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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

**Senate Bill 837 – Education – Curriculum – Study of the Holocaust
 (Educate to Stop the Hate Act)
 Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

February 22, 2023

SUPPORT

Background: Senate Bill 837 (SB837) would simply codify MSDE’s 2019 commitment to make significant changes to the State’s Holocaust education framework and to give funding for teacher education to adequacy make the changes. The attached letter from 2019 lays out the changes MSDE stated they would make, but which do not seem to have been, at least, fully implemented. This bill is not an education mandate, it only codifies what the state has promised, yet failed to implement in a timely manner.

Written Comments: In September 2019 then State Superintendent Dr. Salmon responded to a request from The Baltimore Jewish Council, the JCRC of Greater Washington and 79 concerned elected officials about the state of Holocaust education in Maryland, a state where Millennials and Gen-Z-ers have one of the lowest rankings in terms of knowledge of the Holocaust according to a 2020 survey from the Claims Conference¹. The survey found that only 43% of Maryland’s younger citizens knew what Auschwitz was and of that, only 32% knew it was a concentration camp.² Further, 50% have seen some type of Holocaust denial on social media and over 50% had seen Nazi symbolism in their community or social media in the past five years.³ (This survey was taken in March 2020 before the latest wave of antisemitism during the pandemic.) Dr. Salmon stated that the following changes would be made:

- Adding a unit to address the Holocaust within the 4th and 5th grade social studies framework that is currently being revised by MSDE.
- Adding objective(s) regarding the roots of Antisemitism to an upcoming revision of 6th and 7th grade social studies education, to give students the context to study the Holocaust in high school.
- Including a new Holocaust objective in a high school U.S. history revised framework that is nearly completed – “Students will assess the progression of U.S. involvement in world affairs by tracing the origins of the Holocaust and the American response.”

¹ <https://www.claimscon.org/millennial-study/>

² <https://www.claimscon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Millennial-Holocaust-Survey-MARYLAND-TOPLINE-8.11.20.pdf>

³ <https://www.claimscon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Millennial-Holocaust-Survey-MARYLAND-TOPLINE-8.11.20.pdf>

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- Adding an objective to “evaluate the cause, course, and consequences of the Holocaust” to the Modern World History framework for high school. Maryland’s current framework referred to genocide but did not specially reference the Holocaust.
- Emphasizing that local school systems should devote funding for professional development of teachers around Holocaust instruction.

In July 2020 the Baltimore Jewish Council asked for an update and Dr. Salmon (letter attached) stated that all but the middle school updates had been adopted in November 2019 and that the middle school updates would be done by early 2021. In January 2023 the Council again asked for an update and MSDE replied (letter attached) that the middle school updates have yet to be finalized. Further, as you can read from testimony from both students and teachers in our public schools, the high school curriculum does not match the changes MSDE has attempted to make. Perhaps the main reason for the high school guideline changes not matching the classroom experience is due to a lack of educational opportunities for teachers. This bill includes \$500,000 a year in annual teacher education funding so that teacher know how to best educate their students about the Holocaust.

For these reasons the Baltimore Jewish Council asks for a favorable report on SB837.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.