



A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday January 16, 2026 ~ Parshat: Vaera

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Dear Governor Murphy, Speaker Coughlin, and President Scutari: You Failed New Jersey's Jews

There are moments in Jewish life when a Rabbi's words or message to their community must comfort, moments when they must persuade, and moments when they must confront. This Shabbat is not a moment for soft language or careful equivocation. The title of this message is not reckless; it is deliberate. The title names responsibility without demonizing motives, addresses actions and outcomes without impugning souls, and speaks to those in power rather than speaking as partisans to opponents.

At a time when antisemitism is rising and Jewish fear is endlessly contextualized rather than addressed, gentleness can become a form of evasion. Religious leadership demands truth-telling as well as compassion, especially when that truth is uncomfortable. To speak plainly now is to model for our community that Jewish fear does not need to be endlessly translated into more palatable language before it is taken seriously — and that Jewish safety and dignity are not negotiable.

Last Friday, the New Jersey Legislature decided not to advance A3558/S1292, legislation in both the Assembly and the Senate that would have adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism. It was a profound failure to meet the urgency of the moment. At a time when antisemitism is rising across New Jersey, the nation, and the world, our state chose hesitation where clarity was required, and avoidance where moral leadership was needed.

Antisemitism occupies a singular and troubling place among hatreds. Unlike racism, sexism, or other forms of bigotry, only antisemitism is routinely subjected to endless contextualization, qualification, and debate. Jewish lived experience is questioned, reinterpreted, and relativized. Harmful rhetoric is reframed as “political,” intimidation as “discourse,” and age-old tropes as “critique.” Again and again, Jews are told that what they are experiencing is too complicated to name plainly, or worse, that naming it constitutes an infringement on someone else’s rights.

Despite the protestations of its opponents, the IHRA definition does not criminalize speech. It does not prohibit criticism of Israel. It does not suppress political advocacy. The bill explicitly affirmed all of these protections. What IHRA does – and why it has been adopted by democratic governments around the world – is provide a clear, contemporary framework for recognizing antisemitism as it actually manifests today, including when it hides behind the language of politics or human rights. Its purpose is not punishment, but recognition; not censorship, but clarity.

The refusal to advance this legislation sends a painful message to New Jersey’s Jewish community: that antisemitism alone must remain perpetually ambiguous, perpetually debatable, and perpetually negotiable. Other hatreds are named and rejected without hesitation. Antisemitism, by contrast, is treated as an intellectual puzzle rather than a lived danger, a matter for abstraction rather than action. This double standard is itself a hallmark of antisemitism. As the Jewish Federations of New Jersey [stated](#), “This decision was a capitulation to political convenience over the fair treatment and protection of hundreds of thousands of New Jerseyans.”

I want our community to read the following letter to Governor Murphy and members of the New Jersey Assembly. Dozens of Rabbis serving communities across New Jersey have signed the following public letter expressing our outrage at this deeply troubling failure of leadership. We urge our elected leaders to reflect seriously on the consequences of inaction, and to recognize that combating antisemitism requires the same moral clarity and resolve demanded of every other form of hate.

To Governor Murphy and members of the New Jersey Assembly:

We write with profound concern about a [recent report](#) that legislation that would have New Jersey adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA)

working definition of antisemitism was scuttled due to concerns that supporters would face primary challenges. This is a deeply troubling failure of leadership that places political calculations above the safety of the Jewish population. As the Jewish Federations of New Jersey [stated](#), “This decision was a capitulation to political convenience over the fair treatment and protection of hundreds of thousands of New Jerseyans.”

The Jewish community is facing surging antisemitism that we never thought possible in America. A recent NJ.com special report titled [New Jersey Jews are living in fear](#) detailed “a tidal wave of intimidation, harassment and threats” and stated that “Over the past two years, Jews in New Jersey have been beaten, harassed and threatened. Bomb threats have been made. Calls for genocide have been shouted on suburban streets.” The report notes that New Jersey had the [highest number of antisemitic incidents per capita](#) in the nation in 2024, and that “The state itself is also tracking a [spike in anti-Jewish](#) assaults, vandalism and other bias incidents since 2022, according to its own data.

They include an [attempted firebombing](#) of a Bloomfield synagogue. A man who [attacked a security guard](#) after entering a Teaneck Jewish school during Purim. And a one-man antisemitic crime spree in which an Ocean County resident [stabbed an Orthodox man](#) in the chest, carjacked and assaulted a driver, and then ran down two pedestrians in Lakewood and Jackson, later telling police that Jews were ‘the real devils.’”

Already in 2026 demonstrators have gathered outside Jewish institutions to support Hamas’ murder of Jews, and a synagogue has been burned. Now is not the time to play politics with our safety.

The terror attack at Bondi Beach in Australia represents only the most recent example of the lethal consequences of ignoring such hate. That case serves as an urgent reminder that without clarity around what constitutes Jew-hatred, our institutions, campuses, workplaces, and public spaces lose the tools they need to recognize and

address it. This is why **adopting the IHRA definition of antisemitism is urgent.**

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner