

TESTIMONY
of the
American Jewish Committee
in support of
SB372 - A bill to *create the Holocaust and Genocide
Memorial and Education Commission*
before the
Ohio Senate Committee on Finance
December 1, 2020

American Jewish Committee is pleased to endorse SB 372 which will create a Holocaust and Genocide Memorial in Education Commission, a commission whose purpose it will be to “further Holocaust and genocide memorial (...) education”¹ in the state of Ohio.

American Jewish Committee is an organization of American Jews founded in 1906 for the purpose of advancing the rights of Jews and all others to be free of bias and bigotry. From its inception in the wake of czarist pogroms, it has warned against anti-Semitism; in the 1930’s it worked to alert the world of the mortal danger to European Jews posed by Naziism. It continues that work till this day. Just last month, it published *The State of Anti-Semitism in America Report 2020*. Almost a quarter of Americans, according to the Report, profess to knowing little or nothing about the Holocaust. That poll further demonstrates that despite the horrors of the Holocaust, dangerous levels of anti-Semitism persist in America.

Two recent polls, one by the Pew Forum and the other by the Conference of Material Jewish Claims Against Germany reinforce the conclusion that Holocaust and genocide education is urgently needed.

The Claims Conference published the results of their *U.S. Millennial Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness Survey*, the first-ever 50-state survey on Holocaust knowledge among Millennials and Gen Z. (<http://www.claimscon.org/millennial-study/>)

The Pew Forum poll, for example, indicated that less than half of Americans polled knew how many Jews were killed during the Holocaust. Perhaps even more disturbing is the Pew poll’s finding that less than half of those questioned knew that Hitler came to power through the democratic processes.

¹ There seems to be a superfluous word here.

Finally, Pew found that, overall, teens “display lower levels of knowledge about the Holocaust than their elders do” in their study on “What Americans Know about the Holocaust.” (<https://www.pewforum.org/2020/01/22/what-americans-know-about-the-holocaust>)

The Conference of Jewish Material Claims Against Germany also recently issued a poll which too found depressingly low levels of knowledge about the Holocaust amongst “Millennials and Gen Z Americans.” More than three-fifths of those polled did not know that 6 million Jews were killed. (To bring this home to Ohio, 36 percent of Ohioans in these age cohorts believed two million or less Jews were killed in the Holocaust). (<http://www.claimscon.org/millennial-study/>)

Nationwide, an astounding and sickening 11% of these aged Americans believed that Jews caused the Holocaust.

If this abysmal level of knowledge applies to the Nazi Holocaust, about which so much has been written and depicted in films and other media, and for which many museums and memorials already exist, one can only imagine how ignorant Americans are about genocide in Armenia, Rwanda and Yugoslavia.

What is important here is not merely that there is a gap in Americans’ knowledge of history. To be sure, that is a problem. It is rather, that a seminal event like the Holocaust which so vividly demonstrates how fragile democracy is—Hitler staged no coup—is not understood. Neither have many Americans assimilated the lesson of how quickly a civilized nation can descend to mass murder on an unimaginable scale. And, while “never again” became a popular slogan after the Holocaust of European Jewry, Rwanda happened, Yugoslavia happened, and Syria happened. The list, unfortunately, goes on.

We are not so naïve as to believe that Holocaust and genocide education will eliminate once and for all the threat of genocide or another Holocaust or anti-Semitism and the other forms of hate that fuel such abominations. But, no doubt, education properly done makes such events far less likely. It will drive home to students how hateful remarks and the dehumanization of people who are different when accepted and normalized by a society, can lead to a collapse of the moral and ethical restraints which prevent mass murder and the urge to quite literally eliminate those labeled different. Passage of SB372 will drive home how fragile democracy can be and how it devolves upon each citizen to ensure that democracies respect all their citizens and treat them all with equal respect and regard.

We do have one suggestion which we believe will improve the bill and insulate the commission from involvement in every dispute and armed conflict around the world.

Genocide is a crime with a very specific definition embodied in the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, a convention which has been accepted by all nations.² Put briefly, the crime of genocide requires proof of an intention to wipe out a group, or significant segment of, a group. Not every horrific crime, not every violation of

² AJC hosted the architect of that convention after World War II as he lobbied for its adoption AJC is proud to have helped his effort in that and many other ways.

international law, constitutes the crime of genocide. The drafters of the Convention quite deliberately did not want the crime of genocide, with all the moral gravity of that offense, confused, even diluted, with other, often lesser, offenses, even where those offenses also violated the law of nations. Decades later, this precise definition of the crime of genocide was subsequently incorporated without change into the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

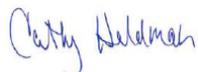
The definition of genocide outlined in proposed section 197.01(A) exactly tracks the definition in the Genocide Convention. However, section 197.01(B) muddies the waters by including undefined “related crimes, including crimes against humanity, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and mass killing.” With a proper intent, these will in some circumstances constitute genocide—but not every war crime constitutes genocide. Neither is every war crime as clearly delineated as is genocide.

We believe that the inclusion of this additional language will embroil the commission in refereeing competing claims of war crimes, which now accompany almost every armed conflict around the globe. That is a prescription for paralysis and for the politicization of what would otherwise be a non-controversial proposition.

We think it is best if the commission focuses on the very worst of crimes—those like the Holocaust, designed to wipe out an entire people. Omitting lines 21 through 23 of the SB372 in our view strengthens, not weakens the bill.

Thank you for this opportunity for us to present our views.

Respectfully,



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