

## **Jewish Leaders Walk Out After NJ Assembly Abruptly Tables Antisemitism Bill**

By Reed Becker

Published July 5, 2025 at 9:35 AM

The sudden move came just minutes before a scheduled hearing on June 23, sparking outrage among Jewish community leaders who called the delay a dangerous setback amid rising antisemitism.

TRENTON, NJ — In a stunning turn of events on Monday, June 23, a New Jersey Assembly committee abruptly tabled a vote on A3558 — a long-awaited antisemitism bill — just minutes before a scheduled hearing. In response, Jewish community advocates from across the state walked out of the hearing in unified protest.

A3558, introduced more than three years ago, seeks to codify a state definition of antisemitism using the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition. This widely recognized standard has been endorsed by 46 countries, 37 U.S. states, and more than 1,200 organizations, municipalities, and universities worldwide. A New Jersey Senate Committee passed a substantially similar bill — S1292 — after numerous hours of testimony in June 2024.

Opponents have inaccurately claimed that the bill would censor speech. In fact, the legislation clearly targets antisemitic conduct, not protected expression. It includes explicit First Amendment safeguards and abides by longstanding U.S. Supreme Court precedent, which allows speech to be considered as evidence of motive in cases of criminal or discriminatory behavior.

The bill's sponsors, Assemblyman Gary Schaer (D-Passaic) and Assemblywoman Rosy Bagolie (D-Livingston), were informed of the decision to table the vote only moments before the 10:00 a.m. hearing began on June 23.

Immediately prior to the community's walkout, Jason Shames, CEO of the Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey, expressed the collective dismay over how the bill was

handled, saying the delay “reflects the climate of anti-Jewish bias and pressure affecting decisions at the highest levels of state government.”

“To postpone an issue so critical to the safety and security of New Jerseyans is to turn a blind eye to and exacerbate the ongoing surge of antisemitism across our state, our nation, and the world,” Shames said. He issued the statement on behalf of the CEOs of New Jersey Jewish Federations, including Susan Antman of the Jewish Federation in the Heart of NJ; Jennifer Dubrow Weiss of the Jewish Federation of Southern NJ; Robin Freedman-Kramer of the Jewish Federation of West-Central NJ; and Steve Levy, interim CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest.

According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the United States recorded nearly 9,000 antisemitic incidents in 2023 — a 140% increase over the previous year and the highest total since tracking began in 1979. New Jersey consistently ranks among the top states for such incidents. Bergen County alone reported 162 antisemitic incidents in 2024 — more than any other county in the state — representing a 269% increase over 2022 and nearly one-quarter of the state total.

“Antisemitism is a critical problem and growing in New Jersey. It isn't going to solve itself,” said Avi Posnick, Northeast Director of StandWithUs. “Unless NJ legislators decide to take the first step to addressing antisemitism — defining it — they are not part of the solution. Like all groups, Jews must be the ones who define their own experiences with oppression. Rather, through inaction and delay, the legislators will be part of the problem, abandoning the safety of large segments of New Jersey residents.”

In response to these disturbing trends, A3558 aims to provide a critical tool for law enforcement and state agencies to identify and address antisemitic hate crimes and discrimination.

Rabbi David C. Levy, Director of AJC New Jersey, pointed to recent acts of violence against Jews as further evidence of the need for immediate action. “The brutal murders of two young Jewish leaders after an AJC event in Washington, D.C., followed by the setting on fire of peaceful Jewish demonstrators in Boulder, CO has amplified the need for this bill,” Levy said. “As we have seen, in their most extreme forms, antisemitic words of hate can be deadly, and as New Jerseyans we have a singular responsibility to call out such hateful speech by clearly defining it. All of which makes this continuing delay in moving this bill forward utterly unacceptable.”

It remains unclear when or if the Assembly will reschedule a vote on A3558. Jewish leaders say they are committed to continuing their advocacy until the measure is passed.