



**Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life at the Pennsylvania State University (Penn State Hillel) Testimony on Antisemitism on College Campuses**

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**Mackenzie Borine, Penn State Hillel Student President**

Good morning, Chairman and members of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Mackenzie Borine and I am the Student President of Penn State Hillel. I am a fourth-year student studying Hospitality Management with a minor in Theatre. I am here to share my experience as a Jewish student at Penn State following the October 7th attack in Israel. A few days after the attack, Penn State Hillel and other Jewish organizations on campus hosted a vigil for remembrance and peace in Israel on October 10th. It was held on Old Main steps on campus. It was beautiful to see the Jewish, Penn State, and Centre County communities coming together and showing support to one another and Israel. I felt safe at the vigil for multiple reasons, I was around people I cared for, and there were police surveilling the area to ensure our safety. Following the vigil, Penn State Hillel hosted weekly pasta dinners and support groups and had counselors in the building for students to talk to all day.

The University's response following the October 7<sup>th</sup> terrorist attack by Hamas started with two statements from President Bendapudi. She released one on October 9th which was broader and offered emotional support by asking the Penn State community members to help and listing the services Penn State offers (Counseling and Psychological Services, Student Care & Advocacy, and Center for Ethical & Spiritual Development). This letter didn't feel like a strong enough statement for many students including Jewish students because around the world and on social media there were instant antisemitic remarks made. There weren't any publicly made yet on campus, but the Jewish student community was being individually attacked on their social media or seeing many antisemitic posts on their feed. She then put out a second letter posted on October 12th to protect Penn State students' right to freedom of expression but violence or hate is not the way Penn State students should act. She stated, "Our fundamental commitment to the

right of free expression is strong, but so is our commitment to safety and well-being. So let me be clear: Law enforcement is ready to intervene if any activity escalates beyond non-violent engagement.” This letter offered a clearer position on how the University will plan to act if violence or hate speech is spread on campus. They linked more resources that students and faculty can use like Safe Walk, how to report bias or discriminatory actions by an employee and student. She also highlighted other organizations like Penn State Hillel, Chabad at Penn State, and the Muslim Student Association.

When it comes to my daily life at Penn State around the time of the October 7th attack, my experience definitely changed. There was a protest on October 12th which was part of the “Day of Resistance” movement, and there were about 100 people in support of the Palestinian people. It was somewhat of a peaceful engagement, but there were chants of “From the River to the Sea / Palestine will be Free” and “No Justice / No Peace”. The University didn’t stop the chant, which wasn’t made a nationally understood antisemitic chant until April. Around this time, anti-Israel groups on campus started becoming very active. On campus, those groups held protests and tabling events mainly at the Hub, Old Main Lawn and the Allen Street Gates. I don’t usually go to those locations often, but my friends did alert me when they saw those groups and I avoided the situation. Their main goal is to intimidate and isolate Jewish students. The times when I can’t avoid anti-Israel or antisemitic events are downtown State College. I live in an apartment there and the Hillel building is downtown. There are times when students will drive around in pick-up trucks and jeeps and be loud to scare us. They have banged on the Hillel building windows, and they have graffitied elevators in the apartment attached to the building. For example, one evening a group of students including myself were having dinner with a guest talking about the culture here on campus regarding antisemitism and anti-Israel demonstrations. Someone banged on the window and had a sign that read “Free Palestine.” It startled all of us and left us scared to leave the building. We stayed inside an extra 30 minutes and I had my friend drive me home, even though I was only a short walk from the building.

When I talk to my friends and other students at Hillel about how they feel after October 7th being on campus, they say similar things. We didn’t feel safe on campus for most of the fall semester following the attack. We were worried while walking to classes that someone would know we were Jewish and say something hurtful or stalk us. Some of my friends started walking faster to and from classes and didn’t stick around too long on campus. We only felt safe at the

Hillel building or in our dorms/apartments. The spring semester didn't get better, but we could see that the University was working harder to protect Jewish students. We knew that President Bendapudi and her administration were constantly communicating with the Penn State Hillel staff on how they could help the Jewish community feel safe and heard during these troubling times.

The University does a good job of handling disciplinary actions once they are made aware of a situation. They take everything seriously and will follow through with what they promised. Anecdotally, I felt encouraged when my friend told me about an incident with her professor, that after she reported him he faced disciplinary conduct and had to issue an apology to her and the class. Penn State is strict about the safety and well-being of its students and wants to create a welcoming environment where students can grow and learn. They create systems to protect their students and employees from hate and violence. I will say Penn State has not failed me and has shown compassion to the Jewish community in ways other institutions have not.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mackenzie Borine  
Penn State Hillel Student President