

Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing
“Never to be Silent: Stemming the Tide of Antisemitism in America”
Questions for the Record for Meirav Solomon
Submitted March 12, 2025

QUESTIONS FROM SENATOR CORY A. BOOKER

1. Ms. Solomon, thank you for your testimony before the Committee and for sharing your personal experiences as a Jewish student. As a student on the front lines of the current divisions on college campuses, what is it like to be a Jewish student on campus in such a politically charged environment?

In a word: disorienting. At times since October 7, 2023 it’s been difficult to recognize my campus. Protests in opposition to American support for the war in Gaza have at times featured antisemitic tropes and hate speech. Jewish students have been excluded from clubs and held accountable for the actions of Israel. These divisions have strained friendships and made my classmates feel unsafe. Growing up in North Carolina, I encountered more brazen, explicit antisemitism; I endured jokes about my horns and someone I thought was a friend mocked me for picking up a lucky penny.

I am distraught that at Tufts, an institution known for valuing curiosity and acceptance, antisemitism persists. Yet it is important not to paint my university or my classmates with a broad brush. I’ll never forget the Palestinian classmate who checked in on me after the 7th, the dialogue sessions in which my classmates and I raised differing opinions respectfully, or the university staff who stayed in constant contact with our Jewish community. College campuses are not a second front in a conflict taking place across the world. They are imperfect institutions where most students, staff, and faculty are appalled by antisemitic hate, by hate of any form.

My classmates and I deserve constructive support from the federal government. We deserve a fully funded Office of Civil Rights to investigate incidents of hate and harassment. As a religious minority we deserve university services that will represent and advocate for us, that are not under siege by the presidential administration. Savage cuts to higher education and the Department of Education do nothing to keep us safer.

Using the pain of our Jewish community as a tool to slash federal grants and silence political opponents is deeply reprehensible. And yet this administration is fanning the flames of our grief to undermine constitutional rights and institutions they view as a threat to their right wing agenda.

Since I testified in person, ICE has apprehended leaders of the campus protest movement, threatening a group of people that includes permanent legal residents with deportation. If the administration’s intent is to gravely threaten free speech and halt criticism of Israel’s government, it has succeeded. If by taking this flagrantly unconstitutional step, it intends to make Jewish students safer, it has failed profoundly.

I want to attend a university where no one feels unsafe because of who they are, where students can participate fully and disagree cordially. To get there, Jewish safety must be an end goal, not a cynically deployed political prop.

2. What are some policies and actions taken by college administrators that you believe make college campuses a safer environment for Jewish students?

On the policy front, education stands out as particularly crucial. We celebrate that universities bring together different people from different places and backgrounds. But the reality is that our classmates come to school with varying levels of knowledge about Jews and antisemitism, with history to learn and biases to unlearn.

I am proud that Tufts, in consultation with our Jewish community, introduced a comprehensive antisemitism training for first year students. It has improved discourse on campus markedly, improving the fluency and empathy of our student body around antisemitism.

I am heartened to see task forces proliferate at universities across the country, charged with combating antisemitism. It is my hope and my recommendation that they will address the issue holistically and comprehensively. While the war in Gaza has led to a drastic increase in antisemitism, anti-Jewish hatred existed long before and will exist long after this conflict. Any approach that, like Project Esther, is geared solely towards stamping out campus protests, misses the forest for the trees.

Finally, I urge universities to resist attacks on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. This rather sprawling term can encompass antisemitism and Holocaust education, Jewish Studies programs, and Jewish representation in student government. Cuts to DEI serve right wing ideologues, not Jewish students.

Less policy-driven, but equally crucial is maintaining close contact and dialogue with the Jewish community on campus. Consulting with Hillel, Chabad, Jewish studies departments, and Jewish students enables administrators to make decisions that represent the community. This ethos should extend beyond the Jewish community and include sober, responsible elements of the protest movement. Brown University's agreement to end the encampment is a salutary example of how to address divisions on campus without the acrimony and hate that has plagued other universities.

3. In your testimony, you expressed concerns about chilling legitimate debate and extolled the benefits of hearing from multiple viewpoints, even those we fundamentally disagree with. In your opinion, how can school administrators effectively balance respecting freedom of speech with proactively battling discrimination and harassment?

Nearly everyone can agree that universities have a legitimate interest in curbing speech that incites violence against members of their communities or demeans them based on their immutable characteristics. Nearly everyone can also agree that universities should be hubs of dialogue and discourse, places for students to engage with ideas with which we disagree.

Because those two principles are so important, and not mutually exclusive, most universities already have policies in place to uphold them. Especially at moments like this one, with such sensitive and politically fraught issues at hand, universities must apply their policies in a consistent, viewpoint-neutral manner.

It bears mentioning that there are plenty of avenues to battle discrimination and harassment that have nothing to do with policing speech; antisemitism education and collaboration with the campus Jewish community are important steps. So is establishing a transparent and actionable complaint process so that universities can effectively and internally address antisemitic incidents. Universities should cooperate openly with the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights investigations, accepting the oversight of a body that exists to ensure students' rights are respected.

But it does fall on administrators to make distinctions between legitimate political speech and antisemitic hate. I recommend that universities not adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism when making these determinations and that the federal government not compel them to do so. Kenneth Stern, the definition's author has spoken out against the politicization of the definition to curtail legitimate criticism of Israel. To avoid limiting the tools at their disposal, administrators should emulate the Biden administration's strategy, eschewing the codification of any one sweeping definition of antisemitism as the sole standard.

Instead, I hope that universities will treat free speech and due process as pillars of their approach to these issues. Firstly, universities should do so because academic inquiry and discourse can only flourish when free speech rights are respected. Furthermore, history shows us that Jews and other minorities are safest when liberal ideals like free speech, constitutionalism, and democracy are ascendant.

By demonstrating broad acceptance of free speech and allowing students to express unpopular, even caustic opinions, universities equip themselves to better deal with genuine incidents of antisemitism. Drawing a clear distinction between protected expression and hate speech and harassment allows universities to foster the former and root out the latter. Even as the Trump administration seeks to clamp down on the free speech rights of citizens and permanent residents, universities can and should fight antisemitism and all forms of hatred, while honoring free speech.