

Testimony Presented to Members  
of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees of the Virginia General Assembly  
Virginia Western Community College  
By Jeanne Trabulsi of 101 Walnut Court, Front Royal, Virginia  
On behalf of the Virginia Coalition for Human Rights  
January 3, 2019



Paul Noursi – Co-chair  
Nancy Wein – Co-chair

#### Participating Organizations

American Muslims for Palestine  
Appalachian Peace Education Center  
Arab American Association of Central Virginia  
Community for Justice in Palestine & Israel of the Alliance of Baptists  
Defenders for Freedom, Justice, and Equality  
Israel Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church - USA  
Jewish Voice for Peace  
National Arab American Women's Association  
New Dominion PAC  
Northern Virginians for Peace & Justice  
Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace  
Plowshares Peace & Justice Center  
Richmonders for Peace in Israel and Palestine  
Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East, Northern Virginia Chapter  
United Methodists for Kairos Response  
US Campaign for Palestinian Rights  
Washington Interfaith Alliance for Middle East Peace

My name is *Jeanne Trabulsi*, and I'm a member of the Virginia Coalition for Human Rights representing over 8,000 Virginians. Our coalition of 17 organizations believes that the Israel-Palestine conflict is a human rights issue that to be understood requires access to facts—not disinformation.

Based upon a review of recently adopted history and social sciences textbooks that we initiated in early 2018, we are concerned that portions of these textbooks are inaccurate, biased, and NOT in correlation with Virginia Standards of Learning. And, that without corrections, the next generation of Virginians will graduate with a one-dimensional view of the Middle East. They will be indoctrinated with ideology and will not be availed with perspective and knowledge. We have three asks: 1) greater **accuracy in textbook content**; 2) greater **safeguarding of content integrity** by insulating the textbook review process from the pressures of political concerns; and 3) **making funding of textbooks contingent upon a JLARC audit** of the current review process overseen by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) that has led to documented textbook inaccuracies.

There are many single-interest groups that seek to manipulate the content of textbooks in order to promote a particular point of view. For example, there is an organization based in California called the Institute for Curriculum Services (ICS) that has proposed edits to Virginia textbooks that offer a one-sided view of the Israel/Palestine conflict. This Institute's proposal, which was received by VDOE, was funded by three Israel-affinity groups in Richmond, Tidewater, and the greater Washington D.C. area. These proposed edits romanticize the establishment of the State of Israel and suggest that

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only the Arabs and Palestinians are culpable for the Arab-Israel conflict—omitting any ways that Israel might also be contributing to the conflict. Is this a lobbying effort on the part of these groups for a foreign state—namely Israel? Are these textbooks being subjected to undue influence? Is this propaganda?

We have had our concerns about textbook bias confirmed by 16 prominent nonpartisan, Virginia-based academicians including Professor Emeritus William B. Quandt of the University of Virginia. In letters to Virginia's elected officials and textbook publishers, these experts on the modern Middle East wrote that the current texts and proposed ICS changes convey inaccuracies, and, that if allowed to stand, would continue to degrade not only the textbooks but the teaching guides that accompany them.

The General Assembly will authorize spending over \$140 million in textbooks in the next two years. That's just the state share. You have the power to ensure that the VDOE exercises rigorous quality control when adopting these textbooks. You have the power to ensure that textbooks provide a balanced presentation of facts that represent reality. You have the power to ensure that textbooks have not been unduly influenced by interest groups espousing a biased point of view. \$140,000,000 is a lot of money to spend. It should be spent wisely.

Thank you.