



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Field Hearing Statement of Vice Chairman Ritchie Torres (D-NY)

Countering Violent Extremism, Terrorism, and Antisemitic Threats in New Jersey

October 3, 2022

I am deeply grateful to Congressman Josh Gottheimer for generously hosting us in his District and for his visible and vocal leadership in combating antisemitism. Although I am not Jewish, I have been a consistent voice against antisemitism from the moment I entered Congress and even well before then. For me, the reason is simple: combating antisemitism is not and should never be the sole responsibility of the Jewish community. It is a moral obligation that should bind all of us, but most especially those of us in the United States Congress.

The House Homeland Security Committee has jurisdiction over the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, which has emerged as a vital tool for protecting the Jewish community from violent extremism. In a properly functioning society, there would be no need for a Nonprofit Security Grant program. There would be no need for schools and synagogues to be heavily protected by security barriers and security cameras and security guards. There would be no need for students, in the innocence of their youth, or congregants, in their place of worship, to undergo active shooter training. The tragic necessity of the Nonprofit Security Grant Program is a sign of the troubling times we live in and the troubled souls who increasingly live among us.

The United States is confronting an unprecedented crisis of antisemitism. Antisemitic violence and vandalism have risen to levels not seen in decades; about 30% of all antisemitic incidents in the US in 2021 were concentrated in New York and New Jersey. Just last week, Rutgers University's chapter of Alpha Epsilon Pi, a Jewish fraternity, fell victim to vandalism during Rosh Hashanah.

In an age of online radicalization, violent extremism commands the largest microphone it has ever known in human history—a platform that history's most vicious and violent demagogues could only dream of. In May of 2021, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) found the hashtag #HitlerWasRight trending on Twitter, with tens of thousands of retweets and with no content moderation in sight.

In the summer of 2017, in Charlottesville, Virginia, during the Unite The Right rally, white supremacists were found uttering the words — “The Jews will not replace us” — in an odious reference to the Great Replacement Theory. And most tragically, on October 27th, 2018, a white supremacist, motivated by the Great Replacement Theory, entered the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and opened fire, murdering 11 Jews in the deadliest act of antisemitism in US history. Although white supremacist extremism has historically been a dominant driver of antisemitism, it is far from the only one.

In early April of 2022, in New York City, following a wave of terror in Israel that left multiple Israelis dead, a set of extremists—in a rally entitled “Globalize the Intifada”—took to the streets of New York and publicly called for Zionists students and professors to be purged from college campuses and classrooms. The substitution of the word ‘Zionist’ for ‘Jew’ has become the modus operandi of a new insidious strain of antisemitism that has taken hold in college campuses and on social media platforms.

antisemitism is too complicated to be reduced to one cause. It can be found everywhere—on the right and on the left, among the secular and among the religious. History tells us that antisemitism is a virus with more than one

mutation, with more than a single strain. And as a virus, it spreads rapidly and widely—on college campuses, on social media, and on the streets of America where it has grown not only in frequency and severity but also, in far too many places, with impunity.

We are here to examine in greater detail why antisemitism has risen so suddenly and sharply and what we in Congress can do specifically to aid state and local governments, as well as our community-based partners, in turning the tide against an ancient hatred that too often thrives on conspiracy theories and too often hardens into violence. When it comes to the fight against antisemitism, failure is not an option.

#

Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978