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Sent: Sunday, August 11, 2019 10:18 PM
To: Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>
Subject: Ethnic Studies Curriculum Concerns of Serious Bias

To Chairman Chao and Members of the Instructional Quality Commission:

I am writing with much concern and dismay over the proposed new Ethnic Studies curriculum, and its not-so-subtle discriminatory treatment of the Jewish people and the state of Israel. While other ethnic group are given their deserved recognition, Jewish-Americans are inexplicably ignored in most parts of the curriculum, while in other places appallingly disparaged in age-old tropes. While the Jewish people are a small part of the population, our positive contributions to society are immeasurable.

In college, as a cultural anthropology major, I wrote my senior thesis on the importance of celebrating acceptance and diversity in children's television. In my wildest dreams, I could never imagine that in my home state of California, my own identity is not only not accepted and celebrated but instead should be disparaged, denigrated, and ignored.

I have read the curriculum and, quite frankly, I am shocked. In my assessment, it qualifies as propaganda. As a social worker, I have strongly advocated for diversity, inclusion, and tolerance for all. Yet, in my home state of California, I find the same is not afforded to me, as a Jew. Just as I have advocated for others, now is the time for me to advocate for myself and my people. The proposed curriculum should concern all tolerant and accepting Californians, Jewish or not. Please read the proposed curriculum carefully. If, as its stated purpose is to promote tolerance and alleviate prejudice and bigotry is true, it clearly misses the mark in its marginalizing, minimizing, and in some place maligning the Jews, the state of Israel, and the Jewish experience.

In the proposed curriculum, the scourge of anti-semitism is barely mentioned. Yet of all hate crimes in our nation, anti-semitic attacks rank the highest. From the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh to the Poway, CA murder, to countless examples of swastika graffiti and defacement of personal property belonging to Jews, there can be no ignoring or side-lining the issue. My children's schools are heavily secured with gates and armed guards because of the threat. My own children, in this post-Holocaust world, feel unsafe simply because they are Jews. Anti-semitism is alive and well in our state. White supremacy is rising, and Jew-hatred is right up there with their African-American vitriol. To deny the real and present threat to Jewish citizens in this state is to deny reality, however unpleasant it may be to accept.

The proposed curriculum also describes the BDS movement as completely one-sided, and does not offer any alternative reading to an extremely complex issue. For example, those who promote BDS state that Israel is an apartheid state. At the same time, those who oppose BDS state that its aim is a complete dissolution of the Israeli state. This is given as an example and not to take sides, rather to elucidate the differing points of view, both of which deserve consideration and attention.

Finally, the draft proposal effectively erases the important and impressive American Jewish experience. In California specifically, Jews have made significant contributions in politics, culture, and government to combat hatred and discrimination of all people. Yet as is evidence in the proposed curriculum, not only is Jewish contribution to our nation and state inconsequential, it doesn't even deserve mention. Where do the authors of this proposal think things in this nation and state would stand if it were not for the incredible contribution of Jews?

While indeed very angry, most of all I am very saddened by this state of affairs. Ethnic Studies are crucially important. Increasingly, however, they have become radicalized and one-dimensional, effectively "oppressing the oppressor", as it were. This seems to be the case in the current draft proposal of the state's Ethnic Studies curriculum, particularly concerning the Jewish people. What a shame it would be for California's students to be given only a distorted, one-sided, and prejudiced education.

Please re-read the proposed Ethnic Studies curriculum, with an open and honest assessment. And please do not pass the curriculum as it currently stands, particularly in its alarming treatment of Jews and Israel.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Yvonne Venger, LCSW