



May 8, 2025

Testimony of Aaron Petersal, Executive Director of the Maltz Museum, to The Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee

The Honorable Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Timken, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Ohio House Senate Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of the Maltz Museum and our request for a \$1.25 million funding allocation to expand the Museum's Holocaust education programming. As we celebrate our 20th anniversary, we reflect on our role as a leading institution in Ohio dedicated to preserving Holocaust memory and combating hate through education.

Our work is more urgent than ever. Studies reveal a disturbing lack of Holocaust awareness in the United States. A survey by the Claims Conference found that **nationally 63% of Millennials and Gen Z do not know that six million Jews were murdered during the Holocaust**, and nearly **one in 10 Ohioans believe Jews caused the Holocaust**. Even more troubling, **46% of Ohio respondents** could not name a single concentration camp or ghetto. These gaps in knowledge are dangerous—not just for historical preservation but for the fight against rising antisemitism and other forms of hate today.

Antisemitic incidents in the U.S. have reached their highest levels since World War II. According to the Anti-Defamation League, the number of anti-Jewish incidents in the US has reached record levels in four of the past five years. And in the 12 months after 10/7, there were more than 10,000 **antisemitic incidents in America, that's the highest number they've ever recorded in any single 12-month period since they started tracking such data in the 1970s**. Hate does not exist in a vacuum—when history is forgotten, it is more likely to be repeated. That is why Holocaust education is not just about the past; it is about ensuring a safer future for all.

The Maltz Museum is uniquely positioned to address this challenge. As an internationally renowned and leading museum in Ohio dedicated to the Jewish experience and Holocaust education, we serve thousands of students, educators, and visitors each year. We provide powerful tools to help young people understand the dangers of unchecked hate and the importance of standing up against bigotry in all forms. This funding will allow us to deepen our impact in four critical areas:

1. New Dimensions in Testimony Video Capture of Erika Gold

To truly connect people with history, we need personal stories. Our interactive *Dimensions in Testimony* exhibit allows visitors to have virtual conversations with Holocaust survivors, preserving their voices for future generations. We currently host one survivor's testimony, but this funding will allow us to capture a second—local survivor Erika Gold, whose story of hiding in

Budapest contrasts with that of Auschwitz survivor Stanley Bernath. Expanding these resources ensures that visitors can engage with multiple perspectives, deepening their understanding of the Holocaust's horrors and the resilience of those who lived through it. We also must act now to capture these last stories while the remaining few Holocaust survivors are still with us to voice their stories. Time is not on our side.

2. Build Out of Interactive Biographies Theater

Right now, access to these survivor testimonies is limited to scheduled screenings in our 70-seat auditorium. A dedicated Interactive Biographies Theater will allow visitors to engage with these testimonies on demand during all museum hours. This expansion will make these critical resources more accessible and engaging, allowing thousands more students and visitors to learn from survivors firsthand.

3. Rewrite Holocaust Curriculum to Meet National Standards

Holocaust education is one of the most effective tools we have in combating antisemitism, but it must remain relevant. Our curriculum has not been updated since 2018. With new national standards from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, we must modernize our educational approach. This funding will allow us to work with experts to create a hands-on, student-led curriculum that answers essential questions: *Who are the Jewish people? What is our long history? Where does the Holocaust fit into that history? What does modern antisemitism look like, and how do we fight it?*

4. Support for Bringing (post)JEWISH Exhibition to Ohio

The impact of the Holocaust extends far beyond the end of the war, and understanding this history is vital for students today. The postJEWISH exhibition delves into the rebuilding of Jewish communities in Europe and the United States after the Holocaust, offering invaluable insights into resilience, identity, and cultural renewal. This funding will enable the public to engage with this powerful narrative, providing them with universal lessons on perseverance, the human capacity to rebuild after tragedy, and the importance of preserving cultural heritage.

Conclusion

The lessons of the Holocaust are clear: silence and ignorance allow hatred to flourish. This support from the State of Ohio alone will not end anti-Semitism, stop hate crimes, or prevent genocide, but our state can contribute significantly to these goals. At a time when antisemitism has risen at alarming rates, especially after the October 7th Hamas-led massacre, we cannot afford complacency. The Maltz Museum has spent the past 20 years educating, engaging, and empowering students and visitors to recognize the warning signs of hate and take action.

The universal lessons of the Holocaust that we teach ingrain in individuals the need for justice, critical thinking skills, and alliance building. They teach us about the importance of refusing to

participate in hate, of standing up against injustice and acting as allies of those who are targeted. With this funding, we can expand and deepen our reach and ensure that the next generation is equipped with the knowledge and tools to say, *never again*.

I urge you to support this request, especially as at a time of rising hate, intolerance and violence – **particularly targeted at the Jewish People where we've seen the largest increase in hate incidents** - and help us continue this essential work. We look forward to working with you as you continue to devote your urgent attention to this issue. Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Aaron Petersal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Aaron" and last name "Petersal" clearly distinguishable.

Aaron Petersal
Executive Director
Maltz Museum

