



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.

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Contact: Alex Sommer, alex@tuskstrategies.com

Brandeis Center Files Two Title VI Civil Rights Complaints with the U.S. Department of Education Addressing Growing Discrimination and Hostility against Jewish Students at the University of Pennsylvania and Wellesley College; Partners with Jewish on Campus on Wellesley Complaint

Brandeis Center Seeks Detailed Remedies to Address Emboldened Anti-Semitism on College Campuses

Washington, D.C. (November 10, 2023) – Based on well-documented pervasive incidents of discrimination against Jews at two higher education institutions, the Brandeis Center is filing separate complaints with the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) in the U.S. Department of Education. Both seek immediate and specific action to address increasing discrimination against and harassment of Jews in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Each filing includes statements from students that explain how they were harassed and/or subjected to discrimination.

Kenneth L. Marcus, founder and chairman of the Brandeis Center and former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education, states: “These colleges and universities have failed to keep Jewish students safe and are in clear violation of well-established federal civil rights law. There’s been a lot of talk about rooting out anti-Semitism on campuses, and it’s time to hold these colleges accountable. We want to thank the students for their courage in coming forward and collaborating with us to ensure we hold these universities accountable for letting Jewish discrimination run rampant.”

The complaints allege that failure to adequately respond to these unnerving incidents puts both universities in violation of OCR guidance, which specifies that Title VI – which prohibits schools that receive federal funding from allowing harassment, bias or discrimination on campus – protects Jews on the basis of their “actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics.”

The complaints follow a series of recent actions taken by the Brandeis Center to address anti-Semitism after the October 7 massacre of Israeli civilians. Earlier this week, the Brandeis Center partnered with the Anti-Defamation League, Hillel International and law firm Gibson Dunn to launch the Campus Antisemitism Legal Line (CALL), a free legal protection helpline for students who have experienced antisemitism. Brandeis Center also wrote a letter to Harvard University regarding its failure to take action against a professor that Harvard itself admitted had discriminated against Jewish Israeli students.

The Brandeis Center will continue to lead the way in ensuring actual accountability and remedial action in the face of widespread displays of anti-Semitism on U.S. campuses.

Overview of the Complaints

University of Pennsylvania

In recent months, Penn has allowed its campus to become a hostile environment for its Jewish students as well as a magnet for anti-Semites. The anti-Semitic climate on campus was ratcheted up more than a few degrees when Penn hosted the “Palestine Writes Festival,” ostensible about Palestinian literature, but actually an event to highlight anti-Semitic speakers such as musician Roger Waters and 25 others known for their aggressive stance against the Jewish State..

Leading up to the event, anti-Semitic incidents increased. Penn’s Hillel was vandalized by a Penn student who broke in, damaged property, and yelled, “F*ck the Jews.” Penn responded to the criminal activity, but forged ahead with the Festival, which took place over Shabbat and during the Jewish High Holidays of Awe. Although Penn claimed it was not an “official” event, the Festival was funded by Penn, used the Penn name and logo, and took place on Penn property. Some professors included attendance as a course requirement.

Two weeks after the Festival took place, student protestors gathered to celebrate Hamas’ murder and mutilation of Israeli civilians on Oct. 7th. Once again, Penn leadership failed to check the increasingly hostile environment, which leaves Jewish students effectively blocked from classrooms during rallies, fearful for their physical safety on campus, and intimidated by students and professors calling for Jewish blood.

Protesters at the marches compared what is happening in Gaza with Auschwitz, tore down pictures of missing civilians and called out for the destruction of the Jewish State. Last week, the Penn Hillel received bomb threats.

Wellesley College

The Wellesley case is filed by the Brandeis Center and Jewish on Campus. On October 18, while Jewish students were still reeling from attacks on friends and family in Israel, the residential advisor (RA) at a Wellesley dormitory declared in an email “that there should be no space, no consideration, and no support for Zionism within the Wellesley College community.” The Jewish students were stunned. After receiving complaints about the anti-Semitic email, the RA sent a second email purporting to “regret any harm her words have caused.” However, on Instagram on October 20th, the same RA posted that the apology email was sent with a “gun to my head.”

Wellesley President Paula A. Johnson advised the college community that the residential staff had learned from their mistake, but did not call out the anti-Semitic email specifically. President Johnson also encouraged students to attend a panel that faculty were hosting about the conflict.

But that panel only fueled anti-Semitic ideas, further maligning and marginalizing Jewish students on the basis of their Jewish ancestral identity connected to Israel. Panelists minimized the atrocities committed by Hamas against innocent Israeli civilians on October 7, by claiming

that only a small extremist faction of Hamas are terrorists, that Hamas shouldn't be demonized, and that Hamas is not anti-Semitic because they only want to kill Zionists.

Wellesley's failure to take a stronger stance and check the hostile environment violates Title VI. Brandeis is requesting that OCR require Wellesley to take steps to bring it into compliance with Title VI, including by ensuring Jewish and all students have equal access to residential facilities and services provided by residential staff, investigating discrimination by residential staff in connection with their efforts to exclude Jewish students on the basis of shared ancestry and requiring residential staff to undergo training about anti-Semitism targeting Jewish shared ancestral identity connected to Israel.

About the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law

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. More at www.brandeiscenter.com.

About Jewish on Campus

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.