

**Testimony in Support of An Act concerning genocide education (H. 566) by Rep.
Jeffery Roy &
An Act advancing and promoting genocide education (S. 327) by Senator
Michael Rodrigues.
Joint Committee on Education
May 20, 2021**

Chairwoman Piesch, Chairman Lewis and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H. 566 An Act concerning genocide education and S.327 An Act advancing and promoting genocide education.

My name is Jeremy Burton and I am the Executive Director of the JCRC of Greater Boston, a council of 42 member organizations that was founded in 1944 in the wake of the Holocaust and the need for our community to come together and speak with one voice when confronting critical issues such as pervasive anti-Semitism and genocide. We are very grateful to Rep. Roy and Sen. Rodrigues who have been working tirelessly for years with a broad bipartisan coalition of supporters to bring this legislation to a vote and enactment. As you will hear from many today, this legislation, if enacted, will give students in the Commonwealth the tools to identify and stand up against hateful, oppressive acts and to speak up in the face of bigotry.

As stewards of the New England Holocaust Memorial, JCRC honors the sacred obligation to lift up the experiences of those who survived the Holocaust in our own Greater Boston community, using their stories as a lesson to future generations about the consequences of unchecked hatred and intolerance. Together with ADL New England, the Armenian National Committee, and over 60 coalition members, JCRC is proud to play a role in seeking passage of these important bills.

We cannot simply say ‘Never Again’ if we do not also commit to educating the next generation by giving them the resources they need to recognize and stand up to injustice before it takes root.

This legislation is also extremely personal. Like so many of my generation of Jewish-Americans, I grew up with Holocaust survivors as a part of the fabric of my daily life. Both of my step-parents were hidden children. I had classmates whose parents had survived as teen slave-laborers in death camps. The twin sister of a leader in our synagogue endured horrific medical experiments at the hands [of Josef Mengele](#), the infamous Nazi doctor.

Genocide education is not, please pardon the pun, an academic exercise. The lack of education and sensitivity about the consequences of hate has real repercussions. In February, a Lowell school committee member called the school’s former finance director a ‘kike’ on live TV. He followed up with “I hate to say it but that’s what people used to say behind his back.”

In March came the news that the Duxbury high school football team used antisemitic and Holocaust references as audible play calls in a game. It was further revealed that they’ve been using this language in practice for years.

The school committee member and the coach have since resigned, but let us pause to underscore that “people” heard this language being used for “years.” People knew. And they said nothing.

Two months ago, in New York City, a 65-year-old Asian woman was kicked repeatedly in the head and body as she lay helpless on the sidewalk. [A 38-year old convicted murderer has been charged with the hate crime.](#)

The video is horrifying in its brutality, but I was even more alarmed by the reaction of the bystanders. A delivery man simply watches from a few feet away. A security guard (since suspended) literally steps forward to close the building's glass door, while the woman lies bleeding on the sidewalk right in front of him.

We have a problem. It is a failure to know and understand the history of genocide and the lessons of that history. Memory of prior atrocities is fading. According to one recent survey, 22% of American millennials have either never heard of the Holocaust or are unsure whether they have heard of it. 66% of youth 18 to 34 didn't recognize the word "Auschwitz." Only 35% of all Americans know about the Armenian Genocide. Yet, 76% of Americans believe education about the history of genocide can help prevent future atrocities.

As a society we need to take steps to address these issues by ensuring that genocide education is taught in all our schools, not just well-resourced ones. Education is key to combating hate. By learning about the Holocaust and other genocides, students will have the opportunity to explore how stereotypes, prejudice, and religious and ethnic hatred can escalate to atrocity. The Genocide Education Act will provide funding for Massachusetts students to learn about acts of genocide, including but not limited to the Holocaust, Armenian Genocide, Famine-Genocide in Ukraine, Pontian Greek Genocide, & recent atrocities in Bosnia, Cambodia, Rwanda, and Sudan; Give discretion to school districts to incorporate genocide education during appropriate times in the middle school and/or high school curricula.

Most importantly, these bill will help stem the rising tide of hatred and bigotry by reaffirming the Commonwealth's commitment to ensuring that young people

understand the historical significance of genocide, as a reminder of what happens when hatred and intolerance go unchecked.

Thank you.