Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the
Maryland Senate
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
For the Hearing on
Education – Curriculum – Holocaust and Genocide Unit
(Lessons of the Holocaust and Genocide Act)
(SB 416)
February 13, 2019

SUPPORT

Maryland PTA is the state’s oldest and largest child advocacy organization that serves as a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education. We represent thousands of volunteer members in 900 public schools and we are comprised of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. For nearly 104 years, our mission has been to make every child’s potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

Maryland PTA submits this testimony in support of Senate Bill 416, Education – Curriculum – Holocaust and Genocide Unit (Lessons of the Holocaust and Genocide Act). This bill seeks to require that public middle and high schools and nonpublic schools serving middle and high school students and benefiting from state funds include in middle and high school curricula an age-appropriate and interdisciplinary unit of study on the Holocaust and how the Holocaust relates to other historic and/or contemporary acts of genocide. Guidelines for instruction would be issued by the Maryland State Board of Education on or before January 1, 2020. The purpose of teaching Holocaust history and the history of genocide more broadly is to inform students of the events, power structures, and underlying beliefs that led to the deaths of at least six million of those within the Jewish community and to the systemic targeting of those labeled as “other”, and to engage students in thinking critically about what led to the Holocaust and how to avoid a similar atrocity in the future.

Considering the elements of dehumanization present in our society today, and widespread lack of knowledge of basic facts of the Holocaust – a recent survey found that 22% of U.S. millennials either had not heard or were unsure if they had heard of the Holocaust and that 31% of all American adults and 41% of millennials substantially underestimated the Jewish deaths that occurred as a result of the Holocaust.¹ For instance, instruction and remembrance of the Holocaust is especially necessary. According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), there was a 57% jump in the number of reports of anti-Semitic hate crimes throughout the U.S. in 2017, the largest single-year increase that ADL has documented since it began recording reports of anti-Semitism in 1979.
According to the Baltimore Sun, there was a 35% jump in hate crimes in Maryland in 2017; and according to the Anti-Defamation League, there was a nearly 400% increase in reports of anti-Semitic hate crimes in Maryland between 2015 and 2017, with K-12 schools both nationally and locally experiencing a rise in hate crimes and becoming the most common location nationally for reports of anti-Semitic hate crimes to occur.

Remembering and contextualizing for the present and future serves as the goal for teaching and discussing the Holocaust in an interdisciplinary manner. Maryland PTA believes that Maryland should join Kentucky, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, California, Michigan, Indiana, New York and Rhode Island in requiring age appropriate Holocaust instruction and instruction on the occurrence and causes of other genocides in recent history. Holocaust and genocide education in Maryland schools is needed to promote respect and a safe and welcoming environment for all students to reach their potential. For the reasons stated above, Maryland PTA supports Senate Bill 416 and recommends a favorable report.

Testimony is presented on the behalf of

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