



September 18, 2025

The Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 715 – As amended 9/9/2025
REQUEST FOR VETO

Dear Governor Newsom:

We write to respectfully urge you to veto AB 715 Educational equity: discrimination: antisemitism prevention. (Zbur, Addis)

The California Coalition to Defend Public Education (CCDPE) – representing over 110 labor, education, student, racial justice, and community advocacy organizations – has raised grave concerns of censorship and the chilling of education that AB 715 will impose on our public school system. Notably, we join every major educational association and labor union in the state in opposing AB 715, including California's two major public school teachers unions, California Teachers Association and California Federation of Teachers, as well as the Association of California School Administrators, California Faculty Association, California County Superintendents, the California School Boards Association, and the Council of UC Faculty Associations.

There is no question that antisemitism in our schools, and in our society, is a problem and that it is important to address antisemitism wherever it arises - along with every other form of discrimination and racism. For the reasons outlined below, AB 715 is not an

appropriate way to address antisemitism in our schools and will have harmful impacts on other students and teachers.

AB 715 Rests on a Trumpian Weaponization of “Combating Antisemitism” to Attack Speech and Education

AB 715 claims to focus on antisemitism in our schools, yet it relies on a distorted definition of antisemitism that conflates virtually all criticism of the state of Israel with antisemitism. Antisemitism should be understood and defined as discrimination, targeting, violence, and dehumanizing stereotypes directed at Jews because they are Jewish. However, AB 715 threatens to censor inclusive and historically relevant curricula, including critical education about Gaza and Palestine, by referring to the 2023 Biden National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism “as a basis to inform schools on how to identify, respond to, prevent, and counter antisemitism.”

Specifically, the National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism that AB 715 relies on embraces the controversial International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Definition of antisemitism that the Trump administration adopted in 2019.

The IHRA Definition has been widely opposed by civil rights¹ and civil society organizations and institutions internationally, even by Israeli groups², because of how it seeks to silence Palestinian perspectives or any speech or activities that are critical of the Israeli government. Even the author of the definition, Kenneth Stern, has been vocal against its use for educational policy by saying, “I drafted the definition of antisemitism. Rightwing Jews are weaponizing it....It was never intended to be a campus hate speech code, but that's what Donald Trump's executive order accomplished...This order is an attack on academic freedom and free speech, and will harm not only pro-Palestinian advocates, but also Jewish students and faculty, and the academy itself.”³

Using this Trump-adopted definition of antisemitism will open up our school districts and teachers to accusations of being antisemitic simply for including educational material

¹ ACLU Letter to US Dept of Education on IHRA Definition of Antisemitism:

<https://www.aclu.org/documents/reject-definitions-of-anti-semitism-that-encompass-protected-speech>

² “UN urged to reject antisemitism definition over ‘misuse’ to shield Israel,” The Guardian, April 2023:

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2023/apr/24/un-ihra-antisemitism-definition-israel-criticism>

³ “I drafted the definition of antisemitism. Rightwing Jews are weaponizing it,” The Guardian, Dec 2019:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/13/antisemitism-executive-order-trump-chilling-effect>

or allowing classroom discussion that is deemed critical of Israeli governmental policy or actions. The message to teachers is that AB 715 is meant to exceptionalize and weaponize antisemitism at a time when teachers are already being threatened with sanctions or termination for discussing Palestine with their classes.

Relying on the 2023 Biden Strategy will create a chilling effect on public education in California and students engaged in constitutionally protected speech, and increase litigation against public school districts concerning discriminatory enforcement of the new provisions in the bill.

We are already witnessing the shameful attacks the Trump administration has waged on students, immigrants, and universities under the guise of “combatting antisemitism,” using the IHRA definition as the basis for these attacks.⁴ It is unconscionable that California would adopt his rightwing playbook and do his work of stifling speech for him, censoring teachers and students, and attacking the integrity of education.⁵

While an earlier version of the bill condemned Islamophobia, the final version of AB 715 before you fails to mention Islamophobia at a time when the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) reports that Islamophobia in the US is at an all time high. In fact, California has received the highest number of anti-Muslim discrimination complaints in the nation. In 2024 CAIR received 1,004 civil rights claims in California compared to 756 in 2023. Moreover, we know that Islamophobia is not often reported due to fear of retaliation so the real number is undoubtedly much higher.

AB 715 establishes the position of Antisemitism Prevention Coordinator as the only religious group to have a dedicated coordinator, while a companion bill, SB 48 - Educational equity: discrimination prevention coordinators (Gonzalez, Pierson, Fong and Ward) was introduced through a “gut and amend” move in the last few days of the session to declare the intent to establish an Office of Civil Rights with several other named but not defined coordinators. SB 48 places these coordinators in the Department of Education while AB 715 creates the Office of Civil rights under the

⁴ “Most American Jews say Trump is using antisemitism as an ‘excuse’ to silence free speech at universities,” NPR, Sept 2025:
<https://www.npr.org/2025/09/17/nx-s1-5543212/study-most-american-jews-dont-agree-with-trumps-tactics-for-combating-antisemitism>

⁵ “California Democrats are fighting Trump’s battles for him,” New York Times, Aug 2025:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/15/opinion/california-democrat-jewish-trump.html>

administration of the Government Operations Agency. This complicated bureaucracy is being created when the California State Education Code already includes anti-discrimination clauses, including religion, and a detailed Uniform Complaint Procedure to address discriminatory actions.

Additionally, in a move described as “unprecedented” in the Senate hearing on both bills it was noted that all coordinators will be appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate, making these positions political rather than administrative.

Another serious flaw in AB 715 is that it includes a clause that, “Teacher instruction shall be factually accurate”. This phrase opens the door to questions on whether fiction may be taught or discussed in the classroom, not to mention the potential for this clause to prevent teachers from asking students to evaluate or discuss and explore current or past events from multiple perspectives.

In addition to the multiple flaws in AB 715, the bill was rammed through the legislature with minimal opportunities for input from both legislators and the general public. Despite the authors’ clear commitment to the Assembly Education Committee to work with all opponents to the bill, many of our organizations were not included in the negotiations. Assemblymember and Chair Musatsuchi pointed out in the last Assembly Education Committee hearing, which he chairs, that the authors had not made a good faith effort to communicate with the Assembly Education Committee, as promised by the authors. Outside of the legislators who were meeting over this bill behind closed doors, no one saw any of the amendments being proposed until just before the Senate Education Committee hearing, three days before the legislature adjourned for the year. This undemocratic, Trump-like, approach is not acceptable. There must be time for analysis and input from the public, yet clearly, the fast-tracked process undertaken for AB 715 was an attempt to circumvent any meaningful public scrutiny or review.

Fiscal Concerns:

At a time when our state is facing significant financial challenges, AB 715 creates numerous additional costs:

- General Fund costs of approximately \$4 million each year and 6.0 positions to establish and operate the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and the Antisemitism Prevention Coordinator.

- This bill could result in additional, unknown General Fund cost pressures for the OCR to develop a training module to process and resolve discrimination complaints, as specified.
- There could be additional, unknown Proposition 98 General Fund cost pressures, potentially in the millions of dollars each year, for LEAs to ensure that instruction provided by teachers and the instructional materials that are adopted comply with the bill's requirements.
- The CDE estimates General Fund costs of \$1.2 million each year and 7.0 positions for various workload activities required by the bill, including support for complaint resolution, processing of appeals, and requiring specified corrective action to be taken by LEAs.
- Undetermined costs for lawsuits related to the bill

As the Palestinian people are facing what an independent UN commission has recently confirmed is an ongoing genocide⁶, now is not a time to censor discussions of Palestine in our classrooms, discussions facilitated by knowledgeable teachers who can provide the safest learning environment possible. AB 715 will create an atmosphere of fear and censorship in our schools in relation to discussions about Palestine and critiques of Israeli policies. Again, the entire education community has come out in strong opposition to this bill. A veto of AB 715 will let them know that our governor believes not in censorship, but in creating safe, nurturing, and critical educational spaces where our educators and students are supported in navigating the complexities of the world around us.

For the reasons stated above, we respectfully urge you to veto AB 715.

Sincerely,

The California Coalition to Defend Public Education

⁶ "Israel Is Committing Genocide in Gaza, U.N. Inquiry Says," New York Times, Sept 2025: <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/16/world/middleeast/un-israel-gaza-genocide.html>