

To whom it may concern,

My name is Nicole Johnson Gottsegen and I am a resident of Hartland, Vermont. I am a school-based speech-language pathologist and have worked in Vermont public schools for 20 years with students of all ages, from preschool through high school. I am a white woman who identifies as a Protestant, main line Christian, and I am married to a Jew. My family includes people who are lesbian, people who are trans, people whose ancestors came to the United States a few generations ago, or many generations ago, or who are new immigrants.

Though I support the goals of the Vermont Legislature and of the Rule Series 2000 to make sure that our students, our children, are provided with curricula that are anti racist, culturally responsive and inclusive, equitable, and anti discriminatory, it is vital that the Rule Series 2000 explicitly address antisemitism as called for by the Vermont legislature. The legislature explicitly included in section B of the definition of ethnic groups those “that have been historically subject to persecution or genocide”. In leaving out this language, I believe the goal of those drafting the rules has been to make them as broad and fully inclusive as possible. I do not think that anyone has intended to exclude Jews or the Jewish experience. My fear is that, by leaving language about genocide and antisemitism out of the rules, we inadvertently suggest that antisemitism is less damaging, less a concern than other forms of discrimination, and fail to teach a history that is vital to the understanding of the ultimate costs of discrimination and exclusion.

Here in Vermont it is easy to think antisemitism doesn't exist, until you talk with young people who have experienced it in the halls of their high school or on the bus, or until you have truly paid attention to the endless antisemitic tropes used almost daily in our language about Jews and money or Jews and power. These often appear to be accepted parts of our nation's, and even our state's political speech. When I sing and pray with the congregation in a Christian church here in Woodstock, Vermont, if we hear a car alarm or other loud, sudden sound outside, it barely registers. When I attend synagogue in Woodstock, if there is a loud noise outside, everyone notices. During important holidays, our synagogue always has a police officer on the grounds. No one feels the need of a police presence at my church. At the synagogue, the services begin with the usual welcomes, but also with directions about what to do should there be an emergency. During one service, a car alarm went off, and everything stopped, everyone looked nervously around, and certain designated members of the congregation went to look and to check in with the police officer on duty. Fortunately, there was nothing wrong, no one was attacking us, but a quick look at the rising rates of antisemitic violence across the country helps explain the fear.

Jews have not been the only victims of genocide. Too many human stories include histories of genocide. But within the lifetime of my grandparents, within the lifetime of my husband's parents, Nazi Germany systematically killed 6 million Jews. It did not matter if they were religious or not, if they were only one quarter Jewish, if they were married to a Christian, if they were fully assimilated into the dominant culture, if they were rich or poor, if they were German, Dutch, French, Italian, or any other nationality. The justification for this lay in centuries of antisemitism and persecution. And though other nations, including the United States, knew what was being done, they did not help, again, at least in large part, because of antisemitism.

This is not ancient history—I have heard Holocaust survivors speak, I know people who lost family members. The existence of genocide, especially that perpetrated in the Holocaust, is the ultimate reason that the work of equity, anti discrimination, and inclusion is so important. Without directly

teaching the history of antisemitism and working to stop it, we will not truly achieve the goals of the Rule Series 2000.

Respectfully submitted,  
Nicole Johnson Gottsegen