

May 10, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Nate Cutting, and I teach at Ellsworth High School. It is an honor to be here to testify in support of **LD 187 An Act To Require Education about African-American History and the History of Genocide.**

If you asked one hundred English teachers what their favorite book is to teach, you would probably get a wide variety of answers. Invariably, *The Great Gatsby* and *Of Mice and Men* would be mentioned dozens of times. We tend to like those books because they lend themselves to answering important questions like, “To what extent can money change who you are?” Or “what does it mean to be a true friend?” Questions like these inspire lighthearted debates and occasionally laughs. However, as any English teacher knows, we have an important responsibility. There are books on our shelves that simply must be shared because their lessons are too important to ignore.

In the case of *Night* by Elie Wiesel, the questions raised by this book are considerably more challenging. When I ask students, “What does it mean to be a human being?” I can see their eyes move from side to side, up and then down. Often, they understand the question, but the answer is elusive. Making our way through a Socratic discussion, the mood becomes increasingly somber when I ask them to consider, “Why should we study the atrocities of the past?” These questions demand a reckoning of who we are, what we care about, and what kind of world we want to live in. Authors like Wiesel fight against indifference and provide students with the moral education that is essential in today’s increasingly complex global community.

Unfortunately, genocide is a term that students need to know. History repeats itself. The only antidote to ignorance is education. I am advocating today in support of a bill that

holds teachers accountable and reminds them that we have the power to change the world.

Although there are dozens of books that should be taught, there are a few that deserve distinction. They should be read closely and discussed thoroughly. Passing LD 187 ensures that all students will have the opportunity to consider, “in your own life, how will you fight indifference?”

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