

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Policy Committee
Genocide Education about the Holocaust,
Genocide of Indigenous Peoples, and other Genocides (HF 2685)
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

March 13, 2023

Dear Members of the House Education Policy Committee,

My name is Dr. Gabriela Spears-Rico. I am providing this testimony representing myself as an expert in Native American Studies and Critical Indigenous Studies and as a Board Member of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. I received my Ph.D. in Comparative Ethnic Studies and Native American Studies from the University of California at Berkeley in 2015. I am currently an award-winning Assistant Professor of Chicano Latino Studies and American Indian Studies at the U of M. As a trained interdisciplinary cultural anthropologist, I have published on the representation and politics of contemporary Indigenous communities in Mexico, whom I've been researching and collaborating with during the last fifteen years, in peer reviewed articles and with academic presses. I also currently teach both introductory survey courses and upper-division seminars in Indigenous Studies at the U of M. I am a member of and have held leadership positions in the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, among other international academic associations in Indigenous Studies.

Today, I testify to support this bill both as an Indigenous person, a member of the Pirinda community and a Purepecha descendant from the state of Michoacan in central Mexico, as the mother of a child who is a Dakota descendant and an Ojibwe tribal member, and as an academic with expertise on the topic. It is exciting to see that, as it is written, this mandate includes language on Indigenous genocide. As Indigenous people from this continent, we are often left out of history curriculum in our public schools; the genocide that occurred to our peoples is hardly or only referentially mentioned in history classes. It is important for our Indigenous children to see themselves in the curriculum and for all children to learn about how colonialism impacted the Indigenous people of the Americas. Such education helps counter stereotypes that plague Indigenous representation caused by the complete erasure of our history in schools. In Minnesota, it is particularly important for curriculum to include the Dakota genocide as well as Ojibwe and Ho-Chunk dispossession that took place, all of which involved mass deportations of American Indian people within and outside of the state. Events such as the imprisonment of Dakota people at Fort Snelling and their expulsion to Camp Davenport, Iowa should be acknowledged and taught so that going forward, we can move towards reconciliation and towards building a future that is inclusive of the interests and wellness of Indigenous people while working with our tribal nations. Thank you for your attention and time.



Humanus Network

Holocaust and Human Rights Education Consulting

March 6, 2023

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Dear Members of the House Education Policy Committee,

Thank you for your time today. My name is Kristin Thompson and I'm here to speak regarding the importance of the legislation before you, 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*

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Joni Sussman

6904 Mark Terrace Dr, Minneapolis, MN, 55439

March 10, 2023

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Policy Committee
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100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Members of the House Education Policy Committee,

As a child of two Holocaust survivors, I am frequently asked to speak to students about my parents' concentration camp experiences and have found the students to be extremely interested in hearing these stories. The students ask astute questions, some of which apply to their own lives - how one overcomes adversity and moves on, the experience of coming to America as a refugee, the importance of standing up for others who are being bullied, and other important topics.

My father was imprisoned in Dachau. He was liberated by the Americans, who were his heroes ever after. From him I learned the value of living in a free country - America! - and the importance of voting, a right and responsibility he took seriously and something which I discuss with students. From my mother, who was imprisoned in Stutthof concentration camp, and who was a witness to her own mother's murder at the hands of the Nazis - and after whom I'm named - I learned the importance of viewing oneself as a survivor rather than as a victim, a valuable lesson that I also impart to kids.

I have been speaking in schools for over twenty years and find both the students and their teachers eager to absorb the lessons of this terrible period in history.

This important legislation will help to build kids of strong character who know the difference between right and wrong and understand the importance of standing up for others. I encourage you to pass this legislation, which is in the best interest of the children of Minnesota.

Cordially,

Joni Sussman
Publisher, KAR-BEN PUBLISHING



**JEWISH COMMUNITY
RELATIONS COUNCIL**
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March 12, 2023

Minnesota House of Representatives
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Dear Members of the House Education Policy Committee,

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



March 13, 2023

Chair Laurie Pryor
Republican lead Peggy Bennett
Members of the House Education Policy 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 Defence of Four Freedoms for Ukraine), St. Constantine Ukrainian Catholic Church, St. Katherine Ukrainian Orthodox Church, St. Michael and St. George Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Ukrainian American Community Center, Ukrainian American Youth Organization.