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**Written Testimony in Support of
HB638 – Education – Holocaust Education Assistance Grant Program – Established**

Honorable Committee Members, thank you for allowing me to testify today. I am here in support for HB638 as I believe this bill is a critical step to ensuring the safety of the Jewish community in our state and beyond.

My ancestors came to the United States in the early 1900s to escape persecution of the Jewish people in Russia. For five generations, we have proudly called Maryland our home. Despite a thriving Jewish community in our state, I was the only Jewish kid in my class until high school, where there was one other Jewish student in a class of over 330 students.

My experience as a child with antisemitism includes, among other things, being mercilessly laughed at in middle school for wearing a yarmulke and driving up to the multicultural center in Laurel, MD where our small Jewish congregation had Hebrew school only to see Swastikas and explicit language against Jewish people spray-painted on the building. As deeply disturbing as this was, my experience is small when compared to others who have had their family members' grave sites desecrated, been beaten on the street, or been gunned down while praying. It's hard to believe that in 2023 in the United States of America the threat of hate against Jewish people seems to be growing stronger each year.

Every week, I am reminded that Jewish people are under real threat in America. Our synagogue, located in the quiet but growing town of Fulton, MD, is guarded daily by armed security. When I walk into the temple with my family or drop my kids off on Sunday for Hebrew school, I know there is a real possibility that we could become victims of a violent hate crime. No one should be afraid to peacefully practice their religion in America and certainly not in Maryland.

I want to share a story that breaks my heart each time I think of it. I have two children: a 7-year-old son, Ethan, and a 6-year-old daughter, Maia. They are bright beacons of light that fill my day with great joy. Their mother and I are teaching them to be proud Americans and also to understand and be proud of their Jewish and Korean heritage. As you may know or can imagine, it is difficult to be a young child in America who does not celebrate Christmas. This past holiday season was made more difficult by the fact that my daughter, having just had her 6th birthday, was subjected to antisemitism in her kindergarten class.

One day in December, my daughter came home from school looking sullen and not her usual happy, vibrant self. I asked how her day was and she said "not good". I asked her why and she said one of her classmates told her that "Jews are bad" and another told her that "Hanukkah is bad". I asked her how that made her feel and she simply said "sad" as she buried her face in my chest and my heart broke. I then had to explain to my innocent little girl that Jews and Hanukkah are not bad and that sometimes people say things that are hurtful because they do not know any better.

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We immediately reached out to the school principal and my daughter's teacher to let them know of the incident. The principal was genuinely concerned and expressed her sadness that the situation occurred. The teacher spoke with the students specifically and classroom generally about inclusion and diversity and that Jewish people and Hanukkah are not bad and asked the students to apologize to Maia. We wholeheartedly appreciate the school's support, but unfortunately, several weeks after this incident, Maia again came home from school sullen and explained to me that another friend in her classroom told her that they had said something bad about Jews and proceeded to laugh about it to my daughter's face.

To be clear, I do not blame these children, who are as innocent as my daughter, but it must be recognized that someone taught these children these views. We have an obligation to teach our children that these views are not only wrong but also dangerous if left unchecked, as history has shown us. We also have an obligation to support educators so that they understand how best to respond when incidents like my daughter's experience occur.

Honorable members of this committee, this story is but a drop in the bucket of what a rising number of Jewish Americans experience each and every day. We must ensure that the struggles and sacrifices endured by an entire generation of great Americans to fight against Nazism is not forgotten. Antisemitism and hate more generally might never be eradicated but it is incumbent on all of us to take active steps to minimize it and to educate our children especially that it is not those who celebrate Hanukkah (or any other particular religion or holiday) who should feel ashamed but those who choose to promote hate.

For these reasons, I implore you to support this bill and vote in favor of Holocaust education in Maryland.