

For Immediate Release

Brandeis Center Urges Action from Tennessee Legislature

Washington, D.C., September 28, 2016: Today, following recent reports of anti-Semitic, racist, and hateful social media postings at the University of Tennessee – Knoxville, the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law (LDB) called on the Tennessee State Legislature to address whether the series of anti-Semitic incidents violate Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. [LDB](#) a national non-profit civil rights organization dedicated to combating anti-Semitism in higher education joins the call of Proclaiming Justice to the Nations (PJTN).

[LDB President Kenneth L. Marcus](#) commented, “We join the call of PJTN and PJTN’s President Laurie Cardoza-Moore, and urge the Tennessee State Legislature to conduct hearings into whether these reports of anti-Semitism on Tennessee’s public campuses are in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. We call on Governor Bill Haslam to establish a task force to monitor and protect Jewish and Christian-Zionist students.”

[Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964](#) prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs that receive federal funds. In 2004 The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) announced that Title VI applies to discrimination on the basis of Jewish ethnicity or ancestry. Therefore, a university administration has the obligation to address incidents of anti-Semitism by creating a safe environment for all students, condemning and prohibiting anti-Semitism, and holding accountable those who have engaged in anti-Semitic incidents. Jewish and Christian-Zionist students deserve the same protections as all other students on campus.

In August, LDB wrote to the University of Tennessee – Knoxville (UTK), urging Chancellor Cheek to address reports of numerous [anti-Semitic and threatening posts](#) that were found on the social media accounts of current UTK students and recent graduates. The postings include a variety of messages advocating violence against Jews and Israelis; displaying anti-Semitic, homophobic, and racist sentiments; and endorsements of terrorist organizations. The Twitter messages reportedly included statements such as, “Hitler had alot [sic] of great ideas. We need a guy like that in the White House”; “...I already hate you. You dirty filthy Jew. All your people do is f***ed s*** up. Wish hitler [sic] was still around to show you guys”; and “@PalAnonymous Today marks the 26th anniversary of the First #Intifada #Palestine.’ About time for another one...”

In the letter, LDB wrote, “Allowing such incidents, without strong condemnation from the University administration, will signal that UTK takes a disparaging view of Jewish students and students of Israeli national origin. Such messages are incompatible with UTK’s values – and federal civil rights law.”

The letter continued, “[s]peech that invokes anti-Semitic stereotypes against Israelis and Jews, such as the social media messages at issue, can create a hostile environment for Israeli and Jewish students on campus in violation of Title VI.” LDB stands in support of Ms. Cardoza-Moore’s call. Current attempts to address the incidents include reviewing the social media posts for violations of the student code of conduct, alerting the campus police to explore other potential threats, and facilitating an opportunity for the student organizations involved to meet and discuss the incidents that have taken place. Despite Chancellor Cheek’s and the UTK administration’s attempts to recompense the Jewish and Christian Zionist students who were targeted by these offensive posts, it is clear that more work must be done to address issues of anti-Semitism on campus. Therefore, the Tennessee State Legislature needs to investigate these troubling anti-Semitic, racist, and bigoted incidents in order to protect students’ civil rights, provide a safe learning environment, and to hold the offenders accountable.