

**TESTIMONY: UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK**

**Committee Hearing: Resolution 673**

**Recognizing 1/27/19 as Holocaust Remembrance Day and the week beginning on 1/27/19 as  
a citywide week of Holocaust Education in NYC**

**Submitted by:  
Anat Barber**

**January 16, 2019**

Good afternoon. My name is Anat Barber, and I am the professional at UJA-Federation of New York who has the privilege of leading our work with Holocaust Survivors through the Community Initiative for Holocaust Survivors. On behalf of UJA, our network of nonprofit partners and those we serve, thank you for the opportunity to testify on Resolution 673, which will commemorate January 27<sup>th</sup> as Holocaust Remembrance Day in New York City and declare the week of the 27<sup>th</sup> as Holocaust Education Week citywide, and the importance of Holocaust remembrance and education.

Established more than 100 years ago, UJA is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. UJA's mission is to fight poverty; connect people to their communities and respond to crises both locally and around the world. UJA supports a network of hundreds of nonprofit organizations serving those who are most vulnerable and in need of programs and services.

UJA applauds the leadership of the City Council for its continued investment in supportive programs for New York City's Holocaust survivors through the Elie Wiesel Holocaust Survivor Initiative. Many of our nonprofit partners have received initiative grants to provide specialized programming and comprehensive services for Holocaust survivors. Grants funded through the Elie Wiesel Holocaust Survivor Initiative provide case management services, personal care and assistance, legal services and entitlement counseling, transportation services, end-of-life care, and specialized caregiver supports. As we care for this last generation of survivors, we ask that the City Council continue its compassionate support of this vulnerable population.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION**

The declaration of a citywide Holocaust Memorial Day and Holocaust Education Week through Resolution 673 holds a critical sense of urgency and timeliness. In April 2018, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany released the results of a national survey that shared the

shocking statistic: nearly half of all Americans, and almost two-thirds of millennials, cannot identify what Auschwitz was. This is shocking and horrifying. We must learn from our past.

Today, in a time when anti-Semitism is on the rise and events like the recent attack on Jewish lives at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh have shaken America to its core, we must commit to teaching our children and young adults about the Holocaust – to do our part to fulfill our communal promise to “Never Forget” and ensure that we never re-live the horrors of the past again.

By establishing this Holocaust Memorial Day and Education Week, we will be providing the essential framework for our schools, politicians, and organizations to join us in honoring the memories of those who perished and preserving the stories of those who survived.

### **UJA’S PROGRAMS AND IMPACT**

Through the Community Initiative for Holocaust Survivors, UJA provides service to 10,000 needy survivors in our area. We support socialization programs that relieve crippling isolation, individualized support from specially trained social workers, emergency cash assistance, and so much more. We wrap survivors in the warm embrace of our community and assure them that they are not alone. As a community, we bear the sacred responsibility to never forget what happened and, equally important, to never abandon those who endured unimaginable horror simply because they were Jewish. CIHS is the vehicle through which we fulfill this communal promise.

A refrain we hear time and again from survivors who benefit from UJA’s care, is that when they pass away, not only will their own stories perish, but the stories they hold of those who were killed during the Holocaust will perish as well. Our compassionate care providers ensure our clients that their memories will not be forgotten. But we must widen the circle of responsibility of those who will transmit survivors’ stories to future generations beyond those who provide direct service, to the broader New York City community. We have the profound distinction of being the last generation who will live alongside Holocaust survivors, about 40,000 of whom live in the New York area, to ensure that their legacies live on. As a community of New York City, we bear the sacred responsibility to never forget what happened. We hope to see Resolution 673 to fruition to accomplish this sacred goal.

### **WHY NOW?**

We have the profound distinction of living amongst the last generation of Holocaust survivors – the largest concentration of whom in the United States live right here in New York. As the population of survivors wanes, we have a unique responsibility to pay tribute to them, and amplify their voices in meaningful ways.

Creating an official Holocaust Memorial Day and Education Week in New York City would be such a moving way to honor the survivors in our community. January 27<sup>th</sup>, the day when Auschwitz was liberated in 1945, represents the physical transition from imprisonment to freedom, it is only fitting that this be the day that we offer them the symbolic freedom of knowing that their stories will not perish with them.

### **CONCLUSION**

UJA-Federation of New York thanks the City Council for taking up this important Resolution and for its continued support and compassion for this vulnerable population. We look forward to partnering with you on this important endeavor.

Distinguished Members of City Council, fellow Survivors, all Guests,

My name is Gabriella Major. I feel very privileged and honored to be part of this important day. As a child survivor of the Holocaust from Hungary, invaded last by the Nazis in 1944, it is quite a miracle that I am alive and here to celebrate the resolution to have January 27<sup>th</sup> as Holocaust Remembrance Day for New York. I was invited to give my testimony as a survivor. Being a two- year- old child at the time I was not destined to live but to be murdered in the crematoria of Auschwitz. Together with my mother and grandmother we were herded into the ghetto in Debrecen, Hungary, then squeezed into cattle cars for 3 days without any food and water. Somehow miraculously the train took a detour and we wound up in a concentration camp, called Strasshof near Vienna. I was between life and death for 6 weeks. My grandmother died in the camp and 28 members of my extended family were killed in Auschwitz. We rebuilt from the ashes back in Hungary living through once again persecutions under the Communist regime. Eventually we escaped from Hungary in 1956 after the Hungarian Revolution. Soon we were able to come to the United States and rebuild our lives in freedom. I have devoted the last 5 years to Holocaust education of students and adults as a docent at the Museum of Jewish Heritage. I also had the greatest experience in an incredible program, called Witness Theater, sponsored by Self Help and UJA where survivors together with HS Juniors and seniors learn about each other. The students then enact vignettes from the survivors' harrowing experiences telling their stories through an amazing play.

In addition, I have been speaking to groups of students from 5<sup>th</sup> grade through High School and college throughout the city, Long Island, Westchester and neighboring states. I am very passionate about teaching children and adults about the horrors and the lessons of the Holocaust. It is vital and of utmost importance to have every student know what happened and how can we prevent such genocide from happening again. If not now when? Unfortunately, we are losing many survivors; but we still have much to do! We must remember and never forget. That is why we need to insist that everyone know about the Holocaust. The children are our ambassadors, our hope for the future. I hope that they will speak up and will not tolerate prejudice, antisemitism or hatred of any group. My prayer is that through small acts of kindness and good deeds we will repair the world one person at a time. Thank You!

Good afternoon. My name is Rita Iosefson, and I am the Deputy Chief of Staff at the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in Battery Park City. We are New York’s Holocaust Memorial Museum and the third largest Holocaust museum in the world. Our mission is to educate diverse audiences about Jewish life before, during, and after the Holocaust.

We wholeheartedly support this Resolution recognizing January 27, 2019 as Holocaust Remembrance Day and the week beginning on January 27 as a citywide week of Holocaust Education in New York City. Its importance, relevance, and potential are evident in our own experiences as an institution that invites New Yorkers to observe International Holocaust Remembrance Day and to engage in Holocaust education.

Each year we serve more than 60,000 students who visit the Museum. This year, we launched New York’s Holocaust Curriculum—a series of lesson plans and educational resources that we developed with the support of the New York City Department of Education. With the curriculum, we are poised to reach an even greater number of students throughout the boroughs, in their own classrooms.

In our public program offerings, Holocaust remembrance and education are inextricably linked. There are particular moments in the year when we invite our greater community to gather, remember, and learn. One such moment is International Holocaust Remembrance Day, which is observed on January 27th—the date of the liberation of Auschwitz.

The United Nations designates a particular theme for contemplation and action each year. This year’s theme is “Holocaust Remembrance: Demand and Defend Your Human Rights.” In response to this theme, the Museum will offer programs that encourage public audiences to consider the lessons of the past and their relevance to our shared future.

January 27th begins a week of Holocaust education at the Museum. The week will include professional development for teachers—on the Chancellor’s Conference Day of Professional Learning—and a series of public programs. We will present two films and post-screening talks from preeminent historians; a public lecture by a leading Holocaust educator; and a community project to listen to, learn from, and discuss the recorded testimonies of Jewish American veterans who liberated Nazi concentration camps.

Our International Holocaust Remembrance Day programming will culminate with the opportunity to hear from a Holocaust survivor as she shares her life story in her own words. At the Museum, we have found that testimony is often what “gets through” to visitors—communicating the lived experience of history and allowing people to make human connections.

During this week of Holocaust education, Museum admission is free to all. (I should also mention that New York City students and educators always receive free admission to the Museum. All are welcome.) We invite our community to light candles, spend time in our memorial garden, and engage in conversation about the legacies we all carry.

The international nature of commemoration on January 27th communicates that Holocaust remembrance and education are global responsibilities. The connectedness of our modern world, and the diversity of our local communities, makes this commemoration uniquely meaningful.

The Museum supports this Resolution and remains committed to providing a space where all New Yorkers can gather to learn and to remember.

FOR THE RECORD

Testimony of Rabbi Yeruchim Silber  
Agudath Israel of America  
City Council, Committee on Civil and Human Rights  
Re: Reso 673  
January 16, 2019

Good afternoon, my name is Yeruchim Silber and I serve as the Director of New York Government Relations for Agudath Israel of America. We are a national organization headquartered here in Manhattan with an office in Washington and seven regional offices across the country.

Our organization was originally founded in 1912 in Poland and for 30 years Agudath Israel was the leading voice for orthodox Jewry in Germany, Poland, Lithuania and other parts of Europe until those populations were decimated in the holocaust.

Fortunately there were survivors who came to this country and began the work of building anew what had been destroyed. The original survivor generation built schools, synagogues, community institutions, and began families of their own. It was due to their perseverance that our community has witnessed such phenomenal growth over the last 70 years. There are currently about 110,000 children in Jewish day school and

yeshivas in New York City, many of them grandchildren and great grandchildren of survivors.

Although my own parents immigrated to this country prior to World War II and were thus not classified as holocaust survivors, many of my friends and contemporaries growing up were in fact children of survivors and in fact I was one of the lucky ones that actually had living grandparents as many of my contemporaries never know their grandparents who had perished in the holocaust.

Growing up it was a very common site to meet survivors, many with tattoos on their forearms as a constant reminder of the terrible ordeal they went through.

Through the years many organizations have been there to serve the holocaust survivor population. My own organization, Agudath Israel has worked with the survivor population for decades. In addition to operating 3 senior centers, among whose clients include survivors, our youth division sends volunteers to homebound survivors, and our constituent services department is always available to assist them with any needs they may have.

Sadly as the years have moved on, the survivor population has dwindled as so many have passed on and it is estimated that in another 15-20 years there may be nobody left who personally witnessed the terrible atrocities of the holocaust.

Another troubling phenomenon is that of holocaust denial. Unfortunately as the years move on and less and less survivors who can bear witness still reside among us the scourge of denial has increased. Anyone who has visited the Holocaust Museum in Washington, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem or some of the other holocaust museums around the world would have a very hard time denying the holocaust. And so it is crucial that we must educate the younger generations on the full impact of the holocaust all its atrocities and the brutal murder of 6 million men women and children.

Additionally troubling is the rise of anti-Semitic hate crimes in New York which have increased by 90% over the last three years. Just as the Nazis dehumanized their victims prior to murdering them, many hate crimes are a result of demonization, dehumanization and lack of understanding and empathy for others.

Therefore Agudath Israel of America strongly supports Reso 673 which recognizes January 27<sup>th</sup> as Holocaust Remembrance Day and calls for a day of education throughout New York City's Schools to learn about the atrocities of the Nazi regime and to foster empathy and promote tolerance among all groups in this great city. Thank You



**Selfhelp Community Services, Inc.**  
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**Testimony from Selfhelp Community Services  
New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and  
International Group Relations  
Recognizing 1/27/19 as Holocaust Remembrance Day and the week beginning on 1/27/19 as a citywide week of  
Holocaust Education in NYC  
January 16, 2019**

My name is Sandy Myers and I am the Vice President of External Affairs and Communications at Selfhelp Community Services.

Thank you to Committee Chair Mathieu Eugene for holding today's hearing and Council Member Chaim Deutsch for their work and support for resolution 0673-2018, which recognizes January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019 as Holocaust Remembrance Day and the week beginning January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019, as a citywide week of Holocaust education in New York City.

Selfhelp was founded in 1936 to help those fleeing Nazi Germany maintain their independence and dignity as they struggled to forge new lives in America. Today, Selfhelp has grown into one of the largest and most respected not-for-profit human service agencies in the New York metropolitan area, with 46 program locations throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Nassau County. We provides a broad set of services to more than 20,000 elderly, frail, and vulnerable New Yorkers each year, while remaining the largest provider of comprehensive services to Holocaust survivors in North America. Selfhelp offers a complete network of community-based home care, social service, and senior housing programs with the overarching goal of helping clients to live with dignity and independence and avoid institutional care.

Our services are extensive and include: specialized programs for Holocaust Survivors; eleven affordable senior housing complexes; four Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) programs; three intensive case management programs; five senior centers including one of New York City's first Innovative Senior Centers; home health care; client centered technology programs including the Virtual Senior Center; court-appointed guardianship; the Selfhelp Alzheimer's Resource Program (SHARP); and New York Connects, which provides seniors and people with disabilities with the information and support they need to remain living independently in their own homes.

Selfhelp remains committed to serving as the last surviving relative to Holocaust survivors in need of care, and in particular for the approximately 40,000 survivors living in New York City. As the largest provider of services to Holocaust survivors in North America, Selfhelp's commitment extends to educating future generations to ensure that never again remains true, and that the lessons of the Holocaust are shared. In 2012, Selfhelp brought Witness Theater to New York. This is an intergenerational program bringing together Holocaust survivors and high school students to elicit, expose and memorialize the moving stories of survival. Through a guided drama therapy process, group members explore issues of war, loss and trauma while at the same time forming deep and meaningful relationships that dissolve the barriers between generations.

Selfhelp Community Services, Inc. 520 Eighth Avenue, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10018 212.971.7600 www.selfhelp.net

Students and survivors meet in weekly two-hour sessions over the course of the academic year with a trained drama therapist and other program staff. The project culminates in a staged production: the students portray the personal experiences of the group's survivors, while the survivors narrate their own stories. The production is performed for the community and the student body in each high school.

The program aims to involve Holocaust survivors in a therapeutic process designed to help them come to terms with their past, and at the same time to instill the memory of the Holocaust in the next generation. The public performances serve as a vehicle for the survivors' testimonies to be heard by many and to witness the special connections made between the generations.

As we see through our Witness Theater program, the Holocaust has many lessons to teach us, yet the time to learn those lessons from those who lived through it is fleeting. As we are now serving and learning from this last generation of Holocaust survivors, the number of individuals who are physically and mentally able to bear witness dwindles and the question of what happens to their stories and their experience remains.

In the last few months, Selfhelp completed the production of a documentary film, called *Witness Theater: The Film*, which documents a year of Witness Theater, including the process and final public performance. We are now working with our distributor, Menemsha Films, to distribute this film to different audiences. The film serves as an anchor by which viewers can learn about history through the individual stories told by the survivors through the intergenerational program of Witness Theater. We hope that the film will also appeal to educators, in particular those working with communities that cope with trauma, and provide a unique artistic and therapeutic model for their own work. The trailer and a few short clips can be viewed at [www.witnesstheaterthefilm.com](http://www.witnesstheaterthefilm.com).

Beyond this documentary, Selfhelp is furthering its Holocaust education objective through a corresponding study guide for high school students and a website. This work is motivated both by the need to pass on the lessons of the Holocaust, as well as in response to a recent study by the Claims Conference, which found a significant lack of knowledge of the Holocaust in the United States.

Lastly, I want to thank the City Council for their ongoing support of the Elie Weisel Holocaust Survivor Initiative. The Council's support and increased funding has enabled Selfhelp to continue our high quality of care for Holocaust survivors. Although the overall number of Holocaust survivors is declining, the needs of survivors grow in number and complexity as they age.

- Nearly 50% of the survivors coming to Selfhelp live 150% below the federal poverty level.
- 35% of survivors are coping with serious chronic illness
- 41% require help with daily tasks
- 73% of survivors describe their health as poor or fair

Ongoing support is crucial to Selfhelp's ability to continue to serve this population.

I'm thrilled to be joined today by Gabriella Major, a past participant in Selfhelp's Witness Theater program. Gabriella will share her story, her experience in Witness Theater, and her work with younger generations to pass on her story and the lessons of the Holocaust.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and for providing the opportunity to discuss the need for Holocaust awareness and education in New York City. Selfhelp looks forward to participating in NYC's citywide week of Holocaust education.

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**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/16/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Janaya Korben

Address: 547 East Shore Rd

I represent: Myself

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 1-16-19

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Name: Abraham Hecht

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: JCC of Canarsie

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Date: 4/16/2019

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Name: Tatyana Segal

Address: 1311 Brightwater Ave, Brooklyn NY

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/16/19

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Name: Anat Barber

Address: 3750 Hudson Manor Terrace, Bronx, NY 10463

I represent: WJA - Federation of NY

Address: 130 E. 59th Street

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Appearance Card

[ ]

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/16/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: YERUCHIM SILBER

Address: 42 Broadway

I represent: Agent of Israel

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sandy Myers

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Selfhelp Community Services

Address: \_\_\_\_\_



Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gabriella Major

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Selfhelp Community Services

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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in favor  in opposition

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Samuel Bykoe

Address: 268 West End Ave

I represent: Heterocast Services

Address: same

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in favor  in opposition

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Name: EVAN BERNSTEIN

Address: 605 3rd Ave. NY, NY

I represent: ADL

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 11/16/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Zabava ~~Deutsch~~ Ungar

Address: 1325 E 12

I represent: Nachas & Councilman Deutsch

Address: 1310 48 St

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 1.16.2019

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ruth Sichelentz

Address: 324 AVE J Brooklyn NY 11230

I represent: Project Witness

Address: 201 Foster AVE Brooklyn NY 11230

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. 673-A

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RITA JOSEFSON

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I represent: MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE

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