

Testimony of Michael DeLong Before the House Ways and Means Committee in Support of SB 1058—Education—Curriculum Standards—Antihate and Holocaust Education (Educate to Stop the Hate Act)

March 27th, 2024

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, members of the Committee:

My name is Michael DeLong and I am a resident of Silver Spring, Maryland, I am active in local organizing and advocacy, and I am a proud Democrat and American, and a proud Reform Jew. I strongly urge you to support Senate Bill 1058—Education—Curriculum Standards—Antihate and Holocaust Education (the Educate to Stop the Hate Act).

This bill would require elementary, middle, and high schools to incorporate lessons into their curriculum about the Holocaust and also the long history of anti-Semitism that led to this genocide. The Maryland State Board of Education will adopt curriculum standards and resources for these lessons, and also for contemporary racism and prejudice; it will further revise history frameworks to focus on African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Jewish Americans, Arab Americans, and other marginalized people.

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored murder by Adolf Hitler and the Nazis of six million Jews across Europe and beyond. In recent years, and especially since the October 7th attacks, we have sadly seen a big surge in anti-Semitism online and around our state. According to the Anti-Defamation League, anti-Semitic incidents have gone up by 337% and there have been a number of horrible incidents in public schools. In Baltimore County, a Jewish middle schooler was subjected to Nazi salutes, bullying, and displays of swastikas, and decided to learn virtually instead of returning to the classroom. Similar incidents have taken place in Howard County and sadly in Montgomery County, with certain people writing “Kill the Jews.”

Hatred is being spread online on a massive scale, especially on social media. Algorithms and videos perpetuate harmful stereotypes and misinformation about Jews and Israelis. Many young people are confused and misinformed about the Holocaust and anti-Jewish violence. Studying Jewish history is a hobby of mine, and I have been repeatedly surprised by how little a lot of people, especially young people, know about the Holocaust—and they are often completely unaware of other anti-Semitic actions. Most of them were not actively malevolent. They were eager to learn more and to be allies to the Jewish community, but they lacked a basic foundation of knowledge.

Years ago, when I attended my alma mater Reed College, that college was rocked by repeated anti-Semitic incidents, including swastikas being drawn and numerous anti-Jewish comments. Sadly, these incidents continued even after I graduated from Reed. I have often wondered if education about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism before the Holocaust, including anti-Jewish stereotypes and persecutions, would have made a difference.

Moreover, the last of the Holocaust survivors are passing away. After one of these incidents at Reed College, a couple of Holocaust survivors came and spoke about their experiences in concentration camps, and I think it had an excellent impact. Their words did make a difference and now with this bill SB 1058, the Maryland Legislature has the power to make a difference as well.

Detailed education about the Holocaust will benefit students of all races and backgrounds, help combat and reduce anti-Semitism, and indirectly help combat other prejudices as well. A majority of states have already established Holocaust education mandates and Maryland should join their ranks. I also urge that special efforts be made to include Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews in these curriculums, since many of them also suffered and died during the Holocaust and other oppressions. For example, during the Nazi occupation of North Africa the Jews of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya were persecuted, sent to camps, and sometimes killed. An anti-Semitic and Nazi-promoted riot in Baghdad devastated the Jewish community there.

SB 1058 will be a pivotal step towards ensuring that the Holocaust remains a timeless and vital lesson on the consequences of hatred, the importance of tolerance, and the need to combat anti-Semitism.

I urge a favorable report on this bill. Thank you and please contact me at michaeldelong94@gmail.com with any questions.

Shalom,

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