

SB 372 TESTIMONY: *Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Cleveland, OH*

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Burke, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Committee:

We are burdened by a heavy task, to remember 11 million men, women, and children murdered during the Holocaust because they were deemed unworthy by the Nazi regime.

Our responsibility, as citizens of this world, is to remember them – each of the 6 million Jews, including 1.5 million children, and 5 million Catholics, Gypsies, homosexuals, disabled, and still more – not as statistics and facts from history textbooks, but as human beings who had hopes and dreams. Like you and me, they were parents and grandparents, siblings and cousins. They were athletes and scholars, painters and architects. They loved to swim in the summer and throw snowballs in the winter. But unlike you and me, their rights were systematically and legally stripped as part of a government directive. They were caged, experimented on, starved, and gassed. It didn't happen overnight.

Propaganda, hate speech, the passing of laws that put the rights of some above the rights of others -- every step was by design.

We have an opportunity to learn from this period of time, and deliver to children yet unborn, a different kind of world in which empathy leads over jealousy, and acts of kindness are valued over acts of hate. It should not matter what side of politics you are on, or what religion you practice, or where you children attend school. Every person deserves to learn about one of the most violent periods in our human history, lest we should repeat it.

The term “never again” is shorthand for, remember how it started when... and what steps were taken then... Jewish shops were closed, Jewish people were taken from their homes, Jewish cemeteries were vandalized, and Jewish men and women wore yellow stars on their coats, before their bones were turned into soap. Never again means even if you aren't Jewish that you still care what happened to the Jews. Never again means replacing the word Jewish with any other peoplehood and still caring what happens to them. Never again means taking action to ensure history will not be repeated.

At the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage, we take action through education.

In an average year, approximately 10,000 students come through our doors -- we wish it could be 100,000 more, because within our walls are stories that lift history out of textbooks and into real life, sharing real life memories of snowball throwing, sunbeam chasing children and adults who survived the Holocaust to bear witness for the next generation. This is one of the most meaningful ways students can experience history, by meeting a person connected to that historical event, connecting past to present.

When Holocaust survivor Stanley Bernath, of blessed memory, spoke to high school students from Cleveland's Facing History New Tech, their teacher shared the connection made between Stanley's life and their own lives.

Some of our kids experience trauma, drug use in the home, being evicted from their homes, they have gang violence happening around them. To hear Stanley, talk about the traumatic experience that he went through as a teenager - as someone their age - they can find an important connection.

He repeated three things he learned: “never give up no matter how bad it seems, always believe in yourself, and no one is better than I am and I am not better than anyone else.”

Hearing him say those things after surviving the Holocaust, our kids can take that to heart, and do something good in the world the same way he did something good in the world.

We marvel at how students gather around survivors like Stanley and snap selfies to post on their social media feeds, treating a 90 year old man like a young celebrity who they are proud to meet - their age, or race, or religious differences aside - students are invigorated by learning history this way, by seeing objects and artifacts from a different place and time, and listening to the personal and powerful stories of the men, women, and children who were there, connecting past to present with the hopes of building a better future.

We were once told by a teacher, “Our students search and find themselves within this narrative,” as they consider: *How are power and influence used to spread hate? What is legalized hate vs individualized hate? Who are upstanders, bystanders, or perpetrators in any situation?*

Teaching the Holocaust gives students knowledge and language that empowers them to willfully choose what side of history they want to stand on, not only in reflection of the past but also in consideration of the present. Because right now, in the room where they are sitting – wherever they may be – history is happening, just like it’s happening in the room where we are sitting. So, we ask, “What side of history will we be on?”

[The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance](#) explains the all-encompassing nature of Holocaust education.

Teaching and learning about the Holocaust provides an essential opportunity to inspire critical thinking, societal awareness, and personal growth. The Holocaust, a watershed event in world history, spanned geographic boundaries, affected all segments of societies, and occurred in the context of the Second World War.

Decades later, societies continue to wrestle with both the memory and historical record of the Holocaust in the midst of contemporary challenges. These include persistent antisemitism and xenophobia, unfolding genocides in the world, the ongoing refugee crisis, and threats to many democratic norms and values. This is particularly relevant with the rise of authoritarian-style governments as well as by populist or extreme movements within (liberal) democracies. Educators in formal settings (such as schools) and informal settings (such as museums and other such entities) can engage learners through responsible, fact based historical approaches informed by other disciplines.

Although unique in time and place, the Holocaust was nonetheless a human event that raises challenging questions: about individual and collective responsibility, the meaning of active citizenship, and about the structures and societal norms that can become dangerous for certain groups and society as a whole.

In 2019, the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) tracked thirty-one active hate groups in Ohio, up from 26 a decade prior. These hate groups include: Racist Skinheads, White Nationalists, the Ku Klux Klan, and Neo-Nazis like The Daily Stormer -- who made news in Cleveland last year when a Holocaust denial flier with their logo was posted on Maltz Museum property – these groups are listed among other general hate groups like the Proud Boys, who recently received national attention when told to “Stand Back and Stand By” during a presidential debate – and still more. We do not believe that these hate groups represent the values or viewpoints of most Ohioans.

As [antisemitism increases](#) and [knowledge of the Holocaust declines](#), the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Cleveland has established a statewide campaign to increase Holocaust education throughout Ohio in partnership with the [Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center](#) in Cincinnati.

Through this dual partnership, called [Stop the Hate Ohio](#), the museums offer joint programming and workshops to reach thousands of Ohioans throughout the year. Driven by a mutual belief that Ohioans care about learning from the lessons of the Holocaust, we are working together to provide digital programming for the public, training opportunities for educators, and in-person experiences through interactive exhibits.

We stand in support of SB 372 and the creation of a commission giving opportunity to expand our reach and amplify our work.

What we do alone is good. What we can do together is great. What we can do with the support of the State of Ohio is limitless. We can Stop the Hate.

Thank you

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