



**Written Testimony for Arizona House of Representatives
Ad Hoc Committee on Antisemitism in Education
December 12, 2023**

**Tammi Rossman-Benjamin
AMCHA Initiative, Director**

My name is Tammi Rossman-Benjamin, and I am co-founder and director of AMCHA Initiative, a non-profit organization that documents, investigates and combats antisemitism on American college and university campuses. I'm also a former faculty member at the University of California Santa Cruz, where I taught for 20 years.

I heartily commend you for holding this extremely timely and important hearing and greatly appreciate the opportunity to testify about AMCHA's research on campus antisemitism.

The horrific October 7th massacre, mutilation, rape, and kidnapping of Israeli civilians, young and old, triggered a dual crisis for Jewish students on American campuses. On the one hand, they struggled to cope with the immediate shock and trauma of the deadliest attack on Jews in their lifetime. And on the other hand, they were anxious and afraid that following the Hamas attack there would be a surge in antisemitism on their own campuses – fears that have become a frightening reality as antisemitic incidents on campuses, which were already at an all-time high before October 7th, have increased by 700%, according to Hillel International.¹

These incidents include physical assaults, death threats, intimidation, bullying, and vandalism, and almost every incident has been linked to the feverish anti-Zionist sentiment that has taken hold among students, faculty and staff at schools across the country. These sentiments are being expressed at large and sometimes violent protest rallies; in statements and manifestos issued by student groups, faculty, academic departments, and staff offices; in student newspaper op-eds and student government resolutions; and in classroom lectures and departmentally-sponsored events. To the horror of Jewish students, many of their classmates,

¹ In testimony to the United States House Committee on Ways & Means at its hearing, "From Ivory Towers to Dark Corners: Investigating the Nexus Between Antisemitism, Tax-Exempt Universities, and Terror Financing," on November 15, 2023, Adam Lehman, Hillel International Executive Director, stated: "In the past five weeks, our Hillel's have reported 398 antisemitic incidents, a figure that includes 28 physical assaults. This level of antisemitic activity represents more than a 700% increase from the record level a year before in the same period." (https://www.youtube.com/live/Qu_2afSs97I?app=desktop&si=D_3IGw5YyX305J_W&t=41m31s)

professors, and school staff are condoning and even celebrating the Hamas attack, calling it legitimate “resistance,” while Israel’s defensive actions are labeled “genocide,” the Jewish state’s very existence is cast as the justification for Hamas’ attack, and there are ubiquitous calls for the destruction of Israel, home to half of the world’s Jews.

Arizona universities have not been immune to this surge in bigotry. According to our database of antisemitic activity on U.S. campuses,² from October 7th until now there has been a 9-fold increase in antisemitic rhetoric and behavior at the University of Arizona and Arizona State University, compared to the same 2-month period last year. Many of these incidents have involved the Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) groups at each university, who have issued statements praising Hamas as “freedom fighters,” held rallies where their chants and placards condone terrorism, justify the murder of Jews, and call for the elimination of the Jewish state, and demanded their student government and Board of Regents adopt illegal and antisemitic boycotts of Israel. At ASU, enraged SJP members disrupted and ultimately shut down a student government meeting with loud and threatening chants and rock-throwing, forcing Jewish students to exit through the back door with a police escort. And it’s not just SJP. Dozens of student groups have issued manifestos echoing SJP’s messages, including 43 ASU student organizations under the aegis of the school’s “Educational Outreach and Student Services” office, as well as several student groups at UA’s College of Law. Nor is bigotry limited to students. Two UA faculty members teaching an Education class on “Cultural Pluralism for Young Children” defended Hamas’ massacre of Jews and provided their students with information about the BDS movement, encouraging them to boycott Israel.

As disturbing as this nationwide explosion of campus antisemitism is, a study released last week by my organization exposes an even bigger, more systemic and enduring problem for Jewish students.³ Our study investigated the initial statements issued by nearly 100 college and university leaders following the Hamas attack to see how well they addressed Jewish students’ trauma and fears for their safety and security on campus. These statements were then compared to statements issued by leaders at the same schools in the wake of the George Floyd murder in 2020 and the murders of six Asian women in Atlanta in 2021, which impacted their Black and Asian campus communities, respectively.

The findings were deeply disturbing: not only did the vast majority of school leaders utterly fail to adequately address Jewish students’ trauma and fear for their own safety and security, they employed a clear discriminatory double standard, showing far less responsiveness to Jewish students than to their Black and Asian peers.

For example, almost all of the statements following the George Floyd and Asian murders identified the Black and Asian communities as being particularly impacted by the attacks, they

² <https://amchainitiative.org/search-by-incident#incident/display-by-date/>

³ “Selective Sympathy: The Double Standard in Confronting Jewish Student Trauma & Antisemitism after the October 7th Massacre”: <https://amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Selective-Sympathy-Double-Standard-Report.pdf>

named racism and anti-Asian hate as the motivator of these attacks, and they committed their schools to combating racism and anti-Asian hate on their campus and beyond. By contrast, only 14% of the statements issued in the wake of the deadliest attack on Jews since the Holocaust even acknowledged that the Jewish community was impacted by the attack; only 4% of statements identified the antisemitic motivation of the Hamas attack (despite Hamas' public expressions of their genocidal intent); and a mere 2% committed to addressing campus antisemitism, which, by the time their statements were issued, had already begun to explode.

This flagrant double standard is more than just unfair. School leaders who respond appropriately to the group trauma and fears of their Black and Asian students, but who are unwilling to do the same for Jewish students - despite the legitimacy of their fears and the clear threats to their safety and security - cannot be trusted to keep Jewish students safe.

Based on the results of our previous research,⁴ we believe this discriminatory double standard is rooted in school harassment policies that obligate administrators to respond promptly and vigorously to verbally and physically abusive behavior directed at "protected" identity groups, but allow administrators to ignore equally abusive behavior directed at students who do not fit into "protected" categories. This is often the case for Jewish students targeted by anti-Zionist motivated harassment, who are frequently deemed ineligible for coverage under their school's harassment policy.

This lack of policy-based protection from the verbal and physical abuse most frequently experienced by Jewish students has allowed—and will continue to allow—administrators to downplay or ignore Jewish students' justified fears of surging antisemitism. Moreover, by turning a discriminatory blind eye to the harassment of Jewish students, administrators are significantly contributing to the escalation of that harassment by giving a green light to its perpetrators, who correctly infer they can continue their antisemitic behavior with impunity.

From our perspective, the problem is not that Jewish students don't fit into the "protected" categories of their school's harassment policy, but rather, that they must fit into *any* category *at all* before getting the robust protection that *all students deserve*, and that is an essential obligation of every public and private college and university to provide.

We believe that unless schools dismantle the discriminatory double standard at the heart of their current policies and establish new policies guaranteeing *equal* protection for *all* students, they are unlikely to halt the antisemitism that is spiraling out of control on their campuses.

Thank you again for your leadership and courage in tackling this deeply disturbing problem, and for your genuine concern for the safety and well-being of Jewish students – and all students – on Arizona campuses.

⁴ See especially AMCHA Initiative's report, "Falling Through the Cracks: How School Policies Deny Jewish Students Equal Protection from Antisemitism," December 2022: <https://amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Report-on-University-Harassment-Policies.pdf>