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Date: July 10, 2022 at 4:44:55 PM GMT+3
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Subject: Comments and concern about Ethnic/Social Standards Working Group recommendation

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TO: MEMBERS OF THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE
FROM: REPRESENTATIVE AVRAM PATT, Lamoille-Washington District
DATE: July 10, 2022
SUBJECT: RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ETHNIC/SOCIAL STANDARDS WORKING GROUP

I am writing to express my concerns about a specific recommendation and related issues presented by the Ethnic and Social Standards Working Group regarding the definition of "ethnic group" as contained in the enabling language in Act 1 of 2019.

I am Jewish, and a member along with many others of Jewish Communities of Vermont. I am not a member of a congregation or other Jewish organization in Vermont. Although I have a strong personal interest in this issue, I have not been directly involved in the process established by Act 1 since it was enacted. I have been a sponsor of bills regarding education about the Holocaust in Vermont's schools.

My interest and concern stems from the following:

- I am the child of refugees who escaped Poland as the Nazis invaded and who traveled across three continents and an ocean to arrive in this country in 1940. My older sister was born a few months after they arrived. My father enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1944 in order to return to Europe and help liberate it from the Nazis, including the liberation of those still in concentration and extermination camps.
- My mother's parents, who remained in Warsaw, perished in the Holocaust. I am named after my maternal grandfather. My father's father, a prolific writer and labor leader, wrote a book about his niece and her daughter, who were in the underground Resistance in the city of Bialystok, and who were killed by the Nazis. I grew up among survivors, including survivors of the Resistance.
- In this country, my parents very soon understood that racism was the single greatest flaw of the country that was their refuge. While stationed overseas, my father wrote numerous letters to his daughter, who was not yet old enough to read, which included his explanations to her about our nation's history of slavery and the colonization of indigenous lands, and its treatment of the descendants of both of those peoples.
- In 2019 as the Vermont House of Representatives was considering legislation that eventually passed as Act 1, I drafted language concerning the definition of "ethnic groups" that was added to an earlier draft and included in Act 1 as passed: "**(b) Groups that have been historically subject to persecution or genocide.**" I did so because I and

others felt that it was a glaring and obvious omission.

The proposal to eliminate this language in practice is both puzzling and disturbing. The Legislative intent of including the language I drafted was because the original language was not sufficiently inclusive, and was in fact, exclusionary. To not recognize the existence of people in Vermont and elsewhere in the nation who belong to various ethnic groups that have been victimized by genocide is not comprehensible to me. It frankly raises questions for me about the intent and the motive in seeking to ignore this language.

Whether or not individuals who are members of ethnic groups victimized by genocide experience the impact of that in what they experience in their daily lives, it is a knowledge that affects them and makes them very aware of the ongoing and tangible threat to their safety and well-being. In my case, it is not just having to hear an anti-Semitic slur on occasion. It's not just that Vermont's tourism industry does in fact have a shameful chapter in its past history. In very recent years here in Vermont, we have seen the appearance of swastikas and other Nazi terminology on flyers posted in public places, scratched on to school desks, and in spoken word. It is taken as it was intended, as a threat, whether those responsible fully understand what they are doing, whether they specifically intend to harm people, or are warning of something more broadly. It is because of incidents such as this relatively recent one in the largest town in the district I represent, that members of "groups that have been historically subject to persecution or genocide" should be included in the definition.

https://www.vtcng.com/news_and_citizen/news/local_news/hateful-graffiti-found-at-school/article_abd46076-a15e-11e8-8acd-2f89c930b36e.html

Thank you for your consideration of my comments and concerns. I would be happy to discuss with anyone interested.

Rep. Avram Patt, Lamoille-Washington District
Morristown, Elmore, Woodbury & Worcester
Member, House Energy & Technology Committee

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