

From:

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To:

The State Board of Education EQS Committee

Re: Recommendations by Act 1 Working Group, Definitions Section

Greetings:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment again on this critical, foundational section of the EQS recommendations on which the rest of the document relies. I would also like to express my thanks to the Act 1 Advisory Group and the SBE EQS Committee for its tireless work to provide Vermont students with the highest standards that uphold democratic principles and correct some of the omissions that have left the histories of so many ethnic and racial groups out of our curricula.

I fully support the broad and inclusive language as it appears now in Section 2114, which clearly defines words like 'discrimination,' 'ethnicity' and 'racism' without identifying or singling out any specific groups. This logic situates the work to be done within the broader struggle against racism and oppression, which are both embedded in white supremacy and the machinery that has been, and is, used to target innumerable groups. And innumerable is important because sadly there are too many to name, and some will always be left out. This is why the definitions need to be broad.

I have been aware of the work of EQS group since 2019 when I testified during the legislative process in response to certain groups, some from outside our state, who were involved in attempts to insert language into these definitions that singled out antisemitism as a unique form of discrimination and racism to be named and described. Most disturbing to me was the suggestion that a particular definition of anti-Semitism should be included that purposely conflates criticism of the State of Israel with anti-Semitism. This definition, created as a draft for discussion by International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA), was never meant to be adopted by states as a definition, and its author has himself publicly denounced it. Its use has created a climate of fear, and suppression of speech, specifically, the legitimate discussion of human rights abuses and crimes committed by the State of Israel, as well as the U.S. Yet where else should difficult discussions and debate about such issues be encouraged but within places of learning?

It is important to also note that the groups advocating for a singular place for antisemitism in this document do not speak for all Vermont Jews; while most Jews here and in the U.S. are like myself, secular, much of the testimony from JCVT is from rabbis. Likewise, The AntiDefamation League is a regional and national organization, not based in Vermont, with strong ties to the State of Israel - it hardly speaks for all of us.

Tactics of division and fear are the tactics of white supremacy - they divide us and make us

vulnerable. A special lens on antisemitism alone ignores threats to other marginalized groups, most of whom are non white, and erases their unique experiences. We must be united to overcome all forms of racism and discrimination and we must act on the knowledge that oppression is intersectional, and justice indivisible.

Thank you again for this opportunity,
Kathy Shapiro