and Genocide Memorial and Education Commission. I thank you for this opportunity to share with you the work of our Commission, which was established in December of 2020 with overwhelming support from both the Ohio House and the Senate. The Commission is served by 12 Governor-appointed Commissioners, 3 members of the Governor's cabinet and 4 paid staff, all committed to ensuring that Holocaust and genocide education is accessible to all Ohioans to build a more informed and engaged society.

The month of April is Genocide Awareness Month, a time we dedicate to remembering those who were killed during genocides. During this month, we work with our partners and survivor communities to remember those lost, honor those who survived and to educate and raise awareness of these genocides, particularly those that began during the month of April. This year we commemorated the 50th anniversary of the Cambodian genocide, the 31st anniversary of the genocide against the Tutsi's, as well as the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide. In July we will acknowledge the 30th anniversary of the Bosnian genocide. In fact, last week we commemorated the Holocaust at the 45th annual Governor's Holocaust Commemoration at the Ohio Statehouse, where we not only recognized the six million Jews who perished but also honored the U.S. service personnel who liberated and witnessed the camps that were liberated in April of 1945.

This past January, The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany released an eight-country ***Index on Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness***, exposing a global trend in fading knowledge of basic facts about the Holocaust. The *Index* surveyed several European countries, as well as the United States. One of the most alarming of all the responses was that in the U.S., 76% of all adults surveyed believe something like the Holocaust could happen again today. At the same time, **93% believe that all students should learn about the Holocaust in school.**

Last week, the Anti-Defamation League released the 2024 Audit of Antisemitic Incidents, which reports a **282% increase in antisemitic incidents in Ohio**, with 233 reported incidents in 2024 compared to 61 incidents in 2022. In 2023 The Southern Poverty Law Center tracked at least **50 hate groups in Ohio**. *The State of Antisemitism in America 2023 Report* by the American Jewish Committee found that **92% of U.S. adults believe that "Antisemitism affects society as a whole; everyone is responsible for combating it."**

The Commission was created with a mandate to work with Ohio educators and partners to address both the increase in antisemitism and the demand for Holocaust and genocide education to be taught in schools, as well as to identify gaps in curriculum and to provide better training in pedagogy and methodology, in partnership with the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce and Department of Higher Education. In the four years since the Commission was created, we have identified that there is much more to be done.

The data we have collected indicates that there is a great need for Holocaust and genocide education and that we can make a greater impact by both continuing the work we have started and leading the charge to develop engaging learning experiences that can be delivered directly to school districts in addition to the opportunities we are currently providing in partnership with a small number of museums in Ohio. To build upon these initiatives going forward, **the Commission is requesting \$1.11M for each FY26 and FY27, with \$985,000 to be used for Commission operations which is consistent with the FY24 appropriation in the current biennial budget. An additional \$125,000 is earmarked to be used for the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center in Cincinnati**, the only museum in Ohio with content that is exclusively focused on the history of the Holocaust and on the stories of survivors who came to Cincinnati to build new lives.

We know that for each new generation of students and teachers there is a need for education about this historical event. Education is the key to refuting Holocaust denial and neo-Nazism, prejudice and hatred. Genocide education fosters critical thinking skills that enable students to develop an understanding of past events and their enduring consequences and legacies.

### **K-12 Education Initiatives**

The Commission and our partners recognize the need for students to engage and learn about history beyond the classroom walls. Visiting Ohio museums and memorials gives students access to history through artifacts, primary sources and first-person experiences of those individuals who have survived and made their own contributions to Ohio.

Over the last 2 academic years, the Commission has provided over **\$150,000 in field trip funding for 7,300 students from 80 schools across 30 counties** to visit museums and exhibits in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton and Lancaster where they have learned about the history of the Holocaust and other genocides through the words of those who survived these atrocities. The impact that such visits have on students is captured by a comment from a 7th grade Cincinnati student who stated, **“This experience might change my future by making me think before I speak and think about the consequences of my words.”**

Teachers and students alike have reported that these field trips were transformative learning experiences. For some students, it was their first time away from their hometown. After visiting the Holocaust & Humanity Center, an educator from a small rural school district in South Point, in Lawrence County, shared, **“This field trip has a great impact on our students. We live in a rural area with limited opportunities to visit museums and learn about important topics such as the Holocaust. This might be the only time some of our students leave our area and visit Cincinnati. Our students are still talking about the experience...”**

The Commission can reach more schools in rural areas of the state by expanding field trip opportunities through traveling exhibitions and programs that bring these experiences to their own regions in partnerships with local libraries and museums. With sustained support in the next

biennial budget, we will have the capacity to implement this initiative and provide greater access to Holocaust and genocide education across the state.

In the current academic year to date, over **3,600 students and their teachers have been connected by the Commission directly to survivors and their families** who have traveled to their classrooms and schools to share their stories. Ohio is home to survivors of several 20<sup>th</sup> century genocides beyond the Holocaust, including genocides perpetrated in Armenia, Ukraine, Cambodia, Bosnia, and Rwanda, among others. Hearing a genocide survivor or a direct descendent is critical to building listening and thinking skills, as well as making a human connection to the history. Cincinnati Holocaust survivor Henry Fenichel is one such witness who speaks to students regularly. He states, **“I want to bear witness that it happened, so perhaps future generations will learn and not repeat it.”**

As the survivors, liberators and witnesses to the Holocaust continue to pass away, we are now working with second and third generation family members to find new ways to bring the stories into schools. After inviting a survivor to speak to her class, a teacher from NE Ohio shared that personal testimony **“humanizes the event and helps students recognize that these were real people who could have easily been them or their family, had they just been born in a different place.”**

Educators, too, benefit greatly from opportunities to enhance their own learning, in order to teach these challenging subjects in their classrooms. The Commission has funded professional development grants for over **60 secondary educators from 25 counties** over the last 2 years. We host seminars and workshops for educators both independently and in partnership with other organizations. However, these current offerings are not enough to meet the interest and demand from educators throughout the state. We have identified a significant lack of training opportunities in Ohio for teachers in both Holocaust and genocide education. One teacher from Springfield told us that **“Knowing a topic is different than teaching a topic. Teaching genocide is always a challenge. Having resources will be beneficial.”**

By the end of FY25, the Commission will have expended over **\$160,000 for professional development initiatives for Ohio teachers.** With sustained state funding, there is immense opportunity for the Commission to create a more robust professional development program in Ohio for educators, in collaboration with our state, national and international partners. Training in how to teach genocide with age-appropriate content and in alignment with Ohio education standards is crucial to achieving the comprehension of students. The Commission has the capacity both to develop statewide seminars, and trainings to bring specialized workshops to schools who have greater need for teacher professional development in Holocaust and genocide studies. In addition, we are supporting and aiding in the creation of Holocaust and genocide certificate programs, minors and other higher education initiatives at Ohio universities and colleges to enable undergraduate and graduate students, pre-service and in service educators' access to the academic knowledge that will enable them to teach the topic more effectively.

### **Higher Education Initiatives**

Our work in higher education, as directed by our current strategic priorities and budget designations, launched in late 2023 with program development in several public universities. With Commission support, the University of Toledo has developed a minor in Holocaust and Genocide Studies, which will be converted into an online module for in-service educators in the coming academic year. Cleveland State University has approved a certificate in Holocaust and genocide studies, open to enrolled students and in-service teachers for registration next fall. The University of

Akron launched a new course this semester for education majors on “Becoming a Holocaust and Genocide Educator”, for which 27 students applied, and those accepted are receiving tuition scholarships for the course from the Commission. We have also supported class and community lectures and programs at Youngstown State University, Muskingum University and Heidelberg University this academic year. Those programs named above had audiences of students, educators, and the public totaling over 450 attendees.

A partnership with The Ohio State University has culminated in the development a certificate in Holocaust and genocide studies, currently pending administrative approval. Additionally, with the collaboration of internationally renowned Rwandan genocide scholar at OSU, we supported a study abroad trip in 2024 for 16 OSU students who had an immersive, transformative learning experience. Upon returning from Rwanda, one student shared, **“As I returned home, I carried with me a deeper appreciation for the complexities of post-conflict societies and a renewed commitment to contributing positively to a more empathetic and equitable world.”**

Students from the OSU genocide program are now collaborating with the Commission for the recording of testimonies from survivors of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. Ohio is home to significant population of Tutsi survivors, who’s stories of resilience through atrocity and of building new lives as contributing citizens in our state is critical, particularly as supplemental curriculum for educators to make personal connections for students when studying genocide.

**To date, the Commission has provided \$100,000 in program support for the above-named higher education initiatives.** Continued state support could put Ohio colleges and universities on the map as one of the few states with institutions of higher education that offer specialized programs in Holocaust and genocide studies, which would attract an ever-growing population of students around the world who desire to concentrate in this subject area.

### **Future outreach and engagement**

Beyond secondary and higher education, the Commission is tasked with recognizing and honoring survivor communities through commemorations and memorial events around the state. We have partnered with Rwandan Community Association of Ohio for the last 3 years, including just this past Saturday, April 26, to commemorate the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi genocide, where over 100 Ohio Tutsi survivors and community members were in attendance.

Other witnesses of genocide have stories that must also be told. The Commission has produced an exhibition, currently on display at the Statehouse, that features Ohio veterans who served in units that liberated concentration camps across Germany in 1945 and witnessed first-hand the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis. James Matthews from Lakewood, who was a liberator at Nordhausen, was overcome with emotion as he recalled what he witnessed. **“I had never seen anything like this...I told my story because young people need to know these things to face the future ahead.”** We have much work still to do tell the stories of the role that the U.S. military played in liberating Europe from Nazi oppression, and specifically, to **share the individual narratives of Ohio veterans in this period of history.**

In the 3 years since the Commission’s establishment, upwards of **35,000 Ohioans attended and participated in community programs, lectures and exhibitions supported and partially funded by the Commission for a combined total of \$200,000.** These learning experiences exposed audiences to a variety of Holocaust and genocide-related content, from a musical adaptation of a

young Jewish girl's diary during the Holocaust performed in Cincinnati to an exhibition-related program at the Lakewood Public Library about Muslims who saved Jews during the Holocaust.

In late 2025 and throughout 2026, there are internationally renowned exhibitions scheduled to travel to Ohio. The Cincinnati Museum Center will host the exhibition **"Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away,"** a traveling exhibition from the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. This exhibition could bring upward of 250,000 visitors through Union Terminal between October 2025 and April 2026, including thousands of students.

Also in 2026, **"Americans and the Holocaust"**, a traveling exhibit from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, will first travel to the Columbus Metropolitan Library in February and then to the Upper Sandusky Community Library in August. **State financial support for associated public programming and school field trip transportation through the Commission's FY26 appropriation request will expose a vastly greater audience from across Ohio to these unique, once in a lifetime learning opportunities.**

In closing, I want to thank the Senate Higher Education Committee for considering the FY26-27 appropriation request of the Ohio Holocaust and Genocide Memorial and Education Commission. Our work has truly only just begun. With continued investment from the state in the next biennial budget, we will provide even greater access to educational resources, professional development for educators and opportunities for learning and community engagement for all Ohioans.