

Support The “Never Again” Act

A new bill will educate students about the horrors of the Shoah

Support the Never Again Education Act

By Charles S. Temel and Michael S. Miller

Our children are growing up in a world where hate and violence are not simply consigned to the pages of history books, but, regrettably, may also be a part of their own personal experiences. The American Jewish community bears the responsibility of ensuring that our children and neighbors learn about the impact of anti-Semitism in order to prevent such incidents from occurring and to foster an environment of tolerance, empathy, and compassion within civil society.

As the coordinating body for over 50 major Jewish organizations in the Metropolitan area, the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York (JCRC-NY) supports the Never Again Education Act (H.R. 5460), a bipartisan bill introduced by Reps. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) and Daniel Donovan (R-NY).

Just a few generations after the Holocaust, as its last survivors share their stories, there is growing concern over the ignorance and trivialization of the Holocaust. Today, several candidates with histories of Holocaust denial or affiliations with Nazism are running for political office.

A recent study by the Conference of Jewish Material Claims Against Germany on Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness revealed that 41% of millennials believe that much fewer than six million Jews were murdered by the Third Reich (as few as two million or less). Similar numbers cannot even name a single concentration camp or ghetto. Furthermore, academics and elected officials worldwide are growing more confident espousing ideology which completely denies the Holocaust or significant aspects thereof. For the sake of those who perished, and for the sake of our children’s future, this requires intervention.

The Maloney-Donovan Never Again Education Act is self-funding. It depends on private donations, to the US Treasury which are deposited into the Holocaust Education Assistance Program Fund to be awarded as grants to local educational agencies, organizations, or secondary schools that provide teachers with the resources and training.

This is to better impart the lessons of the Holocaust and its consequences of bigotry and hate to students of all backgrounds. The bill requires the creation of a Holocaust education website which would connect curriculum experts at the Department of Education with Holocaust educators to develop programs tailored to the needs of individual teachers and communities.

Teachers must understand the context in which children live so that the message and program can truly be internalized and actualized. This bill provides educators with the ability to do so. Sadly, as the numbers of Holocaust survivors dwindle, we must collect and enshrine their stories before there are no people left to tell them.

The Never Again Education Act specifically mandates a detailed exploration of Hitler's slaughter of six million European Jews and millions of others in the name of racial purity, including the Roma, Slavs, Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, disabled individuals and homosexuals. It is only when we educate our students on the horrors of the ghettos, concentration camps, gas chambers, mass graves, and slave labor that we can begin to understand the dangers of intolerance, scapegoating, and hate.

The stories of Anne Frank, Eli Wiesel, and Viktor Frankl, Hollywood movies such as *Schindler's List*, *The Pianist*, and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* only touch the surface on how to teach our children about the Holocaust. The Maloney-Donovan bill encourages engagement with students at the appropriate age and offers professional development opportunities for teachers. The materials must include the full breadth of the history of the Holocaust, including the Third Reich dictatorship, concentration camp system, persecution of Jews and others, and the post-World War II trials.

It must span from particular anti-Semitism to broad racism and the abridgement of human and civil rights. Teachers must use historically accurate information and terminology while encouraging their students to do the same. These educational standards are clearly outlined in the bill.

The U.S. Congress has already demonstrated a major commitment to Holocaust education and remembrance by establishing Holocaust Remembrance Day in 1978 and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1993. Holocaust education is already required by law in eight states, including New York.

Despite this requirement, many children do not understand its relevance, and there are often financial and logistical barriers to obtaining quality, educational resources. Let us ensure that the resources we provide for children have the best possible educational impact and appropriately honor the memory of all that was lost during the Holocaust.

Very soon, the last of the Greatest Generation will pass on. The numbers of those who wore the American uniform of liberators and witnessed the horrors and those who wore the ragged uniforms of survivors and experienced the horrors are diminishing with time.

We must remember. For our parents, our children and our future.

We strongly urge you to contact your Congressional Representative and inform them of the importance of this bill.

Charles S. Temel is the President and Michael S. Miller is the Executive Vice President and CEO of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York.