



**JEWISH COMMUNITY  
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MINNESOTA & THE DAKOTAS

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March 21, 2023

Chair Cheryl Youakim,  
Republican Lead Ron Kresha  
Members of the Education Finance Committee  
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.  
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Members of the House Education Finance Committee,

I'm writing in support of HF 2685. As a child of a Holocaust survivor, a former St. Paul public school teacher, and current director of Holocaust education at the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas, it is my professional and personal mission to ensure that instruction on historical, as well as contemporary, prejudice and discrimination is taught in an educationally sound and just way.

Centering complex histories such as the Holocaust, the Genocide of Indigenous Peoples, and other genocides is essential as it creates opportunities to focus on the diversity of people's lives, the beauty of traditions, and all that is lost when the stages of genocide erode a democracy, state, or nation.

Such education also enables students to deeply consider the use and abuse of power and the roles and responsibilities of individuals, organizations, and nations when confronted with human rights violations and genocide.

Coming from a refugee family heightened my awareness of when prejudicial attitudes and behaviors become acts of bigotry, as well as when hate can become deadly.

My experience as a long-time educator is to teach about this pattern, teach about the people it has affected and continues to affect, and teach the responsibility we all have for each other to build a more tolerant world. By studying the patterns, the laws, the history, the policies, and the bigotry which leads to genocide, we teach our students to analyze not just what societies did wrong, but how as our future leaders they can do better.

Once this awareness is awakened in a student, it can never go away.

My mother used to say that if more people had spoken up throughout the years of WWII, her father and relatives would not have died at Auschwitz. She used to ask me, "Where were the voices of reason?" I know firsthand the dangers of remaining silent and indifferent in the face of the oppression of others and I have felt the pain of genocide. Let's empower our students to learn historical truths to create a more just future.

Respectfully,  
Laura Zelle  
Director of Holocaust Education