



ZIONIST ORGANIZATION OF AMERICA

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The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Sessions:

We write on behalf of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), the oldest and one of the largest pro-Israel organizations in the U.S., whose mission includes fighting anti-Semitism and anti-Israel bias. We are appalled by the numerous bomb threats that have been made to Jewish day schools and Jewish community centers around the country, and by the vandalism of Jewish cemeteries in St. Louis, Philadelphia and now Rochester. President Trump showed leadership when in his first address to a joint session of Congress on Tuesday, he opened his remarks by denouncing these anti-Semitic acts as "hate and evil." It is crucial that the President's strong condemnation be accompanied by equally strong action. We urge you to use every tool available to fully and vigorously investigate these incidents, ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice, and do whatever you can to prevent future incidents of hate, threats of violence, and vandalism targeting Jews.

At least 100 Jewish community centers and schools have reportedly received bomb threats since the beginning of the year. In February, hundreds of graves were desecrated in two Jewish cemeteries, one in St. Louis and the other in Philadelphia. Yesterday, a Jewish cemetery in Rochester was vandalized. These expressions of anti-Semitism are inspiring justifiable fear in the Jewish community, but also among non-Jews, too. There are approximately 350 Jewish community centers (JCCs) across the U.S. and Canada, which serve people of all ages, of every religious, racial and ethnic background. Jewish and non-Jewish community members use JCC summer camps, preschools, special needs programs, gyms, and swimming pools, and take advantage of the many other programs and services that JCCs offer to our communities.

Our alarm grew when we learned that earlier this week, a [gunshot](#) was fired through a Hebrew School classroom window at a synagogue in Vice President Pence's home state of Indiana. Also, ISIS fanatics have [reportedly](#) called on fellow extremists, through an ISIS-linked chat room, to "terrorize" Jewish communities in the west, urging them to "dress up like a Jew" and conceal weapons under their coats before "unleashing the pain of the Muslims" on their victims.

All these incidents are frightening and reprehensible and require a forceful response, but we at the ZOA do not see anti-Semitism as a recently growing phenomenon. It has been a serious problem for many years, particularly on our college campuses. According to the [available FBI hate crime statistics](#) (from 1996 to 2015), Jews have always been the biggest target of religious hate crimes, by a wide margin. According to the [statistics for 2015](#), the most recent year that statistics are available, 52.1% of all the hate crimes based on religious bias were motivated by the offenders' anti-Jewish bias – more than all other religious groups combined.

We know from our work on college campuses that anti-Semitism has been a serious problem for many Jewish and pro-Israel students, rendering some afraid to identify openly as Jewish and as supporters of Israel. Some students even fear for their physical safety. In July 2015, Brandeis University released the results of its [study](#) of anti-Semitism on North American college campuses. The study was based on a survey conducted of U.S. and Canadian college students and young adults. Among the deeply troubling findings was that nearly three-quarters of respondents to the Brandeis survey reported having been exposed during the previous year to anti-Semitism.

It is more important than ever that our government make it crystal clear that there will be zero tolerance in the U.S. for any and all forms of Jew-hatred, and that those who engage in it will pay a harsh price. We respectfully urge you to take the following steps:

1. Use every tool in your legal arsenal to investigate incidents of anti-Semitism, apprehend the perpetrators, and hold them fully accountable under our federal hate crime laws, including but not limited to the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009, 18 U.S.C. § 249 (making it unlawful to willfully cause bodily injury – or attempting to do so – with a dangerous weapon because of the actual or perceived race, color, religion, or national origin of any person); and the Church Arson Prevention Act, 18 U.S.C. § 247 (making it unlawful to intentionally deface, damage, or destroy religious property – or attempt to do so – or to attempt to obstruct a person's free exercise of religious beliefs).
2. Implement the [policy statement](#) that the co-chairmen of President Trump's Israel Advisory Committee issued last fall, during the presidential campaign – that the Justice Department “investigate coordinated attempts on college campuses to intimidate students who support Israel.” To date, the Justice Department has, to our knowledge, played little if any role in investigating the intimidation that so many college students have been enduring simply because they love and support the Jewish State.
3. Urge the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) to vigorously enforce Title VI of the Civil Rights Act to protect Jewish students from anti-Semitic harassment and intimidation at federally funded schools. The ZOA played a key role in getting OCR to clarify, in [2010](#), that Jewish students are entitled to the protections

of Title VI. But since then, to our knowledge, OCR has not found a single civil rights violation in any case alleging campus anti-Semitism under Title VI.

4. Urge the U.S. Department of Education to consider the U.S. State Department's definition of anti-Semitism in evaluating and deciding anti-Semitism cases under Title VI. As you know, the State Department uses a [definition of anti-Semitism](#) that is excellent. The State Department has long recognized that while of course not all criticism of Israel is anti-Semitic, some anti-Israel and anti-Zionist sentiment crosses the line. Unfortunately, the Department of Education does not use the State Department's definition of anti-Semitism, or to our knowledge, any definition at all. We believe that using the State Department's definition of anti-Semitism would assist OCR in enforcing Title VI and protecting the right of Jewish students to a learning environment that is both physically and psychologically safe.
5. Express your support for legislation that will bolster OCR's ability to more effectively address campus anti-Semitism. In 2016, the Anti-Semitism Awareness Act of 2016 was introduced with bipartisan support. The Act would have required OCR to take into consideration the State Department's definition of anti-Semitism in assessing whether an incident of harassment was motivated by anti-Semitic bias. The Senate unanimously passed the bill, but unfortunately, the bill was introduced so late in the congressional term that the term expired before the bill could be passed in the House. We expect that a similar bill will be introduced this year. It would more likely achieve passage if you publicly support it and urge members of Congress to do the same.
6. Consider the ZOA a resource. We have long been committed to fighting all forms of anti-Semitism, in schools, on college campuses and elsewhere. It would be an honor and privilege to work with you to eradicate this age-old problem.

Respectfully,



Morton A. Klein
National President



Susan B. Tuchman, Esq.
Director, Center for Law and Justice

P.S. I, Morton Klein, remember with pleasure the conversation you and I had at the Capital Grille restaurant in Washington, DC, discussing our concerns with the Obama administration.