



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 10, 2025

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Stanford University Sued for Alleged Anti-Semitism: Israeli Postdoc Harassed, Life-Saving Research Sabotaged, and Forced to Leave

Lawsuit exposes toxic environment where Jewish students face widespread and ongoing hostility on campus

Washington, D.C. - [The Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law](https://www.brandeiscenter.org/) and the law firm of Cohen Williams LLP filed a federal lawsuit today against Stanford University in the Northern District of California alleging the university is complicit in permitting an environment saturated with intimidation and harassment of Jewish and Israeli students to flourish on campus.

The Brandeis Center and Cohen Williams represent a Jewish Israeli post-doctoral researcher who was hired by Stanford after being recommended by a Nobel Laureate, to help develop his research of synthetic and “smart” insulin which would revolutionize treatment for millions of people suffering from diabetes. When he joined the new Stanford lab, however, he was met with discrimination and insidious, malicious conduct intended to permanently tarnish his reputation and career – including tampering with his lab results and manufacturing a bogus complaint against him – merely for being Israeli.

In April 2024, Israeli chemist Dr. Shay Laps arrived at Stanford for a postdoctoral position, where he was to help develop a revolutionary diabetes treatment. He had developed a close professional relationship with his lab leader due to his high achievement level and progress in making groundbreaking chemistry developments, and together they applied for - and earned - the most prestigious grant in the field of diabetes. Yet as soon as Dr. Laps arrived at the lab, he was targeted by a lab staffer, who knew nothing about him other than that he was a Jewish scientist from Israel. Left unaddressed, the targeting escalated, including into increasingly serious and malicious attempts to harm Dr. Laps, with the hostility eventually spreading to others who also began to engage in the same harmful pattern of harassment.

At their first meeting, the lab staffer told Dr. Laps never to speak to her, including when it came to ordering lab supplies, part of her professional responsibilities in the lab. Subsequently, when Dr. Laps tried to join a group of co-workers including the lab staffer for lunch, the lab staffer instructed Dr. Laps not to sit with her or other lab employees. She also urged other researchers in the lab to shun Dr. Laps. The staffer took her hate to new levels when she tampered with Dr. Laps’ research, producing fraudulent results behind his back that could have ruined his career,

and encouraging him to discard all evidence of her tampering. Over the subsequent months the hatred spread to others in the lab and those associated with lab employees. When Dr. Laps discovered the sabotage of his experiments, the lab's leader and his mentor refused to address the issue.

Dr. Laps was isolated and sabotaged by multiple individuals at Stanford. His former mentor even turned on him. When Dr. Laps brought the hostile treatment he was experiencing to his mentor and the lab's leader, rather than address the discrimination in the workplace, the lab leader attempted to bully Dr. Laps into leaving the country. The lab leader – falsely – claimed that Stanford's Title IX Office had alerted him to a complaint and formal investigation against Dr. Laps, and pressured Dr. Laps to flee. But those were lies. Stanford's actual Title IX Office later confirmed they had done no such thing, that no victim had ever made a complaint, and that there was no investigation. Dr. Laps reached out for help, writing to Stanford President Jonathan Levin and the School of Medicine Dean Lloyd B. Minor, only for the Stanford administration to disregard his claims, ultimately resulting in his resignation. Dr. Laps has never, in his entire career, faced questions regarding his professional or personal integrity until these baseless and fraudulent actions were taken against him.

These are not the only incidents of anti-Semitism that occurred on Stanford's campus. In the days following October 7, the instructor of a mandatory freshman orientation seminar deviated from the planned curriculum to argue that October 7 was "justified" and "not terrorism." The instructor allegedly singled out Jewish freshman students by asking all the Jews in the room to raise their hands. After choosing one, the instructor took the student's belongings and forced them to face the wall alone. The same instructor informed students that more people have died from colonization than the Holocaust, and asked students to identify their national origins so that he could label them "colonized" or "colonizer."

Another professor told a large crowd that "European settlers" (meaning Israelis) intended to "replace" the "native population" of Palestine, while another encouraged students to compare Zionism to Hitler's vision of Aryan Germany. When encampments took over the main campus plaza, protestors touted signs that read, "Die Israel" while celebrating Hamas and calling for violence. Protesters also hijacked and disturbed the class of a Jewish professor, and masked students banged on the windows of a classroom whilst slipping a flier under the door that read: "You're being taught by a Zionist. Drop this class."

"The incidents that took place on the Stanford University campus are exposing deep, dangerous biases against Jewish and Israeli students and faculty. Rather than stepping up to protect vulnerable students, the Stanford administration shrunk in the face of responsibility, took action only when needed to protect itself, and ignored the vehement instances of anti-Semitism plaguing their campus," said **Hon. Kenneth L. Marcus, chairman and CEO of the Brandeis Center and the former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education who ran the Office for Civil Rights, which investigates schools for civil rights violations, during two administrations, and is representing Dr. Laps.** "Their failure to address this behavior, blindly ignoring horrific anti-Semitic harassment and discrimination, is gross negligence and utterly unacceptable."

“Our client, Dr. Laps, is an exceptional young scientist who came to Stanford hoping to create a type of insulin that could revolutionize diabetes treatment worldwide. His commitment to excellence, innovation, and humanity should have been a perfect fit” said **Talia Nissimyan of Cohen Williams LLP, who is also representing Dr. Laps.** “But when Dr. Laps suffered discrimination and retaliation at Stanford based on his religion, national origin, and ethnicity, the university preferred not to look. Instead, they attempted to bury Dr. Laps' career, and when that didn't work, to bully him into rescinding his complaints. Instead of upholding the values upon which it was founded, Stanford succumbed to the rising tide of campus anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli bias, costing Dr. Laps critical years of his career, and costing the world the potential fruits of his talents. No form of bigotry is lawful or acceptable, and what happened to Dr. Laps demonstrates why: because we all suffer. We intend to hold Stanford to its highest promise, and bring this action in the hopes that our client can finally secure the accountability he deserves.”

This is not the first time Stanford has been under scrutiny for anti-Semitic activity. In 2021, the Brandeis Center [filed](#) a complaint with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and California's Civil Rights Department (CRD), exposing how Jewish employees at Stanford experienced severe and persistent anti-Jewish harassment. In December 2023, the Office of Civil Rights opened an investigation into Stanford for Title VI national origin discrimination involving religion, and sent a letter to Stanford in May 2024 warning that a hostile environment targeting students based on their Jewish ethnicity, religion, or Israeli national origin violated federal civil rights laws. [Occidental College](#), [Cal Poly Humboldt](#), [UC Santa Barbara](#), [Pomona College](#), [USC](#), [Scripps College](#), and UCLA are among other universities in the state of California that have been accused of perpetuating atmospheres of anti-Semitism on their campuses.

The Brandeis Center is leading a national effort to fight anti-Semitism. In response to a Brandeis Center lawsuit earlier this year, Harvard [agreed](#) to take significant measures to address anti-Semitism on its campus, including recognizing the centrality of Zionism to Jewish identity and explicitly stating that targeting Jews and Zionists constitutes a violation of school rules.

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About The Brandeis Center

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.

About Cohen Williams LLP

Cohen Williams LLP is a Los Angeles-based litigation boutique with national reach. The firm was founded in 2014 by three litigators who sought to build an elite team of trial lawyers that could tackle top-tier cases across California. Since then, it has evolved into a thriving boutique firm that handles complex, high-stakes criminal and civil litigation in state and federal courts nationwide. Attorneys Reuven L. Cohen, Kathleen M. Erskine, Talia Nissimyan, and Michael Fisher have led CW's efforts in this case.