House Committee on Homeland Security
"Countering Violent Extremism, Terrorism, and Antisemitic Threats in New Jersey"
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Remarks of Holly Huffnagle, U.S. Director for Combating Antisemitism, American Jewish Committee (AJC)

Thank you, Congressman Torres for the introduction. Distinguished members of Congress, thank you for convening today's hearing and for offering American Jewish Committee this opportunity to present brief remarks. I am Holly Huffnagle, AJC's U.S. Director for Combating Antisemitism. It is an honor to be with you today, and with our esteemed witnesses.

We are gathered here in New Jersey and virtually because we are facing a growing threat of antisemitism and extremism. In the past year alone, in New Jersey, the Katz JCC reported a bomb threat in Cherry Hill, NJ in March; in April, a Nazi swastika was graffitied outside of a cemetery in Haddonfield, eggs were thrown and Jewish students were harassed following a pro-Palestine rally at Rutgers University, and an Orthodox Jewish man was stabbed by a man making antisemitic remarks; in July, a Nazi swastika and "Kill Jews" graffiti were discovered on a Lakewood walking path; the far-right, white supremacist Goyim Defense League distributed antisemitic flyers in Lindenwold and Brigantine in August; and, just a few days ago, in September, eggs were again thrown at the Jewish fraternity at Rutgers University during Jewish New Year. There has been a 25% increase in antisemitic incidents in the state in 2021, and it is on track to increase again in 2022. New Jersey is not alone. Unfortunately, we are witnessing rising antisemitism across the United States.

Before the Committee today, we must look at a few key questions. The first is what is happening right now? The second is why. Why is this happening--in this moment? And third and finally, what does rising antisemitism mean for the future of the United States and what can be done? While American Jewish communities continue to thrive in the United States—and thank goodness they do not face levels of persecution here compared to other parts of the world—we must turn the tide back on rising antisemitism to protect not only American Jews, but our democracy as well.

First, what is happening? Antisemitism is rising in the United States. It is becoming more violent, and more open. According to the FBI, crimes targeting Jews comprised 55%--the majority—of all religious bias crimes, although Jews are only 2% of the population of the U.S.[1] In the past year, 41% of Americans have seen antisemitism—and many more than once. And American Jews are experiencing antisemitism. In fact, one in four (24%) American Jews have personally been targeted by antisemitism this past year. American Jews are also changing their behavior out of fear of antisemitism. They are avoiding certain places, avoiding wearing things that might identify them as Jewish (such as a kippa or a Star of David necklace), or avoiding posting content online that might reveal their Jewish identity. That last piece jumps significantly

[1] This data comes from the FBI Hate Crime Data Explorer (2021).

for young American Jews (ages 18-29).[2] Today, antisemitism is more visible, easier to access, easier to share and spread than ever before.

Second, why? Why is antisemitism rising? And why now in 2022? No reason justifies antisemitism, but there are several factors happening concurrently contributing to the current rise.

1. Rising economic uncertainty: There is a long history of Jews being blamed or scapegoated for society's economic woes.
2. Waning confidence in government and in democracy: We have seen antisemitism on full display in anti-government movements.
3. An increased emphasis on race and national identity:
   - On the far-right, the number of white nationalist and supremacist groups in the U.S. has increased by 55% between 2015 and 2019.
   - On the opposite end of the spectrum, on the far-left, Jews are labeled as "white" and even "white supremacists." The irony is real white supremacists benefit from these anti-Jewish attacks.
4. A deepening polarization over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:
   - This cause is especially coming to a head on U.S. college campuses and universities, where Jewish students have been excluded from participating in certain groups or clubs because they are seen as supportive of Israel.
5. The fading legacy of the Holocaust, combined with Holocaust denial and distortion:
   - When awareness of the Holocaust diminishes, so does the understanding of where unchecked antisemitism can lead. A recent study shared that 48% of American Millennials and Gen Zers cannot name Auschwitz, or the name of any other concentration camp or ghetto. 63 percent of Americans aged 18 to 39 do not know that six million Jews were murdered.
   - Most disturbingly, 11 percent believe Jews *caused* the Holocaust. That number jumps to 13% if we just look at how respondents from New Jersey answered. 13% of 18 to 39-year-olds in New Jersey believe Jews caused the Holocaust.
   - Relatedly, the distortion of the Holocaust with inappropriate comparisons, such as to Covid-19 protocols or to abortion, is increasing. Holocaust distortion is an attack on Jewish memory and identity, and it normalizes downplaying the Holocaust. It is unacceptable.
6. The Internet and social media: The digitization of antisemitism has been the greatest contributor to the rise of antisemitism, antisemitism mis/disinformation, and conspiratorial thinking in the last decade.
7. There are more sources of antisemitism in America today: Antisemitism does not just come from far-right white supremacists, as it did in Pittsburgh. We see it on the far left, we see it from religious extremists like we did at a kosher market in Jersey City in December 2019, and we even see it within segments of other minority communities. And it is this complexity of antisemitism, coming from all these different sides, that creates the biggest challenge to combat it.
8. And finally, ignorance: Increasing levels of ignorance about what antisemitism is and what it looks like, is how antisemitism is growing and spreading unnoticed. Not only do one-third of Americans not know what antisemitism is, the majority who do, see

[2] These statistics are from American Jewish Committee's most recent State of Antisemitism in America report (2021).

antisemitism solely as a hatred. We often hear the phrase, "I am not antisemitic. I don't hate Jews. Jews have too much power and they control the media. But I don't hate them." This lack of knowledge that antisemitism is more than a hatred but also a certain perception about Jews—a conspiracy about Jews—was the main issue in mislabeling the hostage situation in Colleyville, Texas this past January.

Conspiracy is the belief that there is someone or something in power who is exploiting humanity or controlling world events. To the antisemite, Jews are this "someone" in power; for example, the statements "Jews control the banks" and "Jews control the government" were phrases spoken by the perpetrator in Colleyville. That is why he chose a synagogue—the one closest to the location where Aafia Siddiqui[3] was held—for the site of this attack. But the FBI originally erroneously said the incident was "not related to the Jewish community." The record was corrected, but numerous news outlets continued to run the original line.

With this example, but also many others, the conspiratorial nature of antisemitism makes it different from other forms of racism which vilify their victims as inferior. (Of course, Jews have also been historically vilified as inferior.) But antisemitism is unique because it also perceives its target—Jews—as being "superior"—as having too much privilege, too much power, and attacks them for that. There is a large blind spot in today's society when it comes to antisemitism because here we have a minority who is assailed because of their perceived power. Therefore, we cannot just see antisemitism as a hatred or a religious bias--it is not just about criticizing Judaism or Jews as a religion; Jews are primarily attacked today for who they are (no longer for what they believe), for their perceived power and influence, or for the Jewish state, Israel.

This brings us to the crux of the issue. What does rising antisemitism mean for the future of America? And what can be done?

Because antisemitism at its core is envy, resentment, distrust, and conspiracy, when we see rising antisemitism, we also witness the weakening of democratic, pluralistic society.[4] And because we know when societies cannot stop rising antisemitism—by ignoring it, minimizing it, or even redefining it—they often fail to protect their democracy as well, it is urgent to generate a society-wide effort—led by our government leaders—to address the problem head-on.

Earlier this month, AJC published a Call to Action Against Antisemitism in America to mobilize and unite American leadership in all sectors of society to understand, respond to, and prevent antisemitism, and I want to pull today from the preventative measures—How can we go beyond simply responding to antisemitism, but actively work to prevent it? I am going to list ten data-backed measures; I will be skipping the details of each measure, for the interest of time, but have provided a full account in writing for the record.

1. **To prevent antisemitism, understand the problem.** 34% of Americans are not familiar with the term antisemitism—they have either never heard the word before, or have heard it

[3] A Pakistani national who is serving an 86-year sentence at the Federal Medical Center, Carswell in Fort Worth, Texas, United States for attempted murder and other felonies.

[4] Because antisemitism is an ancient hatred—traced back two thousand years, it's familiar— there is unfortunately a large repertoire of accusations and tropes to choose from to blame someone—often Jews (or coded words for Jews)—for these crises. But antisemitism is not only an attack on Jews; it is really an assault on the core values of America.

but do not know what it means.[5] For governments, law enforcement agencies, and others who have a practical need to identify and respond to antisemitism, the best tool continues to be the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism, with almost 1000 entities—governments, multilateral bodies, universities, sports teams, etc. using it, which defines antisemitism as "a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews."[6] That "certain perception" piece—that antisemitism is not just a hatred of Jews, but a conspiracy about Jewish power and control—was vital to comprehend the actions of the hostage-taker in Colleyville, Texas last January. And it was initially missed. To ensure antisemitism is properly understood, Congress should reintroduce and pass the bipartisan Antisemitism Awareness Act.

2. **To prevent antisemitism, engage the Jewish community.**[7] 36% of Americans do not know a Jew. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Americans who say they know someone Jewish are significantly more likely to know what antisemitism is and view antisemitism as a problem, with 66% saying so, compared to 49% of those who do not know anyone Jewish. But even those who know Jews, many Americans do not know who Jews are—they think of Jews solely as a religious group. But Jews are a diverse, multiethnic, multiracial people.[8] Given this diversity, characterizing Jews as only "white" and "privileged" ignores history and present reality. Congress can lead here in helping constituents understand antisemitism and who Jews are, as well as facilitate a standing Jewish community or interfaith advisory board to help ensure regular communication. Convening stakeholders, including law enforcement, and creating a diverse network of community leaders to discuss antisemitism and hate crimes, is critical. Finally, engage Jewish communities by empowering them. Jewish community members, particularly leaders in Jewish institutions and synagogues, should participate in security training to be prepared in case of an emergency. Community members can also be trained as volunteer security guards.

3. **To prevent antisemitism, invest in Jewish community security.** 56% of Jewish institutions have increased security between 2018 and 2020. Address physical attacks and domestic terrorism. Physical attacks against Jews are often perpetrated by white supremacist extremist groups and homegrown violent extremists. A federal plan to address the propagation of extremist ideologies in public institutions, such as prisons and law enforcement units, is recommended as well as the reestablishment of interagency initiatives between federal and state agencies to address domestic terrorism. Through funding and legislation, Congress plays a crucial role in safeguarding Jewish institutions. The 2018 Protecting Religiously Affiliated Institutions Act protects synagogues, community centers, and nonprofits against threats of force. The Nonprofit Security Grant Program provides $360 million in security funding for high-risk nonprofits. Law enforcement should encourage Jewish institutions to apply for these grants. Additionally, the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act, already passed

[5] Members of Congress can share AJC's Translate Hate glossary on their websites as a resource for constituents. AJC's Recognizing when Anti-Israel Actions Become Antisemitic is designed to help elected officials navigate and address Israel-related antisemitism.
[6] To date, 28 states along with the District of Columbia have endorsed the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism. New Jersey has yet to take this important step.
[7] When an antisemitic incident occurs, members of Congress should check in with their local Jewish communities. A standing Jewish community or interfaith advisory board can help ensure regular communication.
[8] The Jewish people include Ashkenazi Jews descended from Eastern Europe, Black Jews from Ethiopia, Brown Jews from India, and Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews from North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, and Iran.

in the House, should be passed by the Senate to authorize dedicated domestic terrorism offices within the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, and the FBI.

4. **To prevent antisemitism, be prepared for the patterns.** A heightened awareness of the situations and times when antisemitism increases enable proactive planning to combat it. Antisemitism often rises during election cycles, around Jewish holidays, and during flare-ups in the Middle East. Government and community leaders, allies, and law enforcement should be on alert during these times and provide support to the Jewish community, as needed.

5. **To prevent antisemitism, gather better data, including hate crime reporting.** To date, there still isn't a comprehensive study that looks at antisemitic attitudes, sources of antisemitism and root causes, and American Jews' experiences with antisemitism all in one place. In AJC's upcoming survey, we are asking about antisemitism in the workplace;[9] if Jewish students feel excluded because they are Jewish or their assumed or actual connection to Israel; Jews' experiences with antisemitism online and on social media; if what happened in Colleyville made American Jews feel less safe as a Jewish person in the U.S.; if their institutions have increased security measures; and if they feel safe in those Jewish institutions. But civil society cannot fund this data alone. At the state level, New Jersey should consider creating a task force to study and prevent antisemitism. We also need improved hate crime reporting from law enforcement. In 2020, Jews were the target of 55% of all religiously motivated hate crimes, despite accounting for just 2% of the U.S. population.[10] As astonishing as that number is, many hate crimes are not reported to law enforcement by victims and nearly 90 percent of cities do not report hate crime data to the FBI. An insufficient grasp of the problem impedes efforts to find solutions.[11] The Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act, signed into law in May 2021, establishes grants to incentivize reporting; robust funding of at least $15 million is necessary. Once funded, local governments can leverage Department of Justice resources for hate crimes bias training and establishing hate crimes hotlines.

6. **To prevent antisemitism, issue unequivocal condemnations.** We continue to see blatant incidents of antisemitism, yet responses are often "antisemitism and all forms of racism, intolerance, and xenophobia are unacceptable wherever and whenever they occur." But grouping antisemitism with a long list of other hatreds and bigotry, when it was only the Jewish community attacked, is unhelpful and even hurtful. We just saw this exact response over Rosh Hashana from Rutgers University when a Jewish fraternity house was vandalized. In addition, challenging rising antisemitism alone does not compete with combating racism—an allegation we have heard. Fighting hatred, bigotry, conspiracies about the "other," go hand in hand.[12] Antisemitism is also present within segments of communities who experience

[9] This will include asking if Jewish employees have avoided expressing views on Israel out of fear of reprisal or animosity.
[10] In 2021, four in ten U.S. adults witnessed antisemitism, including negative remarks or online content about Jewish people. It is crucial to report these occurrences to authority figures, law enforcement or, if online, to the social media platform. Everyone should be encouraged to report anti-Jewish incidents.
[11] Law enforcement should work with the Jewish community when antisemitic crimes occur, increase security to Jewish institutions, and accurately record and report antisemitic hate crimes.
[12] For example, the language of "Jews will not replace us" chanted by white nationalist marchers at the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, in August 2017, was the same "great replacement" conspiracy theory that led to the murders of African American shoppers in Buffalo, NY in May 2022. In response to what happened in Buffalo, Black activist Eric Ward, said it best: "It is important for us to understand that African Americans were killed because they were Black, but the motivating story that drove the killer was an idea that he was at war with the Jewish community."

racism and, even in these delicate situations, it must be challenged. Congress can lead here and call out antisemitism unambiguously.

7. **To prevent antisemitism, depoliticize the fight against it.** While bipartisanship has been critical to U.S. success in countering hatred of Jews in the U.S. and abroad, the fight against antisemitism has become increasingly politicized. When considered only through a partisan lens, antisemitism is not being countered, but instrumentalized. Instead, we urge government leaders to participate in bipartisan caucuses and coalitions to counter antisemitism and hate.[13] Congressional caucuses model the power of coalitions to condemn hate, support vulnerable communities, and raise awareness.[14]

8. **To prevent antisemitism, urge the White House to create a national action plan to combat antisemitism.** At the very least, the White House can appoint an official to improve interagency coordination to deploy each agency's resources most effectively and ensure a whole-of-government response to antisemitism, which is currently lacking. Federal efforts should also involve Congress and include a funding mechanism to meet security, educational, and training needs. Only through the collaborative efforts of all facets of the government, will we be able to achieve unity of effort towards addressing antisemitism. Additionally, comprehensive state or city-wide strategies to respond to and prevent antisemitism should be considered.

9. **To prevent antisemitism, fund educational initiatives.** The importance of education in prevention cannot be overstated. Education and trainings—on Jews, the Holocaust, antisemitism, and more importantly, Jewish life—provide an opportunity not only to show solidarity but to gain knowledge and tools to identify and respond to antisemitism and Jewish community needs. Programs to combat racism and intolerance provide an important framework, but they may downplay or ignore the problem of antisemitism. Because of its complexity, antisemitism should be addressed as a unique form of hatred. The Never Again Education Act, signed into law in 2020, promotes U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum educational programming around the country. As only 39 states mandate Holocaust education, Congress should continue to fund and incentivize education on Jewish history, the Holocaust, and the contributions of Jews to America. Congressional staff should also be trained to identify and respond to antisemitism, including Holocaust denial and distortion. Finally, as misinformation spreads online and off, media literacy is increasingly important. Several recent antisemitic attacks originated on social media, where posts and videos demonizing Israel were viewed and shared hundreds of thousands of times. Congress should allocate resources for media literacy programs educating about the urgent need to check sources and question bias, especially online and on social media.

10. **Finally, to prevent antisemitism, stop its proliferation online.** The digitization of antisemitism has been one of—if not the—leading contributors to the rise of anti-Jewish

[13] This is especially vital now, given the divisions in our country. A recent large Pew survey, for instance, revealed that "growing numbers of Americans see people in the opposite political party as close-minded, dishonest, unintelligent and even immoral." In addition, there has been a massive breakdown of public (and private) trust; not only are we not speaking as much to those who are or who think differently than us, studies show we are less trusting—of others and our institutions. Congress must rebuild this trust with the public and with each other.

[14] With more than 150 Representatives, and more than half the Senate, the House and Senate Bipartisan Taskforces are a useful example of reflecting political will to address the problem, which should lead to increased legislative measures.

prejudice in the last decade. 15% of young American Jews (18-35) were personally targeted by antisemitism online in the past year (many more have seen it) and 31% have avoided posting content online that would identify them as a Jew out of fear of antisemitism. Social media companies have the responsibility to remove antisemitic content, and lawmakers from both sides of the aisle and some platforms should work to reform Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act to hold social media companies liable for content on their platforms. Bills like the Protecting Americans from Dangerous Algorithms Act would hold social media companies accountable if their algorithmic amplification of content leads to offline violence. Other bills, such as the Platform Accountability and Transparency Act, the Platform Accountability and Consumer Transparency Act, and the 2019 Filter Bubble Transparency Act address algorithms and the role of content moderators. Bipartisan, common sense federal reforms like these should be fully examined. For clarity and consistency, we must ensure one solution, not 50 individual state solutions, sufficiently addresses the problem.

To conclude, it is much more challenging to discuss prevention, and to discuss what is actually working. We know better data—shining a flashlight on the issue, has worked; we know trainings on antisemitism within DEI spaces have worked as we see policies changed and corrected; we know pushing on the social media companies has worked—we still have a long way to go, but we are much farther than we were five to seven years ago; we know that coalition building has worked, especially since behavioral science has demonstrated people change when information comes from someone they trust, someone like them—which might not be the Jewish community so non-Jewish allies are paramount here; and we know being proudly Jewish—fostering Jewish pride and Jewish life—works. When these interventions are used properly, used together, and used continuously, we notice a difference and we see glimpses of success—even if partial—which is why having the House Homeland Security Committee take on and champion these preventative measures is so critical—in New Jersey, and across the United States.

I want to thank you for your time and your commitment. Despite the threats of antisemitism, Jews across the country and around the world are proudly displaying their Jewish identities. The Jewish community has incredible allies, from local houses of worship and community leaders to elected officials at all levels, such as the Members of Congress here today. And those leaders are speaking out, in defense of their Jewish friends and for the sake of our democratic values. We are very grateful to the House Committee on Homeland Security for bringing attention to this pressing and pervasive issue, and for the participation of Committee members both virtually and in-person in New Jersey.

Thank you.