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To: Ethnic Studies; SBE; Tony Thurmond
Cc: [Emails Redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Ethnic Studies Curriculum

The comments below address a pending draft of an Ethnic Studies Curriculum for California K-12 public schools. The curriculum is supposed to have reflected the California Legislative Assembly Bill No. 331. While remarkable efforts have been done in its preparation, the curriculum, unfortunately, is full of explicit and implicit racism-provoking issues that it is frustrating to figure out a fair way of evaluating it. Ethnic studies have the potential to give us affirmation of who we are and our respective contribution to all; and given our diversity, a properly and fairly-designed and applied curriculum, can move us forward united as one nation.

The significance of judging the “others.” (Please, bear with me, we will get there).

As a professional scientists’ union representative in one of California State departments, I observed how “employee evaluations” judgements are performed. There are two potentially unfair and discriminatory aspects in the evaluation. Based on my experience and observations, the evaluation is typically negative, and for this reason, it often causes immeasurable damage to the employee and the employing outfit as well. It focuses on: What the employee did that was considered imperfect, in the opinion of the particular manager, and what the employee should do better in the future. The employee may be notable and well-recognized in his/her field. He/she may be a person in his/her sixties, close to retirement. Unfortunately, often such evaluation is professionally deflating and personally devastating. It took me over a year, working along with other union representatives, and the department’s management , to shake up the Human Resources offices in the State and in my department to have them agree to add just one positive question to the employee evaluation list: What he/she did well, and how to reinforce that positive performance. I did not deal with the second

unfair/discriminatory feature of the evaluation: Evaluating managers by employees. Organizations could gain much by listening to both, the employees and the managers. It is clear though, that employee evaluation refers to *individuals*, not groups. When we try to judge groups such as those distinguished by the color of their skin, ethnicity, religion, and the like, we will be crossing a red line towards racism. Like in “employee evaluation” of individuals, judging groups, is the fertile soil of racism, and tends to lean heavily on negating the “others,” with very little, if any, racists’ self-evaluation.

If we observe each and every form of racism, racists always “judge” and blame the “others,” rarely themselves. I experienced this in my birth City of Baghdad, as most Arab/Muslims were prejudiced against us as Jews. Unfortunately, the pending Ethnic Studies Curriculum is doing likewise by defaming the Jews in many ways. Like our brothers and sisters in the “African-American” communities, who can feel and tell when they encounter signs and hints of anti-black racism, the Jews developed their own sensitivities to manifestations of antisemitism and Israelophobia. That is why when the curriculum reviewers saw many cases, hints, and examples of anti-Semitic language and references spread out across the curriculum, 80 groups of Jews and others, could not comprehend that our beloved California seemed to be turning into 1930’s Germany. The 80 protesting groups against the curriculum included: Black Americans for Inclusive Ethnic Studies; Institute of Black Solidarity with Israel; Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors; Christians and Jews United for Israel; National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel; the Israel Christian Nexus; Scholars for Peace in the Middle East; San Diego Asian Americans for Equality; Students and Parents Against Campus Antisemitism; and Swarthmore Alumni Against Antisemitism on Campus.

The curriculum is saturated with unproven presumptions and focus on *indoctrination* instead of *education*. I was born to a poor family in Baghdad and experienced the destructive fallout of *indoctrination* on Jews, Christians, and Muslims. I experienced the bloody events of the pogrom of 1941 as many Muslims in my city, along with the police and soldiers who

were supposed to protect us, canvassed the areas and trapped and killed, raped, and burnt down Jewish homes and businesses. As about a million Jews in the Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa were facing an Arab-initiated version of the Holocaust, it was Israel that embraced us as equal citizens. Since the essence of anti-Semitism is the singling out and targeting Jews for annihilation, the existence of Israel as the shelter of last resort for Jews makes it particularly and venomously hated by anti-Semites. The curriculum, unfortunately, is inundated with explicit and implicit innuendos against Israel and Zionism.

One of the listed words for discussion by high school students is “resistance.” This is apparently a noble term to investigate: The founders of our country were the resisters of the brutal British forces; the French resistance in WWII fought bravely for their lives and liberty against the Nazis; and the ever-brave Jewish resisters in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising stood up to the Nazis and their towering and fear-inspiring tanks. But as you look further at the Middle East embattled theater, you realize that several of the groups and countries, which are slaughtering their own people and aiming to engage in a genocidal war against Israel, call themselves “resisters.” What a mockery of linguistic deception. Thus, the reference to “resistance,” should be made clear in its application to specific events, or to be deleted completely.

Another glaring deception included in the curriculum is this: The “oppressed” versus “oppressors” dogma. My community in Baghdad was severely tormented and abused, particularly beginning in the 1930’s and later on, as many of Iraq’s Arab/Muslims aligned themselves with the Nazis. In contrast with the historic reality when the Middle Eastern and North African Jews were too often “oppressed,” they are labeled in the curriculum as the “oppressors,” while the Arab/Muslims, who acted as the oppressors, are placed on a silver platter as the “oppressed.” Jews are not asking for any apologies from those who abused us for so long, all we ask for is this: That we all move forward with mutual respect, while placing the misguided and deceptive oppressors/oppressed dogma in the waste basket.

Throughout history, indoctrination played a deadly role in promoting hate and genocide. There is an essential difference between *teaching* and *indoctrination*. The most succinct statement clarifying the difference was given about a hundred years ago, by the renowned Arab poet and writer, Kahlil Gibran: "If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads to the threshold of your own mind." ("The Prophet," page 56). A basic failure of the curriculum is the writers' belief in a certain theoretical construct, which they try to *impose* on us and on our children. I could not find in the curriculum a critique of this construct. However, I came across a book by Alan Dershowitz, "Defending Israel," where he discusses some concepts on which the curriculum is deeply anchored:

"Intersectionality is a radical academic construct that argues that all forms of oppression are inexorably linked - capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, racism, anti-Islamism, heterosexualism and, of course, Zionism – and that the oppressors of all victimized groups are essentially the same. This pseudo-academic "theory," which has no empirical or scientific basis, resonates on campuses where "identity politics" have often replaced individual merit. Indeed, the very concept of "meritocracy" has become a "politically incorrect" equivalent of all the above "isms." The villains of identity politics are the "privileged classes," which include white, heterosexual, male students and family. The most targeted privileged group on many campuses are Jewish students, especially those who support Israel and are "accused" of Zionism." (Page 218).

In this respect, Martin Luther King Jr. comes to mind. While this giant of a man eloquently articulated the dreams and sorrows of his people, he did far more than that. He was ever a champion of humanity and humane values, and thereby he spoke often for us all: "... and what is anti-Semitism?" MLK asks, "it is the denial to the Jewish people of a fundamental right that we justly claim for the people of Africa and all other nations of the globe. It is discrimination against Jews, my friends, because they are Jews. In short, it

is anti-Semitism ... Let my words echo in the depths of your soul: When people criticize Zionism, they mean Jews – make no mistake about it.”

Our country as a whole, is internationally viewed as the epicenter of education. That is why so many countries of all ideologies and regimes send their youth to the United States for the richness of learning, within an invigorating academic environment. Did we sincerely and deservedly earn this fame? Let us listen to the inside story documented by Alan Dershowitz in his book, “Defending Israel,” page 226:

“ Whenever I receive an invitation to speak at a university, I ask the sponsors why they don’t invite one of their own professors to make the case for Israel. Often, they tell me that there is not a single professor on their campus willing to risk the wrath of anti-Israel colleagues and students. They worry that their evaluations will suffer or that other negative consequences will ensue. Some are prepared to support Israel privately, but not publicly. Courage is not an attribute of most professors, at least when it comes to taking on the powerful anti-Israel forces at many universities. There are some exceptions, but they are all too rare.”

The astonishing “success” of a fearful environment in many colleges, is being passed on as an educational disaster to our high schoolers. This is one more reason for concern to the introduction of an endemically faulty and misguided ethnic studies curriculum, which is already loaded with many other problems.

The draft of the curriculum also speaks about *advantaged* families and groups, where such advantage is presented as something negative. My parents worked very hard to make ends meet to provide for our family. While a young boy, I had to wake up early in the morning before going to school to peddle food snacks to early-rising working men, to earn some money. In my immediate poor neighborhood, most kids had to drop out of school in order to work and help their families. Infused with the love of learning, in spite of poverty, my parents never contemplated my quitting

school. Thanks to them, I graduated elementary school, high school, and obtained Bachelor and Masters degrees. This gave me an *advantage* in life and a satisfying standard of living. We normally achieve such an advantage through studying and hard work. The question is, when the proposed curriculum presents such forward-looking advancement as being bad rather than good, how can students look to improve their lot and narrow down the economic gap with others? Is this position a recipe for success or failure?

The pending curriculum draft also has enormous implications to the standing and security of the country. As we all know, today's students are, inevitably, the ones who will lead the country. Can we expect that leaders, who are mostly indoctrinated to follow, rather than being educated and empowered to think for themselves, be the most fit to lead the country?

Racism, including anti-Semitism and Israelophobia, comes in endless forms and circumstances. My wife and I love to occasionally engage in ballroom dancing. It is a beautiful form of exercising and socializing. It is a notably unifying activity: You are welcome, regardless of skin color, religion, ethnicity, shape and form, and any other attributes. Once, we participated in an Argentine Tango class, as the instructor was Argentinean. He was a great dance instructor. He told us a story which was oozing with anti-Semitic implications and innuendos. When my wife and I protested that ballroom dancing is supposed to be an enjoyable and uniting activity it was misused by the instructor in creating a divisive and ugly class environment. In the following week's class, after the instructor had a chance to talk to his American friends, he apologized to the entire class for what he said. He explained: It was a "cultural difference" as how Argentinians and Americans see things. Yes, when anti-Semites express anti-Semitic views, they sometimes think of it as cultural differences.

Considering the nature and purpose of the ethnic studies, as well as the young age of the targeted students, it is most appropriate and invigorating that the classes are made enjoyable and unifying, rather than divisive, so that issues are discussed with mutual respect of every person and group, and recognition of each of the groups, whether or not included in the ethnic

studies selected coalition. Eventually, united we go forward, divided we go downhill.

I urge all concerned to work together to listen to the protesters of the deeply faulty curriculum, with the purpose of reaching accommodation, in the spirit of a dialogue framework. I would suggest a few basic steps at this point:

1. The State Department of Education and the Ethnic Studies Curriculum should commit to zero tolerance to all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism and Israelophobia. They should also commit to the acceptance of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism, which is an essential source of clarification.
2. Expunge from the entire curriculum and any related documents any language, theories, and explicit and implicit language and examples which invoke any and all forms of racism and supremacy of any group of people over others. This includes removing of all resources included in the bibliography and referred to in the curriculum and related documents.
3. Address the question of assuring that there will be teaching, but not indoctrination, of students. This involves transparency in the teachers' training, with the active participation of groups and agencies, such as "AMCHA Initiative Protecting Jewish Students," "StandWithUs," "Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting – CAMERA," etc.
4. We do not trust our children with babysitters unless we ascertain the babysitter's trustworthiness. Many of the present instructors in Ethnic Studies are so biased that they do not hesitate admitting their embracing of clearly anti-Semitic and Israelophobic beliefs and tendencies. Existing and prospective teachers should be trained and be specifically certified to meet the particular requirements of ethnic studies. The question of transparency in the classroom should be resolved to the satisfaction of all, including the students' parents and the community.
5. Surveys show that Jews are the number one religious/ethnic group in California, most targeted for hate crimes. For this and other relevant

reasons, Jews should be considered as one of the main core groups, with representation no less than any other.

In summary, unless it is completely cleansed from its racist viruses, including antisemitism and Israelophobia, and restored to the purity of the letter and spirit of the legislative bill, the pending curriculum shall remain to be in a completely unacceptable variance with the legislative bill in many areas of deep concern. The California Department of Education should not be made to lend a hand towards racial indoctrination of our high schoolers, as would be the case with a legislatively non-complying curriculum. Ethnic studies classrooms have the unique opportunity to address diversity and other matters productively, for others to follow, including the United States House of Representative and the Senate. Let us all rise to the occasion, for the sake of our children, for the sake of their future.

I, Ezra Amir, am a survivor of the Baghdadi Pogrom against the Jews in June, 1941, which is known as the "farhud,"

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