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ADL and Brandeis Center File Title VI Complaint Against UMass-Amherst, Alleging Pervasive Antisemitic Climate for Jewish Students

Complaint claims school failed to protect students, including after violent antisemitic assault

May 2, 2024 – ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) and the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law today announced that they submitted a formal complaint against the University of Massachusetts Amherst with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) alleging that the university has failed to address the severe discrimination and harassment of Jewish and Israeli students, which fostered a hostile antisemitic environment.

[The complaint](#) alleges that since the events on Oct. 7, Jewish students at UMass-Amherst have faced a litany of antisemitic incidents, including a violent assault. The complaint seeks remedies under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

“Even after a violent antisemitic assault on campus, UMass has done nothing to make Jewish students feel safe and, infuriatingly, this assault is the tip of the iceberg – part of a persistent pattern of enabling hate against Jews,” said Jonathan Greenblatt, ADL CEO and National Director. “This is a textbook example of an administration that is deliberately indifferent and negligent – the U.S. Department of Education must intervene immediately.”

In an attack corroborated by multiple eyewitnesses, the Complainant, UMass-Amherst Senior Dylan Jacobs was called a “Zionist s***bag” and then punched and kicked repeatedly by another student. A small Israeli flag was ripped from his hand, stabbed and thrown in a trash can. While UMass-Amherst was quick to condemn the attack, it did little beyond that. Instead, it spent nearly six months ignoring the incident, despite requests from the victim to address the matter.

Mr. Jacobs was also bizarrely subject to a no-contact directive without any basis provided, told he must stay away from members of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), but the SJP members could still approach him. This could effectively create a situation in which Mr. Jacobs is in violation of the directive through no fault of his own. But, without explanation, the SJP members

were not subjected to a no-contact order. UMass-Amherst failed to provide Mr. Jacobs with any information regarding the basis of said no-contact directive and effectively established a potentially dangerous dynamic.

“A Jewish student was charged at and repeatedly and violently punched and kicked for holding an Israeli flag at a Hillel Bring Them Home event, and what did the university do? They issued a statement urging ‘peaceful advocacy’ and simultaneously condemned Islamophobia. Adding insult to injury, it took them five months to hold a hearing on the violent assault and they have yet to hold the attacker accountable. What kind of message does this send to the UMass community? It is no wonder anti-Semitic protestors continue to block entrances and exits to buildings, call for violence against Jews, harass and intimidate Jewish students, disrupt events and spew anti-Semitic conspiracy theories,” stated Kenneth L. Marcus, chairman of the Brandeis Center and former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education for Civil Rights for George W. Bush and Donald Trump. “Following the law, holding perpetrators accountable and issuing consequences is not rocket science. It’s beyond shameful that we have to call in the Department of Education to get a school to address a violent anti-Semitic assault and ensure other students aren’t similarly attacked.”

Additional specific examples of antisemitic incidents cited in the complaint include genocidal chants, antisemitic slurs, and physical threats. There were statements from UMass-Amherst student groups praising Hamas’s terrorism as justified “resistance,” and disruptive pro-Hamas protests that prevented people from physically entering or exiting buildings, working, or studying.

There was also online harassment of Jewish students in a group chat, which included derogatory, vile, and antisemitic language. This rhetoric was so egregious that a perpetrator’s account was banned from a UMass public school page.

The complaint urges OCR to compel the university’s administration to implement a series of measures necessary to secure the safety of Jewish students at UMass, including issuing a public statement condemning antisemitic hostility and the BDS movement, urging the university to incorporate the IHRA working definition of antisemitism into its campus policies to better recognize the types of antisemitic discrimination confronting Jewish students, and providing mandatory antisemitism training to university administrators, faculty, students and staff.

In addition to ADL and the Brandeis Center, Jason Torchinsky and Erielle Davidson from Holtzman Vogel Baran Torchinsky & Josefiak PLLC and Douglas Brooks from Libby Hoopes Brooks & Mulvey, P.C. are serving as the plaintiff’s counsel in this case.

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. More at www.brandeiscenter.com

ADL is the leading anti-hate organization in the world. Founded in 1913, its timeless mission is “to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” Today, ADL continues to fight all forms of antisemitism and bias, using innovation and partnerships to drive impact. A global leader in combating antisemitism, countering extremism and battling bigotry wherever and whenever it happens, ADL works to protect democracy and ensure a just and inclusive society for all. More at www.adl.org.

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