

BALTIMORE SCHOOL *for the* ARTS

Testimony for Maryland General Assembly – State Senate
SB 837: Education – Curriculum – Study of the Holocaust (Educate to Stop the Hate Act)
Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
February 22, 2023

TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF PASSAGE

Warm greetings to the esteemed members of the State Senate. Thank you for hearing this bill today regarding the importance of Holocaust education and combating antisemitism. This bill is meant to provide accountability and support for objectives already in place through the Maryland State Department of Education. It is no question that Holocaust education is important and worthwhile; that philosophy needs to be supported by high-quality curricular materials and supports.

My name is Gerad Bandos, and I'm a high school chemistry teacher at Baltimore School for the Arts, in Baltimore City Public Schools. You might be wondering, as I did six years ago, what bearing the Holocaust has on chemistry, but if we have any hope of cultivating scientifically literate citizens, we must seize on the role of science in the Holocaust, as a genuine example of the relationship between science and society. My students examine the moral failings of the scientists of that generation, as well as the ethical dilemmas we face today in the scientific legacy of the Holocaust. How do we relate to medical knowledge from experiments performed on Jewish inmates without possibility of consent? What obligation does a scientist—for example, the developer of Zyklon B—have to ensure his discovery is not used for anything evil? We also discuss the successes of scientists throughout the Holocaust, such as Lise Meitner who effectively explained nuclear fission while she was fleeing Nazi persecution, or Niels Bohr, who used his power and privilege as a scientist to guarantee a place of refuge for the Jews of Denmark.

Unfortunately, I have found that students lack any of the foundational knowledge of Holocaust and antisemitism to engage deeply in these rich discussions. We need fully developed Holocaust curriculum and tools to educate about and diminish antisemitism throughout every setting of education in our state. Our lack of curricular content for the Holocaust was never more apparent to me than when, at the beginning of the school year, my school had trouble with antisemitic graffiti—swastikas appearing in bathrooms. While the administrators dealt with the disciplinary response, I was the first teacher approached to help the whole school with the restorative response, putting together a program with in-person and asynchronous components for Holocaust education. I sent daily “educational bites” to the student body with historical information about antisemitism and the Holocaust. I facilitated viewing and discussions for the PBS Ken Burns documentary *The US and the Holocaust*. And I facilitated a school-wide assembly with a Holocaust refugee survivor. But for most of the program, I had to start at “Square One,” as we did not have any indicators that the students had sufficient background in the Holocaust or the history and dynamics of antisemitism to engage in the more difficult discussions about American antisemitism and contemporary antisemitism. Our students are not presently moving through their schooling with an enduring understanding of the events and forces of the Holocaust.

My question for you today, is that when something similar happens in any other school across Maryland, do you want to spend valuable time “reviewing the basics,” or do you want students to dive into the process of building a better world as soon as possible? Vote YES for SB837 – Education – Educate to Stop the Hate Act.