

Thank you for inviting comments regarding The Educational Quality Standards
My name is Susan Leff and I am a Jewish resident of Burlington. I am the immediate past president of Temple Sinai in South Burlington where I remain on the board. I spent 10 years as the Executive Director of Hillel at the University of Vermont, and I have been a school teacher in the public schools earlier in my career.

I am here tonight to ask you to please include for the **Standards'** definition of Ethnic Groups **in the Standards** to be exactly as it appears in the ACT 1 law, including section B.

In ACT 1, Ethnic Groups intentionally includes part B, “groups that have been historically subject to persecution or genocide”.

Vermont legislators included part (B) because **they want** Vermont K-12 students to learn about the cultures, contributions and struggles of groups, including Jews, who have been historically subjected to persecution and genocide. This aligns with the White House's **recent, first in US history**, National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism.

This is consistent with the “U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism “ roadmap

A key focus is President Biden’s "whole-of-society" call to action which includes K-12 Departments of Education, County Offices of Education, and school districts providing "readily available quality educational resources:"

QUOTE: “We call on state and local governments to include Jewish studies in ethnic studies and history curricula. Lessons should include Jewish history, as well as curricula on positive Jewish contributions to America, Jewish diversity, and manifestations of contemporary antisemitism.

More education [is needed] on Jewish American history and the valuable role that Jews have played in our national story. “

Antisemitism is alive and well in Vermont. I’ve experienced it as a member of the community and in my roles in the Jewish Community.

I am not here to ask that Jews be specifically included in the definition of Ethnic groups, only that the definition is broad enough, by including section B ,that we not be excluded. I took part in some of the working group discussions and there was sometimes an anti-Jewish bias in those discussions. Advocating for inclusion of Jewish history, culture and understanding resulted, sometimes, in equating Judaism and Zionism on the part of some participants. That worries me.

When my daughter as a 6th grader at Edmund’s Middle School in Burlington, she was beat up by another student you screamed “You kike” while she did it. The school responded to the physical aggression but declined to treat it as antisemitism, saying that they thought that the other girl had no idea what that word meant. We also had a swastika carved into our door on South Willard St.

At Temple Sinai, under my tenure as President, we installed bullet proof film, new locks and a beefed up security system as well as steel and concrete barriers in front of the doors that go 8 feet into the ground. We did that at the urging of the Vermont State Police, among other advisors, as they worried about the safety of those inside the building.

At UVM, swastikas on doors and white boards were a common occurrence and comments and verbal micro-aggressions came from faculty and staff as well as other students. It's against the policy of the University to schedule exams or essential activities or field trips that can't be made up on the Jewish holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Every year, it was an issue, and I advocated for our students.

Vermont has the oldest Jewish community in New England. Jewish people often came as refugees, a precursor to our newer refugee populations. The early Lithuanian population settled in Vermont as merchants and businessmen and the descendants of that population are still an important component of our business community. Our Jewish population are proud Vermonters who have enriched the state with culture and heritage that should be taught in our schools as a part of our curriculum along with the contributions of other ethnic groups who also bring a rich heritage to our state.