

Public Comment

A-35



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Via email –

Supervisor Hartmann, Chair
Supervisor Capps
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Supervisor Williams
Executive Officer Miyasato

January 23, 2023

Re: Support for International Holocaust Remembrance Day Resolution

Dear Chair Hartmann, Members of the Board, and Executive Officer Miyasato,

I am writing on behalf of the Anti-Defamation League's Santa Barbara office, which serves Santa Barbara, Ventura, and San Luis Obispo Counties, to express our support and appreciation for the proposed resolution to recognize January 27, 2023 as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. As you may know, ADL is a leading anti-hate organization with a 110 year-old mission "to stop the defamation of the Jewish people, and to secure justice and fair treatment to all." ADL's educational programming has long included professional development and classroom materials for middle and high school educators who teach about the Holocaust.

I had the honor of addressing this Board in person last January in support of the passage of a similar resolution. We heard then from two survivors of the Kindertransport – the organized effort that saved over 10,000 children, most of them Jewish, from the Nazi death camps. We discussed the importance of hearing these firsthand accounts to witness the impact ourselves, to honor those who experienced it and worse, and to reinforce the lessons we learned from that era in order to prevent such bigotry and conduct from occurring again. The number of living survivors is sadly dwindling, and so we will need to rely on recordings of their accounts, on the accounts of their children, on history books, and on a commitment to preserving and to continue exploring these truths.

I noted then that antisemitism historically has increased in times of political polarization, distrust in government institutions, and threats to public welfare, including pandemics, and we have clearly seen that occur in recent years both nationally and locally. ADL's 2021 Annual Audit of Antisemitic Incidents (released in May of 2022) reported 2,717 credible antisemitic incidents that year – a 34% increase over the number reported in 2020 and the highest on record since ADL began its annual reporting in 1979. Three of the four prior years were also among the highest five years ever recorded.

ADL also just released a survey of antisemitic attitudes in the United States, which found that 20% of the diverse pool surveyed believe in six or more antisemitic conspiracy theories, demonstrating extensive antisemitic prejudice. This result is nearly double that in ADL's 2019 survey and represents the highest level we have seen in three decades. It suggests that as many as 66 million Americans may believe in classic antisemitic notions and tropes. 20 percent of respondents, for example, believe Jews have "too much power" in the United States; 21 percent agree that Jews "don't care about anyone other than themselves;" and 53 percent say that Jews will go out of their way to hire other Jews. These findings reveal substantial belief in tropes that Jews are too powerful, selfish, and clannish. While young adults show less belief in anti-Jewish tropes (18% believe six or more tropes), the difference is substantially less than measured in previous studies. Coming at a time when antisemitic incidents are already at historic levels, the disturbing increase of antisemitic attitudes indicate that we are reaching a dangerous inflection point.

Santa Barbara County is experiencing these troubling trends. Our office experienced a 34% increase in antisemitic incidents reported in the Tri-Counties in 2022. Incidents in Santa Barbara County included hateful slurs and assaults targeting Jews, antisemitic vandalism and graffiti in public parks, bus stops, and a popular bike path, and virulently antisemitic flyers distributed in multiple Santa Barbara neighborhoods only a month ago. We responded to these incidents in a variety of ways, including supporting victims, briefing law enforcement, and seeking remedies. Outcomes are often best when we are not doing so alone.

Effective response starts with words. Clear support for the Jewish community and condemnation of antisemitism are important – particularly from our public officials, and we thank again those of you who joined the statement from multiple local Jewish institutions in the wake of the flyer incident. This resolution is important too, for the absence of words leaves antisemitism unchecked and allows our memory and understanding of the most extreme example of it to fade.

Words alone, however, cannot stem the rise of this antisemitism. We urge the Board to consider actions it can take to help prevent antisemitic attitudes and other forms of bigotry within the County. Many of the factors that contribute to rising antisemitism also negatively impact other minority or marginalized communities, and we have seen a rise in hate crimes and incidents against those groups as well. The following actions by the Board could help address and prevent bigoted attitudes in the County:

- (1) Recognize January 27 of every year going forward as International Holocaust Remembrance Day;
- (2) Direct the County Administrator to survey County staff each year, if the County does not already, on whether the County's own practices and

- policies are respectful of minority and marginalized populations and cultures, and report results of those surveys to the Board each year;
- (3) Direct the County Administrator to return with proposals for training or education of County staff about antisemitism, and a plan for including training about antisemitism and other forms of bigotry as part of orientation for new staff;
 - (4) Direct the County Administrator to investigate the re-establishment of the Human Relations/Cultural Relations Commission, which existed from 1991 to 2008, to focus on addressing and preventing antisemitism and other forms of bigotry and hate in the County.

Thank you all again for your support of the proposed resolution, your commitment to addressing and preventing antisemitism, and your support for minority and marginalized groups in Santa Barbara County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan Meisel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "D" and a long, horizontal flourish at the end.

Dan Meisel
Regional Director