

Combating Historical Amnesia: Maryland's Imperative for Holocaust Education

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With the rise of antisemitism in America, an ominous feeling that we're reliving the 1930s is permeating Jewish communities. In these foreboding years, leading up to the Holocaust, Jews were scapegoated, marginalized and "othered", their businesses vandalized and boycotted, and hateful, antisemitic, imagery was commonplace. Sadly, these historical references are lost on too many of America's youth: one in five young Americans consider the Holocaust a [myth](#), and [two-thirds](#) are unaware that six million Jews were murdered.

In response to this alarming ignorance, and recognizing the [positive impact](#) that Holocaust knowledge has on attitudes toward Jewish communities, Maryland legislators have recently introduced two bills. [House Bill 1181](#) (CF Senate Bill 1058) would require schools to incorporate lessons on the holocaust into social studies curricula, including the pivotal events leading up and the roots of antisemitism. [House Bill 71](#), would provide grants for holocaust teaching materials and training in all Maryland public schools.

This is not Maryland legislators' first attempt at addressing these issues. In early 2023, Benjamin Kramer (D-Montgomery County) [proposed a spate of bills](#) to address ignorance of the holocaust and the burgeoning antisemitism in Maryland. These included creating a Holocaust Remembrance Day, funding school field trips to the Holocaust Museum, security grants for faith based institutions, and establishing a Holocaust education requirement in public schools. All passed with broad support except the last one.

Legislators now have another opportunity to act and the need is more pressing than ever.

In the aftermath of the October 7th terrorist attack in Israel, the [Anti-Defamation League](#) reported a staggering 337% increase in antisemitic incidents in America. Even before this, Maryland had the [10th](#) most antisemitic incidents of any state. In 2022, there were 3,697 reports of [anti-Jewish](#) hate crimes in the state, the most ever recorded and a [98% increase](#) over the year prior.

Unfortunately, our public schools maybe the epicenter of this alarming trend.

In Baltimore County, a Jewish middle schooler, subjected to Hitler salutes, bullying, and displays of swastikas, has opted to learn virtually over returning to the classroom. In Howard County, Jewish parents have expressed concern about an increasingly hostile climate, where students feel emboldened to utter derogatory comments and share antisemitic content online after numerous pro-Palestine school walkouts took place that were approved by administrators.

Montgomery County, with a population that is 10% Jewish, also had [several walkouts](#), many riddled with antisemitic signs and slogans, such as “Kill the Jews” and references to the terrorist organization, Hamas, as the “Palestinian resistance”. The district also has four public school teachers currently on administrative leave for writing antisemitic content online and in work emails. Even before October 7th, there were several high profile cases of antisemitic [bullying](#) and [graffiti](#) in the district with [61% of all hate/bias incidents](#) being anti Jewish. The issue has escalated to the point where Jewish educators within MCPS have united, [calling](#) for comprehensive antisemitism training for all staff members.

They are right that change is needed. A majority of states have already [established holocaust education mandates](#) and Maryland should join their ranks. Until the curriculum is changed, Maryland’s youth will continue to [languish](#) among the ten states with the least Holocaust knowledge. Approving these bills is the bare minimum the state can do to confront the twin plagues of historical ignorance and modern antisemitism.

Whereas once a glimpse of a tattooed number on an arm in the grocery store or a harrowing story of survival delivered to a school or religious institution provided inescapable reminders of the holocaust, the last of the survivors are passing on, necessitating a greater need for formal holocaust education. These bills, if passed into law, would be a pivotal step towards ensuring that the holocaust remains a timeless and critically important lesson on the consequences of hatred and the importance of tolerance.

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