

Testimony to the 132nd Maine Legislature  
Committee of the Judiciary

Good morning, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and honorable members of the committee. My name is Leslie Kirby, and I am the CEO of the Jewish Community Alliance of Southern Maine. I'm here to speak with you today about the real and immediate threat of antisemitism for the Jewish residents of Maine.



Steadily increasing since 2015, antisemitism has reached an all-time high since October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023. In the year following the October 7<sup>th</sup> attacks, there were over 10,000 documented incidents of antisemitism. That is about 28 incidents per day, each and every day, in the United States alone. This represents the highest number of incidents ever recorded since the ADL began tracking antisemitism and is a more than 200% increase over the prior year<sup>1</sup>. According to the FBI, even though we are only 2% of the population, Jews are targeted in 15% of hate crimes in general and are the #1 target of religious-based hate crimes, with almost 70% of those crimes in the US targeting Jews<sup>2</sup>. And a recent study shows that, in 2025 America, people with “Jewish-sounding” names are now being systematically discriminated against in the current job market, needing to send out 25% more applications to get a positive response compared to people without Jewish-sounding names.

The statistics from the FBI and ADL are staggering and distressing, but they don't tell the full story. Antisemitism is not an abstract concept, and it's not something that just happens in other places. Phrases like “no hate in our state” and “never again” are easy to say. But the reality is, there is hate in our state and never again is now. Antisemitism is a clear and present reality for Jews throughout Maine. I am new to Maine; I moved here in September. My first week here, we had two incidents of antisemitic graffiti at a local elementary school. In just the 6 months since I have been here, we have seen members of the Jewish community discriminated against in hospitals and on public buses. Swastikas have been carved onto everything from school signs to park benches in multiple locations around the state. Violent flyers were distributed in the parking lot of a Hannaford's in Northwest Maine, explicitly targeting the Jewish community in general and our facility in particular. And multiple times each month, we are asked to assist families whose children are experiencing antisemitism in Maine's public schools, some as

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.adl.org/resources/press-release/over-10000-antisemitic-incidents-recorded-us-oct-7-2023-according-adl>

<sup>2</sup> <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#!/pages/explorer/crime/hate-crime>

young as first grade – that’s a 6-year-old, experiencing antisemitism in a space that should be safe and secure to nurture learning for all. These incidents affect everyone who lives and works here, and erode our collective sense of safety, security, and freedom.

Antisemitism is an existing and ongoing problem, and we must all work collectively to own our own piece of it. The current hyper-partisan environment in our country – and in Maine - does a tremendous disservice to everyone fighting antisemitism and other forms of oppression. The rush to call out bad behavior on the “other side” often blinds us to our own groups’ transgressions – and have no doubt, antisemitism exists on all sides and in every level of our political spectrum. Antisemitism thrives when only call out bad behavior of the “other side”, making excuses or ignoring that same bad behavior when it is perpetrated by someone we care for, someone we respect, or someone who meets our political needs. We must be equal opportunity in our calling out of antisemitism, everywhere we see it. When it’s in the form a friend’s social media post, when it’s in the form of a colleague’s joke at work, and when it’s in the form of statements and deeds from members of our own political parties. There is no acceptable level of antisemitism, just like there is no acceptable level of racism or sexism or any other oppressive system. We must have the strength and demonstrate the leadership to clean our own houses and not afford ourselves the easy out of saying “but what about them”.

Antisemitism is often the beginning of tyranny, but it is never the end, and the impacts of antisemitism reverberate throughout our democracy. We support Representative Griffin’s House Bill 1351, and we further call on the Maine State Legislature to do everything in its power to make sure that Maine is a safe space for everyone to live and thrive, including the 25,000 Jews who call Maine home.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Leslie Kirby  
CEO, Jewish Community Alliance of Southern Maine  
[lkirby@mainejewish.org](mailto:lkirby@mainejewish.org)