



Humanus Network

Holocaust and Human Rights Education Consulting

March 14, 2023

Chair Cheryl Youakim
Republican Lead Ron Kresha
Members of the House Education Finance Committee
Holocaust, Genocide of Indigenous Peoples, and other Genocides (HF 2685)
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Members of the House Education Finance Committee,

Thank you for your time today. My name is Kristin Thompson and I am writing regarding the importance of the legislation before you in HF 2685, especially the teacher training component.

I have unique insight on this topic because in addition to being a history teacher for 19-years in Minnesota schools, I also spent 5 ½ years at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C. where I was the Educational Program Coordinator. During my tenure at the Museum, I developed and facilitated multiple, rigorous programs that annually engaged hundreds of educational leaders from around the globe. Currently, I am the founding director of Humanus Network, an educational consulting firm dedicated to developing Holocaust and human rights educational resources.

Why Holocaust Education?

After the Holocaust, the world said, “Never again”, yet we know that human rights violations, atrocities, and genocide continue around the globe today.

Institutions and systems that were supposed to protect citizens and uphold democracy, failed during the Holocaust. Studying *how* and *why* the Holocaust happened helps us find ways to safeguard against making similar mistakes today.

With an alarming increase in reported incidents of antisemitism, dangerous speech, hate speech, and hate crimes, Holocaust and genocide education is more important than ever. Studies have shown that Holocaust education develops and strengthens skills of critical thinking, historical inquiry, and empathy. These are skills we want every student to possess and cultivate; we want them to think critically about important issues and understand that they have agency; we want them to seek out credible sources to establish fact-based evidence as they interpret history and find personal relevance; and we want them to be empathetic, compassionate people who are moved to action when confronted with intolerance of any kind.

In order for Holocaust and genocide education to “do” all of those things, teachers must be adequately equipped and trained. Far too often, that component is missing from mandates and legislation. Minnesota can be proud that this bill is inclusive of teacher training. Without proper

training, many educators are afraid to teach this topic in part due to the gravitas of the subject and a desire to “get it right”, to “do no harm”; they become paralyzed by that fear and that’s when problematic lesson plans can emerge.

Why Minnesota bill must include funding for teacher training:

Careful consideration regarding resources and pedagogy must be applied to teaching about the Holocaust and genocide. Curating resources that are both steeped in primary sources to promote historical accuracy and are aligned with state and national education standards can be an overwhelming and time-consuming endeavor. Accessibility to credible organizations and institutions that can help provide these resources will be a vital component of this bill.

Additionally, many teachers do not have a deep background in the historical facts themselves. Too many times an assumption is made that teachers already know the history. My experience has shown me, time and time again, this is not the case. Therefore, foundational training should be made available to all educators who will be teaching this topic.

Organizations like *Humanus Network*, and in cooperation with the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas, have developed teaching materials to specifically meet this challenge and train teachers both in historical content and sound pedagogical practices.

An additional recommendation includes supporting teachers to seek out credible organizations and institutions for further training once the foundations have been addressed. This is critical to fostering quality Holocaust and genocide education in MN.

Respectfully,
Kristin Thompson
Founding Director, *Humanus Network*

Kthompson@humanusnetwork.com