

# Germans Recoil at Push to Rename ‘Anne Frank’ Day Care

The proposed change, reportedly at the behest of parents and employees who found her story difficult to explain to children, comes amid acute concern about rising antisemitism in Germany.



**By Graham Bowley**  
Reporting from Berlin

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A proposal in a small German town to rename a public day care center that is currently named after Anne Frank has become the center of a fraught national debate in the country about antisemitism.

The plan to change the day care center’s name in the town of Tangerhütte, about 75 miles west of Berlin in the state of Saxony-Anhalt, has attracted widespread coverage in the German press and criticism from politicians and Jewish leaders over the past few days.

Over the weekend, a local newspaper, the Volksstimme, published a report that the day care center, which it said had carried Anne Frank’s name since the 1970s, would be renamed “World Explorer.”

The proposed change comes in an atmosphere of acute concern about rising antisemitism in Germany, following the Oct. 7 Hamas assault on Israel and the subsequent Israeli bombardment of Gaza. Germany has long engaged in palpable national soul searching about the responsibility to remember the past given the country’s own history, including specifically about Anne Frank herself.

Frank was a young Jewish girl who became one of the most well-known victims of the Holocaust. She hid from the Nazis in a secret annex in a house in Amsterdam, but eventually was discovered and died at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany toward the end of World War II.

According to the report in the Volksstimme, the impetus to change the name had come from parents and day care employees, with the new name thought to be more child friendly. The story of Anne Frank was difficult for children to understand and “parents with a migrant background would often not know what to make of the name,” the newspaper reported, citing school authorities. The director of the school was quoted as saying the school wanted a name “without political background.”



The day care center in Tangerhütte, Germany. Peter Gercke/Picture Alliance, via Getty Images

Amid the heightened tensions in Germany, the newspaper's report prompted Jewish leaders and politicians to speak out.

But on Wednesday, the mayor of Tangerhütte, Andreas Brohm, said in an interview that the day care center had decided to end the discussion about changing its name following the outcry.

He was speaking ahead of a town council meeting Wednesday when the main political parties were expected to put forward a joint position blocking any name change.

"The discussion has stopped," Mr. Brohm said in a telephone interview.

On Sunday, Christoph Heubner, executive vice president of the International Auschwitz Committee, issued an open letter, in which he said Mr. Brohm and others responsible for the center were consciously turning their backs on Anne Frank.

"When people, especially in these times of renewed antisemitism and far-right extremism, are prepared to nonchalantly clean up their own history and consider the name of Anne Frank to be no longer desirable in the public space, it sets off alarm bells and sends out warnings concerning the fate of remembrance culture in our country," he said in a statement accompanying the letter.

A nonprofit organization, Miteinander e.V., which supports democratic society in

Saxony-Anhalt, warned about right-wing extremists using the debate to criticize immigrants. “We appeal to parents, day care center management and the city parliament to make a prudent and responsible decision in the face of a massive rise in antisemitism,” it said.

On Monday, as criticism mounted, the town issued a statement which said that, in fact, nothing had yet been decided about a new name, which had been under consideration for some months.

As early as July 2023, the town said, the topic of new name arose as the day care center considered other changes. “These discussions are still ongoing without a decision being made at the moment,” the town said

In that statement, Mr. Brohm said, “We have received many constructive suggestions and proposals, for which we are very grateful.”

The statement added, “Tangerhütte, with its educational institutions and all its civic engagement, stands for an open-minded Germany that is at the same time as aware of its historical responsibility as it is of its educational mission.”

Wolfgang Schneiß, an official overseeing issues of Jewish life in the state government, said in an interview Tuesday that he assumed the town would reject the idea.

“I and the government of Saxony-Anhalt have no sympathy for such a renaming,” he said in an email. “It does not fit our times. There are many good ways of communicating the topic of Anne Frank to young children in a contemporary way, especially to people with a migration history.”

Sven Schulze, a government minister in Saxony-Anhalt, said that members of his Christian Democratic Union party serving on Tangerhütte’s town council would not support the renaming. “Not only in today’s world, but in general, such a suggestion is completely absurd, instinctive and small-minded,” he wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter.

The chairman of the town council told the German news media that he and other council members would put forward a resolution to reject the renaming and would call on the mayor to issue a clear statement against any change.

“On Wednesday, the city council will unanimously take a position against the request to rename the day care center,” the chairman, Werner Jacob, told the Welt newspaper.

Christopher F. Schuetze contributed reporting.

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