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## FEDERAL COMPLAINT FILED AGAINST AMERICAN UNIVERSITY FOR RAMPANT AND PERVASIVE ANTI-SEMITISM

### According to the complaint, not only did AU ignore the anti-Semitism, it harassed student whistleblowers

**Washington, D.C., Jan. 17, 2024:** On behalf of numerous Jewish students at American University (AU) who have been assaulted, threatened, harassed and intimidated in dormitories, classrooms and campus spaces, [The Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law](#) and [Jewish on Campus](#) today filed a [complaint](#) with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR). According to the complaint, AU was fully aware of the pervasive and hostile environment for Jewish students, and not only ignored it, in some cases, it chose to subject Jewish whistleblowers to harassment and disciplinary proceedings.

The complaint details how dormitory doors and posters of Jewish and Israeli students were vandalized with swastikas and threats; out-of-control anti-Israel protests were permitted to disrupt classes and block Jewish students access to dining halls, classrooms and student spaces; posters of Israeli hostages were repeatedly torn down; and Jewish students have been harassed, targeted and discriminated against by peers and faculty. Jewish students report feeling fearful, anxious, shunned, isolated and marginalized.

One of the incidents included in the complaint describes how a Jewish Israeli student was repeatedly spit on by fellow students and his piano recital flyer was vandalized with anti-Semitic graffiti, including swastikas and "DEATH TO THE ZIONISTS HITLER WAS RIGHT." The complaint also documents how dormitory doors of Jewish students were marked with swastikas. One of those same students later received a text from an unknown number that said, "I know who you are, jew." Numerous dormitory bathrooms have been vandalized with swastikas and Nazi images and slogans. Obscenities were yelled at Jewish students, including "Zionist killer," "Zionist pig" and "You have blood on your hands," and Jewish students were accused of supporting "apartheid" and being "responsible for genocide."

In a particularly egregious example involving AU faculty, one of AU's professors chose to devote official classroom time to the sharing of photos from pro-Palestinian protests, which she projected onto a large screen. The professor exalted the protests, sharing how meaningful and powerful they were for her. When one of the photos showed a sign of a Star of David in a trash can with the caption, "Keep the world clean," in a very deliberate and noticeable way the professor stared at a Jewish student in the class to the point that many of the other classmates turned around to also stare at the student. The Jewish student left the class in tears. In another classroom incident, "I do not want to sit on the same side of the room as this Zionist," and "You have blood on your hands. You are responsible for genocide," was screamed at the only Jewish student in the class by a peer. Neither the professor nor the administration addressed the conduct.

As documented in the complaint, while the university took prompt and effective action in response to incidents of Islamophobia, AU officials repeatedly ignored the anti-Semitic discrimination and harassment Jewish students reported to them. The university neglected to investigate anti-Semitic conduct or take the necessary steps to eliminate the mistreatment Jewish students endured.

Even worse, however, the complaint describes how the university chose to further harass and discriminate against several Jewish students by subjecting them to a baseless disciplinary hearing for using their phones to record individuals tearing down posters of Israeli hostages. The students filmed those tearing down the posters because when they first reported the infraction

to university officials they were told the school required documentation to take action. Yet, once in receipt of that proof, the university launched an investigation against the Jewish students for harassment and disorderly conduct, and threatened them with disciplinary action. Some of the students were even told their study abroad programs could be revoked. The vandalers, meanwhile, have yet to be held accountable.

“Shamefully AU has repeatedly chosen to turn a blind eye to the anti-Semitism snowballing on its campus,” stated Brandeis Center founder and chairman Kenneth L. Marcus who served as U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education for Civil Rights under the George W. Bush and Donald Trump Administrations. “Not only has the university failed in its legal obligation to protect Jewish students from illegal targeting and harassment, it is attempting to bully those brave enough to speak up. The university’s delinquency is reprehensible, and it only signals to the AU community there are no consequences for those who harass, threaten, assault or shun Jewish and Israeli students, emboldening those hostile to Jews even further.” Marcus testified recently before the [House Judiciary Committee](#) and the [House Subcommittee on Higher Education and the Workforce](#) as well as before a [Senate roundtable](#) on the need for decisive action by universities to combat rising campus antisemitism.

Julia Jassey, co-founder and CEO of Jewish on Campus, said, “Jewish students deserve consistent support from their university administrators, not harassment for standing up against anti-Semitism. Where the law is clear, AU officials have failed. On campuses across the country, Jewish students have faced an unprecedented level of antisemitism since October 7, including at AU. Ignoring these experiences is tantamount to tolerating them. We urge a swift investigation and a campus climate where no student has to endure such harassment.”

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color and national origin, including discrimination against Jews on the basis of their actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, in educational institutions that receive federal funding. Under the law, harassing, marginalizing, demonizing and excluding Jewish students on the basis of the Zionist component of their Jewish identity is just as unlawful and discriminatory as attacking a Jewish student for observing the Sabbath or keeping kosher.

Hillel International has documented a more than [700% increase](#) in campus antisemitism since Hamas’ massacre of Israeli civilians on October 7<sup>th</sup>.

The Department of Education is currently investigating Brandeis Center and Jewish on Campus complaints filed against [Wellesley](#) and [SUNY New Paltz](#), as well as complaints filed by the Brandeis Center against the [University of Southern California \(USC\)](#), [Brooklyn College](#), and the [University of Illinois](#). And the U.S. House Education and Workforce Committee is investigating [Harvard University](#) regarding its failure to take action against a professor that Harvard itself admitted discriminated against Jewish Israeli students. The Brandeis Center is representing the Harvard students. The Brandeis Center also recently sued the [University of California](#) in federal court for UC Berkeley’s longstanding, unchecked spread of anti-Semitism. The Department of Education recently reached an unprecedented agreement with the [University of Vermont](#) to address growing antisemitism on its campus in response to a complaint filed by the Brandeis Center and Jewish on Campus.

The Brandeis Center, along with the ADL, Hillel International, Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP, and other leading law firms and Jewish organizations, launched the [Campus Antisemitism Legal Line \(CALL\)](#), a free legal protection helpline for college students who have experienced antisemitism.

**The Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law** is an independent, unaffiliated, nonprofit corporation established to advance the civil and human rights of the Jewish people and promote justice for all. LDB engages in research, education, and legal advocacy to combat the resurgence of anti-Semitism on college and university campuses, in the workplace, and elsewhere. It empowers students by training them to understand their legal rights and educates administrators and employers on best practices to combat racism and anti-Semitism. The Brandeis Center is not affiliated with the Massachusetts university, the Kentucky law school, or any of the other institutions that share the name and honor the memory of the late U.S. Supreme Court justice.

**Jewish on Campus** is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded and run by Jewish college students, for Jewish college students. Since its founding in 2020, JOC has collected stories of anti-Semitism from thousands of students around the world and has assisted in creating change on campus.