



May 19, 2017

Honorable Commissioners,

My name is Jane Charney, and I serve as the Director of Domestic Affairs at the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago. Thank you, Chairman and the Committee, for the opportunity to testify before you today.

Hate Crimes, unfortunately, are becoming an all too common of an occurrence and an issue that affects everyone here today. We very much appreciate all that the Cook County Board of Commissioners is doing to stand up against hate.

The Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago is a 116-year-old non-partisan organization representing a diverse community here at home and overseas. Our network of institutions provides essential health and human services to over 500,000 Chicago-area residents of all faiths and ethnic backgrounds. We provide services to domestic violence survivors, foster youth, people with disabilities and the frail elderly, to name a few. Our facilities are located throughout Cook County and include Sinai Health System, Holy Cross Hospital, HIAS Chicago, Jewish Child & Family Services, CJE SeniorLife, the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago, and Jewish day schools.

Also, since 1975, the Jewish Federation has been the administrator of the Illinois Refugee Social Service Consortium and, through this work, has resettled more than 125,000 refugees of all faiths and backgrounds and from all over the world, who had been fleeing persecution.

The recent uptick in anti-Semitic and other hateful acts here at home is beyond alarming. Such incidents include the vandalism at the Loop Synagogue in early February, a swastika on John Hay Elementary School in Austin, and a similar incident that occurred at Lincoln United Methodist Church in Pilsen, with the words “burn” and “kill” written under a swastika. Last month, one of our donors reported seeing the letters “KKK” carved onto a bathroom stall at a downtown law firm.

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The FBI reported 5,818 hate crimes in 2015, up about 6% from the previous year. Jews, who make up just 1.7% of the US population, were the target of more than 52% of all religion-based hate crimes in 2015, the latest year for which data is available. The FBI also reported Anti-Muslim hate crimes increased by 67%. Anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S. surged more than one-third in 2016 and have jumped 86 percent in the first quarter of 2017, according to new data from the Anti-Defamation League's annual Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents. The data also show doubling in the amount of anti-Semitic bullying and vandalism at non-denominational K-12 grade schools.

We are particularly concerned about social media and the internet being used as avenues for harassment and for propagating anti-Semitic tropes. Social media – particularly Facebook and Twitter – have become hotbeds of hate speech. Anti-Semitism is prevalent both in individual posts and messages as well as on multi-user forums and message boards.

My colleagues at the Anti-Defamation League recently conducted a thorough investigation of online hate speech and found that between August 2015 and July 2016, for example, more than 2.6 million tweets contained language frequently found in anti-Semitic speech. ADL used a broad set of keywords and keyword combinations to identify these tweets.

In addition, ADL research shows that at least 800 journalists received anti-Semitic tweets with an estimated reach of 45 million impressions. The top 10 most targeted journalists, all of whom are Jewish, received 83 percent of these anti-Semitic tweets. The tweets contained personal attacks, detailed threats to the journalists and their families, cartoons depicting the Holocaust and executions of Jews, and similar content.

Our Israel Education Center reports that Jewish students on college campuses throughout Illinois also have been victims of an unprecedented wave of online and physical harassment in the last several years, with message boards peppered with anti-Jewish slurs. Frequently, the harassment escalates from highly charged discussions about the policies of the Israeli government and devolves into anti-Semitic taunts. These posts on anonymous message boards and in Facebook groups quickly veer away from protected political speech and into the territory of bigotry.

We are also witnessing an extraordinary rise in hate against many other minority groups. We stand with Muslims, the GLBT community, refugees, people with disabilities, African-Americans and Latinos against the notion that bigots can hide behind the anonymity of the internet and threaten the very fabric of our country.

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As Jews, we take seriously our responsibility to speak out against hatred, not only because the security of our own community is intertwined with that of other minority communities, but also because our moral values, as Jews and as Americans, demand it.

Given the recent wave of attacks, the Jewish Federation, working with its affiliate agencies and community partners, has taken steps to minimize the impact of hate crimes against our community and our partners. The following highlights some of our recent work in this area:

- The Jewish Federation hosted a security summit for its affiliate agencies, with a panel of law enforcement experts that discussed recent security threats to our community and provided tips for reporting incidents and safety planning.
- In response to the attack on the Loop Synagogue, the Federation hosted an interfaith gathering of Christians, Muslims, and Jews, in which 1,000 people attended, calling on Chicagoans to stand together against any hateful act under the major tenant of all religions, “Love Thy Neighbor.”
- The Jewish Federation was one of 22 organizations invited to participate in the Illinois Attorney General’s Hate Crimes Summit in March. The organizations presenting represented the Jewish, Muslim, African-American, refugee, immigrant, LGBTQ, disability, and Latino communities. Representatives shared their community’s recent experiences, including acts of bias, threats and negative effects of new policies.
- The Federation continues to work with and strengthen its relationships with its partners among Chicago’s faith and ethnic communities, including with Fierce Women of Faith, Rainbow Push Coalition, and our partners in the Muslim community.
- The Federation is working in Springfield to beef up current Hate Crime legislation and supports the IL AGO’s most recent bill, HB 3711, that aims to expand the current Hate Crime law, which particularly addresses internet and social media bias-based harassment. Federation has also testified and signed in support of several anti-hate resolutions at the state, county, and city levels.

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I testify before you today to assure you that the Jewish Federation stands with all communities who are being targeted by hate. Together, we challenge those who seek to divide, demonize and intimidate our collective communities.

As residents of Cook County are rich in ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, we all have an obligation to stand up for one another, as neighbors, and push back against hate together.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jane Charney  
Director of Domestic Affairs  
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