

Testimony of Andrew C.M. Mizsak
Member of the Board of Kol Israel Foundation
Ohio Senate
Committee on General Government and Budget
Tuesday, March 1, 2022

Good Morning Chairman Peterson, Vice Chairman Cirino, and Ranking Member Craig:

My name is Andrew Mizsak, and I am a Member of the Board of Kol Israel Foundation. I have been a Member of the Board since June, 2021, and I am honored to be one of the first two non-Jewish Board Members in the now-near-63-year history of the Foundation. It is my honor to submit this written testimony to you this morning. I apologize I am unable to join you today, due to an unavoidable set of scheduling conflicts.

I submit this testimony in the hopes of your favorable consideration of reporting of SCR No. 11 out of Committee and to the full Senate.

I would first like to thank Leader Yuko and Senator Dolan for their support of this Resolution, and for their support of Kol Israel Foundation. Kol Israel Foundation was so grateful for their attendance at our annual Remembrance Ceremony on the Sunday between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur at the Kol Israel Foundation Holocaust Memorial in Bedford Heights on Sunday, September 12, 2021. I would like to invite all of you to join us this fall for this annual event.

In order to provide additional context about the Kol Israel Foundation Holocaust Memorial, and its importance to the history of Southeastern Cuyahoga County, the State of Ohio, the United States, and the world, please allow me to walk you through a few key dates.

In 1959, Holocaust survivors who immigrated to Northeast Ohio, founded Kol Israel Family as a way of building a social network, forging a bond of extended family, and creating a community within the Jewish community of Northeast Ohio, of those who had the shared experience of living through the Holocaust.¹ By 1961, these founding members of Kol Israel Foundation had raised enough money to erect the monument that has stood as a silent sentry over the six caskets interred beneath the Kol Israel Foundation Holocaust Memorial that contain ashes, remains, and other mementos of victims of the Holocaust.²

One of the main purposes of this Memorial is to allow the loved ones of those who were lost in the Holocaust to have a place where they can offer the prayers of Kaddish – the prayers of remembrance – to their loved ones who were murdered by Hitler’s forces between 1939 and 1945.

¹ History of Kol Israel Foundation. www.kifcle.org/history

² Memorial and Commemoration. www.kifcle.org/memorial

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At the time of the dedication of the Kol Israel Foundation Holocaust Memorial in May, 1961, weeks past the 16th anniversary of V-E Day, this monument – believed to be one of the first, if not the first, permanent memorials in the United States created to honor and remember victims of the Holocaust.

For many years, other than by members of Kol Israel Foundation and those who have a connection to it, this monument was largely unknown to the greater community within Southeastern Cuyahoga County – primarily comprised of Bedford Heights, Bedford, Maple Heights, Oakwood, Walton Hills, and other nearby surrounding communities. I can share with you as a lifer in the general area, until about 2015, I had no idea what this monument is.

In 2015, The Honorable Fletcher D. Berger, Mayor of the City of Bedford Heights, connected my wife Dana – who was Director of the Bedford Historical Society at that time – and me with Mark S. Frank, now-Immediate Past President of Kol Israel Foundation, because the Foundation was interested in having an Ohio Historical Marker placed at the Memorial. We were successful in these efforts, and the Marker was dedicated at the 2016 Remembrance Ceremony. The City of Bedford Heights, by an act of City Council, designated the Kol Israel Foundation Holocaust Memorial as a City of Bedford Heights Historic Landmark.

Since 2019, Kol Israel Foundation has been working on obtaining three designations for this place that is considered sacred to so many in Northeast Ohio by the US Department of the Interior. The Resolution before you asks the Congress of the United States to pass an Act of Congress to declare this site as a National Memorial. This is the highest level of designation possible for this site, as this site would then become a part of the National Park System, and Ohio's 11th National Park Service Unit (currently, there are 8 sites and 2 National Trails in Ohio).³

However, this is more than just about the ability to call this Site a National Memorial and have that arrowhead sign on the gates of the cemetery where this monument is located. To receive this designation, and to have the sentiments of the Ohio General Assembly on the record by and through the adoption of this Resolution, says to the Congress of the United States that the people of Ohio believe that the atrocities of the Holocaust should always be remembered, and that this site is important – as evidenced by both Bedford Heights' municipal landmark designation and the placement of the Ohio Historical Marker, as a part of the history of that region of Cuyahoga County, the State of Ohio, the nation, and the world.

³ National Park Service information about Ohio. www.nps.gov/ohio

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By reporting this Resolution favorably out of this Committee and to the full Ohio Senate also makes the statement to the Congress of the United States that it is time to add a site to the list of our nation’s most sacred and important places and spaces that has a connection to the Holocaust.

Currently, of the 423 sites in the United States that have one of the 19 classifications of National Park Service units, there are none that have a direct connection to the Holocaust, and very few have a connection to the European Theatre of Operations of World War II.⁴ Additionally, there are no National Historic Landmarks that have a connection to the Holocaust.⁵ And finally, there are no sites – amongst the over 85,000 sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places, according to our research, that have a connection to the Holocaust.⁶ We believe that by and through the adoption of this Resolution, that the Ohio General Assembly will make the clear statement – just as it did with the creation of the Holocaust Memorial on Capitol Square – that the people of Ohio are tolerant, that they have an appreciation of the history of its people – including those who came here literally with the clothes on their back to build a new life – and that the Holocaust and its permanent remembrance, as well as enshrinement as a National Memorial, is important.

As I stated earlier, there are additional reasons to support this Resolution and to urge the Congress to pass an Act to establish the Kol Israel Foundation Holocaust Memorial as a National Memorial. These include, but are not limited to:

- 1.) National Park Services sites contributes tens of millions of dollars to the economy of the State of Ohio.⁷ This site would have a positive economic impact upon the communities of Southeastern Cuyahoga County.
- 2.) The designation of this Site as a National Memorial would provide additional protections upon it as it relates to if it were to ever be vandalized or defaced.⁸
- 3.) This would add a fifth National Park Service site in Northeast Ohio – all five of them are within driving distance of each other.⁹ This could also serve as a catalyst for a Northeast Ohio Jewish-American Historic Trail.

⁴ Website of the National Park Service. [National Park System \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/)

⁵ National Historic Landmarks Program. [National Historic Landmarks Program \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/nhl/)

⁶ National Register of Historic Places. [National Register of Historic Places \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/nr/)

⁷ Headwaters Economics. [National Parks Economic Impacts - Headwaters Economics](https://www.headwaters.org/)

⁸ [43 CFR § 8365.1-5 - Property and resources. | CFR | US Law | LII / Legal Information Institute \(cornell.edu\)](https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/title-43/cfr-8365-1-5/)

⁹ National Park Service – Ohio. [Ohio \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/ohio/)

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In a 2014 speech to the City Club of Cleveland,¹⁰ Jonathan B. Jarvis, then-Director of the National Park Service, to paraphrase, said that as the National Park Service was on the cusp of entering its second century of service to the nation (as an agency), the Park Service seeks to tell a fuller, and more complete story of the American story – including those of underserved and underrepresented peoples and communities in our nation. While Touro Synagogue National Historic Site,¹¹ the first Jewish Synagogue in the United States, located in Newport, Rhode Island, is a National Park Service site, it shares the story of the Jewish people in the early days of our nation.¹² If the Kol Israel Foundation Holocaust Memorial were to become a National Memorial, as a part of the full story of the United States in and after World War II, value would be added to the National Park System by telling another facet of the American story with an Ohio community, as often found throughout American history, taking the lead.

Finally, the consideration and favorable reporting of this Resolution to the full Senate, is as straightforward as the ask that we are making to the Congress.

Kol Israel Foundation is not asking for any Federal appropriation relative to the support, upkeep, programming, and/or maintenance of this Site.

Kol Israel Foundation already conducts educational programming with local schools, community groups, and other organizational partners.

This monument is already secured by the cemetery where it is located, as well as by the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland.

Our efforts have received documents of support from the following organizations: Letter of Support from Governor Mike DeWine; Letter of Support from the Ohio History Connection; Letter of Support from the National Council of Jewish Women; Letter of Support from The Honorable Kathy Mulcahy, Mayor of the Village of Orange; Letter of Support from The Honorable Annette M. Blackwell, Mayor of the City of Maple Heights; Proclamation of Support from The Honorable Stanley C. Koci, Mayor of the City of Bedford; and many more.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I am happy to receive and reply to any questions the Honorable Members of the Committee may have, and I am grateful for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

¹⁰ [Find Your Park: The Importance of U.S. National Parks and American Values | The City Club of Cleveland | April 11, 2014](#)

¹¹ www.nps.gov/tosy

¹² www.tourosynagogue.org

Respectfully submitted,

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