



**SB 372 Proponent Testimony  
Ohio Senate Finance Committee  
December 1, 2020**

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

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony as you consider one of the most important educational legislations on behalf of the students in the State of Ohio.

As philosopher George Santayana famously stated "***Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it***"

This is one of the most appropriate sentiments in the context of Holocaust education.

Famous Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal has left an enduring legacy on the fight against hate, bigotry, and anti-Semitism. Mr. Wiesenthal sacrificed his career in architecture, his life, and those around him, in order to ensure that Nazis would not only be unable to roam the earth as free men, but that the lessons of the Holocaust crimes will forever be enshrined in our hearts and minds.

That is why Rabbi Marvin Hier, the Founder and Dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, created an organization to further Mr. Wiesenthal's legacy. It is our duty to not only remember the perilous horror of the holocaust, but we must also educate generations as injustices and genocides continue to occur. As Mr. Wiesenthal said in a meeting with then-President Jimmy Carter, "There is no denying that Hitler and Stalin are alive today...they are waiting for us to forget, because this is what makes possible the resurrection of these two monsters".

As the Simon Wiesenthal Center works tirelessly every day to call out acts of hatred, we also recognize that the only antidote to the virus of hate is education.

Ignorance about the Holocaust is growing, particularly among young people. A recent survey showed that two-thirds of U.S. millennials were not familiar with Auschwitz, the largest Nazi death camp complex, located near Krakow, Poland. I am sure you aware that more than 1.1 million people were gassed, shot or starved at Auschwitz, including nearly a million Jews. How can this history be lost on your youth?

In addition, we now contend with Holocaust deniers like the Florida principal who refused to call the holocaust a factual, historical event.



But it is not enough to know what happened, the horrific outcome, but we must understand what led up to the systematic killing of the Jewish people – we must understand how propaganda and hate can happen today in our own communities.

Holocaust education is also a study of democracy and the teaching of core values... as our youth needs to recognize how anti-Semitism and racism can run amok even in a democratic country. Holocaust education is not just looking back, but it is also looking forward.

How do we teach about the horrors of war? Why should we continue to pass on this historical knowledge? We could answer that it is simply out of a duty to remember. However, teaching about sensitive subjects, when grounded in facts and in-depth analysis, can allow us to go well beyond simply remembering by cultivating students' critical thinking skills.

- The Holocaust was a defining event in the history of humanity that shook the foundations of Western civilization and transformed international politics and justice.
- The study of the Holocaust helps us to understand key concepts such as democracy, dictatorship, propaganda, collaboration, resistance, intervention, and genocide.
- Studying the Holocaust contributes to civics and human rights education. It invites us to reflect on fundamental themes of life in society and the negative impacts of common realities such as racism, discrimination and hatred.

Holocaust education has the potential to encourage young people to think about how to improve humanity through individual and group actions. Its real test lies in how young people live out their daily lives. The effectiveness of Holocaust education is not one that we can readily measure, but it is more important than ever.

What always strikes me is the lack of awareness of Mr. Wiesenthal's work, the reality, I have learned, is that we all can see the hate around us, but often we respond only when it is too late. Holocaust education is not just a history lesson from seventy years ago; destructive hate, racism, and anti-Semitism exists today. Unlike in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century where one had to bluntly stand in the town square to share words of hate; today it thrives behind anonymous individuals online through social media.



We, the adults in the room, are responsible to provide our youth the tools to combat their own internal demons, but also to acknowledge hate around them, in their communities and around the world. From our Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, to our countless Moriah Films' productions; the Simon Wiesenthal Center creates educational tools to reach the masses. Our regional office in the Midwest, will work with the Ohio schools, elected officials, professionals, and community members to teach about instances of racism, hate, and anti-Semitism. Our office is working with the Illinois State Board of Education in updating their curriculum and we would make the same resources available to the Ohio State Board of Education.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center commends Senator Michael Rulli for introducing SB372 – the Holocaust Commission Bill that would require Holocaust education in Ohio schools and that would establish a Holocaust Memorial and Education Commission. Senator Rulli and the sponsors of this bill recognize our responsibility to ensure that our young citizens understand the ramifications of unchecked hate and bias. The lessons of the Holocaust are germane in today's society as it forces students to address seminal questions that deal with the essence of what it means to be an up-stander and not a bystander.

Thank you again for allowing me this opportunity to submit my remarks in support of the Ohio Holocaust and Genocide Education & Memorial Commission bill.