



Maryland General Assembly  
House Ways and Means Committee  
February 22, 2023

Testimony of Meredith R. Weisel  
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ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this testimony in **strong support of HB 0638**. This bill will establish a Holocaust Education Assistance Grant Program that will enable local Maryland school systems to provide more comprehensive Holocaust-related teacher training, teaching materials, and trips and activities in K-12 schools. 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 need for robust Holocaust and genocide education in Maryland’s K-12 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. While Maryland still does not have a statutory mandate requiring the teaching of Holocaust and genocide in K-12 schools – a measure ADL wholeheartedly supports<sup>1</sup> – this bill is a critically important step in the right direction.

In 2021 alone, ADL documented 2,717 antisemitic incidents across the country. 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. Of these 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 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

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<sup>1</sup> *[SB837 Education – Curriculum – Study of the Holocaust (Educate to Stop the Hate Act).]* 23 other states have already enacted some form of mandatory Holocaust and genocide education, and similar bills are pending in many states.

example, 22% of American millennials have either never heard of the Holocaust or are unsure whether they have heard of it.

When our students do not understand the history of genocide or the elements leading to it, they cannot fully grasp the significance of their actions or the tremendous harm they can cause to the school community. Education is therefore key to combating hate. By learning about the Holocaust and other genocides, students will have the opportunity to explore how stereotypes, prejudice, and religious and ethnic hatred can escalate to atrocity.

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 Committee to release HB638 with a favorable report.**