

Montgomery County Jewish Parents Coalition



One Community, many voices. United Against Antisemitism.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 1058. I am Dr. Paula Bienenfeld, and I am testifying on behalf of the Montgomery County Jewish Parents Coalition. The Montgomery County Jewish Parents Coalition was founded in 2021 in response to the alarming increase in antisemitism in Montgomery County, Maryland, in particular, the antisemitism, from both students and teachers, in the Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) system. The Coalition consists of hundreds of parents and resident activists working as volunteers to fight antisemitism and antiZionism in the county. In addition to fighting antisemitism in the schools we raise our Jewish voices in the county through events like Jewish American Heritage Month; and we testify and work with county and state legislators and agencies to stop JewHatred and to support Israel. We are a powerful, consistent Jewish voice fighting antisemitism wherever and whenever we see it.

We support Senate Bill 1058, which is sorely needed not only in Montgomery County but throughout the State of Maryland. We appreciate that there are repercussions in the form of funds withheld, should the county Board of Education not implement the required content and curriculum standards and training.

Given the unprecedented levels of antisemitism in our public schools, coming both from students and from teachers, it is critical from a moral standpoint, that this legislation be passed, to require content standards and the teaching of Holocaust education to counteract in part the horrific antisemitism to which our Jewish students are subjected. Our members have heard from Jewish students and their parents of children being yelled at, physically assaulted, children who have had their yarmulkes pulled off their heads, children who no longer wear their tsitsis (religious garb) because they are afraid. We have heard from teachers in MCPS who are afraid to wear any jewelry signifying they are Jews, and are, in the words of one teacher, 'just keeping my head down.' We have heard from teachers who are tearful and in pain because MCPS will not acknowledge the antisemitism prevalent in our schools and will do almost nothing to prevent it.

No child should be afraid to attend our county public schools, and no parent should be afraid to send their children to school. Yet within the last few years this is what has happened.

The requirement for Holocaust education in our public schools is long overdue. Education about the history of the Jews, including the context and years-long run-up to the horrors and genocide of the Holocaust, as well as the history of Jews in the United States, as a marginalized group of people, is critical to an understanding of the meaning of 'Never again' and the current precarious position of Jews in our nation. It is critical in our efforts to deconstruct antisemitism and end Jew hatred in Maryland.