



Memphis Jewish Federation | Jewish Foundation of Memphis

February 23, 2017

Sen. Reginald Tate
301 6th Avenue North, Suite 320
War Memorial Bldg.
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Senator Tate:

On behalf of Jewish Community Partners, the umbrella organization for the Memphis Jewish community, we are writing to urge you to support Senate Bill 581, the Anti-Semitism Awareness Act.

As Jews, we have been collectively fighting anti-Semitism for thousands of years. However, the issue is particularly timely, as 2016-2017 has ushered in a frightening new wave of anti-Semitism on college campuses. Just last month, an attack from an unknown hacker caused printers in several offices at Vanderbilt University to print flyers with anti-Semitic content. Jewish students at colleges and universities throughout Tennessee are vulnerable to student groups that promote the BDS movement (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) against Israel, stage "Israel Apartheid Week" on campus, and perpetrate acts of anti-Semitism thinly veiled as "social justice" and "anti-Zionism".

The issue extends to K-12 schools, too-- last year, right here in Memphis, swastikas and anti-Semitic slurs in praise of Hitler were discovered on the playground of the Margolin Hebrew Academy elementary school.

All this comes during a time of general emboldening of anti-Semites across the country. The past two months have seen bomb threats called in to no fewer than fifty-three Jewish Community Centers in twenty-six states, and just last weekend, 170 graves were vandalized in a Jewish cemetery in Missouri.

In the current climate, many Jewish students worry for their safety. But anti-Semitism isn't just a Jewish issue— it's an American issue. All Americans should be concerned about acts of anti-Semitism, because bigotry and hatred affect us all. The ongoing harassment against Jewish students and Jewish groups is highly disturbing, but more importantly, it's un-American.

The Anti-Semitism Awareness Act acknowledges that "Anti-Semitism remains a persistent, disturbing problem". By enacting this bill, the TN Department of Education will be able to apply the federal definition of anti-Semitism and investigate any violations of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.



This bill sends a strong message to students across the state and to students all over the U.S. that Tennessee will not tolerate anti-Semitism. Support of this bill will strengthen Tennessee's resolve in combating the scourge of anti-Semitism.

For the above reasons, we urge you in the strongest possible terms to vote in support of the Anti-Semitism Awareness Act.

Thank you.

Gary Kaplan
Chair, Jewish Community Partners

Michael Greenberg
Chair, Memphis Jewish Federation