



**Testimony of Amy Spitalnick, CEO of the Jewish Council
for Public Affairs**

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

**Antisemitism on America's College and University
Campuses: Current Conditions and the Federal Response**

Commissioners, thank you for inviting me to testify today at this important hearing on antisemitism and college campuses.

Let's be clear: antisemitism is real and it is rising – across the ideological spectrum and manifesting in a variety of ways. It's hard not to feel like it's coming from all directions right now, from the deadly cycle of antisemitic violence to the ways in which Jewish students, educators, and others have been targeted, ostracized, and marginalized on certain campuses and spaces.

To confront antisemitism, we need to truly understand it. Yes, it often works like many other forms of prejudice – hating Jews simply because of who we are, what we look like, how we pray, and so on.

But what's unique about antisemitism is that it also works as this insidious, pernicious conspiracy theory rooted in tropes and lies about Jewish control and power – intended not only to fuel hate against Jews but also to sow division and distrust: pitting communities against one another, and undermining trust in our democratic institutions because, as the conspiracy theories go, there must be some shadowy cabal controlling them – from “replacement” and “invasion” rhetoric, to false claims of stolen elections, to lies that “Jews” or “Zionists” control our economy and government.

We're stuck in this feedback loop: Increasingly normalized antisemitic conspiracy theories continue to undermine our democracy. Meanwhile, as democratic norms and institutions are eroded, it only creates the conditions for antisemitism to further thrive -- because someone must be blamed.

Breaking this feedback loop requires serious, urgent action, including whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches that recognize Jewish safety is inextricably linked with the rights and safety of all communities and our democracy.

Yet rather than taking meaningful action to confront the real threat of antisemitism and broader hate and extremism, we are too often offered false choices.

On one hand, we have the federal administration exploiting our community's legitimate fears of antisemitism to attack

our democratic norms and institutions. Make no mistake: exploiting the Jewish community's real concerns about antisemitism to undermine academic freedom, gut research funding, attack the rights and safety of others, and undercut our democracy will make Jews – and all of us – less safe. Our safety as Jews has always been tied to the rule of law to the strength of civil society, and to the protection of rights and liberties of all.

On the other hand, some particularly loud voices seek to create a false choice between our ability to show up proudly as Jews - or to have a connection to the Jewish homeland – with our humanitarian, democratic values.

Recent polling underscores that the majority of Jewish Americans reject all these false choices. A September 2025 Ipsos poll found that 72% of Jewish Americans are concerned about campus antisemitism – but the same percentage, 72%, also believe the Trump administration was using it to unfairly target universities.

This aligns with a communal statement that JCPA led in April 2025 from ten mainstream Jewish legacy organizations, including three of the four major denominations, rejecting the false choice between Jewish safety and democracy. We know that a number of actions taken by this administration – such as extrajudicial deportations and gutting university funding – not only do not address antisemitism, but in fact

make Jews less safe by invariably increasing scapegoating and hate and undermining the democratic norms and institutions that have been inherent to our safety and advancement in this country.

So what *is* actually helpful to countering antisemitism on campus and beyond?

It's policies that both ensure accountability AND build real resilience to this hate: protecting core democratic norms and pluralism; education not only about the history of antisemitism but who Jews are today; teaching media and digital literacy, to help inoculate students – and all of us – from extremism in the first place; investing in hate crimes and extremism prevention and civil rights enforcement; and more. But unfortunately, we have seen a disinvestment in these programs over the last few years.

A meaningful approach to protecting Jewish students – and holding institutions accountable when they don't - would mean a significant increase in funding and staff for the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR). OCR investigations into discrimination against students have been incredibly successful over the years in helping schools address and respond to complaints from Jewish and other students facing discrimination – even as the office has long been understaffed. Yet since the start of this administration, we have seen the steady destruction of OCR, starting with an

attempt in March to fire more than half of OCR's staff, and the closing of numerous OCR field offices. Because of these attacks on OCR, students experiencing discrimination are left without recourse due to backlogs and staff shortages. According to reporting at the end of 2025, OCR had about 25,000 pending complaints, including 7,000 open investigations – a backlog that certainly does not advance the safety of Jewish, or any, students.

Jewish safety also requires investing in broader societal resiliency to hate and extremism.

In addition to hate crimes prevention, extremism prevention, nonprofit security grants, and so much more – many of which have been dramatically cut over the past year – this also must include protecting access to higher education, which has been so vital to Jewish success in this country. Access to universities and higher education has been one of the greatest contributors to Jewish success and achievement in America, creating upward mobility for generations of Jewish immigrants and their descendants. And it remains one of the best pathways out of poverty. The attacks on these schools risk undermining that opportunity for Jewish -- and so many other -- communities.

Colleges and universities are also integral to preserving Jewish history and advancing thriving contemporary Jewish life – religiously, culturally, socially, and beyond. I say this as

a former Hillel president: undermining universities undermines their ability to support their students -- and that undermines Jewish life on campus.

And so too does it undermine the critical work of Jewish Studies and many other departments that are key to preserving Jewish history and culture and advancing research into countering hate and extremism.

Protecting Jewish students also requires new approaches to education and engagement, including and especially when it's hard.

That's why JCPA recently launched partnerships with both national teachers' unions, who work on both campuses and in K-12 schools, aimed at empowering leaders and members with nuanced, constructive understanding of antisemitism in this moment. These unions have an obligation to confront antisemitism and all hate in their ranks --*and* the solution is to bring the Jewish community and labor together to confront hate and protect democracy, rather than attack the right to organize or right to association, which have been so integral to Jewish and so many other communities' advancement in this country.

This is personal for me. My grandparents survived the Holocaust, but the rest of their families weren't as fortunate. It was only thanks to my grandparents' ability to be welcomed into this country as refugees after the war, to put

their children through college and graduate school, to join unions – my grandmother as a seamstress, my parents as New York City public school teachers – that my family’s safety and success was possible.

We now have an obligation – both to take on the same scourge of antisemitism that took too many of their family members *and* to ensure our real and legitimate fears are not exploited to undermine opportunity and safety for others.

We know that there’s no inclusive democracy without Jewish safety – and that there’s no Jewish safety without inclusive democracy. Our leaders simply cannot protect one without protecting both.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.