



MILWAUKEE
JEWISH FEDERATION

To Our Jewish Community:

The Jewish Community has been woven into the fabric of Wisconsin for more than 150 years. In that time, we have been tested, and we have stood tall together. As a community we have shared joy, hope, fear and sorrow, and we have always overcome adversity together. But in just the last 8 days, we have been newly tested with a disgusting, hateful escalation of antisemitic attacks on the Milwaukee Jewish community that has reached an alarming and very public new low. By now many of you have heard about the horrifying graphic mural displayed by a building owner at Locust and Holton. This follows a week of harassment, intimidation efforts on and off campus, calls to boycott the Federation, JCRC and Hillel Milwaukee, and labeling all of them as extremist groups.

This is part of a seemingly coordinated siege of antisemitic attacks at UWM, around the Milwaukee community, and in social media spaces. This vile wave of attacks began the moment UWM reversed its suspension of the same 5 student groups who were originally suspended for violating campus codes of conduct regarding threatening and hostile behavior or actions in July.

This is a much longer update than we generally send to the community, but we want to be sure you are well-informed on what has happened and our Jewish Federation's timely responses.

Incidents Occurring at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee

On September 5, the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee (UWM) reinstated five student organizations who on July 19, under a combined group name of *uwm4palicoalition*, put a post on Instagram declaring Israel-supporting organizations such as Hillel Milwaukee and Federation were not welcome on campus and labeled them as "extremist" organizations. We are most concerned about the final line that threatened, "Any organization that has not separated themselves from Israel will be treated accordingly as extremist criminals. Stay tuned."

On Sunday of this last week, September 8, *uwm4palicoalition* posted a series of pieces celebrating the reinstatement of the student organizations and claiming that the University's investigation of the incident showed that there were no discrimination violations in their July 19 post.

Wednesday, September 11, there was a student fair at UWM. There were student organizations who are part of the *uwm4palicoalition* who broke University rules by attempting to set up tables they were not approved to have and who targeted the Hillel Milwaukee table. Additionally, they created and handed out a brochure made to look like it was created by Hillel Milwaukee – some of the wording included:

- You are not "building a community" or "finding your people" in college if you join Hillel MKE, you are simply acting as a pawn to support the slaughter of fellow students like you.
- It is crucial for organizations such as Hillel that indirectly fund the genocide to recruit naïve students straight out of high schools; such students make easy targets to manipulate.

Hillel and another Jewish student organization ultimately decided to leave the student fair due to the level of harassment and the fact that the University was not taking action to ensure the protection of Jewish students or staff.

Yesterday, September 12, there were posts by uwm4palicoalition that mocked the harassing discussions they engaged in with the Hillel Milwaukee students and staff. This follows 11-months of Jewish students not being protected by similar incidents on campus.

Jewish students, like all students on campus, have the right to a safe and inclusive learning environment, where they can practice their identities without intimidation, discrimination, or fear. UWM has continued to fail Jewish students and staff by not enforcing their own code of conduct and allowing other students and organizations to engage in prohibited activities creating a hostile environment for Jewish students, faculty, and staff of the University.

Targeting of Jewish Federation Program

The MJF, through its JCRC, planned and held a community-wide discussion on civility this past Monday, September 9. The program was called “Civility in our Times” and was composed of a panel of diverse community leaders. The purpose of the program was to help focus on civility from a non-partisan perspective as we head into a very heated presidential election; 73 diverse members of the community were in attendance. The program was designed to be a unifying opportunity to bring Milwaukee residents together for this important conversation on democracy.

On Monday afternoon, the executive director of the Islamic Society of Milwaukee (ISM) sent an antisemitic and anti-Zionist email to the three non-Jewish panelists and included the following: “We hope you do not fall for the lobbying efforts of Israel’s proxies in the U.S. and that you continue to adopt a moral and ethical stance based on the recognition of the human, political and civic rights of all people, including Palestinians.”

Someone showed up at the program to hand out and put on cars an antisemitic flyer masquerading as anti-Zionist messaging. The messaging included accusations of the MJF and JCRC promoting Islamophobic and racist messaging; encouraging police to brutalize protestors; promoting antisemitism towards members of the Jewish community who have different viewpoints on the war – and encouraging a boycott of MJF and JCRC events.

Antisemitic Mural with Swastika posted on private property wall at Holton and Locust

Yesterday, Thursday, September 12, many members of the community have reported an antisemitic mural on a private building, visible to pedestrians and drivers. The mural depicts a Jewish Star of David intertwined with a swastika, with language that says, “The irony of becoming what you once hated.” The backdrop includes images of civilian devastation in Gaza.

This image is antisemitic for many reasons. Holocaust comparisons and the use of imagery are never appropriate, because they dehumanize the victims and survivors of the Holocaust, are inaccurate, and fuel Holocaust denial, and create narratives that prevent us from understanding the complexities of both the past and present. The symbols utilized in this mural also include splatters of blood, which invoke past accusations and tropes of Jews committing blood libel.

While they attempt to disguise the antisemitism under the guise of "we don't hate Jews, we just hate Zionists" in effect determining which Jews will be tolerated, and which will not.

We are also hearing from our non-Jewish community neighbors and friends, including our interfaith and community partners — this woke up the entire community as they stand against hate. Freedom of speech may allow this hateful display, but that freedom has consequences, it does not give a pass to hateful or hurtful language, and we will continue to speak out loudly.

Holocaust comparisons and use of imagery is never acceptable. Swastikas are always used as symbols of hatred and intent to intimate Jews. This is NOT a political or human rights statement. It's antisemitism.

We want to assure you in these times the Federation is:

- Using the Federation's vast security and intel capacity to continue to make sure our Jewish spaces and our community remain safe.
- Working with local law enforcement and local leaders to ensure they are aware of and working to mitigate any reports of antisemitism.
- Working with local media to bring light to these dark and hateful attacks and making sure the Jewish community's concerns are heard.
- Working with campus leadership to ensure our Jewish and Israeli students have access to the full campus experience without fear or intimidation.

We understand the fear and concern caused by this and other antisemitic actions. We are touched by our allies who have reached out and know that we are not alone as we face these instances. If you or someone you know experience or witness what they feel MAY be an antisemitic incident, please encourage them use [this link to report](#).

Please continue to reach out with any concerns and, equally important, please let us know if you need support as you process and navigate these challenging incidents. But remember, all good people in our community are concerned about how hateful messages and actions impact their community, and we are hearing from a lot of really good people who stand with us.

Shabbat Shalom,

Miryam Rosenzweig, President and CEO