

Avi L. Shapiro
Benjamin A. Broudy

May 2, 2025

The Honorable Tim Walberg
Chairman
Committee on Education and Workforce
United States House of Representatives
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-6100

The Honorable Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and Workforce
United States House of Representatives
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-6100

The Honorable Burgess Owens
Chairman
Subcommittee on Higher Education and
Workforce Development
Committee on Education and Workforce
United States House of Representatives
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-6100

The Honorable Alma S. Adams
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Higher Education and
Workforce Development
Committee on Education and Workforce
United States House of Representatives
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-6100

RE: May 7, 2025 Hearing
Beyond the Ivy League: Stopping the Spread of Antisemitism on American Campuses

Dear Representatives Walberg, Scott, Owens, and Adams:

Thank you for the time you and your Committee and Subcommittee have spent and are continuing to spend on talking about the issue of antisemitism on U.S. college campuses. As Jewish students deeply involved and active with Jewish life here at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly), this issue is both important and personal. Since the October 7th massacre of over 1,200 Israelis and citizens of the world by Hamas, we have seen a sharp increase in blatant antisemitism across the U.S., and specifically on university campuses. As Jewish students in America we can confirm that antisemitism is alive, well, and growing in all aspects of our lives. We have seen it everywhere - our hometowns, in San Luis Obispo, and even on Cal Poly's campus.

The work that the Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development and the House Committee on Education and Workforce is doing to publicize and help prevent future antisemitic incidents is incredibly important in keeping Jewish college students safe and comfortable; when university students are not doing well, universities are not doing well. It is necessary, and a huge step in the right direction, to put a spotlight on universities that have failed their Jewish students and who have made zero effort to combat antisemitism on their campuses.

Antisemitism is present on many, if not most, campuses across the country, and while we do occasionally experience it here, it occurs far less frequently than at many other campuses. The two of us both publicly wear kippot (yarmulkes) and have never felt in danger or attacked. At Cal Poly, there are no encampments or regions of campus we avoid. We speak Hebrew in the dining halls and talk about Shabbat dinner between classes and feel no animosity from our peers. We table on campus in support of Jewish and Israeli causes. Sometimes we are asked about why we miss class for Jewish holidays - not because people are seeking to ostracize us, but rather to learn more about our traditions. On the whole, the two of us do not see systemic or systemized antisemitism on Cal Poly's campus. We are not claiming our experiences at Cal Poly have been perfect, but we believe the fault does not lie with the administration. Our times on campus have been safe with minimal incidents, almost all of which have been dealt with in full, and promptly, by the administration led by President Armstrong.

In contrast to the administrations at many other universities, we have seen the Cal Poly administration take on the vitally important work of fighting antisemitism on our campus. We have observed President Armstrong clearly communicate with the campus about the need to fight antisemitism. President Armstrong has stood with us; he has never backed away from the safety and security of his students. The administration, and President Armstrong himself, have contacted us personally when incidents have occurred, provided security for our events on campus, and put in place preventative police forces at potentially violent or disruptive anti-Israel protests. If there is someone to blame for these protests, it is likely social media and disinformation, not the work of Cal Poly.

We do want to briefly share some of our personal experiences to highlight specific incidents on our campus about which the committee requested information. Both of us have personal knowledge about some of the incidents of inquiry, and we share that here.

Benjamin Broudy was present for the Heroes of the IDF event on April 4, 2024. He passed by and saw the protest happening outside of the Warren J. Baker Center for Science and Mathematics and stopped to observe. The Cal Poly professor identified in your letter initiated a five minute long verbal confrontation with Benjamin and shoved a Palestinian flag up to his face, violating his personal space. Following that, Benjamin saw a Cal Poly police officer confront the professor and instruct him that he could not get that close to others. Although what the professor said and did was incredibly hurtful, at no time did Benjamin feel like he was in danger or unsafe. Instead, Benjamin thinks that Cal Poly acted appropriately, sending a large police presence to enforce safety as well as Cal Poly Peace Officers from the Dean of Students Office.

As people migrated indoors because it started raining, Benjamin went along with them where he was confronted by a masked protester holding a very large Palestinian flag. Benjamin and the protester had a civil conversation with police standing around the two the entire time to ensure safety. From Benjamin's perspective, the incidents that took place on that day were handled properly and safely by Cal Poly without allowing any Jewish students to be in danger, even if the subjects of the conversation were often uncomfortable.

Avi Shapiro was part of the team that dealt with the vandalism on October 31, 2024, in which hateful messages were spray-painted around the campus. Avi was first made aware of one of the vandalized locations, Engineering 4, by a Jewish student who had walked by and seen the vandalized location. That student did not want to report it, so Avi drove to the campus police department to give an official statement. At that time, the police department had already been made aware of the vandalism at that location and had someone on scene to investigate. While with the police, Avi received reports of further vandalism at the university bookstore. After Avi and an officer arrived at the bookstore, Avi then travelled to the Grand Ave entrance sign to stand guard over a third location of vandalism to protect the evidence until police officers showed up. That night the university not only documented all vandalism, it also removed all traces of the spraypaint and did such a good job that many at the university did not even know what had happened. In short, the university could not have handled the situation any better. The perpetrators of the vandalism wanted to spread their message of hate, and any delay by the university to act, or issuing a statement by the administration, would have only helped spread that very hate.

In all, Cal Poly is appropriately handling these issues; Cal Poly has the back of its Jewish students. The administration has an open door for Jewish students that have any concerns. President Armstrong attends events such as Mega Shabbat to celebrate with Jewish students and the larger Jewish community. While spotlights can be helpful, in this case we do not believe that Cal Poly needs additional attention on this difficult topic. We have an immense amount of appreciation for the Committee's and the Subcommittee's efforts to spotlight universities that are not combating campus antisemitism, but Cal Poly is not the place where that spotlight is needed. The environment at Cal Poly has not been perfect, but throughout the last two academic years the administration has been there for us. It has been continuously improving and communicates transparently with the Jewish community. We hope that you will use your hearing to share with the world the good work of President Armstrong and the safe environment that we enjoy at Cal Poly. We encourage you to ask President Armstrong about his work so that it can be a model for other universities that are failing their Jewish students.

If you wish to contact us, please do so through President Armstrong's office.

Sincerely,

Avi L. Shapiro, '25

Benjamin A. Broudy, '27