



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President
Ben Schneider

Executive Vice President
Greg Miller

Vice Presidents
Seth Schwartz
Jenna Shaifer
Rebecca Zimmelman

Immediate Past President
Mark Barsman

Penultimate President
Ronna Greff Schneider

Assistant Director
Jeremy Spiegel

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Nathan Bachrach
Rabbi Robert Barr
Josh Blatt
Karen Brownlee
Leo D'Cruz
Mark Dowd
Elliot Draznin
Motti Edelstein
Bobby Fisher
Mickey Fishman

Ben Glassman
Gary Greenberg
Drew Hiudt
Julie Jacobson-Ruby
Rabbi Meredith Kahan

Mark Kanter
Rachel Kaplan
Jennifer Kates
Michelle Kohn
Julie Leftwich
Debbie Lempert

Nina Loftspring
Fred Miller
Danielle V. Minson
Yarden Neeman
Lainey Richler
Rebecca Sanders

Ian Sarembock
Matt Slovin

Kayla Soroka
Walter Spiegel
Amy Susskind
Weiskopf

Ryan Williams
Jazz Wolk
Jeff Zipkin
Rabbi Gary P. Zola

**Proponent Testimony for Senate Bill 297
Senate Judiciary Committee
December 4, 2024**

Chairman Manning, Vice-Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is Jeremy Spiegel, and I am the Assistant Director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 297. This legislation represents a critical step toward addressing the growing tide of antisemitism and fostering a more respectful society.

Over the past year, following the October 7th attack on Israel, there has been a noticeable surge in hateful and dangerous demonstrations on college campuses. These incidents highlight the troubling rise of antisemitism in institutions of higher learning, creating an increasingly hostile environment for Jewish students. It is imperative for campuses, particularly state universities, to take an active role in investigating and addressing antisemitism and similar forms of ethnic intimidation.

Just this past month, students at the University of Cincinnati who were hoping to hear from an internationally recognized expert on the Middle East were instead forced to hide in an empty room before police were required to escort them back to the Hillel Jewish Center, with protestors following them the entire way. Mobs of students and outside activists prevented these students from exercising their First Amendment rights. While we are grateful to University law enforcement officers who prevented the situation from becoming tragic, no students should have to fear for their safety while attending an event on campus, especially because of their identity. Sadly, this is just the most recent example of Jewish students being targeted at University of Cincinnati, Miami University, or any of our other public institutions in this state this past year. By adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, Senate Bill 297 provides a clear and standardized framework for understanding, identifying, and responding to such incidents.

Expanding the offense of ethnic intimidation to include acts like rioting and aggravated rioting will hold accountable those who seek to harm others based on race, religion, or national origin. By addressing these gaps, the bill strengthens protections for vulnerable communities, fostering a safer and more welcoming state for all residents.

It's also very important to note that this legislation safeguards First Amendment rights, ensuring that the definition of antisemitism is applied judiciously without infringing on freedoms of speech or expression. Senate Bill 297 balances the need to address hate with the importance of protecting free speech.

Antisemitism remains a growing concern across the nation and in Ohio. This legislation provides the essential tools to recognize and respond to vandalism, harassment, and violence. By defining antisemitism, Senate Bill 297 ensures that our state agencies and justice system are equipped to combat this persistent issue.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 297. I am happy to answer any questions.