

Committee on Education and Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Kiley,

My name is Karen Marder. During the Sept. 12 hearing on antisemitism in K-12 education, my personal experiences dealing with this issue were falsely recounted by Nicole Neily, president of Defending Education, who asserted that I was not protected by my union, the United Federation of Teachers or its national affiliate, the AFT.

I am writing to set the record straight. At no point did I feel abandoned by my union. If anything, I felt comforted, supported, and advised! The false narrative stated by Ms. Neily was just that: false. My union was there for me from the very first day, throughout the process of getting rid of my principal, the *actual* cause of the riot due to poor leadership and discipline; and my union continues to be there for me to this day.

I want the record to reflect what happened. On Nov, 20, 2023, a large group of students at my school had a riot because they were upset about a social media post I made. The post, made Oct. 8, was a photo of myself standing with a sign that said, "I Stand with Israel." During that riot, hundreds of students stormed the hallways, dancing, yelling, chanting and causing damage to school property. I warned my school about this over the weekend, having been tipped off by a former student online. Not much was done, and I was forced to hide in a locked administrator's office while the school went under lockdown and the police and school security regained control.

As you can imagine, this was extremely terrifying. I was escorted to my car by armed police officers and arrived home in the middle of the day, shaken and upset. Right away, I was in touch with my union, the UFT. I heard from my chapter leader, the school representative, within minutes after arriving home, comforting me and explaining the next steps. By the evening, I had spoken to the union's high school representative. When my principal told me I could use my own sick time while the situation calmed over the next few days, the UFT fought for me; and within a day, I had been approved for paid leave, a process that normally takes weeks and months to process. I spoke to Michael Mulgrew, head of the UFT, who gave me his personal phone number and walked me back into my school when I returned a week later. On the first afternoon, Randi Weingarten, president of the AFT had gotten wind of my story and visited me in my home, making sure I was OK, and connecting me with everyone from the Anti-Defamation League to Sen. Chuck Schumer.

The far right has continuously used my story and other incidents of campus violence as fodder for one of their true goals: union busting. Further, their "concern" about antisemitic acts in schools has only served to be a way to denigrate public schools and those of us that work in and attend them. They do not care about Jewish teachers, Jewish students or Jewish lives. They care about sticking it to the Democrats, and I'm sick and tired of being used in their lies and propaganda.

There is no question antisemitism is on the rise, and we need our union and public schools to work together to create curricula to address it, to have open dialogues with students and staff, and to deal with incidents as they occur. We need lawmakers to stop gaslighting and politicizing the issue.

I feel fortunate that my unions, the UFT and AFT, are and have always been leaders in making sure that *all* students and staff feel safe, welcomed and protected in public schools.

Sincerely,

Karen Marder