



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Representative Rob Swearingen, Chair
Members, Assembly Committee on State Affairs

FROM: Kim Vercauteren, Executive Director, Wisconsin Catholic Conference

DATE: February 12, 2020

RE: Support for Assembly Bill 816, Holocaust and Genocide Education

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony today on behalf of the Roman Catholic bishops of Wisconsin in support of Assembly Bill 816, which incorporates the Holocaust and other genocides into the state's model social studies standards for education. Assembly Bill 816 also requires instruction on the Holocaust and other genocides in public, charter, and private schools participating in the parental choice programs.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church notes states that:

Actions deliberately contrary to the law of nations and to its universal principles are crimes, as are the orders that command such actions. Blind obedience does not suffice to excuse those who carry them out. Thus the extermination of a people, nation, or ethnic minority must be condemned as a mortal sin. One is morally bound to resist orders that command genocide. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2313)

It continues "Every act of war directed to the indiscriminate destruction of whole cities or vast areas with their inhabitants is a crime against God and man, which merits firm and unequivocal condemnation." (CCC, no. 2314)

While we appreciate that Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction has already revised the current model academic standards to incorporate instruction on human rights and the Holocaust and other genocides, the WCC takes this opportunity to acknowledge its support for the continued inclusion of these subjects in our state academic standards as required under AB 816.

Assembly Bill 816 also requires that a school board, independent charter school, and private school participating in a parental choice program include instruction on the Holocaust and other genocides at least once in grades 5 to 8 and once in grades 9 to 12. While the WCC does not generally support mandates imposed upon private schools, in this instance the subject matter is of such great importance that our duty to educate and condemn genocide compels our support for Assembly Bill 816. We appreciate, however, that there is discretion provided for under the bill to allow the private school to develop its respective curriculum based on the model provided.

We urge your support for Assembly Bill 816. Thank you.