



February 1, 2025

Special Commission on Combatting Antisemitism  
24 Beacon St.  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chair Cataldo, Chair Velis and Honorable Members of the Special Commission on Combatting Antisemitism,

Together for an Inclusive Massachusetts (TIM) is a diverse group led by Boston Workers Circle, Massachusetts Peace Action, Jewish Voice for Peace Boston, If Not Now Boston, Alliance for Water Justice in Palestine, the Council on American-Islamic Relations - Massachusetts, Sawa: Newton-Area Alliance for Peace and Justice, MTA Rank and File for Palestine, with the support of more than 50 other groups across the state that came together around the belief that **addressing antisemitism is essential, and must be done with care, reflecting the diversity of all Jewish people in the Commonwealth and within a framework that embraces equity and inclusion for all. We want to ensure that the Commonwealth's next steps are inclusive, transparent, and constructive.** To be clear, it is our deep and unwavering commitment to equality and justice for all—including Jewish people and Palestinians—that compels our work.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to present a panel to discuss issues related to antisemitism in K-12 public and private education. We look forward to working with the Commission on this important topic and its potential to be a model for the nation in addressing antisemitism using anti-racist principles.

### **Commitment to Diversity of Jewish Voices**

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Representatives on the Commission picked specifically to bring a Jewish perspective have affiliations with organizations, such as the ADL, AJC, and JCRC, that exclude and seek to delegitimize an important part of the Jewish community. The ADL is open in its belief that anti-Zionism is antisemitism. This puts the ADL, and similar groups that purport to represent the Jewish community to the outside world, in conflict with the growing numbers of the anti-Zionist and non-Zionist Jewish community, who represent around [20%](#) to [69%](#) of the American Jewish community (depending on survey methodology).

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The mainstream pro-Israel organizations represented on the Commission have been fighting antisemitism for decades, and yet they themselves say that antisemitism is worse than ever. Clearly, their approach isn't working. Does it not make sense to have a new discussion, one that is more open and less accusatory, and one that brings in a range of voices of those directly affected by the work of the Commission?

We would like to reiterate our hopes that the Commission will:

- conduct fair and open hearings so that everyone who wants to testify gets to testify. We believe that open discussion is the only way to develop a fuller understanding of antisemitism. Fair and open hearings are the norm for legislative and commission hearings;
- seek diverse views at every Commission meeting by encouraging presentations by groups and experts not affiliated with Commission members who bring alternative viewpoints;
- support political systems that promote equality and uphold rights regardless of ethnic, national, or religious identity;
- advocate for legislation and policies that protect students' right to learn and educators' freedom to teach, including critical examinations of the history or actions of the U.S. and other nations;
- In alignment with state and national standards, encourage legislation and policies that protect pedagogical inquiry into subjects like race, gender, slavery, capitalism, apartheid and colonialism, while safeguarding constitutionally-protected campus discussions and protests on these topics.

### Concerns about the potential direction of the Commission

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We recognize that the purpose of this Commission is to address antisemitism in Massachusetts, to protect members of the Jewish community and to educate Massachusetts residents to better understand and value the Jewish community's history and culture. However, due to the representation on the Commission, we are concerned that this Commission could in addition, or instead, become a vehicle to advance punitive measures and enshrine political support for the state of Israel in Commonwealth statute and policies.

The members of Together for an Inclusive Massachusetts represent individuals and organizations who have witnessed firsthand, and in our communities, politically-motivated false allegations of antisemitism deployed as a way to silence, intimidate and

punish actions that threaten US political support for Israel. There is a risk that political actors on or affiliated with members of the Commission will use this important state body to promote a discriminatory and anti-Palestinian agenda against the wishes of a significant part of the state's residents.

Labelling Palestinians who talk about their own life experiences as racist against Jews suggests that Jews are harmed by Palestinian humanity or that Jewish safety depends on silencing and erasing Palestinian humanity. This is a form of anti-Palestinian racism. Bigotry and discrimination against one group cannot be addressed by normalizing bigotry and discrimination against another group.

### **Resources related to the National Strategy to Combat Antisemitism**

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The National Strategy was developed with significant input by organizations that serve on our state commission. It promotes the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition as the “most prominent” of several definitions of antisemitism and one the administration has “embraced.” In this way, the National Strategy conflates criticism of Zionism and the state of Israel with prejudice against Jews. Together for an Inclusive Massachusetts unequivocally opposes the adoption of the IHRA working definition of antisemitism, which is used to justify suppression of political speech and to censor balanced, fact-based education. Some members of the Commission, including the ADL, place promotion of the IHRA definition among their top priorities, despite significant opposition.

- [The ADL & the White House antisemitism strategy](#) provides a thorough analysis of the National Strategy and its lack of focus on white nationalism.
- [National Plan Reflects the Debate Over Antisemitism](#) examines the diversity of Jewish perspectives on its recommendations.
- [Biden Embraces Antisemitism Definition That Has Upended Free Speech in Europe](#) examines the impact of adopting the IHRA definition in Europe from 2017 to 2022.
- The Foundation on Middle East Peace maintains a continuously updated [database of expert reports, articles, and letters](#) challenging the IHRA definition. FMEP hosted a useful webinar on the IHRA definition and the National Strategy titled [Palestinian Rights, the IHRA Definition, & the Battle Around Biden's Antisemitism Strategy](#).
- The IHRA definition is controversial and many experts say it violates the First Amendment. This includes the [ACLU](#), [Jewish educators](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), and many others. The IHRA definition allows antisemitism to be weaponized, which is [harmful](#) to Jewish people, Palestinians, and, in fact, everyone else. Its codification

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is widely [opposed](#), including by the more than 1,300 signatories represented by [Concerned Jewish Faculty](#), which include a hundreds of Massachusetts faculty members .

- Jewish people disagree on many issues, including about what [constitutes](#) antisemitism and [what to do](#) about it.

## Resources related to the diversity of Jewish perspectives about the political ideology of Zionism and definitions of antisemitism

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While the Commission is exploring free speech considerations, as representatives of the Commonwealth, its members must abide by the other limits on state power set by the Constitution, namely freedom from a state’s “establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

- The Jewish community has always held [diverse](#) opinions about the establishment of a nation-state for Jewish people, from the [beginning](#) of the Zionist [political movement](#), to [before](#) October 7, 2023, and [in the last year](#).
- Zionists have long equated opposition to Zionism with opposition to [Judaism\(pdf\)](#). That history includes Israeli government efforts to quash American Jewish opposition to the *Nakba* or to Zionism between the 1950s and 1970s, including by attacking the American Jewish Council which at that time “[was publicly critiquing the Nakba and pushing Israel to afford full civil and human rights to Palestinians](#).”
- Many religious Jews believe that Zionism, as a nationalist political ideology, is actually in conflict with the fundamental tenets of Judaism. Moreover, there are more non-Jews who profess to be Zionists than there are Jewish people in the world. According to the [Religion Media Center](#), there are over 30 million Christian, predominantly evangelical, Zionists in the US, roughly five times the Jewish population. They support the gathering of Jews in Israel in order to usher in the “End Times” when Jews will be converted to Christianity (or die) and Jesus will return to rule for a thousand years. Many Jewish people find Zionism to be antisemitic for this reason.

## Resources related to training and curricula on understanding antisemitism

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The risk of approaching antisemitism in the way advocated by some members of the Commission (for example, using McCarthyesque tactics to compare “antisemitism from the left” to Soviet-era propaganda) is that it will: a) not protect Jewish people from the major sources of antisemitism, which originate in the white nationalist right-wing and b)

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perpetuate and normalize [anti-Palestinian racism](#). We believe that an antiracist approach to antisemitism uplifts all communities and does not harm one group for the supposed benefit of another. There are several sources for understanding antisemitism through an intersectional and/or liberatory framework. These are just a few:

- Shane Burley and Ben Lorber, [Safety Through Solidarity: A Radical Guide to Fighting Antisemitism](#) (2024)
- Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, [Understanding Antisemitism](#) (2017) and [Discussion Guide](#) which provides historical and economic conditions behind some of the most prevalent antisemitic tropes (2021)
- Bend the Arc: Jewish Action and the Collaborative for Jewish Organizing, [Dismantling Antisemitism](#)
- Parceo’s [“Curriculum on Antisemitism from a Framework of Collective Liberation”](#)
- [Diaspora Alliance](#) organizes workshops and resources on antisemitism
- T’ruah, [A Very Brief Guide to Antisemitism](#) (2024)
- T’ruah, [Criticism of Israel and Antisemitism: How to Tell Where One Ends and the Other Begins](#) (2024)

### Resources related to data and trends of antisemitism

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- Unfortunately, our knowledge of the prevalence and nature of antisemitism in Massachusetts is limited, as demonstrated by the findings of researchers at [Jewish Currents](#), [The Forward](#), and by [Wikipedia](#), among others, that the ADL is not a reliable source.
- The ADL [misrepresents](#) student protest against Israeli actions in Gaza as violent and anti-Jewish. The Crowd Counting Consortium, a joint project of Harvard Kennedy School and the University of Connecticut, collects publicly available data on political crowds reported in the United States, including marches, protests, strikes, demonstrations, riots and other actions. Their [most recent study \(pdf\)](#) analyzes data from nearly 12,400 pro-Palestine protests and over 2,000 pro-Israel protests in the United States during the period from October 7, 2023, to June 2, 2024, concluding that “the pro-Palestine movement has not been violent [and that] the rhetorical core of this pro-Palestine movement has not been a call for violence against Jews, but rather a call for freedom for Palestinians and an end to violence being inflicted upon them.” This was validated by a [public letter](#) by more than 750 students across

140 universities expressing solidarity with campus protests and encampments for Gaza.

## Resources about K-12 education (curriculum, DEI and censorship efforts)

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Educational institutions are fundamental to a healthy democracy, and our schools should be allowed to equip students with critical thinking and analytical skills to be able to engage with current and historical events and to develop their own well-researched opinions. Educators need to be able to present a diversity of factual resources as well as the skills to guide students in [discussing difficult topics](#).

The Commission’s K-12 education recommendations must align with Massachusetts’ Social Studies Standards and the National Council for the Social Studies [College, Career, and Civic Life \(C3\) Framework Inquiry Arc](#). Inquiry-based education is a best practice whose “four dimensions are: (1) Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries, (2) Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools (i.e., civics, economics, geography, and history), (3) Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence, and (4) Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action.” Through Inquiry Education, students are supposed to engage with a diversity of materials; ask questions and think critically; understand fact-based information and then formulate their own opinions. These skills are necessary for students to be effective citizens. It is impossible to meet these standards if certain words or perspectives are *a priori* considered hateful, such as “genocide,” “apartheid,” and “colonialism,” and therefore censored from discussion in the classroom.

At the January 23, 2024 meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, a panel representing the ADL, AJC and JCRC offered policy recommendations that, if adopted, would reverse Massachusetts’ high standards and deprive students of benefitting from our state’s exemplary practices of inquiry, equity, and inclusion by dehumanizing Palestinians and erasing them from social studies, history and ELA curricula. Additionally, school administrators across Massachusetts are being pressured to impose disciplinary actions against students and educators for bringing these voices into the classroom. This has created a chilled environment akin to the fear educators feel from right-wing book bans and attacks on Black, brown, and queer students.

- School administrators have faced calls for rolling back DEI initiatives under false allegations that [DEI initiatives](#) are “contaminated by antisemitism”. The Commission must resist calls to replicate right-wing tactics [“in the name of “Jewish safety,” \[... to back\] a wave of McCarthyist repression targeting Palestine-related speech and activism at educational institutions.](#)” For example, see Political Research Associates, [The Anti-DEI Movement and the Jewish Right: Weaponizing](#)

[Antisemitism to Defend White Supremacy](#) (2024) arguing that these efforts seek to “draw pro-Israel American Jews into its ranks, delegitimize racial justice movements, divide progressive coalitions, and neutralize its opposition as it moves closer to power.” (see also Harvard University example in “[How the fight against antisemitism is now used to promote an ‘anti-woke’ agenda](#)”)

- The [AJC](#) and the [JCRC](#) have campaigned to censor Ethnic Studies in Massachusetts pointing to a similar campaign in California. Massachusetts legislators should note that the federal lawsuit targeting California’s Ethnic Studies Consortium and the local teachers union was recently dismissed ([court ruling](#)) concluding:

*“The Supreme Court has long recognized that the freedom to receive ideas, and its relation to the freedom of expression, is particularly relevant in the classroom setting.” Monteiro, 158 F.3d at 1027 n. 5; see Board of Educ., Island Trees Union Free Sch. Dist. v. Pico, 457 U.S. 853, 867, 102 S.Ct. 2799, 2808 (1982) (plurality opinion) (“[T]he right to receive ideas is a necessary predicate to the recipient’s meaningful exercise of his own rights of speech, press, and political freedom.”) (emphasis omitted). Students have a right to receive information and “lawsuits threatening to attach civil liability on the basis of the assignment of [curricular material] would severely restrict a student’s right to receive material that his school board or other educational authority determines to be of legitimate educational value.” Monteiro, 158 F.3d at 1028.”*

- Anti-education policies and actions advanced by ADL, JCRC, and AJC among others include lawfare (see [California](#) and [Philadelphia](#) cases), [book banning](#), [punishment of dissent](#), and other harmful practices that must be resisted to protect public education.
- [DESE’s Massachusetts’ History and Social Science Framework](#) offers excellent guidance on navigating US and world history. [The Fordham Institute commended Massachusetts in 2021](#) for “exemplary history and civics standards that...[do] not whitewash, downplay, or neglect the many painful chapters in our nation’s history.” Guiding Principle 2 of DESE’s Framework states that an “effective history and social science education incorporates diverse perspectives,” and Guiding Principle 8 states that history and social science teachers “have a unique responsibility to help students consider events—including current events—in a broad historical, geographical, social, or economic context” (pp. 13; 15-16). Excluding Palestinian history and narratives because they are inaccurately deemed antisemitic is inconsistent with Massachusetts standards.

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- We are concerned that the Commission will recommend or allow school boards or other educational authorities to take on teaching frameworks proposed by extremist groups, some of whom have [institutionalized relationships](#) with a foreign government. There is an active campaign in Massachusetts, advanced by ICAN, an Israeli-American lobby group, and the [far right organization](#), CAMERA, to target the MA High School Social Studies Frameworks, and more.
- CAMERA’s education analyst proposes censorship of two 6th grade standards ([pps. 89, 102](#)) and a high school standard (Topic #7d, [page 158](#)) because they reference Palestine and Palestinians. She repeats claims that Ethnic Studies, racial justice/DEI organizations, social justice student clubs and groups like Amnesty International and Southern Poverty Law Center are “anti-Israel” and that “teaching about Palestine really means teaching anti-Israel bias and propaganda.” (See [ICAN webinar](#) starting at 1:08:00). Groups like ICAN are proposing alterations to Massachusetts’ Social Studies Frameworks to more closely align with [Israel’s education system](#), which dehumanizes Palestinians and erases them from the historical record. This focus on censoring diverse voices and viewpoints is contrary to Massachusetts’ progressive and inclusive values and would undermine the integrity of our exemplary educational system.
- Massachusetts requires schools to integrate genocide education in different subjects from 6th to 12th grades. The [frameworks](#) requires the teaching of the conditions of genocide and “historical and contemporary genocides” and encourages students to “engage in an inquiry cycle to answer the question *When and how should the United States intervene to address genocide?*” Equating this legitimate education with hate, as expressed in the [ADL’s recent statement](#), creates an environment of censorship and intimidation, effectively preventing educators and students from learning about current events in Gaza. Students and educators are silenced amid a climate of fear of punishment for engaging in timely and respectful discourse. We strongly believe that our classrooms must be safe places to engage in critical thinking based on these educational frameworks and reflective of the discourse among [Holocaust](#) and [genocide \(pdf\)](#) scholars. Some students may feel uncomfortable when encountering opinions they disagree with, but this discomfort is intrinsic to learning. Feeling uncomfortable must not be confused with being unsafe.

## Resources related to civil and Constitutional rights

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The First Amendment establishes Constitutional rights against a state’s abridgement of “the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

- K-12 students’ ability to debate and protest also aligns with [DESE’s educational vision](#), which includes connected, empowered engagement with social issues.
- Protection of diverse political opinions, and students’ right to speak and protest actions of their government, is also protected by law. ACLU of Massachusetts urges colleges and universities to [defend free expression on campus](#) (Dec 2024).
- The ACLU, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International USA wrote a [joint open letter to college presidents and administrators](#) opposing the use of police force against student protestors. (Oct 2024).

Because other states are looking to emulate Massachusetts’ path breaking Commission, the bar is set high. Our hope is that this Commission models an antiracist approach to addressing antisemitism, thereby uplifting everyone and bringing all communities together to ensure equality, dignity and safety for all.

Thank you for considering our testimony. We would be happy to provide additional information, or provide testimony about any of these topics in more detail.

### Together for an Inclusive Massachusetts’ Leadership Team

Alliance for Water Justice in Palestine

Boston Workers Circle

Council on American-Islamic Relations, Massachusetts (CAIR-MA)

If Not Now Boston

Jewish Voice for Peace Boston

Massachusetts Peace Action (MAPA)

Massachusetts Teachers Association Rank and File for Palestine

National Lawyers Guild - Massachusetts Chapter

Sawa: Newton-Area Alliance for Peace and Justice

on behalf of tens of organizations statewide who advocate for an antiracist approach to addressing antisemitism