



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Elaine Phillips

Senator Phillips' Legislation To Ensure All New York Children Learn History Of The Holocaust Passes State Senate

ELAINE PHILLIPS June 12, 2018

Senator Elaine Phillips announced today that the New York State Senate passed her bill that requires the State Education Department to review specific school districts' teaching guidelines and compliance with existing state law, which requires them to offer age-appropriate instruction on the Holocaust.

"Society has an obligation to remember and continue to condemn one of the worst atrocities in human history," Senator Phillips said. "Providing our children with a comprehensive history of the world, which includes teaching the Holocaust in a responsible manner, is crucial in preventing history from repeating itself. With hate-driven crimes in the headlines almost every day, this lesson is more important than ever. I applaud my colleagues in the Senate for passing this bill and call on the Assembly and Governor Cuomo to take action on the measure immediately."

The bill, S.5530, would also authorize the State Education Commissioner to develop any regulations necessary to ensure school districts are providing such instruction so future generations of New Yorkers will never forget the millions of innocent Jews and other persecuted groups that were murdered in the genocide.

A recent study found that there are significant illiteracies in America regarding awareness of established facts and detailed knowledge of the Holocaust. One finding shows that nearly half of all surveyed people aged 18 to 34 could not name a single concentration camp or ghetto out of nearly 40,000 in Europe during the Holocaust. Despite this, one encouraging note in the survey – 93 percent – agree that all students should learn about the Holocaust in school.

This legislation would help keep the Holocaust at the forefront of education, which is more important than ever as the number of living Holocaust survivors decreases. The State Education Commissioner would also be required to deliver review findings to the Legislature and the Governor so all stakeholders can better understand statewide school districts' aptitude for teaching this type of curriculum.

In March 2017, a New York school gained media attention when a high school teacher gave an assignment to his class requiring some of them to make an argument in favor of the Holocaust. Many students were reportedly disturbed by the assignment that wanted students to see things from the point of view of Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany. State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia responded a few days later promising the assignment would not be given again at the particular school in question.

The bill will be sent to the Assembly.