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Governor Jay Inslee
P.O. Box 40002
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Dear Governor Inslee,

Imagine yourself at 14 years old. Rather than attending high school, you wake up for a day of inhumane forced labor, and instead of returning home to your family you are crammed into a room with 9 strangers. This was Ann Birulin's reality for months before she managed to escape the ghetto, only to find out that her mother died of starvation and her younger brother was shot ("Ann"). All students inevitably hear statistics and basic background regarding WWII and the Holocaust. Without mandated Holocaust education, they will not receive the invaluable opportunity to hear personal histories like this in order to comprehend the fact that individual people make up the astounding numbers. Students need to understand the full historical context and buildup to this horrific outcome to identify the specific relationships and strategies used during the Holocaust, in order to recognize them in other current and future situations. As stated by genocide research and professor Samuel Totten, "'Common knowledge' of a historical event does not constitute accurate knowledge," (Totten). Required Holocaust education would introduce personal experiences like Ann Birulin's so that all students can fully comprehend the history and results of the Holocaust. As bill SB 5612 – 2019-20 was intended to do, requiring Holocaust curriculum in Washington education will provide students with the opportunity to "Examine the ramifications of prejudice, racism, and intolerance; prepare students to be responsible citizens in a pluralistic democracy; and be a reaffirmation of the commitment of free peoples never again to permit such occurrences," ("SB").

An in-depth Holocaust curriculum will provide time to focus on the process and impact of the Holocaust as well as dive into more specific examples and individual histories to make the topic more personal and memorable. The Holocaust is a clear example of genocide, perfectly fitting into the 8-stage model created by Dr. Gregory H. Stanton: classification, symbolization, dehumanization, organization, polarization, preparation, extermination, and denial (Stanton). Studying this progression will show students the complex steps and planning behind this horrific event, proving that it was not accidental or inevitable ("Fundamentals"). In addition, it will give students the information needed to identify any similar steps made in today's world. Integrating

specific stories of victims like Ann Birulin would make the topic more memorable and show clear examples of each stage. For instance, learning that Ann was recaptured five months after escaping the ghetto and deported to a slave labor camp where she worked under grueling conditions (“Ann”) would increase students’ comprehension and connection to the subject. Furthermore, learning about this genocide would inevitably aid in the understanding of other genocides, as the victims often had parallel experiences (Totten). The Holocaust is the ideal choice because although it is not the first genocide, “never before in human history had genocide been an all-pervasive government policy unaffected by territorial or economic advantage and unchecked by moral or religious constraints,” (Totten).

Although some may claim that a Holocaust unit would take time away from other historical events, the topics covered through learning about the Holocaust can easily be applied to other events, especially considering the direct impact the Holocaust had on countless other aspects of history. Through my own experiences learning about the Holocaust in both middle and high school, I found that many aspects of the Holocaust curriculum altered my perspective when considering other historical events and current social justice issues. It is difficult to imagine learning world history without including such an impactful event as the Holocaust.

Learning about the Holocaust will also give students an opportunity to study the roles of different groups and individuals and see the consequences of their actions. This study of human behavior is key in understanding the decision-making process and will allow students to form a stronger connection between history and their own lives. Adding this context will also provide students with the opportunity to explore the pressures and fears behind each decision that led up to the Holocaust, including learning about the role of leaders and government and identifying examples of abuse of power (“The Importance”). Using Ann or other victims as an example, students will see each decision that led up to this end result, and through this will gain an understanding of their individual responsibility to their community and the impact of their voices.

Finally, learning about the Holocaust will inspire reflection of current events, resulting in increased awareness and involvement in US politics and current events because students will be able to identify similar issues and warning signs seen in the Holocaust. For example, last summer between May 26th and June 5th alone, “Amnesty International documented 125 separate incidents of unlawful police violence against protesters in 40 states and Washington D.C.,” showing a prime example of infringement of civil rights (“Everything”). Learning about such an extreme example as the Holocaust will motivate students to stand up for others and fight for social justice issues they see in today’s society. In addition, since the beginning of the pandemic, there has also been increasing awareness of hate-crimes and violent attacks targeting Asian Americans. However, fewer people are aware of the fact that this is not solely a recent occurrence. A 2015 study by Dr. Nour Kteily at Northwestern University showed evidence not only of hatred towards Asian Americans but blatant dehumanization. In the study, participants ranked different groups on the Ascent of Man scale and results showed that an astounding 10.4% of participants ranked Asians as less human than Americans (Markowitz). This concerning data shows evidence of a key aspect of genocide in recent years, and students likely would have insufficient

knowledge to identify warning signs such as this in current events without mandatory Holocaust education.

Through a Holocaust curriculum, students would learn that 14-year-old Ann Berulin survived a ghetto, labor camp, and severe antisemitism before escaping the violence and emigrating to the US in 1947, where she volunteered for many Jewish organizations in Seattle (“Ann”). Stories like this would inspire students to continue learning and contributing to their own community, especially during a time where antisemitism has reached an all-time high, increasing 12% from the previous year in the most recent Audit of Antisemitic Incidents in the US (“Antisemitism”). Two years ago, I was able to visit the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, in New York, and the countless stories I had previously heard suddenly became tangible. The most memorable exhibit was a room containing thousands of shoes from victims of the Holocaust. As I looked from a pair of sparkling heels to children’s sneakers, I found myself imagining the life each victim may have led. All students should have this same experience of learning and opportunity for reflection.

Sincerely,

Alexis Vorley

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