

July 25, 2024

Chair David Argall
Minority Chair Lindsey Williams
Senate Education Committee

Re: Combatting antisemitism on Pennsylvania college campuses

Dear Chair Argall, Minority Chair Williams, and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to be here to testify on behalf of the ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) on the issue of combatting antisemitism on college campuses. As you may know, ADL is committed to combatting antisemitism and all forms of bigotry, and we are deeply concerned about the rise in campus antisemitism that we have seen since the attack on Israel on October 7. ADL's timeless mission is to fight the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment for all, because our founders knew over 100 years ago, what we still know now. You cannot fight one form of hate and bigotry without fighting all forms of hate and bigotry. Here in our region, ADL Philadelphia has worked with campus administrators and stakeholders across Pennsylvania to share resources to make college campuses safer for Jewish students. I am pleased to share some of ADL's findings with you today.

I. Regional Campus Incident Response in Pennsylvania

Incident Response

Every year since 1979, ADL has released an audit of antisemitic incidents in the United States. We rely on our organizational partners, law enforcement, and our constituents to report hate they witness or experience. Each incident is vetted by ADL staff, and many are left off our report because we deem them not to be antisemitic. Our most recent audit in 2023 broke records, soaring to **8,973 incidents of assault, harassment, and vandalism across the country**. This is a 140% increase from 2022, another record-setting year. Just over 5,200 antisemitic incidents – nearly 60% of 2023's tally – were recorded in the wake of the October 7th Hamas attack against Israel.

In 2023, Pennsylvania ranked sixth in the United States for the most antisemitic incidents. Our state saw 394 incidents, which include 5 assault cases. Out of Pennsylvania's 86 vandalism incidents, one-third of them featured a swastika. The vast majority of incidents – 303 – were categorized as harassment. Whether in the workplace or walking through campus, Jews were labeled as "Zionists" and "oppressors," shunned from activities, and discriminated against because of their identity.

Campus Antisemitism Report Card

In 2022, our office tracked 9 antisemitic incidents that occurred on a college campus. In 2023, that jumped to 54 incidents, a **500% increase**. Small liberal arts schools and large nationally renowned institutions alike saw spray-painted swastikas, mezuzahs ripped from their door jambs, and Jewish students and organizations targeted for a perceived association with Israel. In the wake of October 7th and volatility on college campuses, ADL released the first edition of its Campus Antisemitism Report Card, a tool for families, college faculty, counselors, and other stakeholders to assess the campus climate for Jewish members of each campus community. ADL chose 85 colleges that have the highest Jewish student populations as well as certain high-ranking colleges. Out of the six schools in Pennsylvania, only one ranks at a “B” grade; the other five received Cs and Ds.

All schools had the opportunity to self-report how they protect students in the wake of antisemitic incidents. ADL also looked at any active investigations and active anti-Zionist student organizations among other factors. We found that at some schools, even if a campus has active Jewish life and organizations, Jewish students can still be targeted and inadequately protected.

II. National Campus Data

ADL Center for Antisemitism Research: July/November 2023 Campus Climate Study

In July and November 2023, the ADL Center for Antisemitism Research (CAR) conducted a survey of American college students to assess the severity of antisemitism on college and university campuses. The survey found that, by November 2023, **73% of Jewish college students** surveyed had experienced or witnessed some form of antisemitism since the beginning of the 2023-24 school year. The prevalence of antisemitism on campus has extended to **non-Jewish students** as well, with **43.9%** reporting the same during that period.

Following the October 7th Hamas terror attacks on Israel, students who have felt comfortable with others knowing they are Jewish decreased significantly. **63.7%** of Jewish students pre-October 7th felt “very” or “extremely” comfortable but now only **38.6%** feel the same. Feelings of physical and emotional safety also drastically decreased. Prior to 10/7, **66.6%** of Jewish students said they felt “very” or “extremely” physically safe on campus, compared to less than half (**45.5%**) post-10/7. **65.8%** of Jewish students said they felt “very” or “extremely” emotionally safe before 10/7, which **fell to 32.5%** after 10/7.

Not knowing what to do and **concern about potential backlash** prevents students from reporting anti-Jewish incidents on campus, but even more so for Jewish students.

ADL Center on Extremism: 2023 Audit of Antisemitic Incidents

Each year, the ADL Center on Extremism (COE) tracks incidents of antisemitic harassment, vandalism and assault in the United States. In 2023, incidents on college and university campuses **spiked by a staggering 321% from 219 incidents in 2022 to 922 incidents in 2023**, most of which (**732**) occurred after the October 7 terrorist attacks. Campus-based incidents represented **10%** of all incidents tracked nationwide.

College or university campus incidents included **695 incidents of harassment, 215 incidents of vandalism and 12 assaults**.

III. Anti-Masking Policies

Recent events on college campuses across the country have been marked by examples of protestors hiding their faces behind masks to remain anonymous while they engage in tactics of harassment and intimidation. ADL is concerned that mask-wearing in these situations can contribute to a hostile environment for targeted students, raising concern under Title VI.

Hiding behind a mask can embolden individuals to cross the line if they believe they cannot be identified and held accountable for their actions. ADL has therefore supported some anti-masking policies that aim to make campuses safer for Jewish students and all who may be harassed by those covering their faces. While protecting free speech and the right to protest is critical, colleges and universities must also ensure that those wearing masks are not interfering with Jewish students' access to their education.

To be clear, not everyone wearing a mask is harassing or harming others, and there are legitimate reasons why mask-wearing may still be needed. Individuals often wear face coverings for their health or for religious reasons, and any policies pertaining to mask-wearing should include exceptions for those purposes. To the extent that campuses are interested in enacting anti-masking policies, ADL remains willing to consult with administrators about the best ways to balance free speech concerns and their Title VI responsibilities.

IV. SB 1260, the Stand With Israel Act

The cornerstone of higher education is the pursuit of intellectual inquiry and academic growth. A critical part of this mission is ensuring access to study abroad programs, collaborations with universities in other countries, and bringing academics from other countries to study and teach. We urge schools to commit to continuing such programs with Israeli academics and institutions.

This past year, we witnessed anti-Israel protestors demand, and heard some reports of colleges/universities and academics engage in, covert or soft boycotts of Israeli institutions and academics. This includes cancelling agreements with Israeli academic institutions, denying Israeli academics visiting professor roles, cancelling lectures by

Israeli professors, and a decrease in grant funding. In addition, there is growing pressure on some universities to cancel their study abroad and exchange programs with Israeli institutions, and even to deny admission to Israeli students. Some protesters are even calling on colleges and universities to divest endowment funds from companies that are based in Israel or do business with Israel.

Such demands often constitute interference with core principles of academic freedom in higher education and a step toward denial of students' access to academic opportunities. These boycotts, whether formal or informal, hinder academic freedom, do not support academic integrity, unfairly single out Israel, and are counterproductive to peace efforts.

For these reasons, ADL supports SB 1260, the Stand with Israel Act, which makes clear that it is contrary to the policies of the Commonwealth for colleges and universities to make investment-related decisions that are intended to financially penalize the government of Israel or commercial financial activity in Israel.

Moving forward, colleges and universities in Pennsylvania should re-affirm their opposition to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement - an international campaign aimed at delegitimizing and pressuring Israel, through the diplomatic, financial, professional, academic and cultural isolation of Israel, Israeli individuals, Israeli institutions, and, increasingly, Jews who support Israel's right to exist.

It is also important for academic researchers to include the research of Israeli academics and their institutions in their own research activities, especially when researching matters in or associated with the Middle East. Intentionally or unintentionally leaving this body of work out of their own research efforts, silences important voices to the intellectual discourse on Middle East matters.

Colleges and universities should also proactively affirm their commitment to the free exchange of ideas and wide access to academic opportunities, including with Israeli academic institutions and academics. They should counter unconstructive calls by publicly elevating their partnerships with Israeli institutions, encouraging students to consider study abroad opportunities in Israel, featuring the work of Israeli scientists and researchers on their faculty, or who collaborate with their faculty, and highlighting the benefits these associations provide to students and the institution.

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent issue. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any additional questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Andrew Goretsky, EdD
Regional Director, ADL Philadelphia