

July 10, 2025

The Honorable Tim Walberg
Chair, House Committee on Education
and Workforce
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Chair, House Committee on Education
and Workforce
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Statement for the Record of the Committee's Hearing, "Antisemitism in Higher Education: Examining the Role of Faculty, Funding, and Ideology"

Dear Chairman Walberg, Ranking Member Scott, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for inviting me to deliver testimony today on the fight to end antisemitism in our country. The organization I lead as CEO, Bend the Arc: Jewish Action, is the largest national Jewish organization focused on domestic policy. Bend the Arc and our supporters across the nation are deeply concerned about antisemitism, as well as anti-Muslim, anti-Arab bigotry, anti-Black racism, anti-Asian hate, anti-LGBTQ hate, and anti-immigrant xenophobia in our country today. We work to fight antisemitism and other oppressions for the safety of our multiracial, multiethnic American Jewish community, and also for the health of our democracy more broadly.

In the wake of recent attacks at American Jewish gatherings — in Boulder, CO and Washington, D.C. — many Jews in the U.S. and around the world, feel fear and pain — from recent threats and violence and from the memories they stir from dark periods in our Jewish history. Afraid that attacking Jewish people, including as a proxy for attacking Israel, is becoming normalized. Afraid of being targeted as Jews or in Jewish spaces, or taking part in civic life.

Against this backdrop, alongside our fear, we must strongly object to the way that this Administration has taken various actions we will detail below—including against immigrants and protestors—in the supposed name of fighting antisemitism. Many in our community feel alone, betrayed, or unsure of who we can trust, which can result in the instinct to isolate ourselves from other people; but we know that our safety as Jews is bound together with safety for all and in a healthy, pluralistic democracy.

Anger, fear, and trauma following the attacks of October 7th and the subsequent war and siege of Gaza not only inflamed passions and fierce debates at American universities—they also sparked intimidation, exclusion, harassment, and sometimes violence. Every student deserves to be in an educational environment free from harassment. Far too many campus administrators failed in their mission to provide a safe environment to Jewish, Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim students. It is not a zero-sum game—good university policies don't pit one group against another, but protect all students. When any group of students is treated with hostility or suspicion in the name of protecting another group, universities fail all students.

Free speech is important—and not absolute. Universities have the right to make rules and policies about what types of protests will be permitted—location, length, and hours, for example. However, those rules and policies must be applied equally, regardless of the specific viewpoint of those protesting. Concerningly, certain police actions have been taken disproportionately toward pro-Palestinian protests (the vast majority of which were peaceful) under the pretext of fighting antisemitism. We do not believe that infringing upon free speech is a way to fight antisemitism – on the contrary, using Jewish students as a justification for infringing upon all students' rights is profoundly divisive and damaging to Jewish students. Additionally, it must be noted that there are many Jewish students who are protesting in support of Palestinian human rights – those students need protection too.

Protest is essential to making democracy work and must be protected. We are firmly against antisemitism being used as an excuse to threaten free speech and criticism of university and U.S. policy. To be clear, criticism of the state or government of Israel or of American policy towards it is not inherently antisemitic. But both supporters of and those who criticize Israel can fuel antisemitism by conflating Jews with the state of Israel with no distinction; holding all Jews accountable for the government of Israel's actions; holding Jewish students to an unfair standard or requiring that they affirm specific beliefs about the state of Israel in order to participate in university activities, coalition spaces and Jewish life; and assuming that all Jews are a monolith and feel the same way about Israel. When protests become popular movements, they bring everyone from everywhere, with all their experiences and talents. They can also bring what pollutes our society, such as antisemitism, anti-Black racism, sexism, and homophobia. These oppressions are not reflective of the movements themselves.

Additionally, Bend the Arc: Jewish Action is deeply alarmed by the Trump administration's [detention of protesters like Mahmoud Khalil, Badar Khan Suri, and Rümeyza Öztürk](#), among too many others, and that, by the administration's own admission, such action is being taken in the [name of fighting antisemitism](#). We also reject the Administration's [implication](#) that, following the attack in Boulder, Jewish safety is justification for the recent travel ban. **We unequivocally reject this premise**; we see these actions as nothing more than cynical attempts to use antisemitism to enact a cruel, authoritarian agenda, to attack those who disagree with the administration's positions, and to dismantle the democracy that Jews rely on to be safe.

In my Haaretz op-ed, "Smokescreen Antisemitism': How the Trump-fueled Arrest of Mahmoud Khalil Endangers Jews" I explain how this strategy is merely an attempt "to obscure, confuse, and create cover for [the administration's] despotic plans that harm everyone. Their goal is to generate division and fear to grow their power and wealth, and most importantly, to distract from their own, very real, antisemitism." I have appended the full text of this piece for your reference. Antisemitism was created to protect people in power by shifting blame for society's problems to Jews, especially during moments of social change or unrest. That is precisely what we are seeing from the Trump administration and their enablers in the broader Republican party.

If this administration truly cared about Jewish safety and ending antisemitism, it would not attempt to shutter the Office of Civil Rights at the Department of Education, or attack our

fundamental freedoms, or allow administration officials to perform Nazi salutes from its biggest platforms. Indeed, the greatest threat to American Jews today is the white nationalist movement and its enablers, including in Congress and the White House, and their efforts to degrade American democracy and replace it with a white ethno-state. Antisemitism is part of the machinery of division and fear that this movement relies on for power. This is the same machinery these movements and their enablers use to endanger Black, Indigenous, and people of color, transgender people, people with disabilities, people who are immigrants, people who are Muslim, and so many more communities.

A core part of this movement's dangerous rhetoric is the so-called "great replacement" conspiracy theory, which has been cynically brought into the mainstream by politicians on the national stage, emboldening white supremacists and leading to violence against many communities. The [Bigoted Conspiracy Caucus Report](#), which Bend the Arc contributed to, details the use of "great replacement" by Republican politicians. Additionally, in the weeks before the massacre at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, the largest antisemitic attack in American history, political leaders, as well as press outlets, stoked fear through their "warnings" about a so-called "invasion" of refugees seeking asylum at our borders. Many added conspiracy theories about powerful Jewish financiers funding this supposed invasion. The murderer in Pittsburgh pointed to those very news reports and conspiracy theories as his motivation for committing mass violence against innocent Jews at prayer. With our colleagues at Political Research Associates (PRA), we detailed this dangerous process which in our report, [Taking Aim at Multiracial Democracy](#). The mainstreaming of the great replacement conspiracy theory was also horrifically at play in the shooting that killed 10 members of the Black community in Buffalo, as detailed by America's Voice in their report, [Two Years After the Deadly Terror Attack in Buffalo, the Replacement Theory has Only Gone More Mainstream](#).

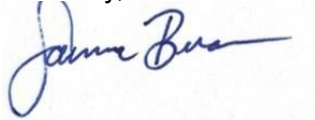
It is critical that our elected officials [denounce and cease using](#) the great replacement conspiracy theory and other related dangerous rhetoric, such as ["invasion" language](#). It is also critical that members of Congress denounce it when Presidential advisors such as Elon Musk and Steve Bannon throw [up the Nazi](#) salute when giving speeches to their base. This rhetoric and these actions stoke violence against the Jewish community as well as other communities targeted by white nationalism. We must also not forget that the Unite the Right rally was on the campus of the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, a rally at which protestors shouted, "Jews will not replace us."

Finally, we urge the Committee and colleague administrators to [refrain from supporting the codification of a specific definition of antisemitism](#), including the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA) definition, or encouraging universities to "adopt" this definition. Even one of the authors of the definition, Kenneth Stern, [advocates against its codification](#). Rather than a codified definition, we need a multi-pronged approach to countering antisemitism and all forms of bigotry, as well as structural reforms that ensure a thriving and inclusive democracy where every single one of us is safe, no matter our race, class, or faith. Indeed, we know from decades of work with government entities that the absence of a codified definition does not prevent necessary and important work to fight antisemitism and other forms

of hate crimes. Indeed, no other form of bias has a legally codified definition, and that fact does not hinder governments from enforcing statutes preventing discrimination, prosecuting hate crimes, and doing other important work to prevent hate violence.

The path toward a safer future for all people exists in a multiracial democracy where everyone has what they need to thrive. We know that Jewish safety is deeply connected to the safety of all people targeted by white supremacy, and the safety of every single one of us will not exist in isolation.

Sincerely,



Jamie Beran,
CEO, Bend the Arc: Jewish Action

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<https://archive.is/2025.03.12-192326/https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2025-03-12/ty-article-opinion/premium/per-the-white-house-the-arrest-of-gaza-protest-leader-khalil-was-on-behalf-of-jews/00000195-8b37-dc7b-adb7-cfff4ce30000#selection-503.0-511.219>

Opinion | 'Smokescreen Antisemitism': How the Trump-fueled Arrest of Mahmoud Khalil Endangers Jews

The White House has been abundantly clear: the arrest of Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil was pursued on behalf of Jews. It's part of a wider strategy to obfuscate MAGA antisemitism and an increasingly fascist regime

By Jamie Beran, the CEO of Bend The Arc: Jewish Action, the largest national Jewish organization that works exclusively on U.S. domestic policy.

"Shalom Mahmoud" are not words I'd ever thought I would see from an official White House social media account – certainly not when used to announce the government's arrest and detention of Mahmoud Khalil, a recent graduate of Columbia University.

Everything about this incident is nightmarish, but the White House's decision to announce his arrest with "Shalom" must not be ignored. The message is abundantly clear: U.S. President Donald Trump wants the world to know that he's [pursued this unconscionable act on behalf of Jews](#).

This is just one piece of this administration's plans to use the false promise of Jewish safety as a smokescreen to carry out their repressive and dangerous agenda. Indeed, the White House has made it terrifyingly clear that this is only the beginning of the administration's assault on activists – all in the name of fighting antisemitism.

But of course, repressive policies and practices, including infringing upon the freedom of speech, the right to protest, and the function of the education system – especially higher education – [are priorities for the Trump administration](#) because they serve his authoritarian modus operandi.

American Jews understand that these rights and institutions are critically important for protecting our community, as well as all marginalized groups. In fascist regimes, these rights and institutions were historically first on the chopping block; that the Trump administration should follow suit is no surprise. What is alarming, however, is the U.S. government's positioning of Jewish safety as somehow a goal for this plan.

Khalil is a U.S. permanent resident. He is married to a U.S. citizen, and his wife is due to give birth to their first son in a month. He is also Palestinian and was a leader of the Columbia University protest encampment following Israel's war in Gaza. The entire manner in which the U.S. government has carried out Khalil's arrest appears aimed at using his Palestinian identity and his beliefs to stoke fear and division.

If Trump actually cared about Jewish people or wanted to end antisemitism, he would be upholding our freedoms to speak, study, and stand up for what we believe, not arresting students and tearing them away from their families. It also wouldn't allow MAGA movement leaders and administration officials to actively promote antisemitic and racist conspiracy theories, use antisemitic messages to win elections, or – lest we forget – perform Nazi salutes from its biggest platforms, and then turn around and claim to be enacting unpopular policies on behalf of Jewish people.

Confused? That's the point. This latest episode is a blatant example of how this administration uses "smokescreen antisemitism" to obscure, confuse, and create cover for its despotic plans that harm everyone. Their goal is to generate division and fear to grow their power and wealth, and most importantly, to distract from their own, very real, antisemitism.

They have learned that positioning repressive actions as benefiting Jewish people obfuscates their audience and drives wedges between Jews and their neighbors who might otherwise join together to oppose these actions. And like all expressions of antisemitism, this strategy directly harms Jews.

At Bend the Arc: Jewish Action, the organization I lead, we have devoted much of our organizational time, resources and power toward ending antisemitism – regardless of its source. We do this because we understand how damaging antisemitism is, for Jewish people and for everyone in the United States.

The American Jewish community has a wide range of views on the war in Gaza, and college campuses have been a space of intense conflict, protest, and in some cases incidents of true antisemitism and harassment. Jews in the United States and worldwide are increasingly experiencing antisemitism against the backdrop of the war, and this poses a real threat.

All antisemitism is unacceptable. That includes when antisemitism happens on college campuses and in protests. It also includes the Trump administration's exploitation of Jewish fear, Jewish trauma, and Jewish experience to enact mass deportations, to punish political opponents, and to build a fascist regime.

This is an important moment that will test the American Jewish community's values and resolve. I draw inspiration from the fact that the judge who ruled that Mr. Khalil should not be deported is himself Jewish. We cannot allow ourselves to be used as an excuse to justify the Trump administration's plans to tear families apart – plans which much of the American Jewish community opposes.

Whatever we think about Mahmoud Khalil's beliefs, he is a legal resident of the United States who appears to be acting lawfully within his rights in this country. When a government starts threatening people's legal status because they disagree with the [content of their protected free speech, it is unquestionably dangerous to all](#), Jewish people very much included. It's doubly dangerous when they claim to do so in the name of Jewish safety.

There is no path to safety in an increasingly fascist regime that involves destroying public and higher education, stifling free speech, or hunting down protesters. There is no path to safety that involves banning people because of their race or religion. There is no path to safety that involves tearing immigrant families and communities apart. The only way we can truly end antisemitism is by locking arms across religions and races, across genders and generations, and insisting that freedom and safety is for us all – no exceptions.

If we buy into the false promise of safety for some at the expense of others – even others we may disagree with strongly – we may find ourselves in a United States where we are no longer able to speak up at all.