

GENOCIDE EDUCATION: GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL; CURRICULUM & ASSESSMENT

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House Bill 4493 (H-1) as reported from committee
Sponsor: Rep. Klint Kesto
Committee: Education
Complete to 11-9-15

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would require that Michigan's social studies curriculum and statewide assessment program include instruction and testing about genocides, including the Holocaust, and the Armenian genocide; and also establish the Governor's Council on Genocide and Holocaust Education as a temporary and privately funded advisory commission.

FISCAL IMPACT: The bill would have an indeterminate fiscal impact for both the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and school districts. Michigan's high school content expectations for social studies already include learning objectives on genocide, but there may be minimal cost for the MDE in ensuring that state assessments now include questions on genocide. However, each school district determines its own curriculum, so the bill may create additional costs for a district in having to update its curriculum to the extent that it was not already covering genocide in grades 8-12.

There would be no fiscal impact to the state related to the council, because the bill would prohibit the use of state funds to support it.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Throughout human history, particularly aggressive and deranged leaders have sought the total annihilation of entire groups of people. When they undertake their campaigns of murder and terror in systematic ways, while employing the full power of their governments to commit indiscriminate murder, we call the tragic result—genocide.

Increasingly, genocide is a curricular topic in social studies classes for American students in public schools. For example, students in New York, New Jersey, California, Florida, Illinois, and Pennsylvania learn about the Holocaust during World War II—a time when the government of Germany, under the control of the National Socialist (Nazi) German Worker's Party from 1933 to 1945, murdered the Jews in territory under their control. National organizations—such as the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the Armenian National Institute—provide teachers with curricular materials that enable students to learn about genocide. See ***Background Information*** below.

Legislation has been introduced to ensure that Michigan students have the opportunity to study historical genocides, in order both to pay tribute to their victims, and to avoid their reoccurrence.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 4493 (H-1) would amend the Revised School Code to require that Michigan's social studies curriculum and statewide assessment program include instruction and testing about genocides, including the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide. In addition, the bill would establish the Governor's Council on Genocide and Holocaust Education as a temporary commission of the kind described in Section 4 of Article V of the State Constitution, which means it would be limited in duration to two years. The council would be advisory and privately funded. The bill would go into effect 90 days after it was enacted into law.

A more detailed description of the bill follows.

Curriculum and Assessment

Under the bill the board of a school district or charter school must ensure that their schools' social studies curriculum for grades 8 to 12 include age- and grade-appropriate instruction about genocide, including but not limited to the Holocaust, and the Armenian genocide. Under the bill, the legislature "recommends" a combined total of six hours of such instruction during grades 8 to 12.

Further, House Bill 4493(H-1) would require the State Board of Education to ensure that the recommended model core academic curriculum content standards for history in grades 8 to 12 include learning objectives concerning genocides, including but not limited to the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide.

Finally, beginning with assessments conducted during the 2015-2016 school year, the state superintendent of public instruction would be required to ensure that the Michigan Merit Examination social studies component, and the M-Step and any successor state assessment for social studies, as appropriate, include questions related to the learning objectives in the model core concerning genocides, including the Holocaust, and the Armenian genocide.

Governor's Council on Genocide & Holocaust Education

House Bill 4493 (H-1) would also create a 15-member Governor's Council on Genocide and Holocaust Education, appointed by the governor, and comprising members with a particular interest or expertise in genocide or holocaust education. Subject to the availability of private funding, the governor would appoint the council within 60 days after the bill was enacted into law.

The bill describes, in detail, the manner in which the council would operate, including but not limited to removing members, filling vacancies, the election of its officers, required quarterly meetings, the size of its quorum, prohibition of proxy voting, required compliance with the Open Meetings Act and the Freedom of Information Act, and prohibition of compensation (but reimbursement for actual and necessary expenses if private funding is available).

The bill requires the Governor's Council on Genocide and Holocaust Education to do all of the following:

- identify sources of strategies and content for enhancing genocide education to students;
- advise school leaders about these strategies and content;
- identify programs and resources to train teachers, and share these programs with school leaders;
- promote genocide education within the schools and general population of Michigan (to include coordinating events and education that appropriately memorialize the victims of the Holocaust, the victims of the Armenian genocide, and also the victims of other genocides);
- secure private funding for the Council (to include applying for and receiving grants and gifts);
- carry out other tasks to meet its goals in providing genocide education; and
- submit an annual report to the legislature on the progress and status of the council.

House Bill 4493 (H-1) specifies that the Governor's Council on Genocide and Holocaust Education is an advisory body only. As such, there is no right or obligation on the part of the state or its subdivisions, officials, or employees to implement the findings or recommendations of the council, unless further legislation is enacted that specifically authorizes implementation of those findings and recommendations.

Definitions

The bill defines "genocide" to mean any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; or forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

"Holocaust" is defined in the bill to refer to the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews and five million other individuals by the Nazi regime and its collaborators.

"Armenian genocide" is defined to mean the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Turkish Empire and its collaborators.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

To learn more about genocide education, visit the websites of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the Armenian Genocide Education Organization:

<http://www.ushmm.org/educators>
<http://www.armenian-genocide.org/education.html>

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Proponents of the bill say 'Never Again'...never again should genocide be allowed. To prevent these atrocities, Michigan teachers should join their colleagues in other states to teach about genocide—how genocides occur, the rise of demagogic leaders, their victims, and those who resist. That way our future leaders can learn to recognize the demagogues among themselves, and then resist (politically, socially, and economically) the often gradual development of policies designed first to intimidate and, ultimately, to exterminate an entire group of people who have been unjustly demonized.

POSITIONS:

Honigman, Miller, Schwartz & Cohn support the bill. (10-8-15)

The Handleman Company supports the bill. (10-8-15)

Armenian Genocide Education Committee supports the bill. (10-8-15)

The National Council of Jewish Women supports the bill. (10-8-15)

Shapiro Real Estate Group supports the bill. (10-8-15)

The Holocaust Memorial Center supports the bill. (10-8-15)

The Armenian National Committee of Michigan supports the bill. (10-8-15)

Sherwood Foods supports the bill. (10-8-15)

MSU Law Talsky Center supports the bill. (10-8-15)

Fennville Public Schools supports the bill. (10-8-15)

The United States Holocaust Museum supports the bill. (10-8-15)

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.