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Oregon's students should learn from Holocaust education

SB 664: Requires Holocaust and genocide education in Oregon's curriculum

SALEM – Oregon's schools will be required to teach about the Holocaust and genocide as part of the statewide social studies curriculum, under a bill that passed the Oregon Senate today.

[Senate Bill 664](#) – which passed 27-0 on the Senate floor – requires school districts to provide instruction about the Holocaust and genocide. It also directs the Oregon Department of Education to provide technical assistance to school districts on implementing the curriculum. Currently, 10 other states require some level of Holocaust and genocide education in their classrooms.

“There is a generation of young people coming up who don't even know what the Holocaust was,” said Sen. Rob Wagner (D-Lake Oswego), who carried the bill on the Senate floor. “This bill will help develop further compassion and understanding among our youth as our country has seen a recent increase in anti-Semitic violence and hate speech. Knowledge is the best weapon to combat hate.”

School districts around the state provide instructional programs that include Oregon State Board of Education content standards. In 2018, the board adopted new content standards for social studies, requiring high school students to study the oppression of ethnic and religious groups. Current standards don't include specific references to the Holocaust or genocide. Senate Bill 664 adds a requirement to educate students all over the state specifically about the Holocaust and genocide.

Claire Sarnowski is a Lake Oswego high school student. She introduced Wagner to Alter Wiener, a Polish Holocaust survivor who had shared his story with about 1,000 high school students in the state since 2000. During the following discussion with Wiener, Wagner decided to bring forward Senate Bill 664. Wiener died tragically after being hit by a car in Hillsboro, where he lived.

“In my classes, I heard students describe how thankful they were for their family, education and life due to the fact many during the Holocaust were deprived of these entities that we so frequently take for granted,” Sarnowski testified in support of the bill. “I am sure this is a common reaction when students hear any survivor speak of their experiences. As a student, I was saddened by our education on topics such as the Holocaust and other genocides which were merely glanced over and lacked depth. More importantly, I realized that my peers did not receive valuable lessons that accompany these teachings such as compassion, gratitude, perseverance, tolerance and acceptance. In schools today, prejudice is as prevalent as ever since acts of racial, social and religious injustice occur in our classrooms.”

Senate Bill 664 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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