

Testimony for PA Senate Ed Committee submitted by Rhonda Fink-Whitman:

July 24, 2024

To the Pennsylvania Senate Education Committee regarding combatting antisemitism on Pennsylvania college campuses,

As the daughter and granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, the author of two popular books about the Holocaust, a Holocaust education advocate who was instrumental in getting Act 70 passed in PA encouraging Holocaust education ten years ago, and a longtime board member of the Holocaust Awareness Museum and Education Center of Philadelphia, I thank you for allowing me to testify today on behalf of myself, my family, and the museum, with some sound ideas on how to combat the surge of dangerous antisemitism on Pennsylvania's college campuses.

We, along with the rest of the Jewish community, have been horrified and appalled at the outbreak of violent protests that have consumed our college campuses in PA and across the nation in the wake of the most barbaric and deadly attack on the Jewish people since the Holocaust on October 7, 2023. We have watched in horror and yes, even fear, as these antisemitic attacks have been condoned and tolerated by college CEOs, presidents, deans, and administrators, AND even encouraged by some professors. This type of behavior targeted at any other racial or ethnic group would not be accepted for one second. There seems to be a double standard when it comes to the hatred and marginalization of Jews. For centuries, it has always received a pass. But no more. We must draw a line in the sand and once again make our PA colleges and universities safe learning environments for all Jewish students and their allies.

We at the Holocaust Awareness Museum and Education Center are committed to teaching tolerance and empathy by bringing the lessons of the Holocaust into the classroom. We've been doing this in the Delaware Valley for 60 years, and in that time, have reached tens of thousands of students. It is well documented, by study after study, that Holocaust education delivered to elementary, middle, and high school students builds more tolerant, empathetic young adults. We believe required Holocaust education in the state of PA would be one way to remedy this scourge of antisemitism on our college campuses. Act 70, which passed in 2014, came up short. It mandated the building of curriculum, and the training of teachers, but failed to *require* Holocaust education in our public, charter, and cyber schools. We have an opportunity to fix that. Circulating in your committee since its introduction last March is SB 1100, a very solid and comprehensive bill – the best in the country actually, introduced by Senator Doug Mastriano, which would finish what Act 70 started, and make Holocaust education a requirement throughout the Commonwealth. SB 1100 has bipartisan support and we strongly urge you to pass this bill now! Perhaps PA colleges could even offer classes teaching the truth about Israel and its history and require antisemitic students and faculty to take these courses.

In addition, you have another bill proposed before you. SB 1185, also introduced by the good Senator Doug Mastriano, which would end taxpayer support to any state-owned or state-related college and university that authorizes, facilitates, or otherwise supports any event that promotes antisemitism on campus. As PA taxpayers, we refuse to fund this abhorrent and dangerous activity. We have seen the calling for the annihilation of the Jewish state, death to Jews, vandalism of school property, restriction of movement on campus to tuition paying Jewish students, marginalizing of Jewish faculty, so-called “apartheid walls,” anti-Jewish walkouts and rallies, glorifying the barbaric acts of Oct. 7, and the idolization of terror groups like Hamas and Hezbollah. All the while, these “protestors” cowardly cover their faces to hide their identities in order to evade possible repercussions and consequences for their despicable misconduct on campus. Condoning such behavior on the part of any college or university would disqualify the institution from receiving state funding for the next academic year. A similar bill was passed with bipartisan support in the U.S. House of Representatives. As PA taxpayers, we urge you to pass SB 1185 as well.

We believe that both required Holocaust education and withholding state funding are two key factors and two great places to start in an effort to pave the road toward making our campuses safe, secure, and *non-threatening* places to grow and learn for *all* Pennsylvania students and once again allow parents to feel safe in their decision to send their children to our state schools.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Rhonda Fink-Whitman

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Member of the board - Holocaust Awareness Museum and Education Center of Philadelphia

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