



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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## UC SANTA BARBARA HIT WITH FEDERAL COMPLAINT FOR PERMITTING RELENTLESS HARASSMENT OF JEWISH STUDENT PRESIDENT

Washington, D.C., May 16, 2024: [The Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law](#) today filed a federal civil rights [complaint](#) against the University of Santa Barbara (UCSB) for leaving its own student government president, Tessa Veksler, utterly vulnerable to severe and persistent anti-Semitic bullying, harassment, intimidation, and threats. The harassment escalated to such a degree it forced Veksler to stay off campus during the end of the fall semester and take her exams online. The Brandeis Center is representing Veksler.

Veksler was elected president of the UCSB Associated Students (AS) in April 2023, making history by becoming the school's first Sabbath observant student body president. She is the daughter of Soviet refugees who fled Jewish persecution, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine compelled her to run. According to Veksler, her parents came to the U.S. in search of a society where they could live freely from anti-Semitism. Yet, a generation later, she is facing anti-Semitic hate for serving her university.

According to the complaint, Veksler has been targeted relentlessly on social media and at her student government office by her peers on the basis of an integral component of her Jewish identity, namely, her "Zionism," which recognizes that Jews are part of a people with an ancestral connection to Israel. Threats such as, "you can run but you can't hide, Tessa Veksler;" attacks calling her a Zionist dog, racist, and fascist; and repeated accusations that she is unfit to serve in her elected position due to her Jewish identity, have plagued her since October 7. Just last month, in a poster featuring Veksler and other students, a photo of Veksler's face was violently slashed. The constant harassment has left Veksler fearful for her physical safety on campus, negatively impacted her mental health, adversely affected her academic performance, and undermined her ability to lead student government.

"No individual should ever have to experience what I went through as a Jewish student at UCSB – harassment, intimidation, threats, and character assassination all in the form of pure anti-Semitic hatred," stated Veksler. "Despite the challenges I have faced, I knew that nothing would stop me from standing up for the Jewish community, maintaining my democratically-elected position, and pursuing justice for myself after being relentlessly targeted on the basis of my Jewish identity."

The situation began online where Veksler was repeatedly cyberbullied and doxed. And after it was left unchecked by the university for numerous months, the harassment migrated to the campus. In February, students plastered signs throughout the Multicultural Center, where Veksler's student government office is located, threatening her and making it clear Veksler is unwelcome on campus and should be excluded. The messages on posters stated: "Zionists are not welcome," "Zionists not welcome," "Ziofascists GTFO [get the f\*\*k out]," "Zionists not allowed," "AS president is racist Zionist," and "Get these Zionists out of office." Some of the posters contained ominous warnings directed at Veksler.

The harassment was further publicized to the entire student body community when photographs were posted on UCSB Multicultural Center's official Instagram account. The harassment continued online with demeaning messages and veiled threats that included, "You are disgusting. Zionists are NOT welcome in the MCC [Multicultural Center]. We will not back down and we WILL take action." One post stated, "Zionist dog is sad she can't harass the non-white students she presides over :(" and another remarked, "Everyone, take a moment of your time to feel bad for this genocide-supporting racist piece of shit," and "f\*\*k your white comfort in stealing a multicultural center." Other posts invoked age-old anti-Semitic tropes including the greedy Jew and claims Jews cannot be trusted to hold elected office.

Some of the harassing messages suggested Jews are not a minority group and do not belong at the Multicultural Center at all.

According to the complaint, the university has largely ignored the harassment, threats, and attacks, failing to stop the harassment or adequately address the hostile environment, and the few steps it has taken have been severely insufficient. It has failed to even put out a statement specifically condemning anti-Semitic efforts to bully and intimidate its own Jewish student president.

The Brandeis Center demands UCSB conduct an immediate and full investigation of the discriminatory and harassing behavior against Veksler and take appropriate disciplinary action against perpetrators. To prevent future incidents like this, they also urge the university to issue a statement clearly and specifically condemning anti-Semitic harassment and efforts to shun and marginalize Jewish students based on the Zionist component of their Jewish identity and commit to conducting anti-Semitism education and training of faculty, students and staff.

“What has been allowed to happen to Tessa over many months – shaming, harassing, and shunning a student until they disavow a part of their Judaism – is shameful and illegal,” stated Kenneth L. Marcus, chairman of the Brandeis Center and the former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education for Civil Rights. “Sadly, this is not the first time we are seeing this mob behavior against a Jewish student elected by their student body to serve. It is incumbent upon UC Santa Barbara and all universities to say enough is enough.”

Brandeis Center attorneys also represented [Rose Ritch](#) when anti-Semitic harassment and discrimination led to her resignation as University of Southern California’s (USC) student government vice president and [Max Price](#), a Tufts student government official similarly threatened with impeachment and disciplinary hearings. Ritch and Price were both attacked for the Zionist component of their Jewish identity. After the Brandeis Center intervened, Students for Justice in Palestine withdrew their call to impeach Price. The Department of Education is currently investigating USC.

Title VI prohibits discrimination based on 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 based on the Zionist component of their Jewish identity is unlawful. UNESCO has cautioned that “Jew” and “Zionist” are often used interchangeably today in an attempt by anti-Semites to cloak their hate. According to President Biden’s U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism, released in May 2023, “Jewish students and educators are targeted for derision and exclusion on college campuses, often because of their real or perceived views about the State of Israel. When Jews are targeted because of their beliefs or their identity, when Israel is singled out because of anti-Jewish hatred, that is antisemitism. And that is unacceptable.”

Last week the Brandeis Center and ADL filed civil rights complaints against [Pomona and Occidental Colleges](#) for severe anti-Semitic bullying, intimidation and physical threats. And the Department of Education [opened](#) an investigation into a complaint filed by the Brandeis Center and ADL about “severe and pervasive” anti-Semitism in Berkeley K-12 public schools.

*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](http://www.brandeiscenter.com)*