

Testimony Presented to Members of the
House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees of the Virginia General Assembly
Science Museum of Virginia, Dewey Gottwald Center
By Nancy Wein from Richmond, 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 *Nancy Wein*. I am a member of the Richmond Jewish community and a member of Richmonders for Peace in Israel-Palestine (RPIP). RPIP is one of 17 organizations within the Virginia Coalition for Human Rights (VCHR).

I am here to discuss the spending of over \$140 million on textbooks over the next two years. I am pleased that the budget includes increases in funding for education. However, I am concerned that portions of the current history and social studies textbooks that cover the Middle East are historically inaccurate and biased. For example, these textbooks romanticize the establishment of the state of Israel and portray Palestinians as the unjustified and unprovoked aggressors and causes of ongoing conflict. The books fail to mention that the original UN partition plan allotted 55% of the land to Israel and 45% to the Palestinians even though the Palestinians at the time owned 94% of the land. It is quite easy to understand the Palestinian's unwillingness to agree to such a plan. Furthermore, in descriptions of the violence since the 1967 war and subsequent occupation, texts emphasize Israeli casualties and ignore the disproportionate use of force that Israel has inflicted on Palestinians resulting in far greater casualties.

VCHR has studied the VDOE textbook review process and we have some concerns. First, the process is not transparent. The public has the right to know the composition of the textbook review committee and their credentials. VCHR was forced to file a Virginia FOIA request to get access to this information and the response was simply a list of names with no identifying credentials. Our second concern is that the evaluation of the content is not being performed by subject-matter experts. Through

Testimony Presented to Members of the
House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees of the Virginia General Assembly
Science Museum of Virginia, Dewey Gottwald Center
By Nancy Wein from Richmond, Virginia
On behalf of the Virginia Coalition for Human Rights
January 3, 2019

our own research, we determined that the members of the committee appear to be either secondary school educators or professors of education with no particular expertise in the area of modern Middle Eastern history. Without subject-matter experts, the process is vulnerable to political pressure from outside interest groups. In the most recent textbook review in March 2018, the California-based Institute for Curriculum Services (ICS) used the Jewish Community Relations Committee of Richmond¹ to convey questionable changes to the content of the textbooks. Without subject-matter experts on the review committee, there is no way to evaluate the validity of any proposed changes.

We ask that the funds allocated to the VDOE be contingent upon the following two measures. First the VDOE webpage should provide a complete list of textbook review committee members including their area of academic expertise so that the public will know definitively that subject-matter experts are on the committee. Second, we ask for a public hearing or a JLARC study to review the VDOE's process for certifying textbooks. We believe that these measures will ensure that the textbook review process conforms to the procedures documented in their manual.

¹ http://editions.us.com/reflector_0418/4/