

# Advocacy in Action

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Earlier this year, Jewish Long Beach celebrated the decision of the Long Beach Community College District Board of Trustees to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of antisemitism. The

Community College District was the first institution of higher education in California to adopt the IHRA definition, thus making an unprecedented statement in support of its Jewish students, faculty, and staff. The district's decision places it firmly on the right side of history at a time when our attention is too often drawn to college and university administrations for instead providing safe harbor to those who would seek to intimidate and do harm to Jewish people.

Community College District Trustee Sunny Zia, herself a graduate of Jewish Long Beach's Alpert New Leaders Forum, envisioned and led this historic effort, enabling our local community college system to exercise leadership in setting a bold example for educational institutions across the country. Credit for this success story lies squarely with Trustee Zia and Long Beach Community College District Board President Uduak Ntuk. By any measure, the board's decision represents significant progress in the protracted efforts of Jewish communal activists to beat back the rising tide of antisemitism.

Jewish Long Beach played a quiet supporting role in the resolution's passage, working with members of the board, at their request, to help educate them on the importance of protecting the Jewish people who work and study on their campuses and of positioning the Long Beach Community College District at the vanguard of the fight against anti-Jewish hate.

The IHRA definition names as antisemitism, among other tactics, the use of Israeli geopolitics or "human rights" as frameworks for intimidation of Jews, thus stripping anti-Semites of an excuse that they have long deployed to systematically erode Jewish identity and pride on college campuses. The district's adoption of the IHRA definition is a potential paradigm shift in how college and university administrations might address the rapidly-spreading infection of antisemitism that plagues so many such institutions. While no additional California colleges or universities have yet followed suit, the Long Beach

Community College District's leadership is not only to be commended, but vigorously celebrated.

Unfortunately, progress in the ongoing effort to stem antisemitism in our education system is incremental, resulting in far more challenges than current solutions. Just weeks after the community college district's historic decision, United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), the teachers union serving the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), made an unsettling surprise announcement that it intended to consider a resolution of support for the anti-Semitic Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement against Israel. The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles (JFGLA) – with whom Jewish Long Beach works closely when necessary to engage in Jewish communal advocacy – sprang immediately to action, leveraging its relationships in the leadership

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structures of both LAUSD and UTLA to help those leaders understand why UTLA's dangerous potential endorsement of a viciously, even lethally anti-Jewish movement was so deeply problematic.

A teacher's union weighing in on issues of geopolitics is dubious, misguided, and unfocused. It was likely a combination of self-examination, self-correction, and education from the Jewish community that led to UTLA's tabling of the resolution just days after announcing its introduction. However, the path to the union wisely backing down from, rather than doubling down on antisemitism would likely have been more treacherous without the federation's quiet advocacy work.

The processes that resulted in the Long Beach Community College District's adoption of the IHRA definition, as well as in UTLA's walking back its antisemitic board resolution, are case studies in how Jewish federations often assist civic leaders in making decisions that ultimately support and protect the Jewish community. Indeed, Jewish communal advocacy is at the core of Jewish Long Beach's founding principles, as we have historically been active in ensuring that the Long Beach area remains an environment in which Jewish life and identity can sustainably thrive. At one point,

the agency boasted an active Jewish Community Relations Council, which served as the voice of the Jewish community on issues of concern and crucial importance to our welfare. More recently, we have conducted advocacy primarily through strong partnerships with institutions such as JFGLA, the California Jewish Public Affairs Committee, ADL, and others.

The ongoing integration of Jewish Long Beach and the Alpert JCC has afforded us the opportunity to think introspectively and recommit to certain central tenets of our mission. We have a foundational imperative to embody the concept of *kol Yisrael averim zeh b'zeh*: that the People Israel are responsible for one another's well-being.

In service to this philosophy, I am pleased to announce that the Alpert JCC and Jewish Long

Beach have created an exploratory working group on advocacy chaired by AJCC board member Ken Schlesinger, which will become a permanent subcommittee of our Board of Directors once our integration is legally complete on January 1. The Advocacy Subcommittee will reposition our agency as the central address for Jewish communal advocacy in Long Beach and West Orange County. Through the activities of this subcommittee, we will take a leadership role in mobilizing on issues of importance to the Jewish community, establishing and maintaining relationships with civic leaders, elected officials, and other faith communities, and ensuring that the Long Beach area's cultural and economic ties with Israel are strong and enduring.

We will continue to build our partnerships with our sister organizations, and the responsibilities of the Advocacy Subcommittee will certainly be carried out collaboratively. Just as the integration of Jewish Long Beach and the Alpert JCC will help ensure that the Jewish community remains a light unto the broader community well into the future, so will the establishment of this committee allow us to fulfill our obligation to leave our corner of the Jewish world stronger and safer *l'dor v'dor*, for generations to come. 