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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday August 15, 2025 ~ Parshat: Eikev

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Hate has a definition, and New Jersey must name it

Anti-Semitism, and especially antisemitic hate crimes have reached unprecedented levels since October 7th 2023. According to data released by the [FBI](#) earlier this month, antisemitic hate crimes in recent years have broken all previous statistical records. In 2024, even as the number of hate crimes overall actually decreased in the US, crimes committed against Jews increased by 5.8 percent, the largest total recorded in over 30 years. We are 2% of the US population, but subject to 69% of all religious based hate crimes. The problem is real. And law enforcement needs tools and resources including a working definition of exactly what antisemitism is. In this climate, clarity matters. Definitions matter. And leadership matters.

Three weeks ago, Jason Shames, CEO of the Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey, testified before the State and Local Government Committee of the NJ State Assembly in support of Bill A3558. This legislation that would formally adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism. Speaking on behalf of the Jewish Federations of New Jersey. While this bill has already passed the NJ Senate, it had been stalled in the Assembly for over a year despite the support it had already garnered by over 75% of the Assembly. Shames [delivered](#) a powerful and principled appeal for the state to take a stand against hate by embracing a widely recognized framework that distinguishes legitimate political discourse from antisemitic incitement.

With antisemitic incidents reaching record highs, and with Jewish communities facing real threats including 719 reported antisemitic incidents, the need for moral clarity and legal consistency has never been greater. The [IHRA definition](#), already adopted by 37 U.S. states and over 30 countries, offers a vital tool for identifying and combating antisemitism without infringing on free speech.

Below is Jason Shames' full testimony. Please take a few minutes and read it. It reflects not only the voice of one leader, but the shared resolve of hundreds of thousands of Jews across New Jersey who refuse to be silent in the face of rising hate. (Following his testimony, the committee voted 7-0 in favor of this bill. Later this year, it will be voted on by the full plenum of the Assembly.)

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about an issue that is both urgent and deeply personal to so many across our state: the alarming rise in antisemitism — and the need for New Jersey to take a clear, principled stand by adopting the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism through Bill A3558.

My remarks today are on behalf of our collective Federations – Jewish Federation of South Jersey, Jewish Federation of Greater Metro West, Jewish Federation Heart of New Jersey, Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey, and Jewish Federation of West-Central New Jersey.

I want to thank Assemblyman Gary Schaer, Assemblywoman Rosy Bagolie, Speaker Craig Coughlin, Assemblyman Inganamort as Co-Primesponsor, and the 54 other Democrats and Republicans who have co-sponsored this bill.

And specifically today, I want to thank Committee Chairman Robert Karabinchak, Vice Chair Lisa Swain, and the members of the Assembly State and Local Government Committee for posting A3558 and bringing it to a vote.

Many people will testify today. Those in favor of this bill will cite clear facts and trends, backed by credible sources – including the FBI, the U.S. and New Jersey Attorneys General, and our partners at the ADL. Opponents, on the other hand, will claim that adopting IHRA curtails free speech. But let's be clear: it does not. Thirty-seven U.S. states and over 30 countries have adopted IHRA without infringing on individual rights. I, along with hundreds of thousands in New Jersey, are exhausted by having to continually explain and defend this truth.

So why am I here again, standing before elected officials in our great state?

Because the Jewish community must stand up to those bullies who see this bill as a threat to their ability to harass and intimidate us. And because Jewish tradition compels us to engage in the democratic process— to seek justice and fight hate wherever it appears.

But we have reached a tipping point. I can no longer pretend that this process has been fair to New Jersey's Jewish community.

Yes, the opposition will find individuals who identify as Jewish or oppose antisemitism to promote their cause. You may hear from some of them today. But they represent a tiny fraction of New Jersey's more than 610,000 Jews. They are praised by critics of the bill because they espouse a view not shared by the vast majority of us.

And while I, and most of the Jewish community, find those views offensive, this IHRA bill clearly allows criticism of Israeli policy. It simply makes clear that no one has the right to commit violence or discrimination against Jews based on those views.

Let me put it another way: I, and those I represent, denounce Islamophobia because all hate is wrong. We have never opposed language or legislation that addresses anti-Muslim bigotry — because it's morally the right thing to do, regardless of the scope of the problem. According to the FBI, 68% of religious-based hate crimes in the U.S. are anti-Jewish. Anti-Muslim incidents represent 8.7%. In New Jersey, the Attorney General's office reports that in 2023, anti-Jewish bias accounted for about 22% of all incidents, while anti-Muslim bias was around 4%. And we know those numbers have only worsened since.

The numbers are clear: antisemitism is a national crisis. Jews are facing unprecedented numbers of bias incidents — and yet we remain among the most vocal voices opposing all forms of hate.

Passing IHRA will protect the Jewish community and counter the very harassment tactics that opponents of this bill often use. Just ask the residents of Teaneck, West Orange, Lakewood, and Highland Park — towns that have been subjected to violent protests and harassment.

Now ask yourselves: has there ever been a time when a mob of Jews marched into Paterson, Clifton, or elsewhere, tore kufis off Muslim men, and shouted slurs like “rapists,” “baby killers,” or “kidnappers”? Can anyone name an instance where a

Jewish mob called for the ethnic cleansing of Muslims and then defaced a mosque? Of course not.

This is the real reason some oppose the IHRA bill — not because it threatens free speech, but because it threatens their ability to freely target Jews with hate.

You are, in fact, free to be a bigot in America. If you want to criticize Israel, you can. If you want to call someone a “dirty Jew,” you can. But you cannot threaten or assault Jews at a synagogue event, screaming “Zionists should die,” or that “Jews are Nazis”. That is an antisemitic hate crime, and it needs to be recognized as such.

That is why this legislation matters. That is why the burden is now on this committee, and on our state, to do the right thing.

Don't be misled by false arguments. Don't be intimidated by bullies.

Take a clear moral stand and affirm that hate has no home in the Garden State.

Committee members, we thank you for your time and consideration. Do the right thing and vote in favor of A3558.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner