

December 18, 2020

Members of the Sunset Commission,

My experience working with the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission and their staff as the Principal Investigator on two grant-funded projects has shown the Commission to be a capable organization that meets its statutory obligations and produces a measurable benefit to the state of Texas. I am a faculty member at South Texas College who is providing this statement based on my direct experience managing and implementing grants funded by THGC from 2017 to 2020. I am not an authorized spokesperson for my employer, and my words should not be taken as such.

Section 449.052 of the law that created the THGC (SB 482) states that the Commission shall “provide advice and assistance to public and private primary and secondary schools and institutions of higher education in this state regarding implementation of Holocaust and genocide courses of study and awareness programs.” With myself as the Principal Investigator, South Texas College received two matching grants from the THGC: one in 2017 for the creation and implementation of a Holocaust awareness program titled *Hate, Hope, and Healing: Exploring the Holocaust Through Music* and the second, in 2019, to perform that work at secondary schools in the Rio Grande Valley. In both cases, the THGC grants and matching funds provided by the college allowed these programs to take place at no cost to the community or schools. These projects are an example of the THGC operating within its statutory authority; They identified the existing creative, intellectual, and financial resources at South Texas College and provided assistance to an awareness program that had a measurable benefit to students in the Rio Grande Valley.

While I cannot speak for other projects, we collected and submitted data in our final reports clearly demonstrating a measurable benefit to the state of Texas. In 2017 post-performance surveys, respondents (n=116) unanimously responded in the affirmative when asked, “Has this program provided greater understanding of the ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping in society and the dangers of remaining silent and apathetic to the oppression of others?” Respondents were also unanimous in their affirmation that the project, “increased [their] awareness of the events surrounding the Holocaust or provided additional support for your belief in the importance of Holocaust education.”

In the 2019 survey (n=280), the same questions were asked, but respondents answered on a 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot) scale. The average response for the first question was 4.24 and the second was 4.11. The survey also included the following question rated on a 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely worthwhile) scale: “This performance took place with the help of a grant from the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission. Do you feel that this was a worthwhile use of those funds?” The average response was a 4.49.

Like many parts of Texas apart from the largest metropolitan areas, the Rio Grande Valley lacks the proximity to Holocaust and genocide education resources that can provide our community with the unique, visceral experiences likely to have an impact. The THGC is invaluable in identifying and supporting educational opportunities in our community, and the data clearly show the effectiveness of those efforts. While there may need to be changes to oversight or

organizational structure, it clearly evident that the Commission does fulfill its statutory obligations and that those efforts yield a tangible benefit to the state of Texas.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or requests for further information. I agree to make this letter available to the public.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Gersten". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Gersten".

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