

To the congressmen and women at today's hearing, thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

My name is Talia Khan. I am an undergraduate alumna at MIT and a current second year graduate student at MIT. I am a Jewish student, the daughter of a Jewish mother and an Afghan Muslim father, and the proud President of the MIT Israel Alliance. Considering my position at the center of Jewish and Israel-related life on campus, I would like to bring to your attention my perspective as a Jewish student currently immersed in an extremely toxic atmosphere at MIT.

Since the devastating attacks against Israel on October 7th, I have watched in horror as a culture of blatant antisemitism has taken root at MIT. I have witnessed the administration, namely President Sally Kornbluth, fail time and again to address this crisis in any meaningful way. President Kornbluth has watched as violent hatred infects, in broad daylight, an institution which is looked to as a beacon of enlightenment. This failure by the MIT administration to protect Jewish students must not be regarded simply as inaction, but rather as a feckless, cowardly, hypocritical, and entirely deliberate choice to remain silent.

There is a radical anti-Israel group at MIT called the CAA. In recent weeks, the CAA's antisemitic rhetoric has shifted the culture on campus, to such an extreme of intolerance that 70% of MIT's Jewish students feel compelled to hide their identities and perspectives (from a poll of 75 Jewish students). I, too, have stopped wearing my Star of David necklace in public. However, today I refuse to hide.

In a letter sent to MIT president Sally Kornbluth on November 10th, signed by over 1700 members of the MIT community, a number of incidents were detailed to illustrate the antisemitism festering on campus. The most extreme example has been a series of protests in the most heavily trafficked area of campus on November 9th and 12th, Lobby 7. These protests, organized by the CAA, unavoidably disrupted life on campus. Participants chanted for hours over multiple days, calling for the complete destruction of Israel ("from the river to the sea") and endorsing violence against Jews with calls for intifada, and calls to "Raise up your two fists and sacrifice everything for Palestine." So disruptive were these protests that MIT Hillel felt compelled to send out a notice to its members warning them against traversing these areas on campus for their own safety. CAA members stormed the offices of Jewish faculty and staff in the MIT Israel internship office. Staff reported fearing for their lives, as students went door to door trying to unlock the offices. How hateful must the environment on campus be that Jews must be warned against walking the halls, for fear of being harassed for being Jewish? Is it normal to get two police notifications sent to all students in one day warning them of potential violence due to an MIT student club event? The MIT student handbook directly states the right for students to exist "free from unreasonable and disruptive offense." Surely, all of this must qualify as unreasonable and disruptive. The MIT student handbook also states that "Harassment is ... verbal, nonverbal or physical [conduct] that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to create a work or academic environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile or abusive and that adversely affects an individual's educational, work, or living environment." We know from a poll of Jewish students that since October 7th, only 90% of Jewish students do not feel

“very safe” on MIT’s campus. 60% of MIT’s Jews have directly experienced antisemitism since October 7th, and 82% feel there has been a negative change in their feeling of safety in their departments and classes (from the same poll of 75 Jewish students). Surely, with this information, we would expect the MIT administration to do something.

While students who organized and participated in these large protests were threatened with suspension if they did not comply with a mandate to leave the area, the administration has failed to follow through with this threat, instead referring student organizers to a long and ill-defined disciplinary process. Once again, President Kornbluth is deliberately ignoring MIT’s handbook, in which she is reserved the right to take immediate administrative action separate from the usual conduct proceedings under unusual circumstances. If these circumstances are not to be considered unusual, which are? Indeed, a Jewish member of the Committee on Discipline, which the MIT Administration has tasked with determining the punishment for these students, stated that as of December 4th, he has not seen a single case come through the Committee on Discipline from these numerous complaints we have made against the CAA and its leaders. Clearly, the MIT Administration and Senior leadership has no intention of creating a harassment-free environment for Jews. They would like to maintain the status quo and get all of us to shut our mouths. This refusal to take disciplinary action has only emboldened the CAA to act more brazenly in disregard of MIT policies.

The MIT administration, in an attempt to “keep the peace,” has refused to take adequate measures to protect its Jewish students. Worse, President Kornbluth has refused to explicitly condemn the CAA by name, instead issuing a lukewarm general condemnation of ill will towards others. This is not only insufficient, but actually insulting. Her response to the November 13th letter essentially avoided all responsibility for the state of antisemitism on campus, simultaneously ignoring the reasonable demands of Jewish student groups to ban the CAA, and enforce MIT’s rules appropriately for students who have violated it. Her failure to address these points speaks louder than any message she attempts to convey through shallow words of understanding. She has gaslighted us, even after we showed videos of Jewish students being physically blocked from moving through the anti-Israel crowd through the main MIT lobby, and, in a private meeting with her after the event when I asked her why she was unwilling to put in writing that she would equally apply MIT’s rules on all groups and individuals, she told me that she can’t because she’s worried about losing the trust of the faculty. The MIT President is unwilling to enforce the rules equally on anti-Israel members of the community, and she knows it. It is no secret.

I have asked for an antisemitism task force for two months. After initially agreeing to a taskforce against hate that would begin by focusing on antisemitism and then turn to islamophobia, the administration has backpedaled. As of December 4th, even though Sally Kornbluth herself said that there are 10 times more reports of antisemitism than islamophobia on campus, the MIT administration said they will now be looking at these two issues simultaneously. I have offered numerous times to be on this task force; they have yet to name a single member, other than the leader, Chancellor Melissa Nobles. Instead they are promoting a new podcast which features a

Jewish professor who has repeatedly gaslighted Jewish and Israeli students on campus into believing that all is well and we are making everything up in an attempt to garner attention.

I will share a few examples of antisemitism on campus and let you all decide if all is well on MIT's campus. First, I was forced to leave my study group for my doctoral exams halfway through the semester because my group members told me that the people at the Nova massacre deserved to die because they were partying on stolen land. This negatively impacted me both emotionally and academically. Second, after a postdoc at MIT called Zionism a mental illness, said that Jewish Israelis want to enslave the world in a global apartheid system, falsely claimed that Israel harvests Palestinians for organ harvesting, and implied that the "average Israeli" is a Nazi, the DEI officer of his department replied by telling us that nothing he said was "hate speech" and that the organ harvesting conspiracy theory was "confirmed." Third, following an almost poetic parallel to a case at MIT in 2003, I was forced to take down my Israeli flags and a poster that said "No Excuse for Hate" and "We Stand With Israel" in my office window after a new banner rule was created 6 days after I put my flags up. Other banners, such as those for "Black Lives Matter" are still hanging proudly in office windows today. A rule was created by the MIT administration to appease bigoted students who can't bear to see that Israel exists. Again, an almost exact replica of this event occurred in 2003, when MIT threatened a student with eviction if he didn't remove an Israeli flag from his dorm window. Silencing pro-Israel free speech is embedded in MIT's mores. Fourth, the interfaith chaplain at MIT interrupted an event four times to call out Israel as an oppressive white supremacist colonizer state and then asked all students who keep kosher to raise their hands to receive their meals, reportedly examining these students to an extent that non-Jewish students felt uncomfortable and compelled to report the event. So far, no disciplinary action has been taken, even though just a few years ago, a Catholic chaplain was forced to resign after expressing his personal political opinions publicly. I could continue on and on. I can tell you about the number of Israelis who have been told that if they are scared of being Jewish at MIT, that they should just go back to Israel; about the HR staff member who told a student that Jews do not fall under a protected class at MIT; about the DEI officer who said that Israel has no right to exist, and the department head who, in an email with that DEI officer, insinuated he would protect CAA members from any disciplinary action taken against them. Instead, I want to ask – why has the MIT administration done nothing? Why have DEI, the Committee on Discipline, and HR done nothing? Why is President Sally Kornbluth allowing the rot of antisemitism to spread, unchecked, throughout campus?

Non-Jewish students at MIT have emailed us in private, warning us to be safe because they hear their anti-Israel dormmates say that any violence against pro-Israel people is justified. The MIT administration has seen every one of these reports. The overwhelming hatred, now unmistakable in the atmosphere on campus, coupled with the administration's unwillingness to take action, has created an unbearable environment for Jewish students at MIT. Jewish students are afraid to leave their rooms, walk the hallways with Jewish clothing and jewelry, and speak in Hebrew on campus. How are we expected to function as members of this community, as students, as the world's leading scientific researchers, when we cannot exist on campus without fear of harassment? According to the MIT Handbook, "Students are expected to uphold

a high standard of civility and to demonstrate their respect for all members of this diverse community.” The CAA members haven’t done that, the antisemitic post-doc hasn’t done that, DEI and HR have not done that, and the faculty and staff in charge of keeping our learning environment safe haven’t done that.

**This atmosphere is intolerable.** Concrete action must be taken **immediately** by President Kornbluth and the MIT administration to remedy this situation. Of the 75 students polled, 95% of Jewish students do not believe the MIT administration has done an adequate job to make students feel safe on campus. The trust between Jewish students and the MIT administration has been irreparably damaged, and the promise to provide an environment for growth and learning has been broken.

It is my hope that my testimony today has brought to light the pain that Jewish students at MIT, and at universities across the country, are currently facing. Only when our leaders step up to combat hatred on campus will we begin to heal as a community. I am supposed to be a student at MIT researching sustainable materials. Unfortunately, I have been put in charge of working to keep MIT Jews feeling safe. I have been put in charge of advocating for hundreds of frightened students, afraid of retribution. I want to stop being told about the most recent antisemitic incident, and feeling like I have to push and push to report it, even though nothing ever gets done. This should not be my job. Sally Kornbluth – please, let me be a student again. Let me study without fear in the school I have called home for eight years. It is your job to keep Jewish students safe, not mine.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share my testimony.

Sincerely,

Talia Khan, Graduate Student President of the MIT Israel Alliance

## RESOURCES

The following are some resources that give an accurate overview of the situation on campus:

- This [slideshow](#) narrates the recent uptick in antisemitism, including notable events that marked turning points in the nature of campus culture and a poll that indicates how fearful MIT students are and their lack of confidence in the MIT administration’s actions to make them safe. We have also compiled a [timeline](#) that lists notable instances of antisemitism, centering around the Coalition Against Apartheid, a student group that is largely behind the recent uptick in antisemitic incidents.
- Concerned by acts of antisemitism against students, the MIT Israel Alliance wrote a [letter](#) to the MIT administration outlining a set of reasonable requests that would make Jews feel safer on campus. These included the removal of the CAA as an official campus group, an official denouncement of their actions, as well as the adoption of the IHRA working [definition](#) of antisemitism. All demands were rejected by the administration, as shown in this [response letter](#)

which many students felt was demeaning and aimed to gaslight Jewish students.

- An anti-Israel [faculty letter](#) and the MIT Israel Alliance's [response](#) in the MIT Faculty newsletter.