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# California State Legislature



## CALIFORNIA LEGISLATIVE JEWISH CAUCUS

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January 3, 2024

Members of the California State Legislature  
California State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: October 7 Attack, Rising Antisemitism, and the 2024 Legislative Year

Dear Colleagues:

We write to ask for your support and solidarity at an unprecedented moment of pain and fear for our Jewish community. Recent events, including Hamas's horrific October 7 massacre, the ongoing Israel-Hamas war, the glorification of violence and sexual assault against Jews, calls for the annihilation of Israel, and the extreme escalation of antisemitism in the United States and around the world have left our community reeling. According to the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES), since October 7 there have been more than 200 bomb threats against Jewish institutions in California. We cannot recall another time in recent history when Jews in California felt as targeted, threatened, and unsafe as they do now. At this moment, the work our Legislative Jewish Caucus has been doing in close partnership with Jewish community organizations feels existential.

For members of the Jewish Caucus, the legislative recess was shaped by the horrific October 7 massacre — the largest mass murder, rape, and kidnapping of Jewish civilians since the Holocaust. The trauma of this horrific event was compounded by the shocking response to the Hamas attack from many whom we had considered allies and whom we have supported. It has impacted many of us on a deeply personal level, and we find ourselves asking fundamental questions — including about the security of our families and our community — that we could not have imagined several months ago.

At the same time, we are grateful that many of you — on both sides of the aisle and across the state — reached out after the October 7 attack, issued supportive statements, attended rallies, engaged with your local Jewish communities, and stood with us during this incredibly challenging moment in time. We particularly appreciate the Diversity Caucuses for their joint statement condemning the October 7 massacre; Governor Newsom for his vocal support and for visiting Israel; and our federal partners — including President Biden, Vice President Harris, Speaker Emerita Pelosi, and Senators Padilla and Butler — who have supported our community in word and deed. We will never forget those who stood with us.

We hope you will take a moment to read this letter, to reflect on the ongoing trauma impacting us and the Jewish community generally, to engage with us in thoughtful dialogue, and to work closely with us on policies that will help build a safer, kinder, and more peaceful world for all communities.

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It is difficult to overstate the ongoing trauma that October 7 has caused for Jews in California and around the world. Hamas — the terrorist organization that governs Gaza — infiltrated Israel and brutally massacred 1,200 people. Thousands more were injured. As documented by The New York Times, [Hamas terrorists engaged in mass rape and grotesque sexual violence](#). Hamas also kidnapped large numbers of civilians — including the elderly, disabled, and young children — and abducted them to Gaza. Hamas’s victims include primarily Israelis, but also citizens of the United States, Thailand, Nepal, France, Ukraine, Russia, the United Kingdom, Germany, Argentina, Canada, and other countries. More than 100 hostages remain in Gaza. The intentional cruelty and brutality of this attack is difficult to comprehend.

The October 7 massacre was deeply personal for members of the Jewish Caucus and for many Jews across California. Many Jewish Californians have family and friends who were impacted, including loved ones who were killed, injured, raped, or kidnapped. We continue to worry about the safety of our friends and relatives in Israel, including those who have been traumatized by the constant threat of rocket fire and the hundreds of thousands of Israelis who have been displaced because of the violence. And, we are worried sick about the hostages who remain in captivity, particularly given harrowing testimony about widespread sexual assault. The Jewish Caucus has been engaged with our Congressional partners and the Biden Administration in support of efforts to secure the safe and immediate release of the hostages and we welcome your assistance in these efforts.

Deepening the trauma for our community has been the truly despicable response to October 7 by many organizations and individuals, including some we have supported as allies. Beyond the devastating silence by so many people and organizations in the aftermath of October 7, there were also a shocking number of people and organizations that excused, celebrated, and even glorified Hamas’s horrific violence against Jews. \*Immediately\* after the October 7 massacre and \*before\* Israel entered Gaza, rallies in cities and on college campuses in California celebrated violence against Jews and glorified Hamas. Prominent social media accounts celebrated the murder, rape, and kidnapping of children and seniors as legitimate “resistance,” “a historic win,” and “an extraordinary day.” And, protestors vocalized their support for violent “intifada” while openly calling for the annihilation of Israel — home to more than 7 million Jews, more than half the world’s Jewish population. At rallies in California and around the world, protestors chanted phrases like “from the river to the sea” and “we don’t want no two states, we want all of ’48,” leaving little doubt that many of them support the annihilation of the world’s only Jewish nation.

Our community has been deeply impacted by public statements that rewrite history or ignore Jewish suffering. It has been infuriating to see statements and resolutions about the Hamas-Israel war that fail to even acknowledge October 7, the ongoing attacks against Israeli civilians, or the fact that Hamas continues to hold hostages in Gaza. For example, UN Women — an official agency of the United Nations — at first ignored and then barely acknowledged the mass rape and horrific sexual violence perpetrated against Israeli women on October 7. The unmistakable signal sent by these statements is that Jewish lives and bodies are somehow less valued and that different rules apply when the victims of human rights violations happen to be Jewish.

More personally for members of our Caucus, it has been incredibly painful to watch individuals and organizations we have considered allies — including some capitol advocates and labor unions — remain

silent when Jews were being raped, butchered, and kidnapped, only to speak out forcefully against Israel's efforts at self-defense. It has been shocking to see the vitriol, lack of context, and historical inaccuracy that has permeated this criticism, with some calling for a boycott of Israel — i.e., the destruction of Israel's economy — and even amplifying calls for Israel's elimination. To be clear, we respect everyone's right to criticize the Israeli government and Israeli policy — indeed, some of us have done so frequently, including during the current war. Yet, the contrast between the silence around anti-Jewish violence and antisemitism, on the one hand, and anti-Israel venom has been shocking.

We are deeply concerned about Jewish students at UC and CSU campuses who have been highly impacted by antisemitism inside and outside the classroom. Shortly after October 7, the UC Ethnic Studies Council, who are UC faculty members, celebrated the Hamas attack as “part of the Palestinian freedom struggle” and strenuously objected to the use of the word “terrorism” to describe the intentional murder, rape, and kidnapping of Israeli children and adults. A coalition of CSU ethnic studies professors issued a statement agreeing with the UC Ethnic Studies statement. Both the UC and CSU ethnic studies faculties called for a boycott of Israel — part of the BDS movement whose goal is to destroy Israel's economy and Israel itself. Students at CSU Long Beach advertised a “Day of Resistance” for Palestine with an image of a hang glider, a tool Hamas used on October 7 to transport terrorists into Israel to murder and rape young people at a music festival. A UC Davis professor posted on social media “zionist journalists who spread propaganda & misinformation . . . have houses w addresses, kids in school . . . they can fear their bosses, but they should fear us more.” The post included knife and hatchet emojis, followed by emojis for three drops of blood. The professor remains employed by UC Davis today, with the University having taken no action to date other than to initiate a vague investigation.

Our concerns about the environment for Jewish students have been amplified by our visits to several UC and CSU campuses, conversations with campus administrators, and meetings with Jewish students, faculty, and staff. Most significantly, what we have heard directly from Jewish students about their experiences with antisemitic harassment, threats, and vandalism on campus is distressing. Our Jewish Caucus sent a letter to UC and CSU leadership demanding comprehensive action to address antisemitism on campus, and we intend to follow-up with legislative initiatives to ensure accountability and the success of those efforts.

Sadly, children in some of our K-12 public schools have been subject to intense anti-Israel and antisemitic indoctrination in the wake of the October 7 massacre. For example, a group of public school teachers in Oakland, backed by the Oakland Education Association, conducted an unauthorized “teach in” that was riddled with offensive, inaccurate, and inflammatory content about Israel and Jews. Among other falsehoods, they taught students that Jews first arrived in Israel in 1948 (Jews have been there for several millennia), that Israel is a place for “white Jews” (the majority of Jewish Israelis are of non-European descent, largely of Middle Eastern, North African, or Ethiopian ancestry), and that “intifada” — which in the current context means killing Jews — was to be celebrated. We have since learned of similar curricula being used in other school districts. We have also seen the tragic impacts of broad ignorance among young people about the Holocaust, including many who do not believe the Holocaust happened.

Unfortunately, these disturbing incidents build upon an ongoing effort by a group of activists with extreme views who, for years, have been attempting to use ethnic studies as a vehicle to teach anti-Israel and anti-Jewish hate in our public schools. Most significantly, a group promoting so-called “Liberated Ethnic Studies” has been shopping its services to often-unsuspecting school districts seeking to comply with California's ethnic studies graduation requirement — a requirement that every member of our Jewish Caucus supported in good faith and as an act of solidarity with other marginalized communities and our sister Caucuses. Unfortunately, rather than focus on the experiences of communities of color in California and the United States, those promoting “Liberated Ethnic Studies” have made it a top priority to promote

bigoted, inaccurate, discriminatory, and deeply offensive anti-Jewish and anti-Israel propaganda — in many cases, promoting the content that was explicitly rejected by the Governor, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State Board of Education, and the Legislature because of its extreme bias and discriminatory nature.

Taken together, these efforts to use California's public education system to indoctrinate young people with dangerous anti-Jewish stereotypes, misinformation, and hateful rhetoric is a top concern for our Jewish Caucus. Certain individuals charged with educating California's children appear committed instead to teaching them to view Jews as oppressors, to hate Israel, to reject Israel's right to exist, and to view "resistance" (in this context, killing Jews) as somehow acceptable or even laudable. We cannot overstate how problematic such incitement is for Jews in California and for our community's future in the Golden State, particularly given our longstanding historical experience with anti-Jewish rhetoric leading quickly to anti-Jewish violence.

This toxic hate directed toward our community has seeped into our public discourse and political process, up to and including fatal violence directed toward a Jewish person at a protest. Local resolutions on the Israel-Hamas war — most notably in Oakland and Long Beach — have provided a platform for bigots to express hateful conspiracy theories and extreme anti-Jewish vitriol. Anti-Israel protesters literally shut down the California Democratic Party Convention after they were unable to achieve their aims through reasoned argument or the political process.

The explosion of hate directed at our community comes at a time when many Jews were already on edge. In the last few years, long before October 7, Jewish neighborhoods in California were targeted repeatedly with hate crimes, harassment, and anti-Jewish violence, including multiple shootings. The statistics tell the same story. In 2022, the Anti-Defamation League recorded the highest ever number of anti-Jewish hate incidents in the United States — which have increased nearly 500 percent in the past decade — and Jews remain the single most targeted religious minority in America. For members of our Caucus, some of whom have been personally targeted with antisemitism, this reality is confirmed by the metal detectors and armed security we now encounter every time we visit a Jewish school or house of worship — a state of affairs we would have considered inconceivable just a few years ago.

Compounding the challenge for our community is that antisemitism is alive and well on both sides of the political spectrum. The far right and far left in America view each other as existential enemies, yet the one thing they seemingly can agree on is that Jews are a unique problem responsible for various evils in the world. Our community is trapped between white nationalists who hate us because they believe we are behind a plan to diminish the influence of white people and far-left ideologues who hate us because we are somehow the epitome of white oppressors. In reality, we are an extremely tiny minority (there are more Latinos in California than Jews in the world) with a long history of being victims of violent persecution. We have seen this movie before, and we are determined to prevent history from repeating itself.

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We want to name and mourn the devastation that is occurring in Gaza. Far too many Palestinian civilians, including a heartbreaking number of children, have been killed — civilians who are not Hamas and who did not commit the October 7 massacre. While Hamas has cynically used these civilians as human shields and intentionally placed them in harm's way, we believe Israel must do everything possible to protect civilian life while it defends itself. More broadly, like so many people around the globe, we pray for a speedy end to the violence, for a future for Gaza that does not include Hamas, for a new government in

Israel committed to peace and a viable Palestinian state, and for a two-state solution that brings peace, security, self-determination, justice, and dignity to Israelis and Palestinians alike.

We are deeply concerned about recent incidents of Islamophobia in the United States, including the horrific murder of a Palestinian American child in Illinois and the injury of his mother, as well as the shooting of three Palestinian college students in Vermont. As Jews and as representatives of diverse communities, we are committed to protecting our Muslim friends and neighbors and to fighting Islamophobia with the same vigor that we fight antisemitism.

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As we return to the Capitol, we invite you to join our efforts to confront hate and bigotry and support the Jewish community at this difficult moment in time. To that end, we plan to unveil a package of Jewish Caucus priority bills and actions in the coming weeks, including:

- Requesting the formation of a Select Committee on Antisemitism in California to explore legislative, budget, administrative, and policy changes we can make to protect the Jewish community in California;
- Addressing the toxic anti-Jewish environment on certain UC and CSU campuses and ensuring our campuses are safe and welcoming for students of all faiths, backgrounds, and viewpoints;
- Ensuring our K-12 schools are not teaching children propaganda and falsehoods about Jews and Israel that lead to antisemitism and anti-Jewish violence;
- Enshrining Holocaust education in our public schools and universities, particularly in light of recent polling demonstrating a broad lack of awareness by younger Americans about this industrial extermination of six million Jews;
- Creating standards and processes for reporting antisemitism in our schools and colleges; and
- Expanding and strengthening the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, which has provided critical security assistance to Jewish institutions, as well as to other communities at risk of hate-motivated violence.

In addition, members of our Jewish Caucus and allies will be traveling to Israel early in the year to meet with diverse stakeholders, and we hope to present more opportunities for Legislators and staff to learn about Israel, antisemitism, and the challenges facing our community.

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We appreciate that California and the world are currently facing many challenges, that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is intensely complicated, and that it may be difficult for those outside our community to fully comprehend how recent events have impacted us so deeply. In that spirit, we hope to begin a conversation — both individually and at the Caucus level — about how we can work together to confront antisemitism, hate, and violence. In the meantime, we welcome your questions, thoughts, and ideas and hope that you will not hesitate to reach out to any of us directly. We need your allyship at this moment of crisis and we look forward to working with you to help build a safer, kinder, and more peaceful world for all our communities.

In Solidarity and With Deep Appreciation,



**SCOTT WIENER**  
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State Senator, 11th District



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Member of the State Assembly, 46th District



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**MARC BERMAN**  
Member of the State Assembly, 23rd District




**LAURA FRIEDMAN**  
Member of the State Assembly, 44th District



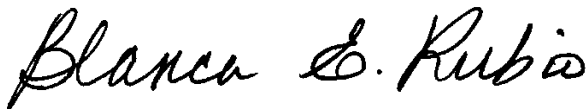
**JACQUI IRWIN**  
Member of the State Assembly, 42th District



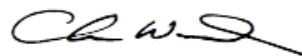
**JOSH LOWENTHAL**  
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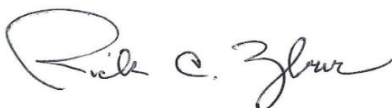
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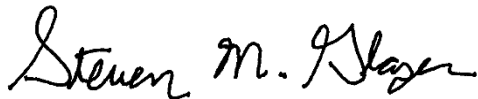
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**STEVE GLAZER**

State Senator, 7th District



**SUSAN RUBIO**

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**HENRY STERN**

State Senator, 27th District

CC: Governor Gavin Newsom  
Lieutenant Governor Eleni Kounalakis  
Secretary of State Shirley Weber  
Attorney General Rob Bonta  
State Controller Malia Cohen  
Treasurer Fiona Ma  
Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond  
California Congressional Delegation