

The Wrong Way to Fight Antisemitism  
An Open Letter from Bay Area Rabbis  
May 25, 2025

**This document is now closed. If you are a rabbi or cantor who would like to sign on, please contact Amy Eilberg [rebamy@eilberg.com](mailto:rebamy@eilberg.com).**

As a politically diverse group of rabbis in the Bay Area, we are deeply concerned by the rising tide of antisemitism in the United States in recent years, and especially since the October 7<sup>th</sup> attack. We continue to care for the many members of our community who have been directly impacted by expressions of antisemitism and the fear that this environment evokes in so many of us. We have been especially concerned for the well-being of our college students, who have experienced harassment, exclusion, and sometimes physical attacks. We will always do whatever we can to oppose antisemitism, and we appreciate the efforts of universities that have worked to ensure Jewish safety for our students, especially in these volatile times.

But we must also speak out as rabbis in support of basic Jewish values, including the inherent dignity of every human being and care for the stranger. And we must speak up in defense of freedoms that have allowed us to thrive throughout our history as Jews in America.

Today, we are witnessing an alarming crackdown on civil liberties in our country, including the detention of international students without due process. We have seen students who had exercised their free speech rights arrested without a warrant, sent to detention centers without their families being notified, and threatened with deportation without a hearing. We know of immigrants, some of them with legal status, abducted and flown to horrific international detention centers without evidence or due process. We are being told that these unlawful detentions are necessary to protect Jewish safety.

But defying basic constitutional protections for people with viewpoints which for some of us are frightening does not protect Jewish safety. On the contrary, the targeting, detention and deportation of international students threatens to erode our democracy without making Jewish or Israeli students safer in any way. What the American public sees is a stifling of free speech, as if the Jewish community demands this. We do not.

We also witness the draconian defunding of university activities that have nothing whatsoever to do with antisemitism. We have seen threats to withhold already allocated funding for essential medical and technological research, the kind of work that has made American universities the envy of the world. Again, these things are purportedly being done to defend the Jewish community.

To suggest that all of this is being done to fight antisemitism strains credulity. How does ending research on cancer or Parkinson's disease make Jews any more secure?

Rather, such actions only strengthen the narrative of true antisemites, who have long seen Jews as a shadowy cabal that controls entire societies for our own parochial needs.

We know that the Trump administration has for many years demonized and dehumanized immigrants. These attitudes long preceded the antisemitic climate we have seen since October 7<sup>th</sup>. We also know that the Trump administration has long demonstrated animus toward American universities, and declared (in [Project Esther](#), for example,) that academic institutions must be punished for their supposed ideological bias.

Many rabbis and Jewish community leaders have pushed back, in both national<sup>1</sup> and local<sup>2</sup> statements asserting that there are many things this administration could be doing that would genuinely support Jewish safety. For example, they could support the work of the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, which is the body charged with university investigations. Instead, this administration has halted the work of that office, headlined renowned antisemites, toyed with the terrifying "Sieg Heil" salute, and praised antisemitic and authoritarian leaders around the world. This will not make us safer as Jews or as Americans.

On the contrary, it is clear that we have thrived as a people in America because it is a nation based on human rights and legal protections for all people in a vibrant democracy. The assault on the pillars of American democracy (the judiciary, the press, academic institutions, the non-profit sector) makes us all less safe. We have too often seen in our history that when a government restricts the rights of one vulnerable group, oppression of the Jews will soon follow. We must speak up and insist that our safety and freedom as Jews is inextricably bound up with the safety and freedom of all people.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-851785>, [JCPA Statement](#), and <https://hias.org/news/jewish-clergy-speak-out-immoral-use-law/> and the American Jewish Committee's signature on a [letter by university presidents](#).

<sup>2</sup> Statement from Minnesota Rabbinical Association <https://tcjewfolk.com/2025/04/01/letter-to-the-jewish-community-about-constitutional-rights-and-jewish-safety/#:~:text=We%20invite%20our%20communities%20to.with%20whom%20we%20may%20disagree>, Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor, <https://www.jewishannarbor.org/statement-on-free-speech-due-process/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=7aff924f-2a11-4ab7-a223-856a7d6d4b0f>, An Open Letter from Massachusetts Jewish Leaders <https://drive.google.com/file/d/17naZzqVjXuq4aVsAieJkLQjm154FS80N/view?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=7aff924f-2a11-4ab7-a223-856a7d6d4b0f>, "Using Jewish Fear," Letter to the Editor to Chicago Tribune from 100 Chicagoland clergy <https://www.chicagotribune.com/2025/04/22/letters-042225/>, Op-Ed in the Charlotte Observer from North Carolina rabbis <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/opinion/article303999166.html>, Letter to the Editor to Philadelphia Inquirer from 60 Philadelphia-area rabbis <https://www.inquirer.com/news/rabbi-letter-trump-international-students-immigration-20250423.html>

This is why, as Jewish leaders, we must object to the claim that the targeting of immigrants and other minorities, the suppression of free speech and the erosion of democratic norms are all necessary to protect Jewish safety. Antisemitism is real, and it must be fought, but not by attacking the fundamentals of American democracy and dividing Jews from other vulnerable groups. We do not agree to be used as a pretext for the suppression of free speech, the dismantling of civil liberties, and attacks on democratic principles in the interest of one administration's political agenda.

Our constituents hold a range of views about various administration policies. But as rabbis, we must lead with moral vision. We must remain grounded in core Jewish values, including the absolute sanctity of every human being and our obligation to champion the needs of the marginalized. These values move us to join hands with other oppressed Americans so that all of us can be safe in a healthy democracy.

We call on all Americans of faith and conscience to remain vigilant against the real dangers of antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other hatred and othering across the political spectrum while refusing to allow this fight to be co-opted for partisan ends. We must stand firm in our values: championing human dignity for all people, defending the vulnerable, protecting democracy, and building a society where no community is used as a political pawn — because we are safe only when everyone is safe.

*Please note: those listed below are signing as individuals, NOT as representatives of the communities they serve.*

Rabbi Ruth Adar  
Rabbi Camille Angel  
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Rabbi Anita Josefa Barzman  
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Rabbi Meredith Cahn  
Rabbi Eli Cohen  
Rabbi Mychal Copeland  
Rabbi David Cooper  
Rabbi Faith Joy Dantowitz  
Rabbi Amy Eilberg  
Rabbi Diane Elliot  
Rabbi Larry Friedman  
Rabbi Dan Goldblatt  
Rabbi Ilana Goldhaber-Gordon  
Rabbi Marvin Goodman  
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Rabbi Chaya Gusfield  
Rabbi Debra Hachen  
Rabbi Laurie Hahn Tapper  
Rabbi Rebecca Hecht  
Rabbi Moshe Heyn  
Rabbi Cyn Hoffman  
Rabbi Jamie Hyams  
Rabbi Debbie Israel  
Rabbi Yoel Kahn  
Rabbi Irwin Keller  
Rabbi Stuart Kelman  
Rabbi Lori Klein  
Rabbi Chaim Koritzinsky  
Rabbi Leah Kurtz  
Rabbi Chayva Lehrman  
Rabbi Susan Leider  
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Rabbi Shelly Lewis  
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Rabbi Deni Marshall  
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Rabbi Shifrah Tobacman  
Rabbi Heath Watenmaker  
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