



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Elaine Phillips

## Senator Phillips Introduces Legislation To Ensure New York's Students Are Being Taught About the Holocaust

ELAINE PHILLIPS April 6, 2017

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Senator Elaine Phillips (R-Manhasset) has introduced legislation to ensure that New York State's students are being taught about the history of the Holocaust. The legislation was introduced in response to numerous anti-Semitic threats and acts, as well as an upstate high school's "critical thinking" assignment where students were told to provide their "Nazi point of view" and justify the mass murder of millions of innocent people as part of the "Final Solution."

"Society has an obligation to remember one of the worst atrocities in human history, continue to condemn it and prevent it from happening again. Teaching the next generation about the Holocaust in a responsible way is critically important, because understanding and learning from the past changes the future for the better. Now more than ever, we need to make sure that's happening," said Senator Phillips.

Senator Phillips' legislation (S5530) would require the State Education Commissioner to review school districts' compliance with existing state law that requires them to offer age-appropriate instruction on the Holocaust. The Commissioner's findings would then be detailed in a report to the State Legislature and the Governor. Additionally, the Commissioner would be authorized to develop any regulations necessary to ensure school

districts are complying with the law and providing such instruction.

Over the last several months, there have been an alarming number of threats and hate crimes targeting people of the Jewish faith, including bomb threats against Jewish Community Centers on Long Island and across the country.

Additionally, recent media reports detailed an assignment given by a teacher from an upstate school that asked students to pretend to be Nazi officials attending the Wannsee Conference, where the “Final Solution” was created. Half the class was assigned to write a memo advocating for the extermination of the Jews, while the other half were to write against it, limiting their arguments to those of Nazi leaders who opposed it. Despite some students raising moral objections, the teacher and the school refused to apologize or promise that the “critical thinking” assignment would not be given again in the future.

“No student should be asked to 'think like Nazis' and argue in favor of the Holocaust. Putting them in the position of having to defend one of the most indefensible crimes in all of human history doesn't promote higher learning; it is wrong and unacceptable. This is a prime example of why the State Education Department needs to undertake this review,” said Senator Phillips.