



Maryland General Assembly
Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

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ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this testimony in support of *Senate Bill 837 Education – Curriculum – Study of the Holocaust (The Educate to Stop the Hate Act)*

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.

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. SB 837 would require the State Department of Education to develop guidelines on, and revise and enhance, instruction about the Holocaust in public schools, and require all public schools and certain nonpublic schools to include the revised and enhanced Holocaust instruction in school curricula. This bill would also encourage certain nonpublic schools to include Holocaust education in certain units of their curriculum. 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.

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.

ADL research has shown that antisemitic incidents and attitudes continue to threaten communities across the country, including in Maryland. In 2021 alone, ADL documented 2,717 antisemitic incidents in the United States. This was a 34% increase from the 2,026 incidents tabulated in 2020, and the highest number on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979. 55 of these incidents happened here in Maryland. Of the total national incidents, 178 involved harassment in K-12 schools – a 93% increase from the 92 incidents of harassment in 2020. School-based harassment incidents in 2021 included one-off incidents (such as when one student told another, “I wish Hitler was alive to kill you and the rest of the Jews,” or when a teacher said,

“Maybe the Jews deserved to die” while teaching a class on the Holocaust), in addition to recurring incidents of antisemitic bullying (such as classmates taunting Jewish students with Holocaust jokes and references). Disturbingly, ADL also documented 152 vandalism-related incidents in K-12 schools last year, involving messages such as “Gas Jews,” “We love Hitler,” Heil Hitler” and “Hitler was right,” and over 90% of these vandalism incidents included the use of a swastika.

These incidents do not take place in a vacuum and unfortunately in 2022 we have continued to see school-based incidents rise and permeate throughout Maryland. 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 awareness of the Holocaust is in decline. 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.

Educating our younger generations about the lessons of the Holocaust is one of the greatest tools we must 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. 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.

We urge the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to give SB837 a favorable report.