

**Submission Brief to the Justice and Human Rights House of
Commons Committee:
Antisemitism and Additional Measures to Address the Fears
of Canada's Jewish Community**

Brief submitted by the Jewish Parents of Ottawa Students Association
(JPOSA)
Member of the Alliance Combatting Campus Antisemitism

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The Jewish Parents of Ottawa Students Association (“JPOSA”) was formed in November 2023 out of frustration with the inadequate response to antisemitic incidents in schools. JPOSA rapidly grew from a few concerned parents to over 180 current members by word of mouth and no active recruitment or marketing. JPOSA is a member of the Alliance Combatting Campus Antisemitism.

The recent escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has played a significant role as the backdrop for the increase of antisemitic incidents in Canada. The conflict has served as a catalyst for antisemitic expressions, under the guise of political commentary, resulting in a surge of both blatant acts of hatred and more subtle forms of bias against Jewish individuals and communities nationwide.

There has been a notable increase in antisemitic incidents on college and university campuses across Canada. These range from hostile rhetoric on social media to the exclusion of Jewish students from campus organizations, and even vandalism of Jewish fraternity houses and cultural centers. This environment not only fosters a climate of fear and isolation among Jewish students but also challenges the principles of diversity and inclusivity that educational institutions strive to uphold. This climate of antisemitism, fear and isolation of Jewish students is not confined to college and university campuses, but also in public elementary and secondary schools.

Since Hamas’s brutal assault on Israel on October 7, 2023, antisemitic incidents at Ottawa public elementary and secondary schools have become more frequent, pervasive, and aggressive. The daily life of Jewish students is often filled with anxiety, isolation, and fear as a result of verbal and sometimes physical abuse.

Jewish students opt to conceal their identity rather than confront the distressing realities of derogatory name-calling, character assassinations, isolation, and peer rejection. Shockingly, even in more severe circumstances, children as young as seven years old have encountered harassment, intimidation, physical assault, threats of both physical and sexual violence, and even death threats.

These incidents have become commonplace and are having a detrimental impact on the social, emotional, psychological, and physical wellbeing of many Jewish students. No student can be expected to learn in a hostile and threatening environment. Moreover, public schools are failing to adhere to the Safe Schools Act when incidents of bullying and harassment of Jewish students are ignored, trivialized, or dismissed, often allowing perpetrators to act with impunity. This disregard for the safety and well-being of Jewish students would not be tolerated for any other minority group.

JPOSA has been diligently collecting evidence and testimony, revealing the widespread nature of antisemitism in Ottawa’s public schools. A survey commissioned by JPOSA has shown alarming statistics:

- 70% of Jewish students have felt unsafe at their public elementary or secondary school because they are Jewish.
- 60% have experienced antisemitism or Jew Hate at their school.
- 60% of the students who have experienced antisemitism report that it was perpetrated by other students; while approximately 15% report the perpetrators also included teachers, school administrators or others.
- 40-50% do not feel safe talking to their teachers or administrators about harassment or antisemitism they have experienced.
- Numerous students have highlighted that various school-sanctioned events, such as protests, flag-carrying, fundraisers, and speaking engagements, contribute to an environment where they

face heightened levels of harassment, bullying, threats, and targeting. As a result, some students choose to stay home from school on these event days to ensure their physical and emotional well-being.

Jewish students constitute a small minority in Ottawa public schools and are subject to harassment and oppression by peers who hold more power through sheer numbers. Consequently, many Jewish students in Ottawa's public schools feel fearful of disclosing or having their Jewish identity divulged.

JPOSA is aware of at least 15 families that have relocated their homes or are planning to relocate so that their children can attend different schools or school boards, due to bullying, harassment or safety concerns at their current schools that are not being addressed by the school administration despite the effort of the parents. In one instance, when parents expressed their fears for the safety of their Jewish child at a school and that they were considering relocation, the guidance counselor told them 'it was probably a good idea' to move their home, so as to live in a school catchment for a school that was safer for Jews.

Testimony of incidents collected by JPOSA via parent and Jewish student surveys include:

- Two students, one from an Ottawa public high school, were arrested for a bombing plot allegedly targeting the Ottawa Jewish community and charged with attempted murder.
- At the same high school attended by the student who was arrested, Jewish students were threatened/harassed/intimidated and chased by peers in relation to Gaza fundraisers and petition circulating regarding a ceasefire. The principal subsequently responded to Jewish parents' concern by remarking that the school does not have an antisemitism problem.
- Issues at multiple other high schools include:
 - The Student-Council co-president and other members of the student council have spread antisemitic hate and blood libel on social media. The same school proceeded with a speaker whose political messages against Israel and the Israeli government resulted in an unsafe environment for Jewish and Israeli students. Parents and JPOSA had raised their concerns with the school before the speaker presented but the school proceeded anyway.
 - Hate speech charges were laid against a student for Nazi image on a flag used during a school walkout/protest. In this same school a teacher told students in their class to be kind to Muslim students because Jewish people are killing their families in Gaza. Students were also encouraged by other students to wear Keffiyehs the day after Holocaust presentation to make a statement about Palestine.
 - A segment of a daily media program created by students, which is meant to showcase school announcements, contained a segment with students waving a Palestinian Flag in the hallways, after which a song celebrating martyrdom for Palestine was played in the video. This was played over loudspeakers to the whole school and posted on the school's website.
 - An Ottawa Rabbi had his invitation rescinded to speak at an annual Day of Injustice, where he had participated in the same program in previous years. The school was only going to discuss Islamophobia and not antisemitism. The Rabbi was only re-invited after this was flagged by JPOSA and the parents of the school.
- Other incidents include:
 - Jewish student told, "I'm going to slice you up" because she is Jewish.
 - "Stop the Genocide in Gaza" fundraisers and stickers with "Stop the genocide in Gaza" and "Boycott Israel" with QR codes to scan to find out what companies to boycott.

- Kids told to “pick a side;” being bullied on the school bus; swastikas drawn on school bus seats; kids yelling “Free Palestine” targeting Jewish students (targeted); students being told that Jews are all murderers, choose between Israel and Palestine, Israel kills babies, etc.

JPOSA’s recommendations for this committee are simple and foundational in nature with the aim of facilitating and allowing the provinces and territories to adopt meaningful and coherent approaches in education both on campuses and in public schools to address this widespread problem across all stages of the education system in Canada.

- Acknowledge that there is a systemic problem with antisemitism at public elementary and secondary schools, in addition to post-secondary schools and take action within your mandate to address it in every way possible.
- Champion and promote the already adopted International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism throughout Canada and leverage the full resources and authority of the federal government, including legislative action where possible, to promote and ensure adoption of the IHRA definition throughout educational institutions in Canada.
- Enact legislation that includes Jews as a minority in Canada, who should be recognized as such under Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion frameworks at Educational Institutions within Canada
- Increase funding and resources for the Office of the Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism, given that hate crimes targeting Jews are the most prevalent form of hate crime across the country with a dramatic increase since October 2023:
 - Create federally funded and implemented educational programs in communities to raise awareness about the history and impact of antisemitism, as well as promoting tolerance and understanding among Canadians.
 - Establish a federal mechanism for monitoring and reporting incidents of antisemitism at schools and more broadly, both online and offline.
 - Encourage interfaith dialogue and collaboration among religious communities to foster understanding, respect, and solidarity in the fight against antisemitism.
- Canada should follow the example set by the US Congress and other countries, including the Netherlands, in legislating that hateful rhetoric like “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free” will be categorized as hate speech which in turn would warrant prosecution. This legislation should be explicit, such that all Provincial Attorney Generals will have a clear mandate to support prosecution of this hate crime. Jewish and Israeli Canadians should not be subjected to calls for the genocide and ethnic cleansing of the only Jewish nation-state while walking down the street or attending school.

Respectfully,

Tamara Taub



On behalf of JPOSA, a member of the Alliance Combatting Campus Antisemitism (ALCCA)