



March 20, 2023

Chair Cheryl Youakim
Republican Lead Ron Kresha
Members of the Education Finance Committee:

As a granddaughter of survivors of the Holodomor (the genocide of Ukrainians of 1932-33), a Minneapolis Public Schools educator of 30 years, Chair of the Holodomor Genocide Education Committee at the Ukrainian American Community Center and Chair of the Minnesota Ukrainian American Advocacy Committee, representing over 17 thousand Ukrainians living in Minnesota, I believe our Middle and High School students must learn to practice critical thinking and react responsibly when confronted with genocide. Genocide is not only something that happened in the past, it is a reality today in places such as Rwanda, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Ukraine, and will continue to confront the world for decades to come. Our future leaders need to be equipped to address this challenge. I write today in support of HF 2685.

Minnesota's Ukrainian community includes descendants of the victims and survivors of the Holodomor, as well as the descendents of Holocaust victims and survivors. Newly arrived Ukrainian refugees bear not only the scars of epigenetic trauma from these systematic attempts to erase our ancestors' communities, but also the most recent scars of Russia's current genocidal attempt to erase Ukrainians as a nation.

In 1932-33, Ukrainians were starved to death on the orders of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, whose goal was to beat Ukrainian farmers into submission and force them to give up their land to government-controlled collective farms. Their land was a valuable resource for grain production that subsidized the Soviet program of industrialization. In a fake news campaign of its time, this crime was denied by the Soviet Union and is still denied by Russia.

As millions of Ukrainians were killed by hunger during the Holodomor, my grandparents were lucky to survive thanks to the availability of fish from the Azov Sea in the city of Mariupol where I am from. Ninety years later, in 2022, my cousin was not so lucky. He and tens of thousands of Mariupol inhabitants perished under the Russian bombs that destroyed 80 percent of the city and whose thousands of survivors were forcibly moved into Russia. Another cousin and her daughter were deported to a filtration camp within Russia and subsequently moved against their will to the Ural mountains in the heart of Russia, more than 2,000 miles away from their home. They are among more than 1.2 million Ukrainians - including approximately 260,000 children - who have been forcibly deported from their homeland.

Our MN Ukrainian American Advocacy Committee works closely with our elected representatives on supporting Ukraine. We are currently asking our U.S. House Representatives

to support [H.Res.154 - Recognizing Russian actions in Ukraine as a genocide](#) and [H. Res 149 - Condemning the illegal abduction of children from Ukraine to the Russian Federation](#) (For more information, please check out the: [State Dept Briefing & Yale Conflict Lab Report](#) UN Sessions "Gross Human Rights Violations due to the Aggression Against Ukraine": [Session 1](#), [Session 2](#))

As an educator, I know that it's critically important to teach young people to make connections between the genocides of the past and genocides happening today. Our future leaders need to understand that if the lessons of the past are ignored, mass violence and genocide can happen again. Inclusion of the study of genocides in the school curriculum will provide the opportunity for the students to reflect on and evaluate different responses to genocides and ways to prevent them.

Regarding the re-education camps where Russia is sending Ukrainian children, the Ukrainian Ambassador to the United States Oksana Markarova has said: "This is a continuation of what Russia has been doing since February 24, 2022. Russia destroyed our museums, destroyed universities, and murdered civilians. It is a genocide against Ukrainian culture and Ukrainian people and what they do to children is horrific. This is a war crime."

Our Minnesota students need to understand what genocide is, and to recognize it when confronted by it in today's world. An understanding of the mechanisms of genocide - such as the dehumanization and isolation of targeted groups, which is currently happening on the occupied territories of Ukraine - will prepare students to be informed and discerning global citizens, able to assess and intervene on events happening in the world around them.

One way that students can learn about genocide is by studying primary sources. An example of such a source is a recently released report from [New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy](#), a US-based think tank, and the [Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights](#), signed by more than 30 leading legal scholars and genocide experts. The report provides evidence that the Russian state is violating several articles of the United Nations Genocide Convention. According to Azeem Ibrahim of the New Lines Institute, who visited Ukraine in March 2022 to gather evidence for the report, "This is a very thorough and detailed examination of extensive evidence. What we have seen so far is that this war is genocidal in its nature, in terms of the language being used and the manner in which it is being executed. That's very, very clear."

Genocide education has the potential to be transformative for individual students and whole communities. Educators highlight the harmful effects of prejudice, racism, discrimination, and mass misinformation while engendering attitudes of tolerance and empathy and underscoring the importance of speaking out against acts of intolerance.

As our society continues to reckon with the legacy of systemic discrimination based on arbitrary factors such as ethnicity, race or country of origin, we owe it to Minnesota's young people to equip them with the ability to identify and stand up to state-sponsored violence and human rights abuses, be it police brutality or genocides, to secure a safer and more equitable future for the people of our country and world.

Respectfully,

Luda Anastazievsky

MPS Educator

UACC Holodomor Genocide Education Committee Chair

MN Ukrainian American Advocacy Committee Chair

The MN Ukrainian American Advocacy Committee represents all the major Ukrainian organizations in Minnesota: AAYUD (Association of American Youth of Ukrainian Descent), ODFFU (Organization for Defense of Four Freedoms for Ukraine), St. Constantine Ukrainian Catholic Church, St. Katherine Ukrainian Orthodox Church, St. Michael's and St. George's Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Ukrainian American Community Center, Ukrainian American Youth Associatio.