



For the Jewish People Their Homeland And Humanity



Iranian American Jewish Federation



October 17, 2023

Re: Urgent Action By Governor Needed to Combat Antisemitism in State-Funded Departments, Agencies, Offices and Districts

Dear Governor Newsom,

We would like to express our sincere gratitude for your leadership during these challenging times of conflict and tragedy in Israel. Jewish communities throughout our state are deeply affected, and your unwavering support is pivotal for our collective sense of safety and well-being.

The distress and trauma of witnessing such overt violence against Jewish individuals in Israel is compounded by our fellow Californians demonstrating in militant support for Hamas's heinous actions. It is disheartening that there are organizational leaders and activists in California vocally celebrating the slaughter of innocent Israeli civilians. We are particularly concerned as some of these organizations have contracts with public agencies, raising questions about their potential influence on state and local policies.

We commend your steadfast commitment to combatting antisemitism and promoting tolerance within our great state through various measures, including but not limited to issuing proclamations recognizing Holocaust Remembrance Week, allocating funding for enhanced security measures, promoting educational initiatives, and supporting legislation and law enforcement efforts to combat hate crimes.

**We believe that a critical next step in addressing the astronomical rise of antisemitism in our state is to issue an Executive Order adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism.**

As Jewish organizations representing diverse communities across California, we are deeply concerned about the alarming increase in antisemitic incidents and the challenges civil servants and the general public face in understanding and identifying it. The California Attorney General's Office's statistics<sup>1</sup> reveal that **anti-Jewish hate comprises 62% of all religious-based hate crimes in California, an unsettling 24% increase in religious-based hate crimes targeting California's 2% Jewish population.** AJC's *2022 State of Antisemitism in America*<sup>2</sup> report found that a quarter of Americans are unfamiliar with the term antisemitism and one-third of these individuals feel that antisemitism isn't regarded as seriously as other forms of hate, despite its deadly consequences.

In order for our state to most effectively combat antisemitism, it must first define it. Now, more than ever before, we firmly believe that the non-legally binding International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism is an invaluable tool in comprehending and combating antisemitism, in all its manifestations. It is a framework that can be employed in complete alignment with the fundamental rights of every individual in our state.

The IHRA definition has gained widespread international recognition and endorsement for its comprehensive and effective approach in identifying antisemitism. The definition was most recently cited in President Biden's landmark White House National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism<sup>3</sup> as the most prominent antisemitism definition that the United States has embraced. More than 30 US states and 40 nations have adopted the definition, as have a multitude of civil society organizations, including the Global Imam Council – the world's largest international non-governmental body of cross-denominational Muslim religious leaders.

We would like to emphasize that the IHRA Working Definition explicitly states that criticism of Israel in itself is not considered antisemitic, contrary to claims made by certain civil society organizations. It is worth noting that several governments, who have adopted the IHRA Working Definition and view it as a valuable tool, have been able to express strong criticism of Israeli policies and practices without infringing upon it. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the IHRA Working Definition is non-legally binding and does not impose any restrictions on speech, even when it pertains to the most hateful expressions.

Governor Newsom, we respectfully urge you to heed the call made by our united Jewish communities by issuing an executive order for the State of California to officially adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism. This decision would not only strengthen California's stance against

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<sup>1</sup> <https://data-openjustice.doj.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/Hate%20Crime%20In%20CA%202022f.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [The State of Antisemitism in America 2022: AJC's Survey of the General Public | AJC](https://www.ajc.org/press-releases/2022/12/14/the-state-of-antisemitism-in-america-2022-ajc-s-survey-of-the-general-public)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/U.S.-National-Strategy-to-Counter-Antisemitism.pdf>

hatred and discrimination but also send a clear message that under your leadership, the state of California is serious in its efforts to support Jewish Americans by understanding and addressing antisemitism.

Borrowing from the State of New Mexico's Executive Order 2022-118, attached to this letter you will find draft language for an Executive Order that is supported by our various Jewish institutions. We appreciate your attention to this crucial matter and look forward to your positive response. Should you require any further information or support, we stand ready to assist you in any way we can.

Thank you for your continued dedication to the welfare and safety of all Californians.

Sincerely,

Alpha Epsilon Pi  
Anti-Defamation League (ADL)  
American Jewish Committee (AJC)  
Association of Jewish Educators  
B'nai B'rith International  
California Israel Chamber of Commerce  
Combat Antisemitism Movement  
Educators Caucus for Israel  
Hadassah  
Hillel at Davis and Sacramento  
Hillel San Diego  
Hillel at UCLA  
Holocaust Museum LA  
Iranian American Jewish Federation (IAJF)  
Israeli-American Civic Action Network  
Israeli American Council (IAC)  
Jewish Federation of San Diego  
JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa  
NEA Jewish Affairs Caucus  
Progressive Zionists of California  
Sephardic Education Center  
Simon Wiesenthal Center  
Stand With Us  
30 Years After

C.C.

Lieutenant Governor Eleni Kounalakis  
Dana Williamson, Governor Newsom's Chief of Staff  
California State Senator Scott Wiener, California Legislative Jewish Caucus Co-Chair

California Assemblymember Jesse Gabriel, California Legislative Jewish Caucus Co-Chair  
California State Senator Josh Becker, California Legislative Jewish Caucus Vice-Chair