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Legislative Testimony of Representative Abigail Griffin

Introducing LD 1351 – “An Act to Require Antisemitism to be Considered as Motivation When Determining a Violation of a Criminal or Civil Law”
April 8, 2025

Good morning Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, My name is Abigail Griffin, and I represent House District 34, which includes the towns of Glenburn, Levant, and Kenduskeag.

Today I am presenting to you **LD 1351, An Act to Require Antisemitism to be considered as Motivation When Determining a Violation of a Criminal or Civil Law.**

The purpose of this bill is straightforward but important. It ensures that when investigating or prosecuting violations of criminal or civil law, included under the Maine Human Rights Act, antisemitism must be considered as a possible motive.

LD 1351 does this by adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, which is currently the most widely recognized and accepted standard. It has been endorsed by 4 consecutive administrations, both Democrat and Republican and adopting this definition brings the state in alignment with policy across 11 federal agencies. The definition has already been adopted by 33 states and the District of Columbia. It has also been adopted by 30 countries.

Across our country and here in Maine, we have seen an alarming rise in anti-Semitic incidents—graffiti, threats, harassment, and violence targeting Jewish individuals and institutions. In many cases, these acts are not properly recognized for what they are: hate-motivated attacks rooted in antisemitism. This bill seeks to correct that by giving our legal system the tools to identify and address anti-Semitic motivation where it exists.



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Let me be clear: LD 1351 does not create new crimes, nor does it regulate speech. What it does is provide guidance for prosecutors, investigators, and decision-makers to ensure that anti-Semitic bias is not overlooked when evaluating a violation of existing law.

We have a responsibility to stand against hate in all its forms. By passing this bill, we affirm that Maine stands with its Jewish residents and that we take antisemitism as seriously as any other form of bigotry.

Please find attached a proposed amendment adding the words, "including the contemporary examples of antisemitism contained therein" to the end of section 1 line 5. Also please find attached examples of antisemitism incidents in Maine.

Thank you for your consideration.

1 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:**

2 **Sec. 1. 5 MRSA §4553, sub-§1-I** is enacted to read:

3 **1-I. Antisemitism.** "Antisemitism" has the same meaning as the nonlegally binding
4 working definition of "antisemitism" adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance
5 Alliance Plenary in Bucharest, Romania on May 26, 2016, including the contemporary examples
of antisemitism contained therein.

6 **Sec. 2. 5 MRSA §4554, sub-§5** is enacted to read:

7 **5. Antisemitism as motive.** When determining whether a violation of this Act or any
8 criminal or civil law has occurred, an assessment of whether antisemitism was a motive, if
9 relevant, for that violation must be made.

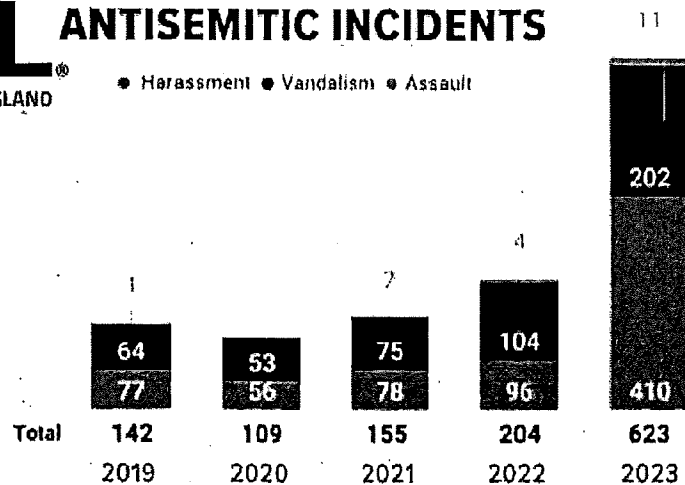
10 **SUMMARY**

11 This bill defines "antisemitism" as the nonlegally binding working definition of
12 "antisemitism" adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Plenary in
13 Bucharest, Romania on May 26, 2016. The bill also amends the Maine Human Rights Act
14 to require that, when determining whether a violation of the Maine Human Rights Act or
15 any criminal or civil law has occurred, an assessment of whether antisemitism was a
16 motive, if relevant, for that violation must be made.

ADL ANTISEMITIC INCIDENTS

NEW ENGLAND

● Harassment ● Vandalism ● Assault



Maine antisemitism incidents:

Over the past two years, Maine has experienced a number of antisemitic incidents. Below are a few examples:

- January 2024 – Harpswell, Brunswick, Bath, and Topsham:** Father and son William and Hayden Deary were accused of spray-painting racist and antisemitic messages across multiple towns. Their actions included defacing road signs with swastikas and white supremacist symbols. The Maine Attorney General filed a civil rights complaint against them, seeking to prevent further vandalism with racist or antisemitic intent.

Note: This incidence of vandalism and graffiti, with the swastikas and white supremacist symbols, would clearly be viewed by law enforcement and the courts as antisemitic.

These next two examples of vandalism, targeting a synagogue and a Jewish-owned business with messages that relate to the Arab-Israeli conflict, might not be so clear, but the IHRA definition could be helpful in assessing the motive of these crimes.

- April 2024 – Bangor:** Rabbi Sam Weiss of Congregation Beth El discovered antisemitic graffiti on a stop sign near his synagogue. The graffiti read "Nazi Israel 30K+ murdered" with a crossed-out Star of David. This incident followed the discovery of pro-Hamas flyers outside the temple in November 2023.
- September 2024 – Portland:** Following the Portland City Council's vote to divest public funds from companies doing business with Israel, vandals targeted the law office of Jewish attorney Stephen Cope, spray-painting pro-Palestinian graffiti. Additionally, swastikas were painted on and around Rowe Elementary School, prompting increased security measures at local synagogues.
- October 2023 – Augusta:** An antisemitic message was found at Cony High School. School officials addressed the incident with appropriate consequences and educational measures, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a welcoming and safe environment.