



January 24, 2017

VIA EMAIL

Delegate William J. Howell
 Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates
 General Assembly Building
 Richmond, Virginia 23218
 DelWHowell@house.virginia.gov

RE: Virginia HB 2261

Dear Speaker Howell,

We write on behalf of national Jewish and civil rights organizations who are concerned about anti-Semitism in Virginia and support HB 2261. We believe that this bill, sponsored by Delegate David LaRock, along with Delegate Mark L. Cole, provides a necessary and measured response to the recurrence of anti-Jewish hate. Specifically, it supplies Virginia state universities with

important, internationally recognized tools to ascertain the intent of people who are accused of certain conduct that violates university policies.

HB 2261 responds to increasing levels of anti-Semitism on university campuses nationwide, including in Virginia's excellent system of public colleges and universities. The following examples are a few anti-Semitic incidents that occurred on Virginia state university campuses in 2016:

- Swastika graffiti in a residence hall bathroom at the College of William and Mary.
- Holocaust imagery spray-painted on a student housing building at the University of Virginia, including an orange Star of David and the word *Juden*, the German word for Jews.
- Numerous fliers for a local Nazi chapter posted on the Old Dominion University campus, portraying a swastika and stating, "Old Dominion University - You have been visited by The AtomWaffen Division. Join our Local Nazis." The fliers directed students to a website replete with graphic, hateful, anti-Semitic messages.
- At George Mason University, anti-Israel activists reportedly threatened to "f*** up a Zionist" disparaging Jews as "Zionist terrorists."

The propagation of anti-Semitism on Virginia state university campuses mirrors a similar surge nationwide. According to the FBI, Jewish hate crime victims outnumber victims of all other religious groups combined. This problem is especially rampant on America's college campuses. Researchers at Trinity College and Brandeis University have found that more than half of Jewish students reported experiencing or witnessing anti-Semitism in 2014 and 2015. Anti-Semitic incidents at universities increased by 45% from 2015 to 2016, according to an AMCHA Initiative study.

The events of 2016 prove that anti-Semitism at Virginia state schools is an urgent and compounding problem—one that demands the effective solutions proposed in HB 2261. The bill is a simple but necessary remedy that requires universities to use the State Department definition to ascertain the motivation of persons accused of conduct that violates university conduct policies, such as vandalism of school property or assaults on Jewish students.

We are pleased that HB 2261 was carefully drafted to ensure compliance with the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Despite some misconceptions about the bill, we note that HB 2261 does not restrict any speech whatsoever. Rather, it provides for the utilization of a widely respected U.S. State Department definition to determine the intent of certain unlawful conduct.

We hope that you will pass HB 2261, for the protection of all Virginia students, to ensure that Virginia preserves its noble legacy as the cradle of religious liberty.

Sincerely,

Academic Council for Israel

Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity (AEPi)

Alums for Campus Fairness

AMCHA Initiative

American Association of Jewish Lawyers
and Jurists

Americans for Peace and Tolerance

Club Z

Eagles Wings

Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET)

Fuel For Truth

Iranian American Jewish Federation

The Israel Christian Nexus

The Israel Group

The Israel Institute

Israel Peace Initiative (IPI)

Jerusalem U

The Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights
Under Law

Middle East Political and Information Network
(MEPIN)

Proclaiming Justice to the Nations

Scholars for Peace in the Middle East

Sigma Alpha Epsilon Pi

Stop BDS on Campus

Students and Parents Against Campus Anti-
Semitism

Zionist Organization of America