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One Hundred and Seventy CA High School Students and Parents Urge Newsom to Veto Ethnic Studies Graduation Requirement

San Carlos, CA, Sept 20, 2021 – One hundred and seventy California high school students and parents today urged Governor Gavin Newsom to veto AB 101, a recently passed bill that would make ethnic studies courses a graduation requirement, citing “[t]his bill will sanction the hounding of Zionist students in high schools across the state and encourage similar behavior across the nation.”

The California legislature voted two weeks ago to advance AB 101. The bill now heads to Newsom, who has until Oct. 10 to act.

The petition reads:

Dear Honorable Governor Newsom,

High school students are already experiencing antisemitism in the classroom. We should know: We are 170 California high school students and parents who will be directly and negatively impacted if you pass AB 101, the ethnic studies graduation requirement bill that enables the adoption of antisemitic curricula. We strongly urge you to VETO AB 101.

This bill will sanction the hounding of Zionist students in high schools across the state and encourage similar behavior across the nation. Zionism is integral to our Jewish identity and we are alarmed that this bill will institutionalize anti-Zionism, a dangerous form of antisemitism.

Despite new ‘guardrail’ language, AB 101 does not, and by law cannot, prevent a school district from adopting the ‘Liberated’ curriculum being developed by the authors of the rejected first-draft Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC), which includes overtly anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist lessons and explicitly promotes student engagement in BDS.

If this bill becomes law, we will very likely be forced to endure this antisemitism in our high schools. Although the bill encourages adoption of the state-approved ESMC and requires local school districts to publicly vet any ethnic studies curriculum other than the state-approved ESMC, the reality is that many, if not most, districts will prefer the antisemitic “Liberated” curriculum over the state-approved version due to support for it from the state’s major teacher’s unions and the higher education community, as well as the success of “Liberated” proponents to create pathways for teacher training and professional development using their antisemitic curriculum.

We do not want to be forced into the position of fighting the adoption of such an antisemitic curriculum by our school districts. It is shameful of you to expect us to do so!

We strongly urge you to VETO AB 101.

A first draft of the state-approved Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) was widely criticized by Newsom, California's Jewish Legislative Caucus, and major Jewish organizations, for promoting the BDS movement against Israel and including anti-Semitic content. The State Board of Education received tens of thousands of letters in opposition.

The ESMC has since been revised to eliminate BDS and other overtly anti-Semitic content. And the approved legislation includes amendments that attempt to prevent the teaching of the original draft, including one stating that "it is the intent of the Legislature that local educational agencies not use the portions of the draft model curriculum that were not adopted by the Instructional Quality Commission due to concerns related to bias, bigotry, and discrimination."

Critics, though, point out that even with these amendments, AB 101 does not, and by law cannot, forbid schools from teaching the ESMC first draft or the even more anti-Semitic Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, especially given Liberated curriculum's support from the state's major teachers' unions and the ethnic studies higher education community.

The Liberated curriculum is being developed by the authors of the rejected anti-Semitic ESMC first draft. In addition, the group's website smears Israel with false charges of "settler colonialism" and "apartheid" and uses classic anti-Semitic tropes of Jewish wealth and power to vilify Jewish organizations speaking out about anti-Semitism; encourages teachers to "create a space within your school" to engage in anti-Zionist activism and to fight the "Zionist backlash," identified as "white supremacy"; promotes anti-Zionist groups calling for Israel's destruction; and provides "skill-building" and "training" on how to start a BDS campaign.