

**Testimony of
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**Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives**

November 15, 2023

***From Ivory Towers to Dark Corners: Investigating the Nexus
Between Antisemitism, Tax-Exempt Universities, and Terror
Financing***

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Neal, and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

On behalf of Hillel International, the largest Jewish campus organization in the U.S. and the world, with a presence on more than 700 campuses in the United States, our top priority in this fraught moment is addressing the frightening rise of antisemitism on college campuses and ensuring a positive campus environment for Jewish students. Hillel was founded 100 years ago to build the next generation of Jewish leaders by fostering vibrant Jewish life on college and university campuses. Today, at a time where we are experiencing the largest increase in campus antisemitism ever on record, and just five weeks after the gruesome terrorist attack on Israel, this hearing is both timely and critical.

Now more than ever, we need our partners in government and beyond to stand with Jewish students on campus to address the scourge of antisemitism. Today's hearing is an important step, and I appreciate the opportunity to testify today.

Introduction

Like all of us, Jewish students on college campuses woke up on Saturday, October 7, to learn of the most violent, deprived and murderous attack against the Jewish people since the Holocaust. Even in those first few hours during which the extent of Hamas's atrocities were still becoming known, students logged onto social media and saw fellow students posting a laudatory graphic of a Hamas terrorist on a paraglider – the same paragliders that were used in an attack to gun down more than 260 young people at a music festival in southern Israel. This shock, during a time when we were all processing what had happened, was hard enough.

But then, on top of that, as students left their dorm rooms to attend vigils across the country for the more than 1,200 Jews who were slaughtered and the 240 people taken hostage, their mourning and grief were interrupted by pro-Hamas protestors. They saw that a Hamas leader had called for "a global day of jihad" against Jews around the world. All within 72 hours of seeing graphic images of thousands of Israeli civilians – people to whom they feel connected or may even know – being slaughtered, raped, taken hostage, or maimed.

Through all of this, students were met with a baffling silence and indifference from many whom they – and we – expected to show empathy and to speak on their behalf, including faculty who lead classes and administrators who lead our country's colleges and universities.

Antisemitism On College Campuses

Even before October 7, 2023, hatred and bias directed at Jewish students had been rising at a concerning rate. From 2016 to 2021, Hillel tracked a threefold increase in antisemitic incidents on American college campuses, up from 109 annual reported incidents in 2016, to 244 in 2021. In 2022, 43% of Jewish students surveyed reported that they witnessed or experienced antisemitism on their campus. Despite this troubling trend, in our work with students, antisemitism did not define most of the day-to-day experience of being Jewish on campus.¹

However, since October 7, Jewish students on campuses across the United States have become a prime target for discrimination, harassment, and hate. Antisemitism now defines the daily experience for far too many Jewish students – many are afraid to be visibly Jewish, afraid of how faculty will treat them, afraid to walk through campus out of fear of being harassed or even physically assaulted, and afraid of demonstrations turning violent. **This understandable fear is now shaping and disrupting the everyday experience of a majority of Jewish college students.**

In just the five weeks since the October 7 attack, there have been 375 antisemitic incidents on campuses across the country reported to Hillel – representing a 700% increase compared with the same period last year.² These incidents have included 27 physical assaults, 23 Hillels vandalized or targeted, 155 incidents of hate speech, and 127 incidents of antisemitic vandalism or graffiti elsewhere on campus. Let me put that in context for you. Over the last four years, there have never been more than 50 incidents reported to Hillel in a comparable month. Of course, 50 antisemitic incidents in a month is a significant problem on its own. But to see it spike to 375 incidents should set off alarm bells for every member of this committee. These are your constituents. These are the young people of your communities. These are hardworking members of their campus communities who deserve the same safety, security, and respect we would want for all students. And yet Jewish students are being harassed, marginalized, and yes, assaulted. We are asking you to use your authority to help keep them safe and to restore our university campuses to places of learning and personal growth, not breeding grounds for hate and discrimination.

Let me give you a sense of what Jewish students have faced in just the last five weeks. While many of these incidents captured national headlines, some of these incidents never even made the

¹ *The ADL-Hillel Campus Antisemitism Survey. 2021*, Anti-Defamation League & Hillel International, October 26, 2021 <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/adl-hillel-campus-antisemitism-survey-2021>.

² This figure is based on reports collected through reportcampushate.org, and reports compiled by campus Hillel professionals.

news — which is troubling on its own — but were reported to Hillel International through our campus staff.

- At Cooper Union College in New York City, Jewish students had to shelter in the library as pro-Palestinian protesters banged on the doors and chanted antisemitic slogans.³
- At Cornell University, a student threatened to kill and injure Jewish students, commit acts of sexual violence against Jewish women, and “shoot up” a kosher dining hall on an online platform.⁴ And just a few weeks before that, Cornell Professor Russel Rickford called Hamas’s killing of more than 1,200 Jews “exhilarating” and “energizing.”⁵
- At UMass Amherst, a Jewish student was punched in the face while holding an Israeli flag.⁶
- A professor at UC Davis made online threats of violence against “zionist journalists,” saying that “they have kids, with addresses.” The university is investigating but, to date, has not taken any action.⁷
- At Ohio State University, two people entered the Hillel building and vandalized Israeli flags in the building, then shouted anti-Israel statements and threats. The next day, two students were physically assaulted in Columbus when their attackers asked them if they were Jewish, and they answered yes.⁸

³ “WATCH: Cooper Union Jewish Students Attacked by Pro-Palestinian Student Group,” *Jerusalem Post*, October 26, 2023, <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-770180>.

⁴ Elijah Westbrook, “FBI Investigating Antisemitic Threats Against Jewish Community at Cornell University,” CBS News, October 30, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/fbi-investigating-antisemitic-threats-against-jewish-community-at-cornell-university/>.

⁵ Jesse O’Neill, “Cornell Students Call for Action Against Prof who was ‘Exhilarated’ by Hamas Attack,” *New York Post*, October 17, 2023, <https://nypost.com/2023/10/17/cornell-students-call-for-action-against-russell-rickford/>

⁶ “UMass Amherst Student Allegedly Punched Jewish Student, Spit on Israeli Flag,” WBZ CBS News Boston, November 6, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/umass-amherst-student-punches-jewish-student-spit-israel-flag/>.

⁷ Jeremy Childs, “UC Davis condemns post apparently by professor threatening ‘zionist journalists,’” *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 2023, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-10-21/uc-davis-condemns-post-apparently-by-professor-threatening-zionist-journalists>.

⁸ Emily Sanderson, “Ohio Gov. DeWine calls for extra patrols around OSU after students assaulted, Hillel vandalized,” WLWT5, November 10, 2023, <https://www.wlwt.com/article/ohio-state-university-attacks-antisemitic-hillel-vandalism/45806251>.

- At Stanford University, an instructor forced Jewish and Israeli students in a freshmen lecture class to identify themselves, then herded them into a corner of the room and separated them from their belongings, saying now they would know what it was like to be a Palestinian. In a later class, the same instructor asked each student to say what country they were from, and separated them into “colonizer” and “colonized”.⁹
- At Syracuse University, anti-Israel demonstrators accused university administrators, Hillel, Chabad, Jewish fraternities and sororities, and every other Jewish organization on campus of being complicit in genocide.¹⁰
- An Israeli student at Columbia University was physically beaten with a broomstick outside of the library.¹¹
- The Alpha Epsilon Pi fraternity house on Georgia Tech’s campus was vandalized.¹²
- A Jewish student at East Carolina University was bullied with hate speech and told that she “should have been finished in the oven like a slice of pizza.”
- At Drexel University, a swastika was painted on an academic building along with the words “f*** the Jews.”¹³
- Rallies on campuses across the country have included chants and signs featuring slogans such as, “the jews R Nazis”, “Zionism is genocide”, “Zionism is facism”, and “we don't want no Jewish state, we want all of '48.” Many understand the last slogan as a call for a single Palestinian state — that is, the destruction of Israel.

⁹ Taylor Romine, Kelly McCleary and Cheri Mossburg, “A Stanford University Instructor has Been Removed from the Classroom Amid Reports they Called Jewish Students Colonizers and Downplayed the Holocaust”, CNN <https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/13/us/stanford-instructor-jewish-holocaust-comments-reqj/index.html>.

¹⁰ Max Bevington, “Syracuse University Investigating Incendiary, Antisemitic Remarks Made at Campus Demonstration,” LocalSyr.com, November 9, 2023, <https://www.localsyr.com/news/local-news/syracuse-university-investigating-incendiary-antisemitic-remarks-made-at-campus-demonstration/>.

¹¹ Amanda Woods and Olivia Land, “Israeli Student Attacked with a Stick Outside Columbia University Library: Cops” NYPost, October 12, 2023 <https://nypost.com/2023/10/12/israeli-student-attacked-outside-columbia-university-library/>.

¹² Cody Alcorn, “Jewish Fraternity House Vandalized on Georgia Tech Campus”, 11Alive.com, October 17, 2023, <https://www.11alive.com/article/news/local/jewish-fraternity-house-vandalized-georgia-tech/85-6ca3b011-7f2b-4f7b-94a4-ccc844febd96>.

¹³ Shreeya Gounder and Krishna Thaker, “Arson and antisemitic graffiti heighten fears of hate crime on Drexel campus,” *The Triangle*, October 20, 2023, <https://www.thetriangle.org/news/arson-and-antisemitic-graffiti-heighten-fears-of-hate-crime-on-drexel-campus/>.

- A Jewish student at Tulane University was struck repeatedly by a pro-Palestinian protester with a flagpole as the protester attempted to burn an Israeli flag, sending the student to the ER.

It's easy to understand why Jewish students are scared. In fact, based on our survey that we commissioned of Jewish college students conducted on October 18 and 19, more than half (56%) report being scared and isolated.

Worse yet, a quarter of Jewish students surveyed said violence or acts of hate have been committed on their campus since the October 7 Hamas attack. That's one in four students subjected to violence in the span of two weeks in what should be a space for learning.

Put yourself in the position of Jewish parents across the country concerned for their children. Every day brings a new and horrifying incident. This can't continue.

Let me be clear: we have no desire to see anyone's free speech rights curtailed or their academic freedom compromised. But neither free speech nor academic freedom is a free pass to allow, or worse, foster a hostile and discriminatory environment on campus for Jewish students. There should be space on campus to debate the conflict, including space for those advocating on behalf of Palestinian civilians, many of whom have suffered under Hamas's rule themselves. In fact, many Jewish students are taking part in that advocacy and sharing empathy for all innocent civilians impacted by the war, Israeli and Palestinian alike. But that's not the same as glorifying the terrorists who kidnapped, raped, and murdered innocent Jews. Legitimate, passionate advocacy certainly does not involve harassment and death threats. And while some colleges and universities are taking action to create a safe learning environment for Jewish students, too many others are not fulfilling that promise and mandate.

How We Got Here

One long-running concern relates to a group called Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), an organization that has long contributed to a hostile environment for Jewish and Zionist college students through their incessant campaigns to demonize Israel on campus. Since the terror attack against Israeli men, women, and children on October 7, SJP has consistently glorified the largest slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust, calling it, in one case, "a historic win."¹⁴ In public

¹⁴ Joseph Ax and Gabriella Borter, "U.S. Colleges Become Flashpoints for Protests over Israel-Hamas War," Reuters, October 13, 2023,

displays on numerous campuses, SJP has celebrated the atrocities perpetrated by Hamas and sought to justify those atrocities as “resistance”, in some cases explicitly calling for more violence against Jews. These SJP-sponsored activities have led to assaults and harassment of Jewish and Israeli students and vandalizing of Jewish institutions like Hillel and other campus property – and these acts of hate are increasing.

While we do believe that students should – and have every right to – come together to explore, debate, learn, and be politically active on any issue, we also believe that groups who support terrorists and incite violence against their fellow students should not be recognized and funded as official student organizations. To that end, we appreciate university leaders condemning any activities that glorify terrorism, harass, and threaten students, and violate clear and reasonable university policies. This includes removing support and recognition of SJP chapters, as we’ve started to see at both Brandeis University, which has revoked recognition of SJP’s campus chapter, and Columbia University, which has suspended SJP for the remainder of the semester.¹⁵

How Hillel Has Responded

While it’s a frightening and anxious time to be a Jewish student, our community is courageous and resilient, especially where we have strong partnerships with universities and leaders in government. I am incredibly proud of the work being done by campus Hillel professionals and student leaders across the country. Faced with their own pain and fear following the heinous terrorist attacks of October 7, they have mobilized to support their communities. Since October 7, campus Hillels have held hundreds of vigils, rallies, and other events to show solidarity with Israel, mourn the victims of the October 7 massacre, and highlight the ongoing plight of the 240 Israeli hostages still being held in Gaza. Hillels have also prioritized offering time, space, and mental health resources for Jewish students to gather and draw strength from one another, and ensure that Jewish college students are safe. As we always have and always will, Hillel believes that one

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-colleges-become-flashpoints-protests-both-sides-israel-hamas-war-2023-10-13/>.

¹⁵ “Columbia University Suspends Student Groups Students for Justice in Palestine & Jewish Voice for Peace for Allegedly Violating School Policies,” CBS New York, November 10, 2023,

<https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/columbia-university-student-groups-suspended-students-for-justice-in-palestine-jewish-voice-for-peace/>; Jericho Tran, “Brandeis University Bans Pro-Palestinian Student Group,” NBC Boston, November 7, 2023,

<https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/brandeis-university-bans-pro-palestinian-student-group/3183990/>.

critical way to counter antisemitism is by building vibrant Jewish communities where Jewish students can express their Jewish identities fully, and by building relationships with other communities across campus to promote partnership and understanding. We remain steadfast in these commitments.

At the same time, we need campus leaders and public officials to play their critical and unique roles in addressing this frightening spike in antisemitism. Campus administrations must take steps consistent with the U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism to root out the underlying issues that contribute to the antisemitic rhetoric we are seeing on many campuses the past few weeks, and to ensure their compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.¹⁶

Since our founding in 1923, Hillel has worked to be a constructive partner to college and university administrators seeking to address the scourge of antisemitism on their campuses. In this current period, we are collaborating with university leaders through our Campus Climate Initiative, a unique educational program that provides campus administrators with practical solutions for ensuring a safe and positive campus climate in which Jewish students feel comfortable expressing their identity and values, free from antisemitism, harassment, or marginalization.¹⁷ University leaders play an essential role in effecting broad-based educational and policy change on campus, and we know that partnerships between campus administrators and Hillels can catalyze positive changes that benefit Jewish students and all students. To date, more than 50 major colleges and universities have participated in the Campus Climate Initiative's 16-month in-depth program, and as just one measure of success, institutions that have participated issued quicker, stronger, unqualified statements after Hamas' attack on Israel.

Just last week, Hillel International hosted a convening at the University of Southern California with more than 250 higher education leaders from throughout the Western United States. The leaders in attendance, ranging from university presidents to DEI officials from 40 colleges and universities, discussed the urgent challenge of antisemitism facing Jewish students, and the many practical solutions universities can pursue in response. These remedies range from fully incorporating antisemitism education and response into their DEI initiatives; to improving their procedures for soliciting, investigating, and acting upon complaints of discrimination and bias directed at Jewish

¹⁶ White House, "The U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism: Key Actions by Pillar," June 2, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/02/the-u-s-national-strategy-to-counter-antisemitism-key-actions-by-pillar-2/>.

¹⁷ Hillel International, "Campus Climate Initiative," accessed November 11, 2023, <https://www.hillel.org/campus-climate-initiative/>.

students; to consistently disciplining students, faculty, staff, and student organizations that violate university policies; to better regulating and policing the protests that are in some cases creating mob-like conditions leading to targeting, harassment, and assaults on Jewish and Israeli students.

University Responses

Faced with the news that Hamas intentionally targeted civilians in such vile and brutal ways, committing numerous crimes against humanity, Jewish students need—and deserve—to have their university leaders and others on campus recognize the trauma that's been inflicted on them – less than 80 years since the Holocaust – and provide them with the space and support to process and to grieve for their families, friends, and loved ones. Instead, they have too often heard from those university leaders misplaced platitudes about cycles of violence and the need for unity and understanding, effectively gaslighting one of the most heinous acts of terrorism against civilians that the world has ever seen.

Some campuses are getting this right. Emory President Gregory Fenves denounced the war crimes committed by Hamas, and wrote, "The reality of Jews being senselessly murdered and taken as hostages will not soon leave my mind, and must be condemned in the strongest possible terms."¹⁸ President Ben Sasse at the University of Florida said, "I will not tiptoe around this simple fact: What Hamas did is evil and there is no defense for terrorism. This shouldn't be hard."¹⁹ And University of Miami President Julio Frenk noted the community's deep ties to Israel, and offered the full mental health support resources of the university to support all students experiencing anxiety or stress, including Jewish students.²⁰ Condemning terrorist atrocities and showing compassion for Jewish

¹⁸ Gregory L. Fenves (President, Emory University) to the Emory Community, October 11, 2023, <https://view.inspire.emory.edu/?qs=82b77784b0aa2bbc97e6d26f6ed1fada897f113409d52705e9d55fd6bad60d52b1394f8876d35d65815655d1660293c8f2bdaa159182627ef215fce06df6eb50f622cbb3d454961166ee546f1abf139e>.

¹⁹ Andrew Caplan, "UF President Ben Sasse Condemns Hamas Attacks, Ensures Student Safety after Stampede Vigil," *Gainesville Sun*, October 12, 2023, <https://www.gainesville.com/story/news/local/2023/10/12/ufs-ben-sasse-pens-letter-to-jewish-students-warns-of-protests/71154956007/>.

²⁰ Julio Frenk (President, University of Miami) to the University of Miami Community, October 9, 2023, <https://view.connect.miami.edu/?qs=35a912e9a90140520f6d325706d687f57c4c0b4609cc24fc5308b3d0413d0e0b98e8e74293d186ed82c7413a84be08leafael6132e5ddc8de41ba4636d4fe1926eef7f597f31b3aa>.

students in a statement as these universities have done should be the lowest common denominator for supporting the Jewish community.

Even with the efforts of those administrations that have spoken up about the initial Hamas atrocities and the subsequent spike in antisemitism, only 41% of the Jewish students we surveyed reported feeling satisfied with support from their university leaders.

Hillels around the world are doing all they can to provide additional security, community space, programming, wellness support and advocacy on behalf of Jewish students. However, Hillel professionals and student leaders can't solve this problem alone. They need – and Jewish students deserve – campus administrators to continue speaking up, showing up, and standing up for their Jewish student communities, which does not in any way preclude them from doing the same for Palestinian-Americans or other students being impacted by the war.

In particular, university administrations must address faculty and staff who use their platforms and resources to traffic in biased and discriminatory agitation that alienates, silences and marginalizes significant minority communities on their campuses. I understand the needs and protections for academic freedom and free speech, but those freedoms are not a license to create an environment of harassment, bullying, and threats for Jewish students, or for any students.

Even amid this degrading campus climate for Jewish students, there is a reason for hope. We've seen Jewish students and Hillel communities show up with courage and resilience in mourning for the victims of the October 7 massacre, and in showing compassion toward the continuing civilian victims of the war – both Israeli and Palestinian – even as they understand that it is Hamas who has put all of those victims in harm's way.

Our Requests for College and University Administrators

We are stronger when we stand together, and that's why we need sustained attention on this issue from the highest levels of government to strengthen our work.

That means ensuring that universities develop clear and transparent non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies that protect against the harassment or exclusion of Jewish, Israeli, and Zionist students; promoting clear and transparent mechanisms for students to report hate

incidents and acts of antisemitism to campus administrators; and ensuring clear and transparent communication from campus leadership regarding steps taken in response to reported incidents.

It will also require the urgent creation of cross-disciplinary task forces or advisory councils – in consultation with Hillel and other Jewish campus partners – to review, address, and improve Jewish student life on campus. Participating in programs like Hillel International's Campus Climate Initiative, which works directly with university administrators to educate them on the history and modern manifestations of antisemitism, is one of many critical steps.²¹

And it will require university leadership to remain nimble and proactive in responding to and preventing antisemitism, to keep open lines of communication with Jewish organizations on campus to respond to needs in real time, and to regularly evaluate whether additional proactive steps are needed to ensure a safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environment for all students, including Jewish students.

Our Requests from Congress and the Federal Government

Much of what is required to address campus antisemitism will depend on colleges and universities taking this issue seriously and responding with concrete changes in their policies and practices. And we appreciate the moral clarity and expressions of support for Israel in its war against Hamas and for Jewish Americans facing growing antisemitism from both Congress and the administration. That said, we would also request the following additional targeted areas of action to bolster our efforts and those of other Jewish organizations:

- **Security:** It is imperative that we strengthen the physical security of Jewish institutions on campus and other security protections for Jewish students. To that end, we urge Congress to immediately and substantially expand the Nonprofit Security Grant program so that our Hillels and other Jewish groups on campus can rapidly deploy security improvements and security personnel.
- **Title VI Enforcement:** Title VI of the Civil Rights Act has become a critical tool in holding universities accountable in addressing hostile and discriminatory environments for Jewish students that deprive them of equal access to education on their campuses. Unfortunately, there are a large and growing number of legitimate complaints from Jewish students, faculty, and staff that merit investigation and action. At the same time, the Office of Civil

²¹ Hillel International, "Campus Climate Initiative," accessed November 11, 2023, <https://www.hillel.org/campus-climate-initiative/>.

Rights at the Department of Education (OCR) does not have adequate resources to promptly pursue these investigations and Title VI actions. We urge Congress, with the support of this Committee, to appropriate supplemental funding to OCR for this critical purpose.

- **Antisemitism Prevention:** To reverse the trend toward growing antisemitism on campus and elsewhere in American society, we need to invest in education and policy change that can better inculcate Americans to the nature of contemporary antisemitism and promote greater understanding and tolerance between the Jewish community and other communities on campus and beyond. To that end, we would ask Congress to consider targeted funding to support non-profit organizations providing these educational and policy solutions, through public-private partnerships.

Conclusion

Jewish learning and tradition teaches us to bring light, even and especially into these darkest moments, and today's Jewish college students exemplify that tradition. While students have a role to play in repairing what's broken in their campus communities and in the broader world, that does not absolve the university administrators, faculty, staff, and our government from doing everything within their powers to ensure the well-being, safety and support for all of their students, including their Jewish students.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.