



## **Congressional Testimony**

### **Never Again: Addressing the Rise of Antisemitism and Supporting Older Americans**

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Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Gillibrand, Members of the Committee, it is a pleasure to be before you this afternoon to testify in the Senate, across the Capitol from where I served for seven terms.

I am honored to be here alongside my three other distinguished panelists, including a heroic Holocaust survivor and my dear friend, David Schachter. It is so important to hear their stories firsthand. Their experiences are an integral part of Holocaust education, as studies have shown that the more a person knows about the Holocaust, the less susceptible they are to antisemitic rhetoric.

Today, I am here in my capacity as CEO of American Jewish Committee (AJC), a global, non-partisan advocacy organization that stands up for Israel's right to exist in peace and security; confronts antisemitism, no matter the source; and upholds the democratic values that unite Jews and our allies.

I come to you today on the heels of AJC's annual Global Forum, where two thousand Jewish leaders from more than 60 countries convened to tackle the most pressing issues facing the Jewish people, America, Israel, and the world.

In the Senate Special Committee on Aging's nearly 65-year history, there has never been a dedicated hearing on antisemitism affecting our nation's seniors. Think about that. Today, we are, unfortunately, doing something historic. This hearing is a testament to the moment American Jews, and indeed the entire American people, are facing right now when it comes to the increased levels of antisemitism and hate that have become all too common in our society.

### **The State of Antisemitism in the Last Year**

Earlier this year, American Jewish Committee released our [\*State of Antisemitism in America 2024 Report\*](#). The report is the first comprehensive data we have that captures the experiences with and perceptions of both Jewish and non-Jewish Americans with antisemitism one full year after Hamas's brutal terrorist attack in Israel on October 7, 2023, in which over 1,200 people were murdered and more than 250 were taken hostage, including 59 who are still held in captivity today, both alive and dead, but all deserving to return home now, after 572 days in captivity. What this report shows is that antisemitism has reached a tipping point in America, threatening the freedoms of American Jews and casting an ominous shadow across our society. The topline numbers are unsettling. 73% of American Jews feel less secure than they did a year ago. 56% of American Jews admit that they have changed their behavior over the last year because of the fear of antisemitism. Your constituents are deciding not to wear a Jewish star or a hostage pin like the one I have on because they fear they will be targeted with hate and violence.

They aren't going to synagogues or visibly wearing kippahs because they think they may be targeted because of their identity as Jews.

And the 1.6 million American Jewish seniors – more than 30,000 of whom are Holocaust survivors – are acutely aware of the antisemitism emanating from every corner of society, and their fear is pronounced. 43% of Jewish American seniors are worried they'll be victims of antisemitism, and 53% are worried that their loved ones will be victims of antisemitism because they are Jewish. And they have reason to worry. American Jewish seniors are seeing an overwhelming amount of antisemitic hate online, they are seeing that posters of Holocaust survivors were torn down last week in New York City, they are hearing from their grandkids about what is happening on campus – chants like “go back to Poland” and threats that October 7 would happen “100 more times, 1,000 more times, and 10,000 more times” ringing on the quad – and they know about the death of Paul Kessler, a 69-year old man who in November 2023 died after being shoved by an extremist while he was simply trying to support Israel and uplift the plight of the hostages.

### **Seniors Are Experiencing Antisemitism**

But it's not just statistics. Here are a few stories about how American Jewish seniors are experiencing this explosion of antisemitism.

Through the USC Shoah Foundation, our partners who catalogue testimony about contemporary antisemitism, we've heard from Holocaust survivors in the U.S. who are deeply worried about the surge of antisemitism happening right now. Eva Perlman, who fled Berlin with her family to Paris, and then was sheltered by Righteous Gentiles in Lyon during the war, is afraid. She said that the antisemitism we are seeing “now is even worse than it was at the time. And it's everywhere.” The time she is referring to? 1930s Europe. In her interview with the Shoah Foundation, she said of the current moment, “I'm scared. I'm absolutely scared because [antisemitism] is a poison that has invaded the whole world. Which was probably latent, you know, it was dormant for many years, and now it's coming out in full force. And I don't know what will happen. I have no idea. Where will the Jews go if they are no longer wanted in this country?”

Bob Koperwas' parents fled east from Nazi occupied Krakow right before he was born. The rest of his family was rounded up and sent to concentration camps. After witnessing just six months of the antisemitism that had transpired since the October 7 attacks, he told the USC Shoah Foundation that, “I'm glad I was born when I was born, because I don't want to be a young child today.”

## **Antisemitism Must Be Fought in a Bipartisan Manner**

This all-hands-on-deck moment we find ourselves in – American Jews and Americans of all religious and political stripes alike – is why it is so crucial that leaders are taking every angle to address this problem. No stone should be unturned. It does not matter who is perpetrating antisemitism and targeting Jews. We will be under attack no matter if it is from those on the far-left or the far-right, as they will find a way to make the Jews the culprits of whatever they deem to be the ultimate evil in their philosophy. It does not matter to us if far-left protestors call us “[baby killers](#)” when we are on our way to synagogue or if neo-Nazis [deface](#) a synagogue with swastikas and other hate symbols. For us, the hatred and fear we experience are the same. Anytime a Jewish person is targeted, it affects every Jew because we are all interconnected. But the rising tide of antisemitism is not just a Jewish problem. It is a crisis for our democracy and our society.

At its roots, antisemitism is interconnected with conspiracy theories. One of the oldest stories used to attack the Jewish community is that the Jews killed Jesus. Since then, no matter where Jewish people have lived, there has been Jewish hate. It has spanned borders and millennia; it has been a left-wing prejudice and a right-wing prejudice. Antisemitism has emerged due to concerns about communism or capitalism. Antisemitism is typically rooted in conspiracy theories about the Jewish people and is irrational in nature, unable to be explained by logic or sound reasoning. This hate flourishes when extremism is on the rise and democratic norms are being challenged. Whenever antisemitism surges, it leaves us divided and unable to deal with the problems facing our society. Addressing it is not only a defense of the Jewish community — it is a defense of democracy itself.

That is why it is so significant that the Special Committee on Aging is having this hearing now. And it is why, despite the partisan rancor in Washington reaching a boiling point, there is still room for productive discourse and bipartisan agreement to address antisemitism. We can take real steps, today, that will make a tangible difference to millions of American Jews. So, I thank Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Gillibrand once again for exercising bipartisanship on this deeply important issue that is so essential to the very fabric of our society.

To that end, I want to take a moment as a former member of Congress to speak candidly to the members on the panel. **Right now, as antisemitism continues to rear its ugly head across society, as we saw recently with the targeting of Pennsylvania Governor Shapiro on the first night of Passover, I urge you to condemn antisemitism unequivocally and publicly, in all its forms, whenever and wherever it occurs. Name it. Call it out. Be strong.** When an incident occurs, it matters when elected officials speak out loudly and use their broad reach, raising awareness that antisemitism is not just a Jewish problem, but an assault on American values.

I spent 16 years in politics; I understand the political implications of every statement you make. I understand that it is often easier to call out antisemitism when perpetrated by someone across the aisle, someone you are used to battling, and I know the challenge that comes with calling someone out within your own party when they do or say something you know is wrong. But every one of you knows that when you speak out against anyone, members from both parties, including your own, when they spew language that threatens others in your community, as antisemitism threatens the Jewish community, people will thank you. You will satisfy the enormous responsibility you have to your constituents. We cannot allow antisemitism – the world’s oldest hatred – to become a partisan political issue and be used as a wedge to divide the Jewish community, because regardless of where it comes from, whether from the right or left or anywhere in between, antisemitism hurts Jews and our country. **I urge every elected official on this Committee to be mindful of politicization and reach across party lines to address antisemitism. The House and Senate Bipartisan Task Forces for Combating Antisemitism serve as examples of how Members can responsibly reach across the aisle to collectively push back against antisemitism. I’m grateful that some of you already belong to the Senate Task Force, and I encourage every single Senator in this chamber to join.**

### **Understanding Antisemitism**

Key to standing up to this threat is truly understanding antisemitism. According to AJC’s [State of Antisemitism in America 2024 Report](#), 30% of Americans are not familiar with antisemitism, including 10% of Americans who have never heard the term before. That is why the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism, which provides a clear and concise description of antisemitism in its various forms, is an important educational tool to help individuals and entities understand how antisemitism manifests in modern times.

### *How Congress Can Better Define Antisemitism*

**Congress should swiftly pass the Antisemitism Awareness Act (S.558), legislation with strong bipartisan support that would ensure the Department of Education continues to consider this useful tool when it seeks to protect students in educational spaces.**

I also want to take a moment to address opposition to the IHRA Working Definition due to concern that it could be used to restrict free speech. Free speech is guaranteed under the First Amendment. However, if someone is espousing antisemitic rhetoric and invoking age-old tropes about Jews (some of which are outlined in AJC’s [Translate Hate](#) Glossary), our laws also make it clear that free speech does not prevent us from identifying antisemitism when we hear it. The IHRA Working Definition and the examples it provides are meant to serve as a flexible educational tool to help people recognize antisemitism, depending on the context, not to restrict

or limit speech. Critiques of the IHRA Working Definition on the basis that it could limit constitutionally protected speech misunderstand the working definition and its purpose, which is to help policymakers, civil society monitors, educators, and others understand what antisemitism can look like, in order to take proactive steps to address the issue and hold perpetrators of antisemitism accountable.

### **Jewish American Heritage Month**

Jewish American Heritage Month will start on May 1, the day after this hearing takes place. At a time when much of the public discourse regarding the Jewish community tends to focus on negative themes and stereotypes, Jewish American Heritage Month presents a valuable opportunity to shift the narrative. It is imperative for the public to understand that like every other American community, the Jewish American community has made numerous valuable contributions to our country. Jewish American Heritage Month is a great way to uplift these contributions to our country's successes in culture, law, medicine, sports, business, and all the ways we have valiantly served our country – including many folks from the past generations, such as my late father, who fought in the Battle of the Bulge against the Nazis in World War II.

Embracing Jewish American heritage is a key strategy in the whole-of-society fight against antisemitism. This approach educates business leaders about Jewish identity; pushes tech companies to combat the spread of antisemitism online and demands that social media platforms enforce their own rules against hate speech; and calls for strong legislation to clamp down on antisemitism wherever it might rear its ugly head. Allowing antisemitism to fester in any part of our society is wholly unacceptable, and it undermines the foundational values of our democracy. History has shown us that vibrant democracies are the only societies that allow the Jewish community and other minority communities to thrive, and allowing antisemitism to permeate our discourse is a threat to our way of life. Fighting antisemitism requires all of us, in our various capacities, to unequivocally call out and condemn this bigotry. Educating people across society about American Jewish history and all of the enormous contributions Jews have made to America, while also increasing American Jewish visibility, are essential steps in fostering empathy and understanding, which is crucial as ignorance often underpins prejudice and hate.

AJC's [\*State of Antisemitism in America Report 2024\*](#) found that 59% of U.S. adults say antisemitism has increased over the past five years. What's more, 88% of this group say they are concerned by the rise in antisemitism. Corroborating that sentiment, 90% of the general public believe that not only does antisemitism affect society as a whole, but everyone is responsible for combating it. It is great that so many members of the general public understand the scale and scope of the scourge of antisemitism we are facing. But, concerningly, only 13% of non-Jewish U.S. adults know how many Jewish people live in the United States, demonstrating that despite

concern and desire to act, the size and contributions of the Jewish community continue to be misunderstood.

### *How Congress Can Embrace Jewish American Heritage*

Congress established Jewish American Heritage Month, and elected officials continue to play a valuable role in lifting up this important honor. But there is more to be done. **Congress should codify into federal statute May as Jewish American Heritage Month, ensuring this month and the countless contributions and sacrifices Jewish Americans have made to our country are celebrated.** Members of this body, and indeed all members of Congress, should recognize Jewish heritage, Jewish life, and Jewish contributions to American society. This educates the public about who Jews are as a people and can help mitigate antisemitism. Having a Jewish person in your life, or even just knowing more about American Jews, can go a long way to combat hate. Our [State of Antisemitism in America 2024 Report](#) found that 60% of U.S. adults say they personally know someone who is Jewish. We found that knowing someone Jewish has a deep impact on knowing what antisemitism is and thinking that it is a problem in America today. 81% of U.S. adults who know someone Jewish know the term antisemitism, whereas only 52% know the term if they don't know someone Jewish. It also affects thinking that antisemitism is a problem: 81% of Americans who know someone Jewish say antisemitism is a problem in America today, while only 58% of Americans who don't know someone Jewish say the same. This tells us how when people have any relationship or familiarity with Jews, they are more likely to be cognizant of the threat antisemitism poses today.

### **The Need For Holocaust Education**

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum plays a vital role in teaching about the important history and lessons from the Holocaust, and I appreciate Congress's bipartisan commitment to ensuring this vital information is taught in our nation's schools. In our [State of Antisemitism in American 2024 Report](#), we found that more than half of U.S. adults (53%) answered three or more questions about the Holocaust correctly, and those who did are more likely to know the term antisemitism and what it means; say that antisemitism has increased in the past 5 years; be concerned about the increase in antisemitism; and say antisemitism is a problem in the United States.

### *How Congress Can Bolster Holocaust Education*

Congress has a vital role to play in improving education about the Holocaust and understanding of antisemitism. **I was pleased that Congress reauthorized the Never Again Education Act at the end of last year, which empowers the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum to provide Holocaust education, resources, and training, and urge this chamber to also pass the Holocaust Education and Lessons (HEAL) Act (S.332), which would direct the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum to deepen our understanding of where the gaps in K-12**

**education are by conducting a study on Holocaust education efforts in states, local educational agencies, and public elementary and secondary schools nationwide.** This information will inform policymakers as they discuss how best to address gaps in Holocaust education and what additional resources are needed to bolster curricula. **Congress should also ensure, through the annual appropriations process, funding that supports Holocaust education and grants, including \$2 million for the Never Again Education Act, continues.**

### **Antisemitism Online**

Antisemitic rhetoric has exploded online. Online and on social media continue to be the places where American Jews experience antisemitism the most. According to AJC's [\*State of Antisemitism in America 2024 Report\*](#), 67% of Jewish adults have seen antisemitic content online or on social media at least once in the past 12 months. While 20% of that group report that these incidents made them feel physically threatened, many people do not report the incidents. The number one reason given by Jewish respondents as to why they chose not to report antisemitism *online or on social media was that they did not believe any action would be taken.*

#### *How Congress Can Fight Antisemitism Online*

To mitigate these issues, there are several avenues Congress can take. **Congress should pass fundamental reforms to Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act and hold social media companies accountable for the spread of antisemitic and hate-fueled violence on their platforms. Congress should ensure online platforms lose their special immunity if they utilize an algorithm to amplify or recommend content to a user that promotes violence and can impose stronger transparency requirements on online platforms that prevent algorithmic bias, improve moderation systems, and enforce community standards. And finally, Congress should pass legislation requiring social media companies to allow researchers access to the platform's data, while maintaining users' privacy.** Qualified, independent researchers can help Congress—and the social media companies themselves—better understand how the platform's algorithms are spreading antisemitism.

Experts from American Jewish Committee actively engage with social media companies on these issues, provide briefings and policy recommendations, and serve as a trusted flagger or early warning partner, which allows us to escalate harmful content and alert the companies to changing trends in antisemitism. AJC would be happy to brief Members of Congress to ensure you remain updated on the latest data and can develop comprehensive policies that can make these platforms safer for all users.

### **Antisemitism On Campus**



Unfortunately, a large number of antisemitic incidents we have seen since October 7, 2023, have occurred on college campuses. At George Washington University, pro-Hamas phrases, including “Glory to Our Martyrs” were projected for hours onto a building in the heart of the campus. At Cornell University, a student threatened to kill Jewish students in an online forum. At the University of Maryland, students chanted, “there is only one solution - intifada revolution,” with “Holocaust 2.0” found chalked on the ground at the time of the rally. In December 2024, a freshman at George Mason University was arrested and charged with plotting a mass casualty attack on the Israeli consulate in New York, which he referred to as “a symbol of Judaism in the world.” These types of antisemitic incidents have continued well into the 2024-2025 academic year as schools have struggled to appropriately respond.

### *How Congress Can Counter Campus Antisemitism*

In our [\*State of Antisemitism in America 2024 Report\*](#), 32% of Jewish university students reported feeling uncomfortable or unsafe at a campus event because of their Jewish identity, a 75% increase from our study last year. Universities are not fostering an open and safe environment for their students. In the months following Hamas’ attacks, the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights received almost three times as many Title VI complaints as the entire previous fiscal year. And we don’t even know the extent of the problem because filing a Title VI case is not a process that many students know how to do. **Congress should pass the Protecting Students on Campus Act (S.163), bipartisan legislation which would not only empower students to report Title VI violations they experience but also help ensure institutions of higher education are properly addressing discrimination complaints, so that safe learning environments are guaranteed for all.**

I am concerned by the Administration’s executive order on March 20, 2025, titled “Improving Education Outcomes by Empowering Parents, States, and Communities,” which was intended to begin the process of eliminating the Department of Education. These proposed cuts directly impact the Department’s Office of Civil Rights (OCR), which enforces civil rights laws in any educational institution that receives Department of Education funding. Without OCR, along with other critical Department of Education programs, the protections guaranteed for Jewish students by Title VI could be compromised if complaints are not investigated in a thorough and timely manner. **Because of this, Congress should call on the Trump Administration to support the Office for Civil Rights, ensure adequate staffing levels in Washington, D.C. and in all regional offices, and provide at least \$162 million for OCR so that it can continue to carry out its important mission of keeping students safe.** As more than half of the OCR regional offices were recently closed, a review must be undertaken to understand the impact of that decision. Additionally, there must be guidance on where the OCR’s functions will be housed going forward in the federal government. Students deserve to know the federal government will

be there to enforce the rights and protections afforded to them and step in when these rights are violated.

### **Addressing Security Threats**

Just as we can do more to educate and train people to understand antisemitism, more also needs to be done to protect Jewish communities from physical threats. Our [\*State of Antisemitism in America 2024 Report\*](#) data found that, for American Jews who are affiliated with a Jewish institution, 30% said their institutions were targeted by graffiti, threats, or attacks in the last five years. Nearly one-third of a minority group's institutions have been threatened. And as alarming as that number is, even more American Jews think their synagogue, their campus Hillel, their JCC, or their kosher deli might be next. For American Jews who are affiliated with a Jewish institution, 70% said their institutions have increased security measures since October 7, 2023.

#### *How Congress Can Address Security Threats*

**Congress should support community-based violence prevention programs and encourage local law enforcement to build stronger ties with synagogues, Jewish community centers, Jewish day schools, and other Jewish institutions and organizations — and vice versa.**

Through these relationships, Jewish communities can avail themselves of state and local-level training, technical assistance, and resources to bolster their security. And these local efforts should work in conjunction with federal programs such as the Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP).

The NSGP provides funding for nonprofits at high risk of terrorist threats and attacks to increase their preparedness and support security needs. This essential program has been severely underfunded for years, only fulfilling 42% of requests in 2023. Since October 7, 2023, Jewish institutional applicants to the NSGP have increased as antisemitic attacks have surged, and fears about attacks have become pervasive. Funding for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program is currently frozen, leaving hundreds of Jewish and other religious institutions increasingly vulnerable to attack. **Congress should call on the Trump Administration to immediately unfreeze this vital funding and, further, ensure the program continues by providing \$500 million in fiscal year 2026.** I want to thank Congress for its continued bipartisan support for this program. It is more vital now than ever before.

### **The Need For a National Coordinator to Counter Antisemitism**

In the United States, while we have a Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism in the U.S. Department of State, their focus is global. The efforts of the Federal Task Force to Combat

Antisemitism can be streamlined and amplified by including all federal agencies. Additionally, having a point person solely focused on leading interagency coordination and building infrastructure around combating antisemitism, including leading and maintaining the process of sharing federal government efforts across agencies and with the Jewish community, will make countering antisemitism more efficient and effective.

### *How Congress Can Help Create a National Coordinator*

**Congress should work with the Administration to appoint a national coordinator to counter antisemitism so that our government continues to take a whole-of-government approach to fight the scourge of antisemitism.**

### **Engage With Jewish Communities**

**I implore you to take the time to personally engage with the Jewish communities in your state.** You could attend a local Shabbat dinner or participate in a roundtable discussion. Sit down with and listen to Jewish students about what they are seeing and encountering in their schools and on campus. You'll witness the challenges they face and the experiences that shape their lives. Let your staff and your constituents know that you stand with the Jewish community as they boldly describe what they have faced. There is no more important ally to our community than the people we elect to represent us in Washington. With our 25 regional offices nationwide, connecting with your local AJC office, Jewish Federation, and leaders of large synagogues is a great way to start building these meaningful connections.

### **Fighting Antisemitism Will Strengthen Our Democracy**

This moment is not only about the Jewish community, but also about the society we live in, and we must find ways to work together in a bipartisan manner to protect Jewish seniors, combat antisemitism in society, and create a better future for our children and grandchildren. When I was in Congress, I swore to uphold the Constitution and worked hard to defend the families in my district. As the CEO of AJC, I lead a 118-year-old global organization dedicated to creating a world where Jews thrive and are safe. Right now, that starts with defeating antisemitism, and by working together, we can aggressively wage this battle and our victory will be protecting the Jewish community and strengthening our nation.

The hatred of Jews and antisemitism has plagued our world for thousands of years. It has led to Jews being vilified, isolated, harassed, chased, expelled, hunted, and murdered. At its core, antisemitism is a symptom of extremism and the fraying of our shared social cohesion. When antisemitism is tolerated, it means even more conspiracy theories have the air to bloom into something more dangerous and sinister. It means there is a rot gnawing at the foundation of our

society and that we are at risk of democratic backsliding, extremism, and dehumanization. And it means that every one of us, not just the Jewish community, is worse off. Fighting antisemitism will not only protect the Jewish community in America but also protect our democracy.

For American Jewish seniors – more than 30,000 of whom are Holocaust survivors, as well as veterans of our military who put their lives on the line to fight for our country's freedom, small and large business owners who contributed to our economy, and the countless others who, in their own ways, gave all of themselves to the promise of America – the moment they are facing right now is scary. American Jewish seniors remember a time when Jews were often intentionally ostracized in our country. Through their tenacity and dedication to American and Jewish values, American Jews have experienced what some have deemed a “Golden Age” for our community. But now, with antisemitism on the rise, the acceptance we have enjoyed is at risk of going away. These seniors deserve to live out their many remaining years celebrating the successes of their family and community, and observing their faith openly without worrying about what happens if they are proudly Jewish in public or if their children or grandchildren will be victims of antisemitism. For these amazing American Jewish seniors, for the Jewish community, for the future of our democracy, we must all come together to fight antisemitism now.

Thank you.