

Senate Education Committee,

My name is Claire Sarnowski, and I am a 14-year-old freshman from Lake Oswego, Oregon. Thank you for providing me with another opportunity to share my passion as to why Senate Bill 664 is critical for Oregon students. In September 2018, I testified alongside my dear friend Holocaust Survivor, Alter Wiener to establish conversation surrounding the necessity of teaching the Holocaust and other genocides. Growing up, my parents instilled in me the importance of history and the way in which it shapes our character. After reading novels in grade school centered around World War II and the Holocaust, as well as having conversations with my parents about these horrific events, I became interested in these topics. It wasn't until I heard Alter share his life experiences during 4th grade that my life changed forever. I am eternally grateful that I was able to meet him after his presentation and create an unbreakable bond that would last in the years forthcoming. Some would say that our friendship was unlikely due to a multitude of differences including age, gender, religion, and living through different generations. However, getting to know one another, the similarities we shared greatly outweighed these differences. A commonality that we both possessed was a love for learning and education. Alter's dream was to mandate education which would continue the legacy of the Holocaust and genocides. Although he is not here with me today, he prepared me to carry on this mission and to persevere in making this a reality. I witnessed first-hand the impact Alter's story had on my peers when my school was able to be part of the nearly 1,000 audiences Alter spoke to. In my classes, I heard students describe how thankful they were for their family, education, and life due to the fact many during the Holocaust were deprived of these entities that we so frequently take for granted. I am sure this is a common reaction when students hear any survivor speak of their experiences. As a student, I was saddened by our education on topics such as the Holocaust and other genocides which were merely glanced over and lacked depth. More importantly, I realized that my peers did not receive valuable lessons that accompany these teachings such as compassion, gratitude, perseverance, tolerance, and acceptance. In schools today, prejudice is as prevalent as ever since acts of racial, social, and religious injustice occur in our classrooms. These teachings can combat this stereotyping and ensure students are equipped to be an upstander rather than a bystander. When word spread about my involvement in Senate Bill 664, I received an overwhelming response from classmates, teachers, parents, and community members who felt this legislation is imperative to teach our students. As time inevitably moves forward and we get further away from when the Holocaust occurred, we are losing our history and not acknowledging the fact genocide is still taking place as we speak. We need to ensure these atrocities are never forgotten nor ignored: as philosopher George Santayana once stated: "Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it." I strongly encourage the teachings of the Holocaust and Genocides in schools to perpetuate the legacy of those who perished, survived, and were affected by these tragic events. This education is essential for not only my generation but future generations of Oregon students to come.

Thank you for your consideration,

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