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RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

Witness Testimony for February 09, 2026 Hearing
Anti-Semitism and Religious Liberty in the Private Sector



**Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Draft Witness Testimony for Fifth Hearing
February 9, 2026
Washington, DC**

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PANEL I: HIGHER EDUCATION

Yitzchok Frankel

Thank you, Chair Patrick, and members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission, for inviting me to speak today.

My name is Yitzy Frankel. I'm a father of four, a recent graduate of UCLA Law School, and—unfortunately—a firsthand witness to the erosion of religious freedom on American college campuses. As an Orthodox Jew and descendant of Holocaust survivors, my faith isn't just a part of my life—it's the core of who I am. I wear a kippah, keep kosher, observe Shabbat, and pray daily. These practices sustained me through law school. And it is my faith that made me a target when antisemitism surged at UCLA after October 7, 2023.

In the wake of Hamas's brutal attacks, UCLA's campus became a breeding ground for hatred. Activists chanted genocidal slogans like “from the river to the sea” and “Intifada revolution.” Jews at UCLA witnessed classmates smashing a piñata of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu while yelling “beat that f---ing Jew.”

But the worst came in spring 2024, when activists set up an encampment on Royce Quad—the heart of campus—and created a Jew Exclusion Zone. Masked enforcers set up checkpoints, barricades, and required wristbands for entry. Jewish students like me were stopped, harassed, and physically blocked unless we disavowed Israel's right to exist and hid our religious symbols, like a Star of David necklace or a kippah.

To illustrate how chilling this was, I brought something with me today, a copy of my grandfather's Nazi-issued work permit from the Holocaust. This document, with a fake non-Jewish identification, was the only “paper” that allowed him to pass safely through checkpoints and escape death. Eighty years later, on an American university campus, I was shocked that I was expected to wear an activist-approved wristband and disavow my Jewish faith just to access public spaces. This is not the first time someone in my family has needed the correct identification to pass safely. We must ensure it is the last.

80 years after the Holocaust, many of my Jewish classmates lived in fear on an American college campus. The way I was treated as a Jew on UCLA's campus violated my right to freely exercise

my religion in a public space, turning UCLA into a place of contempt rather than learning. This wasn't just random mob rule—it was enabled by institutional failure.

UCLA's administration didn't just stand by; they actively aided the exclusion. UCLA provided the barricades used to create the Jew Exclusion Zone. They stationed security to enforce the checkpoints. And despite their public admissions that they knew Jews were being blocked, they instructed the campus police to stand down, ceding public property to violent antisemites. Even UCLA's own Task Force to Combat Antisemitism later condemned all this as "structural antisemitism" and a violation of the First Amendment. The Justice Department agreed, finding in 2025 that UCLA acted with "deliberate indifference," creating a hostile environment under the Equal Protection Clause and Title VI.

My experience mirrors a national crisis: similar discrimination and harassment at Columbia, Harvard, Northwestern, and beyond, where antisemitism masquerades as political protest, but targets religious identity. Post-October 7, Jewish students nationwide have faced isolation, threats, and chilled expression of faith—wearing a kippah or attending a Shabbat service becomes a risk.

That's why, with the help of brave lawyers from the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, Clement & Murphy, and Davis Polk, I sued UCLA alongside two other students and a professor. In August 2024, Judge Mark Scarsi issued an injunction, calling the mistreatment of Jews on UCLA's campus "unimaginable" and "abhorrent." UCLA appealed, but, after over a year of fighting, they finally surrendered in July 2025. The settlement included a federal court order barring exclusion of Jewish students and faculty, plus \$6.13 million—symbolizing the 613 commandments in the Torah. That sum included donations to Jewish organizations liked Chabad at UCLA, the Jewish Graduate Organization, and the Orthodox Union Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus.

This outcome wasn't just a personal victory—it exposed lessons for the nation. Litigation can hold failing institutions accountable, but it cannot be the only tool. UCLA's penalties, including frozen grants and proposed fines, show that accountability matters, yet some critics—even from Jewish groups—call these "punitive." I disagree: without consequences, universities will continue facilitating antisemitic hate. My case proves that swift enforcement protects religious liberty, but gaps remain.

Looking forward, I urge this commission to recommend policies that safeguard religious minorities like Jewish students. The administration must strengthen Title VI enforcement by the DOJ and Department of Education—mandate investigations within set timelines and tie federal funding to compliance.

Several days after October 7, when UCLA's Chancellor issued a weak statement that failed to unequivocally support Jewish students or condemn the celebrations of Jewish death sweeping campuses, I wrote to him directly. I quoted the Book of Esther. In it, Mordechai gives Queen Esther a dire warning: "Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape... If you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter. . . And who knows—perhaps you have attained this royal position for just such a crisis." (Esther 4:13-14) Leadership hesitated then, as it has too often since. But in three weeks, we will celebrate Purim—the story of how silence nearly doomed a people, yet courage and providence brought deliverance.

I take Mordecai's words to heart, and this is why I stood up to UCLA and am not afraid to call them, and others, out. This commission, and the policies it recommends, can be our modern Mordechai and Esther: a call to action before it's too late. Let us ensure that no Jewish student—or any believer—must ever again hide their faith to access education, public spaces, or safety in America. Relief and deliverance must come from here, now, through bold protection of religious liberty for all. Thank you. I welcome your questions.

Coach Bruce Pearl

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you today. My name is Bruce Pearl. I have been outspoken about the dangers of rising antisemitism as a father, a husband, and a former college coach and current basketball analyst for Turner & CBS Sports.

Since October 7, 2023, it has become increasingly clear that we are facing a moment of real danger. Not only for the Jewish people, but for the principles of religious freedom and human dignity that are central to this great country.

I have spent decades building and leading teams made up of people from every background, race, ethnicity, and religion. I know firsthand that when people judge each other by anything other than the content of their character and what they contribute, the entire team suffers. That truth extends far beyond sports.

History teaches us that when a society begins to scapegoat, exclude, or target a group based on their identity, the decay rarely stops with that group. Unfortunately, we are seeing those warning signs today across the United States.

Antisemitism is poisoning our society, and it will tear our country apart unless we stop it. Although Jews make up less than two percent of the U.S. population, more than sixty percent of religious hate crimes target Jewish people.

This poison is coming from across the political spectrum. On the far right, we see conspiracy theories about Jewish power and hidden “Israeli influence.” We see Holocaust denial, and efforts to demonize Jews as enemies of Christianity. On the far left, the Jewish people's basic rights and sense of belonging are being attacked under the guise of antizionism. From Islamist extremists, including terrorist groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis and their sponsor -the Iranian regime, **we face openly genocidal threats.** This Muslim Brotherhood literally wants me dead as I sit here before you today because I am Jewish, or I support Zionism, the Jewish peoples right to live in OUR ANCESTRAL HOMELAND, the land of Israel.

While many different aspects of Jewish religious and ethnic identity are being attacked, it's important, it's vital, it's essential to recognize the specific role that Israel and Zionism play in the current moment.

According to Pew, the vast majority of Jews believe that caring about Israel is an essential or important part of what it means to be Jewish. Similarly, polls show that the vast majority of Jewish people consider denying Israel's right to exist and chants like “from the river to the sea,” to be antisemitic. This has nothing to do with criticizing the Israeli government, which Israelis and Jews do all the time. It reflects the fact that Zionism is central to Jewish religious and ethnic identity, and rooted in thousands of years of history, language, culture, faith, and geography. Jewish prayer, scripture, and ritual are filled with references to Zion. Jews have prayed

toward Jerusalem for millennia. Our holidays end with the words, “Next year in Jerusalem.” Half of the world’s Jews live in Israel today, creating an unbroken connection between the Jewish people and our homeland, ISRAEL.

Bad faith actors will twist these facts and use them to claim that Jews are disloyal to this country. But the truth is we’re like countless other groups that have immigrated here. We’re proud of our unique heritage, and we’re also proud Americans who have helped make our country great. I grew up in Boston, a town with great ethnic neighborhoods which sometimes led to a lack of integration, which led to some mistrust and tension. But the Italians of the North End, the Irish of South Boston, the African Americans of Roxbury, or the Jews of Dorchester and Mattapan, weren’t any less American because they loved their ethnic backgrounds.

Because many people don’t fully understand who Jews are, they also can’t recognize a lot of the bigotry we experience today. So let’s be clear: when someone dehumanizes Israelis, promotes discrimination against the world’s only Jewish state, or denies its right to exist, those are not simply controversial political opinions. They are forms of hate that have real-world consequences right here in America.

Much of this hostility spreads in ways that are not easy to see. In too many university classrooms, the notion that Israel is a settler-colonial state is taken as a given, even though it is a lie that erases three thousand years of Jewish history and connection to the Jewish homeland. Some students are so poisoned by such lies that they vandalize property and TRY HARD TO intimidate Jewish peers on their campuses.

Meanwhile, just last month a group called the Muslim American Society, which has received over \$260,000 in taxpayer funding from the City of New York, was found to be selling merchandise supporting terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah. In this environment, it should come as no shock when we see far left and Islamist extremists harassing Jews outside synagogues in New York, Los Angeles, and other cities.

Threats to Jewish religious liberty from the right are also growing. Just last month, a young athlete burned down the historic Beth Israel synagogue in Mississippi and later told police that it was “the synagogue of Satan.” That phrase has recently become popular again because far right podcasters are spreading it to millions of people online, seeking to turn Christians against their Jewish neighbors. This return to religious intolerance builds on years of far-right figures urging Americans to blame Jews for every problem in their lives. Combining the “Church only,” “America only” and “White only” CAN POTENTIALLY BE powerfully attractive to MANY young white Christians trying to live the American Dream.

The end result of all the disinformation and radicalization is deadly violence. Last year, a far-left terrorist murdered a young couple, Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim, outside the Capital Jewish Museum in Washington, D.C. I was in DC that very morning speaking to members of Congress in the Capital, Celebrating Jewish Heritage month with The Combating Antisemitism

movement. That young couple could have easily been me. When I leave this building this morning, my head has to be on a swivel. In Boulder, Colorado, an Islamist terrorist hurled Molotov cocktails at participants who were part of a weekly solidarity walk calling for the release of hostages held by Hamas. The terrorist ended up murdering 82-year-old Karen Diamond, a Holocaust survivor who came to this country for a better life and was murdered by the same hate that fueled Nazi Germany. In 2018 and 2019, white supremacist terrorists targeted synagogues in Pittsburg and Poway, murdering 12 Jewish worshippers.

This is not who we are, but it is who we will become if we do not take dramatic and urgent actions to fight antisemitism NOW.

This Commission and our Federal government have an essential role to play in that fight. Here's how:

First, civil rights laws must be fully enforced. Federal prohibitions against identity-based discrimination, under provisions like Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act, the Free Exercise Clause, and the Equal Protection Clause, must be applied consistently and evenhandedly for the protection of all protected groups, including Jewish Americans.

Second, institutions, including our own Congress, should be encouraged to adopt and use a clear, widely accepted working definition of antisemitism — **the IHRA definition** — as a nonbinding tool. The clarity of this definition helps protect civil rights while fully respecting First Amendment freedoms.

Third, antisemitic incidents must be accurately reported and tracked so policymakers can respond effectively to threats against religious communities.

And finally, and for me this is the most important, education is crucial. Academic and civic institutions must teach what antisemitism looks like today in all its contemporary forms. Universities want to stay institutionally neutral. They don't want to take sides for fear of protests or stirring up the pot. We first teach the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, trust and lies and propaganda. The TRUTH is THAT Israel has been surrounded by ISLAMIST neighbors WHO RULE THEIR PEOPLE, AND who simply don't want to live next door or side by side, they want the Jews gone from the land. The truth is that if the Jews had lost ANY OF THE WARS THAT WERE THRUST UPON IT in 1948, 1967, 1973 or during any other year since, INCLUDING SINCE THE INVASION ON OCTOBER 7, 2023, Jerusalem would not be the FREE city that welcomes AND PROTECTS all faiths to visit, LIVE and worship. Yet we are afraid to teach our kids those simple truths.

I love the United States. This country saved my family. Because of its promise of liberty, my family was able to build a life here. But we all know that freedom must be protected. It does not preserve itself. ***And today, that responsibility is more urgent than ever.***

We have a choice. We can hope this moment passes. Or we can stand up and say clearly: this is not who we are.

I believe this Commission is here to do the latter, and I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute.

Thank you again for allowing me to speak today, and for your commitment to defending religious liberty for ***all*** Americans.

Finally, my message to the haters: ***THE JEWISH PEOPLE ARE NOT GOING ANYWHERE.***

God Bless America and Am Yisrael Chai.

Rabbi Ari Berman

Antisemitism on Campus: A Symptom of a Deeper Crisis

Introduction

- Antisemitism on college campuses is real and alarming
 - It is not the root problem, but a **symptom** of a deeper institutional failure
 - The true crisis: erosion of moral purpose, intellectual inheritance, and institutional courage
 - Universities have advanced scientifically while abandoning their cultural and moral mission
-

The Loss of Moral and Intellectual Anchors

- Embrace of moral and cultural relativism undermined universities' custodial role
 - Decline of liberal arts and shared intellectual foundations
 - Fragmentation into narrow, politicized, or specialized silos
 - Students lack tools to:
 - Distinguish truth from falsehood
 - Weigh justice against cruelty
 - Choose moral courage over convenience
-

What Universities Once Were—and Why It Mattered

- Universities as moral and intellectual communities, not credential vendors
 - Education as entry into a living tradition across generations
 - Expanding canon rooted in enduring texts and shared inquiry
 - Students formed as thinkers with judgment, imagination, and conscience
 - Moral clarity emerged naturally from this model
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Antisemitism as a Consequence of Moral Drift

- Moral erosion leads to campus discord, distrust, and confusion

- Post–October 7 failures stemmed from lack of moral orientation, not policy gaps
 - Leadership focused on optics and messaging rather than ethical clarity
 - Gap between stated principles and lived practice reflects loss of institutional conscience
 - Failure to clearly condemn antisemitism leaves Jewish students vulnerable and extremism unchecked
-

A Quiet Shift: Students Seeking Meaning

- Growing student dissatisfaction with excellence absent purpose
 - Demand for grounding, context, and moral seriousness
 - Signals a major shift in higher education priorities
-

The Rise of Faith-Based Colleges and Universities (FBCUs)

- FBCUs educate ~10% of U.S. undergraduates and outpace national enrollment growth
 - Growth reflects unmet demand for meaning-centered education
 - Demonstrate that:
 - Academic rigor and moral formation reinforce each other
 - Scientific innovation thrives within moral frameworks
 - Collaborative institutional culture focused on whole-person formation
 - Evidence of renewed hunger for integrated intellect and purpose
-

Conclusion: Reclaiming Purpose and Investing in the Future

- Most hopeful trend: the return of purpose in higher education
 - Antisemitism will not be solved by policy alone
 - Universities must reclaim their role as moral actors shaping judgment and conscience
 - Clear moral language protects Jewish students and strengthens campuses
 - FBCUs offer a compelling model worth national attention
-

Policy Implication: Invest in Faith-Informed Research

- Federal government funding for FBCUs, especially faith-engaged research
 - Faith is deeply influential yet under examined in public research agendas
 - Science is incomplete without understanding community context
 - Faith-based institutions are uniquely equipped to study these kinds of questions
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Closing

- Reconnecting intellect to meaning restores education's true purpose
- Education should shape character as well as knowledge
- This renewal is essential to securing the moral future of society

PANEL II: ANTISEMITISM, THEN AND NOW; ANTISEMITIC IDEOLOGIES

Joint Testimony of Liat Cohen-Reeis, Christian & Jewish Alliance, and Pastor Jonathan Cooper, The Mission Church

Ms. Cohen-Reeis:

Mr. Chairman, members of the commission, thank you for this opportunity. I am the founder and director of the Christian & Jewish Alliance in San Diego, California. I'm here to share about the hostility we have faced from antisemitic agitators who disrupted our worship services. We are seeking legal protection so that we can worship in peace.

As a devout Jew, I believe that Hashem (G-d) created an everlasting covenant with Abraham, described in the Torah. This covenant established the Jewish people as an ethno-religious group whose ancestral homeland is in the modern State of Israel. My religious beliefs require me to support and pray for the land of Israel, as a safe haven for the Jewish people. The term that most Jews around the world use to encompass our connection to the Jewish ancestral homeland of Israel, which is part of my religious, ethnic, and cultural identity, is "Zionism."

The massacre on October 7, 2023 in Israel was the largest slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust. During that time, many of us in the San Diego Jewish community felt isolated. Yet I refused to believe that we were actually alone. I reached out to local Christian leaders, including The Mission Church, and we formed the Alliance based on our shared religious beliefs regarding the nation of Israel. I also became the Director of the Antisemitism Task Force at StandWithUs, which is an international organization devoted to combatting antisemitism and misinformation on Israel through education and outreach.

At first, we regularly hosted events bringing Christians and Jews together, from intimate Shabbat dinners hosted by local churches to large worship services. But hostile agitators have consistently targeted our public events, attacking us as we worship. Our first event was an outdoor worship service in October 2024 at a Jewish community center. A group of individuals tried to drown out our message with sirens and bullhorns. Because we were in a gated area with a large field, they had to stay at a distance. But the agitators, along with Code Pink San Diego, posted on social media saying, "We needed to disturb their peace." Little did we know how these agitators would make their threats a terrifying reality in the year ahead. Their campaign of trespassing, disruption, and harassment at our worship services in 2025 has alienated nearly all of the Christian churches that were initially willing to partner with our Jewish community. These attacks have made me feel even more alone than when I founded the Alliance. That's one of the ultimate goals of antisemitism – which includes isolating Jews by attacking anyone who dares to support them.

Pastor Cooper:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Commission, for this opportunity to share the truth about what Jews and Christians are experiencing on the west coast. I serve as assistant pastor at The Mission Church in Carlsbad, California.

God's Word calls Jesus' church to support Israel and her people. Our conviction comes from Genesis and Deuteronomy, when God makes and affirms his unconditional covenant with Israel to be His light to the Nations, setting His love upon his chosen people. We believe that God's covenant with Abraham clearly stated an everlasting grant of "the Promised Land," which includes modern Israel. The Bible teaches that God loves when His people are protected by others, who even at their own expense stand with Israel. The Mission Church takes God's words to Abraham seriously; "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you." To translate these beliefs into application, we as shepherds of The Mission Church faithfully teach our members the whole counsel of the Bible and provide opportunities to help our congregation understand the modern problems facing Jews and the Nation of Israel.

After the October 7 massacre, our Church took initiative to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Jewish people in their time of need. We've been deeply honored and blessed to partner with Liat through the Christian & Jewish Alliance. Our interfaith worship service on March 19 was part of this mission. In our sanctuary, we prayed, worshipped, and heard a message by Dr. Einat Wilf, who is an Israeli citizen, former member of the Israeli Knesset, renowned scholar, and expert on the current conflict in Israel.

The sanctuary was packed with more than 450 people, including many Jewish guests. Our lead pastor opened the service with a warm welcome and prayer. Jews and Christians linked arms and held hands during worship in song. It was beautiful. But the atmosphere completely changed shortly into Dr. Wilf's message, when a hostile agitator stood up inside the sanctuary and began screaming hateful language about Jews and accusing us all of "murder."

That first agitator refused to leave the sanctuary and physically resisted members of our safety team who tried to escort him out. Soon after Dr. Wilf began speaking again, a second agitator began screaming and resisting removal, stalling the service yet again and frightening worshippers. This happened seven different times from agitators who pretended to be guests, strategically planted themselves throughout the sanctuary, and timed their hostile rants to be as disruptive as possible. As each new disruptor jumped up, the terror and distraction only grew.

One agitator screamed to free Palestine "from the river to the sea," calling for the elimination of the Jewish homeland, and screamed epithets in front of adults and children alike, including "f--- you." When we began to remove her from the sanctuary, she forcefully resisted, planting her feet and slamming her body into me and other safety team members. We almost fell down the balcony stairs.

Meanwhile, a mob grew outside the Church's front door as each agitator was removed from the sanctuary. They screamed through bullhorns and blared sirens right outside the Church, shouting chants like, "Mission Church, you can't hide! We charge you with genocide!" They falsely accused our members and Jewish guests of being "Nazis." My peaceable invitation to speak with these agitators was met with violent rhetoric and hostile body language.

Our worship service was shattered by the disruptions. Our guests feared for their safety and felt more alone than ever. Then the agitators dominated the narrow sidewalk right outside the Church's front door, blocking the exit with their bodies, large signs, flags, carts, and bullhorns. One waived a large Palestinian flag around like a weapon. The mob completely blocked the path from the entrance to the parking lot. As several hundred worshippers tried to leave, this caused a massive bottleneck.

We had coordinated with the police earlier as a proactive measure, but they said they couldn't help because the disruptors were on a public sidewalk. When violence became inevitable, the police and members of our safety team finally cleared a narrow path, so that a few could safely leave at a time. But the mob remained. Terrified families begged me to be personally escorted for safety reasons.

I have never experienced anything like that mob. Nobody should have to pay that price simply to worship. We have the right to safely exit out our main church doors without fear of violence or harassment. To our shock, several of the same disruptors returned to our Church on Easter Sunday, the holiest day of the Christian calendar, to harass members, guests, and children celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. They blared sirens and hostile chants and held graphic signs with photos of bloody children. Although we had scheduled children's activities including a bouncy obstacle course, Easter crafts, and animal petting station in the parking lot, we had to bring the children inside for their safety. Many children were moved to frightened crying because the noise and anger of the agitators was inescapable even inside their Sunday school classrooms. Many first-time guests drove away instead of exploring Christianity by coming to our Easter services, which is traditionally our largest attendance of the year. After we peacefully invited amicable discussion, one agitator threatened to come back on Mother's Day, prompting us to retain counsel and send a warning letter. But the same agitators returned to disrupt our next service with the Christian and Jewish Alliance on September 7.

Ms. Cohen-Reeis:

On September 7, we planned an interfaith worship service bringing multiple synagogues and churches together. We met at the Legacy International Center, a Christian venue that regularly hosts worship services and is also supportive of Israel. I thought it would be a safe space for Jews and Christians to worship together. We invited rabbis and pastors to pray and speak, and we sang in Hebrew and English, led by The Mission Church's praise team and an African American gospel choir. We did not advertise the event publicly but invited only our distribution list. Over 480 guests registered.

But right before the doors opened, the Center's staff told me, "They're here." I saw angry disruptors dressed in black, wearing face masks and waving Palestinian flags on the sidewalk right outside the event space. The agitators laid down dolls along the driveway so that guests had to drive over the dolls, as the agitators screamed "baby killers" at them on megaphones. My friends Ruth, Stephanie, Marca, and Jake are all devout Jews whose worship experience that day was ruined, and I'd like to share their stories.

As Ruth and her husband were driving into the event in their small car, they saw agitators blocking the entrance, blaring sirens and shouting angry chants through bullhorns. Several disruptors were swarming back and forth across the driveway, holding signs with swastikas and blocking cars with their bodies. When Ruth pulled up, a pink-haired woman wearing a full black face mask jumped onto the hood of her car, screaming and banging on the windshield. Ruth was terrified.

When my friend Stephanie pulled up in her car, she was blocked and her car was swarmed by agitators. One agitator announced over a bullhorn, "Next we also have the House of Israel president, super racist, super hateful!" Another agitator screamed at her to get out of the car and fight, while a third smacked her car window and tried to shove a sign inside. The disruptors were so aggressive that many guests drove away altogether. Over 100 guests who had registered did not attend.

When my friend Marca tried to drive in, the agitators blocked her car too. On foot, she tried to ask the agitators to get off private property, and four or five of them surrounded her, shoving their bullhorns into her face, and aggressively filming her on their phones. She only escaped because our friend Rodney put himself in harm's way to protect her. The police didn't stop the agitators.

Once the worship service started, the agitators banged drums and blared sirens the entire time. The sirens were so loud that they almost drowned out our speakers. Many guests had ringing in their ears for days afterward.

When my friend Jake asked the agitators to quiet down so that we could pray and worship, several of them surrounded him and crowded him into the busy street. They got in his face, blared sirens, and banged pots and pans. When he tried to walk back to the worship service, the agitators blocked his path and followed him, screaming, "Go back to Israel!" and "Zionism is Nazism. You are a Nazi, you are a baby killer!" These are just some of the many horrible incidents that happened to guests trying to enter the property.

After the event, disruptors personally attacked our guests on Instagram for their Jewish identity. Using a CodePink channel, an agitator also posted videos threatening, "We will not give them a moment of peace." None of my friends deserve this kind of hostility and persecution. All we wanted was to gather safely, pray, and worship together without fearing for our lives.

This is what antisemitism looks like today. This is happening not just in San Diego, but all over the country. In 2019, President Trump signed an executive order adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition, which states: "Antisemitism is a certain perception

of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities." That is exactly what we are experiencing. The agitators expressed hate toward us at our worship services, intimidating, obstructing, and interfering with our free exercise. They targeted our Christian friends and allies, trying to isolate us by punishing anyone who dares to support us.

This hatred has devastated the Alliance. Since September 7, we haven't been able to hold any more events. Many guests are afraid to attend in the future. The agitators must have access to our membership list, leaving me unable to use it. And nearly all of the Christian churches that were initially willing to partner with us are now afraid that harm will come to their own congregations, all except for The Mission Church. We are seeking legal protection through a federal lawsuit so that the Alliance, the Church, and other people of faith around the nation can worship in peace in the future.

Pastor Cooper:

These disruptions have deeply impacted our Church, which has had to take major precautions for the safety of our congregation. Our members have had to face the difficult choice between suppressing their voices to support Israel or risking their own safety to stand for Biblical truth. I know this terrible choice firsthand. My four young children—then 9, 10, 12, and 14 years old—attended the March 19 service. I was hoping that they would learn about Israel and grow in their understanding. Instead, my wife and I were forced to walk them to our car through the gauntlet of angry disruptors screaming “you can't hide” and “f--- you” at them. The event—which should have been a beacon of hope and unity between Christians and Jews in our safe sanctuary—turned into a traumatic source of nightmares for my children.

As difficult as the safety concerns are, the deepest harm from all of this is spiritual. Behind the agitators and their volatile chaos is a pointed message – that Israel is the real enemy, if you stand with them you are no better than Nazis, and we will silence you with fear and hostility even in the sacred spaces of your worship. The agitators have directly attacked our faith. This harmful ideology has seeped into our own church, especially among young people, as it has more broadly in conservative Christian circles. The most concerning element of all this as a pastor is not whether our members are willing to stand for truth in the face of opposition – it's when they start to question what the truth is.

That's why antisemitism is not just a Jewish problem. It is everyone's problem, especially those of us who follow Christ. We cannot let the agitators, the influencers, or antisemitism disguised as academic rhetoric scare us into silence. God clearly calls us to support our Jewish neighbors, and it is our honor to faithfully do so. Our Church cannot hide or be silent while Jews are most threatened.

That's why we retained First Liberty Institute and Jones Day, and together with the Alliance and our friend Ruth Mastron, we filed a federal lawsuit in November 2025. In the FACE Act, Congress made clear that it violates federal law to "intentionally injure, intimidate or interfere with or attempt to injure, intimidate or interfere with any person lawfully exercising or seeking to exercise the First Amendment right of religious freedom at a place of religious worship." The FACE Act should protect The Mission Church, the Christian & Jewish Alliance, and every church and synagogue in this great nation from interference by agitators seeking to disrupt our free exercise of religion.

In closing, we are so grateful for this administration's courageous commitment to religious freedom. Thank you to Attorney General Bondi, Assistant Attorney General Harmeet Dhillon, and the many others who are defending people of faith in similar cases in Minnesota, New Jersey, California, and all over this nation. We are hopeful that the United States government will stand with us too. The freedom to worship in peace is sacred, especially at a time when Jews and Christians are under attack. Thank you for listening to our story. God made a covenant with Israel to be His light to the Nations. May the light shine brighter than the darkness, and may God bless you.

Dr. Moshe Glick

Personal Introduction & Urgent Context

- Dr. Moshe Glick: Father, grandfather, dentist from West Orange, NJ; active community volunteer (EMT, nonprofit committees aiding the ill and food-insecure).
- Presented video footage from November 13, 2024, showing a violent assault outside Congregation Ohr Torah synagogue in West Orange during a peaceful Jewish-Christian gathering that included prayer for hostages in Gaza and honoring Israel as the only democracy in the Middle East. youtube.com/watch?v=OmmRkED78Us&feature=youtu.be
- Incident underscores the alarming rise of antisemitism in modern America and the urgent need for equal protection under the law.

The Incident & Double Standard in Justice

- Pro-Hamas agitators marched toward the synagogue to disrupt the event.
- One aggressor (Altaf Sharif) defied police orders, charged past officers, and assaulted a 64-year-old Jewish man by choking him—an act captured on video that could have been fatal. Sharif later gave false statements to police.
- No charges filed against Sharif; no meaningful investigation of others. Prosecutors stated: “No one else committed a crime, only Glick, so no one else was investigated.”
- Dr. Glick intervened to stop the assault after repeated pleas for police help went unanswered; he was arrested instead.
- Faced four felony charges, including bias intimidation (mandatory 5–10 years prison, even for first-time offenders); indicted twice (first indictment abandoned by prosecutors as flawed).
- Refused Pretrial Intervention diversion program to avoid admitting guilt for an act of defense of others.
- Full vindication: On his final day in office (January 2026), Gov. Phil Murphy granted a complete pardon, exonerating Dr. Glick despite no conviction.
- Gratitude to U.S. Assistant Attorney Harmeet Dhillon and DOJ colleagues Jonathan Gross and Orlando Sonza for FACE Act enforcement and shining national light on the injustice.

Broader Pattern & Implications

- Clear double standard: Disruptions of other religious services often excused as free speech; Jewish self-defense aggressively prosecuted.

- Selective enforcement criminalizes Jewish protection while excusing attacks on Jews.
- If police and prosecutors fail to protect—or target defenders—Jewish communities face grim options: withdraw from public life, emigrate to Israel, or demand systemic reform.
- Risk: Normalizing antisemitism within law enforcement threatens equal justice and all freedoms.

Historical & Biblical Warnings – The "Canary in the Coal Mine"

- Jews serve as the canary in the coal mine: earliest sign of societal illness (erosion of democratic values, intolerance, hatred that eventually endangers everyone).
- Historical examples: Nazi Germany (persecution of Jews led to Holocaust and regime collapse); Soviet Union (suppression, pogroms, contributed to internal rot and fall); ancient Egypt (Pharaoh's oppression in Parshat Bo brought plagues and decline of a mighty empire).
- Personal connection: Wife's four grandparents were Holocaust survivors, two having survived Auschwitz—a living reminder of unchecked hatred's consequences.

Hope & Divine Principle

- Genesis 12:3: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
- America's exceptional prosperity and freedom tied historically to protecting Jews and embracing Judeo-Christian values (Founding Fathers' inspiration from Hebrew scriptures, refuge for immigrants fleeing pogroms and Holocaust).
- Current threats: Violent protests, calls to erase Jewish existence, foreign-funded radicalization.
- Cannot follow Europe's path (fortified synagogues, fear-driven emigration).
- Purim lesson (Book of Esther): Silence at this moment risks forfeiture of blessings; "for such a time as this."

Call to Action & Closing

- Commission must address enforcement failures and ensure equal justice—or risk broader societal decline.
- Jews will endure ("relief and deliverance will arise from another place"), but America's future depends on whether it stands against hatred or remains silent/complicit.
- Offer to assist: Ready to help commission and White House with recommendations and implementation.

- Closing blessing (Numbers 6:24-26 – Priestly Blessing): May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.
- God bless President Trump, God bless America, Am Yisrael Chai.

PANEL III

Leo Terrell

Thank you, Chairman Lieutenant Governor Patrick, members of the Commission, and distinguished guests.

I want to begin by recognizing President Trump for his executive order establishing the Religious Liberty Commission. That order reaffirmed a foundational promise of this nation, that every American has the right to freely exercise their faith without fear, intimidation, or punishment. Religious liberty is not a privilege granted by the government. Religious liberty is a God given right protected by our Constitution. When that right is threatened for one group, it is weakened for all of us.

I also want to express my sincere gratitude to Attorney General Bondi for her leadership and unwavering commitment to protecting civil rights and religious freedom. I thank Chairman Lieutenant Governor Patrick for his principled leadership of this Commission, and Vice Chair Dr. Ben Carson for his lifelong service to this country.

I appear before you today not only as a civil rights attorney, but as someone who has spent his entire career confronting injustice wherever it appears. I currently serve as the Chair of the DOJ Task Force to Combat Antisemitism. This role should not be symbolic. This role reflects urgent, active work, because what we are witnessing in this country is a growing crisis of religious liberty and truth.

Let me address the elephant in the room upfront. I am not Jewish.

I am a Black Baptist. And I am proud to be standing here fighting antisemitism because this is not a Jewish issue. This is a civil rights issue. A constitutional issue. A moral issue. And ultimately, it is a test of whether this nation still means what it says when it promises liberty and justice for all.

History teaches us something we ignore at our peril. **Hatred never stops with the Jews!**

The Jewish community understood this during the civil rights movement. Jewish Americans marched. They organized. They donated. They stood shoulder to shoulder with Black Americans when doing so carried real danger. Some paid with their lives. They understood then what we must remember now. When lies and hate are tolerated, injustice spreads.

And today, hate is spreading again.

We saw the horrifying results of antisemitism on October 7th. Entire families butchered. Women gang raped. Elderly people dragged into captivity. Violence so extreme that the human mind struggles to comprehend it.

And the hate did not remain overseas.

Here in the United States, Jewish Americans are being targeted simply for practicing their faith.

As Chair of the DOJ Task Force to Combat Antisemitism, I do not learn about this problem from headlines or social media alone. I hear about it directly, every day, around the clock. Letters. Emails. Phone calls. Parents describing their children being targeted in schools. College students reporting harassment on campuses, being blocked and spit on when trying to go to class. Employees facing antisemitism in the workplace. Teachers encountering hostility within their own unions. Jewish people can't go online without being confronted by conspiracy theories and antisemitic lies pushed by influential voices on the far left and the far right, often amplified by foreign funding and foreign influence. Jewish Americans are even navigating hostility within our own federal government, where at one agency Jewish employees had to overcome enormous obstacles just to hold a Chanukah celebration.

In Denver, a Holocaust survivor was burned alive for calling for the release of hostages in Gaza. In Washington, DC, I watched as blood was wiped from the sidewalk outside the Capitol Jewish Museum after the murder of Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim. In Manhattan, a large group of anti-Zionist protestors blocked congregants, including children and families, from entering the Park East Synagogue. Jews were physically prevented from congregating inside their own house of prayer.

I wish this was an isolated incident. Across this country, protests have been deliberately staged directly outside synagogues, with chants and threats so aggressive that families fear entering to pray.

Antisemitism is present across every sector of American life, public and private, and the volume is overwhelming. That is why fighting antisemitism cannot be episodic or symbolic. Fighting antisemitism must be a full-time commitment, 365 days a year, 24 hours a day.

We must be honest about where this hatred against Jews begins. The mind virus does not start in adulthood. Our children are exposed to this mind virus in K-12 across the country! In too many classrooms, activist curricula are being pushed with the support and protection of powerful teacher unions that prioritize ideology over truth. History is distorted. Language is politicized. Israel is erased from the map. The Jewish people are portrayed as oppressors or mere victims. By the time many young people reach college, these narratives are deeply ingrained and resistant to truth. That is not education. That is indoctrination. And when teacher unions promote this conduct while claiming to speak for children, equity, or the future of education, they are betraying the public trust.

As a civil rights attorney, I have spent my life confronting injustice. I have seen how lies divide people. I have seen how selective outrage becomes a weapon. And I have seen what happens when good people stay silent because speaking up feels uncomfortable or risky.

But this moment **DEMANDS** moral clarity.

Antisemitism today is a stress test for civilization itself.

It tests whether truth still matters. It tests whether moral courage still exists when the pressure is high.

I have been told that speaking up for Israel and the Jewish people is risky. That it costs friendships. That it costs platforms. That it costs professional opportunities.

But history keeps score.

To the young people listening today, do not outsource your thinking. Ask questions. Demand sources. Follow the money. Demand consistency. And never confuse moral performance with truth and moral courage.

To the Jewish people in America and around the world, your right to live openly, freely, and safely as Jews is nonnegotiable. You are not alone.

The United States stands with you. President Trump stands with you. Attorney General Bondi stands with you. This Commission stands with you. And I stand with you.

My commitment to fighting antisemitism did not begin with this administration, and it does not end with it. This is a lifelong commitment. Because this fight is bigger than politics. This fight is about conscience. About truth. About the legacy we leave behind.

Standing against antisemitism is not a position I hold. Standing against antisemitism is a responsibility I carry.

I will continue to speak truth, even when inconvenient. I will continue to challenge lies, no matter how widely they are spread. And I will continue to defend the right of every American to live their faith openly and without fear.

This is not a position.

This is an obligation of us ALL.

Thank you.

Reverend Thomas P. Ferguson

Catholic Teaching on Antisemitism

This past year, 2025, the Catholic Church celebrated the 60th anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, which is very commonly known as Vatican II. Between 1961-1965, all of the bishops from around the world met in Rome, at the Vatican, to address issues relevant to the Church's teaching and practice as regards both its internal life and its mission in the world.

For most Catholics, the most significant and lasting impact of the Council was its provision for the celebration of Mass and other acts of worship in vernacular languages.

For those who are not Catholic, one of the greatest achievements of Vatican II was to renew the Church's commitment to ecumenism, or fostering a greater unity among Christians, in prayer, study, dialogue and service to those in need.

There are also two documents that are of tremendous significance for the work of this Commission, and they are the Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis humanae* (December 7, 1965) and the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra aetate* (October 28, 1965).

The Declaration on Religious Liberty affirmed as Catholic teaching, the idea that:

the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion ... in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others

The council further declare[d] that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is [also] to become a civil right. (DH 2)

In the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, the bishops at Vatican II reminded all Christians that:

according to God's saving design, the beginnings of [our] faith and [our] election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets

[And] since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is ... so great, ... [the Council wishes] to foster and recommend ... mutual understanding and respect, which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies, as well as of fraternal dialogue

[And, most importantly for our purposes today,] in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, [and] displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone (NA 4).

Thirty-five years later, this teaching on antisemitism prompted Saint John Paul II in the Jubilee Year 2000 to seek forgiveness on behalf of Christians of every time place, who might have ever contributed to acts, or a spirit of antisemitism in any way. Addressing our common Creator, he placed a note in the Western Wall, stating:

"We are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of yours to suffer, and, asking your forgiveness, we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood."

In their recent collaboration with the American Jewish Committee on a glossary of antisemitic terminology, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, echoing the words of Pope Francis, stated clearly: "A true Christian cannot be antisemitic."

Before I conclude these remarks, may I offer one brief personal example of how Catholics not only condemn antisemitism but also reflect a willingness to engage in fraternal collaboration that flows from the common spiritual patrimony of Christians and Jews:

From 2004-2008, I was pastor of Saint Thomas a Becket Catholic Church in Reston, Virginia. That church has the distinction of sharing what is one of the most prized portions of a faith community's patrimony – its parking lot! – with a Jewish community.

The Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation was established in 1967, with congregants, but no building of its own.

The community eventually acquired a portion of the land owned by the Catholic Church in Reston, and conducted its worship in the same space used by the Catholic parish until its synagogue was built on the property where both communities have since shared not only the parking lot, but also semi-annual Catholic-Jewish dialogues on various theological, spiritual and moral/ethical issues, while also collaborating together and in conjunction with a local interfaith non-profit to serve the material needs of those who are poor in the community.

It's a small example, but an apt conclusion to this brief description of the Catholic Church's absolute condemnation of antisemitism and its commitment to respect and collaborate with the Jewish community to make a positive contribution to the common good in our religiously pluralistic American society.

Elizabeth Spalding, PhD

Ideologies of Anti-Semitism

Outline for Witness Remarks at Religious Liberty Commission Hearing—Panel II: Anti-Semitism, Then and Now—February 9, 2026—Washington, D.C.

- As the Commissioners know, anti-Semitism has a long history. The purpose of these remarks is to help the American audience understand the ideologies (and sometimes, aspects or derivatives thereof) of anti-Semitism that negatively affect U.S. politics and education and undermine our freedoms, including religious liberty.
- This first requires a definition of ideology.
 - What ideology is not: Not just ideas or a set of ideas; not religious faith; not a political or economic point of view; not a political party or movement, although either can be or become the vehicle of an ideology.
 - What ideology is: a fixed political worldview that holds within it an agenda or plan for fundamental societal change; characterized by the belief that man's nature and thus society are malleable and can be remade and restructured (both repeatedly, if necessary); rooted in "truth" as defined and therefore relativized by the ideology, rather than permanent truth discovered through the harmony of reason and revelation (e.g., as expressed in the American Founding).
- Ideology was born during the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution and fully formed in the modern era. Aspects of anti-Semitic ideologies that have exerted the most influence in the United States stem from communism, Nazism, and Islamism. For all these ideologies, think extremist in terms of intent and effects, rather than "far left" or "far right."
 - Not every -ism is an ideology, and not all ideologies are totalitarian; but all ideologies are extreme in an agenda for fundamental societal change, whether they employ tools of violence.
 - While a modifier should not be needed in front of ideology, it is often helpful to place the adjective <radical> before ideology. Then audiences should understand (better) that anti-Semitic ideologies are of the modern world and, most unfortunately, made their way in part, or more than in part, to the United States.
- In the context of anti-Semitic ideologies that have found their way into American politics and education, the historical or conventional prejudices against Jews on religious, racial, or other grounds may still be present. If so, these prejudices are colored and turbocharged by ideology.

- Developments did not happen overnight but result from almost a century of political and educational movements and trends.
- In higher education, critical theory and its various offspring benefited from coming after progressivism.
- Intellectual as well as activist agendas were, and are, sometimes mutually reinforcing. Since the 1960s, this has contributed to a porousness between education and politics when it comes to the effects and effectiveness of anti-Semitic ideologies.
- The ongoing politics associated with watershed events such as 9/11 or October 7 transpire in the aforementioned circumstances.
- Anti-Semitism of any kind makes no sense. When it is first or primarily driven by ideology, it is, if possible, more irrational and more evil than what we might term conventional anti-Semitism.
- What is the solution—or, at least, the beginning of the solution—to respond to, reduce, and prevent anti-Semitic ideologies in American politics and education?
 - Correct information and non-ideological education are needed at all levels.
 - A robust defense of religious liberty and respect for faith traditions are necessary in our country.
 - Freedom of speech and civil discourse are essential in and of themselves and as supports of religious liberty.

PANEL IV: RELIGIOUS LIBERTY FOR EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS

Amb. Sam Brownback

- The National Committee for Religious Freedom, a bipartisan, multi-faith nonprofit that advocates for religious freedom for all Americans opened our business checking

account with Chase Bank on Friday, April 15, 2022.

- Three weeks later, Chase Bank sent a letter dated May 6, 2022, notifying us that they had decided to “end their relationship” with the NCRF effective May 9. We only

found out the account was closed on May 19 when trying to make a deposit because the May 6 letter was received the following week. This account was closed without any

written request for information. A check closing out the account was received on May 25.

- When contacted, Chase described the decision to close the account as one coming from the corporate office. It was initially explained that the decision was final and non-revocable. A note in the file read that Chase employees were not permitted to provide any further clarifying information to the customer.
- Finally, after multiple requests for information, in June a member of the executive office at Chase in New York stated that Chase would reconsider providing the NCRF disclosed all donors, provide a list of intended fund recipients for the next election cycle, and the full details of how the NCRF would select pro-religious freedom candidates to support.
- After inquiries from the press, in October 2022 a JP Morgan Chase spokesperson described our version of the events as “patently false” to the Daily Caller. However, the recording of the June call and its transcript were made available to journalists.
- Chase then contacted the NCRF through a former Senate staffer of Ambassador Brownback who arranged for a formal written explanation to be sent. The NCRF was assured that asking for a major donor list was standard operating practice for all of

Chase’s 50,000+ faith based non-profits and the decision to terminate our account was in no way related to our religious or political views. It is worth noting that at this

point, the NCRF had never suggested that there was a political motive at work.

- On October 21, 2022 Chase Bank sent a letter stating that something said at the account opening triggered a money laundering and domestic terrorism investigation. When pressed for information on what was said to trigger such an investigation and when asked why the NCRF was not given the standard 60 days to provide information or written explanations, Chase once again changed their explanation.
- In a November 9, 2022 email, Chase stated that the account was closed because of a heightened customer risk profile triggered by the involvement of Ambassador Brownback because Chase designated him as a “Politically Exposed Person” given his recent roles as Senator and U.S. Ambassador.” However, this designation, according to Federal banking guidance, DOES NOT apply to former US elected officials, only foreign nationals.
- In response to a shareholder question at the JPMorgan Chase annual shareholder meeting on May 16, 2023, CEO Jamie Dimon said, “No apologies are necessary and no corrective action is necessary.” Despite Chase representatives repeatedly telling reporters that the Bank does not comment on customer accounts, Dimon decided that policy does not apply to the CEO and said, “In this particular case, an account was closed because they didn’t fill out all the forms we asked them for.” This is patently false because the account was closed just three weeks after opening and without any request for additional customer information.
- Chase CEO Jamie Dimon and other big bank CEO’s met with Republican members of the Senate Banking Committee on February 13, 2025. After that meeting Dimon told members of the media, “We don’t debank people because of political or religious affiliations, but there are a lot of things that can be fixed. We should fix them. The rules and requirements are so onerous, and it does cause people to be debanked, in my opinion, who should not be debanked.”

After contending for years that no one was being debanked, Dimon admitted it was happening but blamed bank regulators. There was no specific reference to the NCRF.

- To this day, the NCRF still does not have a clear reason as to why our account was closed after only three weeks. Chase has offered at least five varying explanations. The bank tells reporters we know why, but we don’t know which reason they want us to believe.
 - Unfortunately, this was not the first time an organization has found itself facing a sudden and unexplained account closure. We are concerned that religious institutions, houses of worship, and people of all faiths are at risk of having their business, credit, or even personal or private bank accounts terminated for any or no reason at all. After we went public, we heard from other organizations that were embarrassed by their ordeal and kept silent.
 - No American should lose access to our banking system because of their religious or political beliefs.
-

Lacey Smith

Good afternoon. It is an honor to be here. Thank you for inviting me to share my story.

I used to be a flight attendant for Alaska Airlines. I *loved* my job. It was a career that allowed me to share in life with so many. To share experiences, stories, hurts and wins. As a Christian, I wanted to serve and love others the best I could. I enjoyed working with my diverse coworkers. I loved the airline too, particularly because for years it had encouraged a culture of open communication.

But all that has changed.

In February of 2021, after I had been happily working for Alaska Airlines for 7 years, Alaska posted an article on their internal message board titled, “Alaska supports the Equality Act.” (The Equality Act was a proposed law that didn’t pass. It would have impacted a lot of things like opening up women’s spaces across the country based on gender identity, and it would have removed some protections of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act for people of faith.) After the article—which was private to employees, not visible to customers or the public—there was a button inviting us to “Submit a comment.”

As a conservative Christian, I had concerns about what Alaska’s support for the Act meant for me as an employee so I asked, "As a company, do you think it's possible to regulate morality?"

That one, simple question got me fired.

Alaska took me off all my scheduled trips and called me in for an Investigative meeting. They were very elusive about the details and informed me I was to speak to no one about it, leaving me feeling isolated and intimidated. In the initial meeting and throughout the process, I repeatedly explained that I am opposed to discrimination, but there were things I disagreed with about the proposed law. However, Alaska fired me, explaining in my Notice of Discharge that “Defining gender identity or sexual orientation as a moral issue ... is ... a discriminatory statement.” This confirming to me that I was being targeted because of my religious beliefs about morality.

I later learned that another flight attendant named Marli Brown was terminated at the same time. She also had posted concerns about how the Act would impact people of faith and about the safety and privacy of women and girls in women’s spaces. Alaska called our comments “hateful,” “discriminatory,” and “offensive,” and they said it was discriminatory to use the term “opposite sex” because that implied that there were only two sexes. Both Marli and I

had great relationships with all our coworkers, regardless of their beliefs and backgrounds, but that didn't matter.

I knew that what had happened to me wasn't right, that companies can't fire religious employees simply for asking questions stemming from their religious beliefs. I'm thankful that God led me to First Liberty Institute, and they agreed to represent me and also my former coworker Marli.

It wasn't until I was able to bring a lawsuit that I found out more detail about the extent of the religious discrimination and the hostility towards people of faith displayed both by Alaska and also my union, the Association of Flight Attendants. The union, who was supposed to protect me in cases of discrimination, had been in contact with Alaska from the beginning, encouraging and expressing support for my termination. The Union President reported our comments, complaining to the Airline about our religious beliefs not being inclusive. The Union President said that he hated me, and another union official said, "Can we PLEASE get someone to shut down comments, or put Marli and Lacey in a burlap bag and drop them in a well...!"

Alaska Airlines was also hostile toward our religious beliefs. One of Alaska Airlines' lawyers wrote, "We should stay away from 'everyone has a right to have their own beliefs' in this case because the 'belief' is actually discrimination. Employees actually do not have the right to believe that LGBTQ rights are 'immoral.'" And the person who ultimately made the decision to fire us replied, "I 100% agree."

When my supervisor at Alaska was asked where employees would be allowed to mention moral beliefs opposed to LGBTQ activity, she responded, "At home without any other employees being ... there to hear it. That would be okay."

As you can imagine, when I was fired, my life was entirely upended. I was uncertain of the future and doubting myself. I wondered if speaking up on behalf of my moral conscience was worth it. I not only lost my income and my health insurance, I also lost a job I absolutely loved, my security and my future. One reason I took the job as a flight attendant was that I have family who lives overseas. Losing my job meant I also lost the ability to stay as connected with them. My husband and I had dreamed of one day traveling as a family once we had kids, and I lost that dream, too. I felt isolated and bullied by a company that had told me that they valued diversity. Yet when I expressed even a whisper of my religious beliefs, I was fired. Because of the uncertainty of our financial situation, my husband and I felt compelled to move across the country to a more affordable area.

I'm hoping that as people hear my story they understand the importance of protecting the rights of employees to respectfully share their religious and moral opinions in the workplace. Unfortunately, many do not know their rights and are bullied into silencing their moral conscience in an attempt to hold on to their jobs and security. However, Benjamin Franklin said to give up freedom in an attempt to secure safety would result in the loss of both. And fortunately, we have Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which protects us against religious discrimination in the workplace.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my story. May it help others to know their rights and to understand the importance of protecting the rights of employees to respectfully share their religious and moral opinions in the workplace. And as Founding Father John Jay stated, “By knowing their rights, they will sooner perceive when they are violated and be the better prepared to defend and assert them.”

Hermione Susana

Good Morning.

I thank the commission for this opportunity to speak and share my story of religious discrimination in the private sector.

I still remember the joy of serving fans at Madison Square Garden—chatting with families, sharing laughs over game nights, feeling part of something bigger. That joy turned to heartbreak when my deeply held religious convictions about the sanctity of life as a Catholic made me unable to comply with the vaccine mandate.

In March 2020, during the COVID-19 outbreak, I was a seasonal hospitality server at three New York City venues. All three shut down for guests and most staff for nearly a year.

In February 2021, venues reopened with strict restrictions. I was among the few who quickly returned, enduring daily COVID-19 testing and guidelines to help reopen—at 10% capacity initially, building to 100% by spring. As a tipped employee, I often earned less than I would have if I had stayed home and collected unemployment plus stimulus checks, but I was eager to work.

In May 2021, Madison Square Garden announced a vaccine mandate: Be vaccinated by July or request a religious or medical accommodation. I submitted a detailed religious accommodation request on time—as a union member with UNITE HERE Local 100—but it was denied. My religious accommodation clearly stated my Catholic beliefs with supporting information and references on the church's clear teaching on the sanctity of life and how the three vaccines violated my beliefs. My body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and I could not in good conscience inject something I believed violated that sacred trust—a conviction rooted in prayer and scripture that I hold sincerely. The union informed me that every religious accommodation request to Madison Square Garden was rejected with a templated response.

The company then stated that unvaccinated employees were resigning and removed our ability to work. I quickly responded that I was not resigning but my response was ignored. The company never formally terminated me or others like me but locked us out of the scheduling system and no longer responded. The union promised to file grievances but did not. This was my first religious freedom violation.

Worse came in August 2021, when New York City's Key to NYC mandate required vaccination for private-sector employees at indoor venues by September 13. Because of this I was unable to work at the Barclays Center.

That mandate was especially discriminatory: It exempted non-resident performers, athletes, and their staff—people in the same buildings where we worked. Yet employees like me, with sincere religious objections, were barred, while unvaccinated athletes and artists and their entourages were

allowed in. I watched as unvaccinated professional athletes and performers entered the same arena where I was barred. Madison Square Garden even advocated for those exemptions after rejecting ours. My last venue was Yankee Stadium, where an outdoor area allowed me to continue working briefly.

The onslaught of discrimination and persecution at this point only increased because an emergency executive order was issued by New York City officials in December of 2021 with even tighter restrictions. Subsequently I lost my job at Yankee Stadium. My employer did not offer us a religious accommodation.

As a NYC resident, I also faced consumer discrimination from the vaccination restrictions: From September 2021, unvaccinated people couldn't enter indoor restaurants, theaters, or venues—no religious exemption applied there. For my Jewish brethren, this evoked painful historical echoes of exclusion based on not having papers. Officials ignored religious sensitivities for months, while exemptions for performers and athletes continued.

By January 2022, I had lost all three jobs, where I had worked for over a decade; my apartment; and stability. I had no choice but to leave the state, moving to Georgia to live with my dad. In March 2022, NYC officials lifted vaccine requirements for patrons and gave exemptions to resident athletes and performers where I worked, but did not give those exemptions to workers like me. We were demonized and ostracized for upholding constitutional religious freedom.

I continued fighting with emails and letters to the union and employers. I also filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). I found out after the deadline that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) could have represented me. It was impossible for me and other private sector employees to fight a very long, expensive legal battle. To this day, cases that unvaccinated public sector New York City workers won years ago are still tied up in appellate courts.

The city dropped its private-sector mandates on November 1, 2022. I returned to the Barclays Center that same month. It took over a year to return to Yankee Stadium. Unfortunately Madison Square Garden never brought us back.

I still endure the financial burdens from my decision. For example, I don't have health insurance, and I am unable to obtain affordable housing due to the permanent loss of income from losing my third job. When the mandates were in place, I did not want to give into the temptation of obtaining false vaccination documentation to work because as an American I have the right to my religious accommodation under the law. Our laws protect my religious freedom and it should be fought for despite the cost.

I and other workers in New York City like me have permanently lost jobs, homes, full pensions, scholarships, medical benefits and more. Our 401ks, savings, and other assets have been depleted and debts skyrocketed with little to no justice in pursuit of our religious freedom.

Despite the pain, my faith sustained me—and it still does. I share this not just for myself, but for every believer facing similar choices today and tomorrow. Religious liberty must never cost a person's livelihood, home, or dignity in America.

Thank you.

OTHER SUBMITTED TESTIMONY

Boundless, Understanding the Rise and Normalization of Anti-Semitism in the United States

Prepared by Boundless for the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission's Hearing on anti-Semitism, January 2026

Background on Antisemitism in the United States: Insights from Boundless Research

[Boundless](#) is a nonpartisan think-action tank focused on understanding and countering antisemitism through rigorous research, message testing, and education. Since October 7, 2023, we have conducted a series of national studies to track how antisemitism is evolving in the United States, how Americans understand Jews, Judaism, and Israel, and how these dynamics are shaping the lived experiences of Jewish communities.

Taken together, our findings paint a troubling but clarifying picture: antisemitism today is not only rising in frequency, but shifting in form. It is increasingly normalized, mischaracterized as political expression, and fueled by widespread confusion about basic concepts, especially

Zionism and the relationship between Jews and Israel. At the same time, there is public recognition that antisemitism is a serious threat and strong bipartisan support for decisive action. The gap between concern and effective response is where Jewish communities are feeling most vulnerable.

The Impact of October 7 on Young American Jews August 2024 Study

Our August 2024 study examining the impact of October 7 on young American Jews reveals a striking dual reality. On the one hand, young Jews remain deeply connected to Israel: 76% report feeling connected, and 90% say they care about Israel. An overwhelming 85% affirm Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. These findings directly challenge narratives suggesting that younger generations are disengaging from Israel or abandoning core aspects of Jewish identity.

At the same time, the social cost of that identity has grown dramatically. More than half of young Jews (55%) report feeling unwelcome or excluded because of Israel or their Jewish identity. This sense of exclusion is not abstract. It is being experienced on college campuses, in social and professional spaces, and in civic life. Young Jews are being placed in an untenable position:

expected to disavow Israel to gain acceptance, or to remain silent to avoid harassment. This dynamic has profound implications for religious liberty, freedom of expression, and equal participation in American society.

Key Findings ([Link to Study](#))

- 76% of young American Jews feel connected to Israel while 90% responded that they care about Israel.
- 85% of young Jews overwhelmingly believe that Israel has a right to exist as a Jewish state
- More than half of young Jews (55%) said they have felt unwelcome or excluded because of Israel or their Jewish identity.
- Nearly half (46%) of young Jews feel less safe since the war between Israel and Hamas started.
- Two-thirds (65%) keep lower profile as Jews since the war started and 63% feel nervous to visit Jewish spaces like synagogue, JCC or Jewish day school.

Misunderstanding of Zionism October 2024 Study

A core driver of today's antisemitism is not simply animus, but ignorance particularly around Zionism. Our October 2024 study on misconceptions of Zionism found that only one-third of Americans claim to be familiar with the term, and just 14% can correctly define it. In other words, the vast majority of Americans are forming strong opinions about Zionism without understanding what it is.

Critically, our research shows that this confusion is not immutable. When respondents were given a simple, factual definition of Zionism – “Zionism is a movement that supports the Jewish people having a state in their ancestral homeland, Israel” - the number of people who identified as Zionists quadrupled, from 9% to 38%. This demonstrates that hostility toward Zionism is

often rooted less in ideology than in distortion and misinformation.

The same study found that most Americans do not recognize genocidal rhetoric when it is framed as political speech. Phrases such as “From the River to the Sea” or “by all means necessary” are widely misunderstood or dismissed, even though they have clear implications for violence and the eradication of Jewish self-determination. This failure to recognize incitement has contributed to an environment in which threatening language toward Jews is tolerated and increasingly normalized.

Key Findings ([Link to Study](#))

- Just one-third (34%) of the general population claims to be familiar with the term ‘Zionism’.
- In fact, only 14% of people could correctly define Zionism.
- Providing a simple education on what Zionism is, quadruples the number of people who identify as a Zionist (9% -> 38%).

- Most Americans don't recognize genocidal rhetoric (e.g., 'From the River to the Sea' and 'By all means necessary').

Normalization of Antisemitism in the Broader Public October 2025 Study

By October 2025, two years after October 7, our national study found that these trends had deepened. Nearly one in four Americans (23%) now view antisemitism as a legitimate form of protest in response to Israel's conduct in Gaza. Nearly one-third (31%) report difficulty separating their feelings about Jews from events in Gaza, and 42% do not distinguish between Jewish individuals and the Israeli government.

These attitudes have concrete consequences. Forty-two percent of Americans do not believe that protesting outside synagogues is antisemitic. This reflects a profound erosion of norms that once protected houses of worship and religious communities from political intimidation. When Jewish religious spaces are treated as fair targets for protest, the line between political expression and religious harassment collapses.

Key Findings ([Link to Study](#))

- Nearly 1 in 4 (23%) Americans view antisemitism as a legitimate form of protest in response to the Israel-Hamas war.
- Nearly one-third (31%) find it difficult to separate their feelings about Jews from events in Gaza.
- 42% of Americans do not believe protesting outside synagogues is antisemitic.
- 42% of Americans do not distinguish between the Israeli government and Jewish people.

Public Demand for Action February 2025 Study

Despite these troubling trends, our February 2025 study on voter attitudes shows that the American public clearly understands the stakes. Eighty-seven percent of voters see the rise in antisemitism as a threat to the safety of the American people, and 72% leaders have a responsibility to confront it. There is strong bipartisan agreement that antisemitism is not merely a Jewish issue, but a broader challenge to social cohesion, public order, and democratic values. Voters support concrete action. Large majorities endorse new policies and legislation, stricter enforcement of existing laws, and clear limits on speech that incites violence or harassment

against Jewish communities. Four in five voters express concern about foreign funding of anti-Israel protests and support stronger oversight of external influence on U.S. institutions. More than two-thirds believe universities should be held accountable when they fail to address

antisemitic harassment on campus. Importantly, there is bipartisan consensus that institutions which fail to uphold anti-discrimination laws should face consequences.

Key Findings ([Link to study](#))

- 87% of voters see the rise in antisemitism as a threat to the safety of the American people.
- Voters broadly agree that free speech should have limits when it incites violence, harassment, or threats against Jewish communities.
- 4 in 5 voters are concerned about foreign funding of anti-Israel protests and support stronger oversight of external influence on U.S. institutions.
- More than two-thirds believe universities should be held accountable for failing to address antisemitic harassment on campus.
- Bipartisan consensus exists for stronger government action.

Conclusion

The data makes clear that antisemitism in the United States is being fueled by misinformation, moral confusion, and the erosion of long-standing boundaries between protected expression and targeted harassment. Americans recognize antisemitism as a serious threat and want leaders to

respond with clarity, moral courage, and enforcement of the law. The challenge now is not diagnosing the problem, but closing the gap between knowledge and action.

To learn more, contact Boundless at info@boundlessisrael.org.