



Maryland General Assembly
House Ways and Means Committee
February 28, 2024
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ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this testimony in support of *House Bill 1181, Education – Curriculum Standards – Antihate and Holocaust Education (Educate to Stop the Hate Act)*. At a time of rising antisemitism across the country, including in Maryland, and at a time when Holocaust and genocide awareness, particularly among young people, is fading from memory, this bill sends a clear message that Maryland is committed to ensuring that schools have the tools they need to push back against these trends.

Since 1913, the mission of ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) has been to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” Dedicated to combating antisemitism, prejudice, and bigotry of all kinds, as well as defending democratic ideals and promoting civil rights, ADL has long been recognized as a leading resource on effective responses to violent bigotry, conducting an annual Audit of Antisemitic Incidents and drafting model hate crime statutes for state legislatures. We strongly feel that the need for robust Holocaust and genocide education in Maryland’s schools could not be more urgent. When students do not understand the history of the Holocaust and other genocides, or the elements leading to these tragedies, they cannot fully grasp the significance of bias and bigotry today, or the lasting impact that hateful words and conduct can have on the community at large.

Since October 7, U.S. antisemitic incidents have skyrocketed, reaching the highest point of any three-month period since ADL began tracking in 1979, according to preliminary data. Between October 7, 2023, and January 7, 2024, ADL recorded **a total of 3,283 antisemitic incidents** across the United States, representing a **361-percent increase** compared to the same period one year prior, which saw 712 incidents. The preliminary three-month tally is higher than the total number of antisemitic incidents tracked in any year in the last decade, except for calendar year 2022, when the total number of incidents reached a historic high of 3,697.

Since Oct. 7, there’s been an average of nearly **34 antisemitic incidents per day**, putting 2023 on track to be the highest year for antisemitic acts against Jews since ADL started tracking this data in the late 1970s. The American Jewish community is facing a threat level that’s now unprecedented in modern history. It’s shocking that we’ve recorded more antisemitic acts in three months than we usually would in an entire year. In this difficult moment, antisemitism is spreading and mutating in alarming ways. This onslaught of hate includes a dramatic increase in fake bomb threats that disrupt services at synagogues and put communities on edge across the country.

This data also confirms what Jewish communities have seen firsthand across the country – and it corresponds with a notable rise in antisemitic attitudes. We’re seeing a mainstreaming and a normalization of antisemitism, the likes of which have not been seen in this country for

generations. In Maryland, 109 antisemitic incidents were reported in 2022, a 98 percent increase from the 55 incidents in 2021, and a 132 percent increase from the 47 incidents reported in 2020. Maryland registered with the 10th highest number of antisemitic incidents reported in the country for 2022. The raw data we are analyzing shows Maryland poised to report even higher for our 2023 audit of antisemitic incidents.

In 2022, there were 494 antisemitic incidents tabulated in non-Jewish schools (mostly public schools). This is a 49-percent increase from the 331 incidents in 2021. Of the 494 K-12 school incidents, 257 were incidents of harassment, 232 were incidents of vandalism and five were assaults. School-based harassment incidents in 2022 included one-off incidents such as when one student told another, “Ew Jew. Why don’t you kill yourself,” or when a student shouted in the middle of a math class, “If anyone celebrates Yom Kippur today, you can die!” Harassment incidents included recurrent antisemitic bullying, such as classmates taunting Jewish students with Holocaust jokes and references.

The 232 incidents of antisemitic vandalism in K-12 schools in 2022 represent a 53% increase from the 152 incidents tabulated in 2021. Of the 232 vandalism cases recorded, swastikas were present in 88% of K-12 school vandalism cases (205 incidents). Vandalism incidents included messages such as “Kill all Jews,” “6M Oven,” “Hitler was right” and “Jews not welcome.” Given the insidious nature of bullying, compounded by the fact that many children may not feel empowered to report their experiences, it is likely that the actual number of school-based antisemitic incidents was significantly higher than the data reported in the Audit.

These incidents did not take place in a vacuum. They come at a time of rising bigotry, the emboldening of hate groups, and a resurgence of Holocaust denialism—a challenge that has existed on the fringes for many years, but in recent years has encroached on the mainstream of our politics and discourse. They also come at a time when Holocaust and genocide awareness, particularly among young people, is fading from memory. According to one recent survey, for example, 22% of American millennials have either never heard of the Holocaust or are unsure whether they have heard of it.

Here in Maryland, we have an important obligation and unique opportunity to empower a new generation to learn from our past to build a safer, stronger, and more equitable society in the future. Throughout the state of Maryland, ADL provides anti-bias training to students and educators and develops innovative materials, programs, and services that build bridges of communication and understanding. **HB 1181** would require the State Board of Education to develop comprehensive curriculum resources for instructional content on antihate education, including the Holocaust at age-appropriate levels. This bill is absolutely necessary as the stories of the Holocaust have and will continue to serve as crucial reminders of the dangers of allowing hate and extremism to go unchecked.

Almost eight decades after the end of World War II, we do not have the privilege to remain complacent about hate in any form, especially as we are seeing antisemitism rear its ugly head yet again. Educating our younger generations about the lessons of the Holocaust is one of the greatest tools we have to fight back against this continuous onslaught of hate and extremism. According to a recent study from Echoes and Reflections, an ADL educational program,

Holocaust education encourages empathy and tolerance. Students with Holocaust education have more pluralistic attitudes and are more open to differing viewpoints and report a greater willingness to challenge intolerant behavior in others. Students who learned about the Holocaust through survivor testimony showed higher critical thinking skills and greater sense of social responsibility and civic efficacy.

When students do not understand the history of the Holocaust and other genocides, or the elements leading to these tragedies, they cannot fully grasp the significance of bias and bigotry today or the lasting impact that hateful words and conduct can have on their school community or the community at large. Education is key to combating hate. By learning about the Holocaust, students will have the opportunity to explore how stereotypes, prejudice, and religious and ethnic hatred can escalate to atrocity.

ADL's researchers, educators, and advocates are prioritizing improving and expanding Holocaust education across the country, as it is a crucial tool in the fight against antisemitism and hate in all forms. Maryland must join the list of states that already require Holocaust education in their schools.

**We urge the Ways and Means Committee to give
HB1181 a favorable report.**