

VCHR and Virginia professors push back against questionable textbook changes by Israel-advocacy organizations

RICHMOND/ The Virginia Coalition for Human Rights (VCHR) and prominent Virginia college and university professors on May 30 demanded publishers protect the quality and accuracy of history and social studies textbooks used in K-12 classrooms across the commonwealth. The VCHR letter urged publishers not to adopt “factually-challenged, biased and exclusionary Institute for Curriculum Services (ICS) recommendations.” Publishers contacted include Houghton-Mifflin Harcourt, McGraw-Hill, Prentice Hall and National Geographic.

The ICS, with backing by state and local Israel advocacy organizations, submitted a large number of questionable proposed changes to the Virginia Department of Education and publishers during a recent textbook review process. Examples of ICS-submitted changes include:

1. Emphasizing Arab culpability for crisis initiation leading to military action and failure of peace efforts—and never Israeli culpability, even when it is undisputed historic fact.
2. Replacing the commonly used words of "settlers" with "communities," "occupation" with "control of," "wall" with "security fence," and "militant" with "terrorist."
3. Referencing Israeli claims such as "Israel annexed East Jerusalem" and the Golan Heights as accepted facts without referencing lack of official recognition by the United Nations and most member nation states.

Signatories of the VCHR letter to textbook publishers argued against “any rushed adoption” of such changes until “a diverse panel of qualified and nonpartisan academic experts is consulted for feedback.”

This initiative to maintain quality and accuracy in textbooks was led by VCHR, a coalition of 16 organizations representing over 8,000 Virginians.

Among the 14 Virginia academic signatories of the letter are:

- Professor Noura Erakat, Assistant Professor of Legal Studies, Social Justice, and International Area Studies, School of Interactive Studies, George Mason University
- Professor Michael Fischbach, Professor of History, Randolph Macon College
- Professor Peter Mandaville, Professor of International Affairs, Schar School of Policy and Government, George Mason University;
- Professor William B. Quandt, Professor Emeritus, Department of Politics, University of Virginia;
- Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, Distinguished Adjunct Professor of Government and Public Policy at the College of William and Mary.

Letters presenting all academic and VCHR coalition member organization signatories and other documentation sent to textbook publishers may be viewed online at vchr.org/vatextbooks.html.

For more information about the campaign to protect the integrity of Virginia textbooks, contact VCHR point of contact for this issue, Jeanne Trabulsi at jgracet@msn.com, (telephone # 540-622-6278), or VCHR co-chairs Paul Noursi at paulnoursi@gmail.com or Nancy Wein at rpiprva@gmail.com.