

Respectfully submitted to the SBE EQS Subcommittee

Sept 1, 2022

My understanding is that Act 1 is supposed to help tackle bias, discrimination, and inequity in Vermont Schools. The goal is to support the needs of young people who are underrepresented or marginalized. In VT, Jews are underrepresented and at times are marginalized. We are less than 3% of the state population. For example, most VT schools do not recognize or make concessions for Jewish students on the High Holy Days in the fall. Some schools have only 1 or 2 Jewish families in the district. Some have none at all. Many Vermont children grow up never having met someone who is Jewish.

While the stated intention is to make sure *all* students can thrive in a culture of belonging that is free of bias, discrimination, and oppression, the Working Group has been carefully crafting the language of your working documents to exclude Jews and other groups that have been historically persecuted and subjected to genocide.

I would like to remind everyone here that Act 1 is about how and under what conditions students in Vermont learn. It is supposed to help support *all* students and help them feel comfortable within the school communities so that they are better able to learn. A couple of weeks ago I silently cheered as you discussed the importance of including all gender and sexual orientation groups. I applaud that you name each of the local indigenous populations. Yet you are willing to exclude groups that have been subjected to Genocide. This makes no sense.

How many members of this committee have looked at the Education Justice Coalition of VT social media? It is full of Anti-Israeli propaganda. I intentionally use the word propaganda as it uses emotional pictures and soundbites. These posts do not actually educate or look at the hard questions or propose realistic solutions. They don't teach students to be discerning readers or look at the hard questions of how to heal old wounds. The posts are simply antisemitic. And these posts have absolutely nothing to do with Justice in Vermont or supporting Vermont students.

The group that Ms. Garces founded is incrementally working toward an anti-Israel and anti-Jewish agenda within Vermont. It contributes to making Jewish students feel excluded and disrespected in our schools. Mark Hage has been a very public anti-Israel advocate for years. I have not seen him try to create peace or attempt to work to bring people together. He foments hatred while putting forth his own agenda.

My mother and grandparents watched the Germans restrict their lives inch by inch Holland during WWII. They watched while their rights were taken away one at a time. During these meetings, I am witnessing the Working Group erase support for Jewish students, word by word and sentence by sentence. I am saddened and angered.

If the Working Group was led by White Supremacists, nobody would stand for it. However, the fact that the group is chaired by people with a clear, public, anti-Jewish agenda is not questioned. *Why?*

While Ms. Garces and Mr. Hage focus on and highlight the problems in the Middle East, hate crimes in Vermont have been rising. Antisemitic incidents are right at the top of that increase. I strongly urge this committee to consider that they are allowing people with a clear bias against 3% of our state population to strongly influence what our children will be taught in our schools.

Respectfully submitted,
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