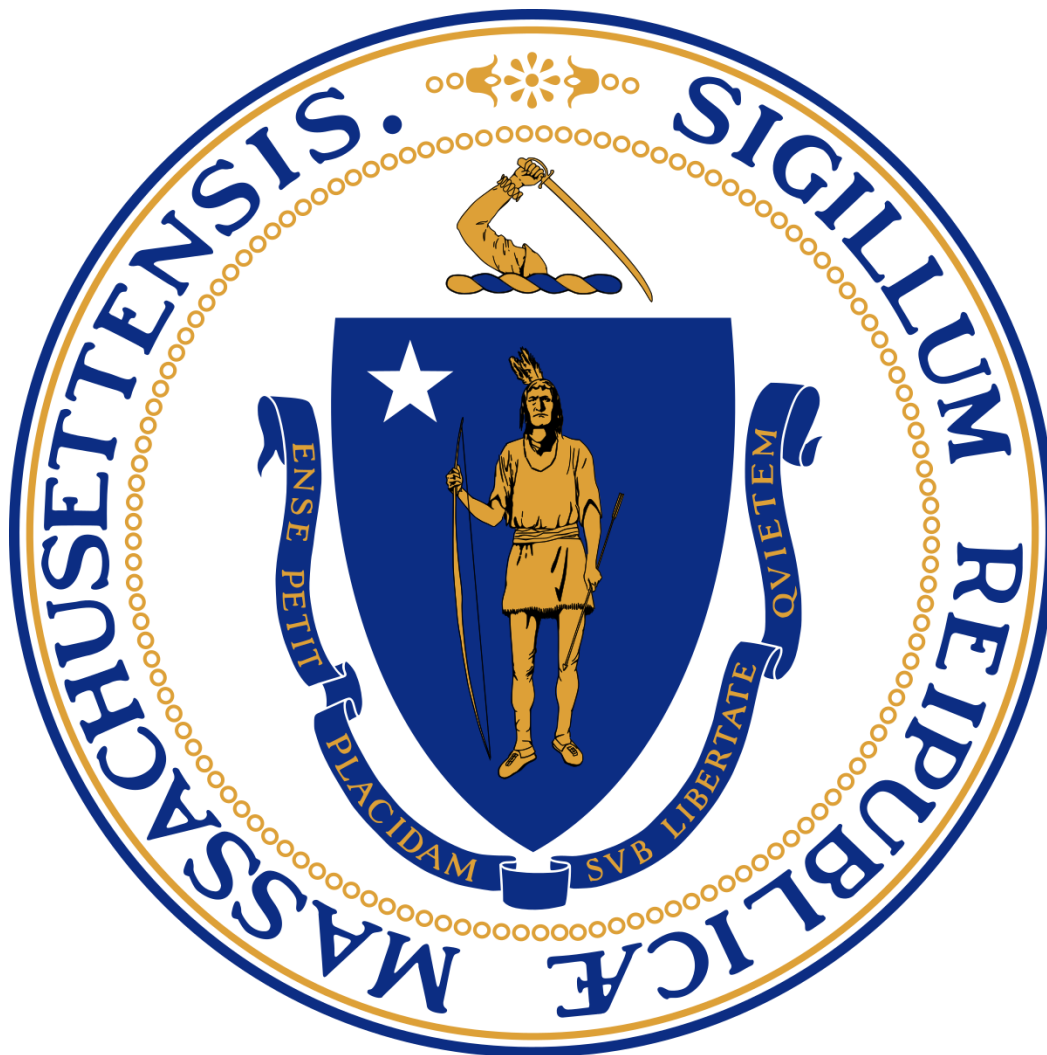


Special Commission on Combating Antisemitism



Preliminary K-12 Education Findings and Recommendations

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I. Purpose and Context

Section 201 of Chapter 140 of the Acts of 2024, An Act Making Appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2025, established the Special Commission on Combating Antisemitism in the Commonwealth (“the Commission”) to investigate and make recommendations to the General Court to combat the rise in antisemitic incidents and hate crime in the Commonwealth. To meet its charge, the Commission has met 10 times between October 2024 and August 2025, including multiple public hearings during which the Commission gathered testimony from interested parties.¹

The enabling legislation established compositional requirements for the Commission to ensure representation from parties and stakeholders that could be interested in legislation regarding efforts to combat antisemitism in the Commonwealth. Consistent with this requirement, the Commission was comprised of the following 19 members:

Commissioner:	Appointed by:	Vote on K-12 Recommendations
Co-Chair Senator John Velis	President of the Senate	Yea
Co-Chair Representative Simon Cataldo	Speaker of the House	Yea
Representative Steven S. Howitt	House Minority Leader	Yea
Robert Leikind	Speaker of the House	Yea
Peggy Shukur	Speaker of the House	Yea
Jeremy Burton	President of the Senate	Yea
Jody Kipnis	President of the Senate	Yea
Rita Blanter	Senate Minority Leader	Yea
David Friedman	Governor	Yea
Dara Kaufman	Governor	Yea
Jamie Hoag	Attorney General	Yea
Constantia (Dena) Papanikolaou	Commissioner of Higher Education	Yea
Karen Sampson	Commissioner of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	Yea
Michael Memmolo	Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination	Yea
Chief Thomas Fowler	Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association	Yea

¹ All public hearings held by the Commission are recorded and available for public viewing at <https://malegislature.gov/Commissions/Detail/646/Hearings>.

District Attorney Paul Tucker	Massachusetts District Attorneys Association	Yea
Mayor Ruthanne Fuller	Massachusetts Municipal Association	Absent
Jill Hai	Massachusetts Municipal Association	Yea
Aaron Polansky	Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents	Yea

The Commission created and voted upon this preliminary report in response to stakeholder requests for recommendations on K-12 education prior to the beginning of the 2025-26 school year. A final report containing the Commission’s findings and recommendations on all subject matter within the statutory charge will be issued to the Clerks of the House of Representatives and Senate on November 30, 2025.

II. Statutory Charge

Section 201 of Chapter 140 of the Acts of 2024

(a) There shall be a special commission on combatting antisemitism in the commonwealth. The commission shall: (i) report on trends and data related to incidents of antisemitism in the commonwealth; (ii) make recommendations for the implementation of the United States national strategy to counter antisemitism; (iii) identify and evaluate existing efforts to combat antisemitism in the commonwealth; (iv) identify best practices from efforts to combat antisemitism in other states and jurisdictions; (v) evaluate the commonwealth’s hate crime statutes and whether any amendments would better protect residents from antisemitism and other similar forms of hatred; and (vi) recommend strategies, programs and legislation to combat antisemitism in the commonwealth. The commission shall submit a report of its study and recommendations to the clerks of the house of representatives and the senate and the senate and house committees on ways and means not later than November 30, 2024.

(b) The commission shall consist of: 3 persons appointed by the senate president, 1 of whom shall have expertise in combatting antisemitism and 1 of whom shall represent a Jewish community organization in the commonwealth; 3 persons appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives, 1 of whom shall have expertise in combatting antisemitism and 1 of whom shall represent a Jewish community organization in the commonwealth; 1 member who shall be appointed by the minority leader of the house of representatives; 1 member who shall be appointed by the minority leader of the senate; 2 persons appointed by the governor, 1 of whom shall have expertise in legal issues related to civil rights and civil liberties; 2 persons appointed

by the Massachusetts Municipal Association, Inc.; the attorney general or a designee; the chair of the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination or a designee; the commissioner of higher education or a designee; the commissioner of elementary and secondary education or a designee; 1 person appointed by the Massachusetts District Attorneys Association; 1 person appointed by the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association Incorporated; and 1 member appointed by the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, Inc. The senate president and the speaker of the house of representatives shall each designate a co-chair from their respective appointees.

III. Commission Process

The following table summarizes the Commission’s work throughout its ten hearings. Appendices to this report provide testimonies offered at each Commission meeting and hearing:

Hearing	Purpose	Agenda	Hearing Materials ²
October 29, 2024	To introduce commission members to their legislative charge and discuss areas of emphasis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening Statements of the Chairs - Rep. Cataldo and Sen. Velis • Self-Introductions of the Members • Overview of the Statutory Charge • Overview of Meeting Agenda • Overview of WH National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism • Discussion of Topic Areas for Emphasis in Furtherance of the Commission’s Work as Prescribed in Section 201 of Chapter 140 of the Acts of 2024 • Anti-Defamation League Presentation on Available Data on Antisemitism • Introduction to Combined Jewish Philanthropies’ Center for Combating 	<p>White House National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism</p> <p>2023 ADL Massachusetts Data</p>

² All Commission materials may be found on the General Court’s website at <https://malegislature.gov/Commissions/Detail/646/Hearings>.

		Antisemitism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Logistical Commission Matters ● Meeting is Adjourned 	
November 19, 2024	To examine antisemitism in K-12 educational settings and institutional responses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Roll Call ● Opening Statements of the Chairs on Current Events and Future Opportunities for Student Testimony – Sen. Velis and Rep. Cataldo ● Overview of Meeting Agenda ● Testimony from Massachusetts Student on Experience with Antisemitism ● Acton-Boxborough Regional School District Superintendent Peter Light Presentation on District Response to Hate and Bias Incidents ● Lubavitcher Yeshiva Academy (Longmeadow) Rabbi Noach Kosofsky Presentation on Antisemitism in Schools and Community Responses to Incidents ● Lappin Foundation Presentation on Best Practices in Responding to Antisemitism in Schools ● Approve October 29th Meeting Minutes ● Meeting is Adjourned 	Acton-Boxborough Protocols for Responding to Incidents Involving Hate or Bias Superintendent Peter Light’s Letter to Families Following October 7th
January 23, 2025	To further discuss antisemitism in schools and to consider the impacts of antisemitism on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Roll Call ● Approve November 19th Meeting Minutes ● Opening Statements of the Chairs and Announcements on Future Meeting Agenda 	ADL-CAR Parent Survey of Antisemitism in Schools Results: Antisemitism in Schools and

	students	<p>Including Topic Areas and Opportunities for Public Comment – Sen. Velis and Rep. Cataldo</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Overview of Meeting Agenda ● Presentation on Parent Survey of Antisemitism in Schools by Anti-Defamation League Center for Antisemitism Research (ADL-CAR) – Matt Williams, VP, ADL-CAR ● Office of the Massachusetts Attorney General Presentation on First Amendment Considerations – Jonathan Burke, Asst. Attorney General, Civil Rights Division ● Facing History and Ourselves Presentation on School Programming – Elizabeth Carroll, New England Program Director ● Presentation on Psychological Impact and Effects of Antisemitism on Students – Dr. Miri Bar-Halpern, PsyD ● Meeting is Adjourned 	<p>Support for Holocaust Education ADL</p> <p>Facing History and Ourselves Presentation on School Programming – Elizabeth Carroll, New England Program Director</p> <p>Facing History Explainer: Antisemitism and Its Impacts</p> <p>Executive Summary of Evaluation Results for Brave Classrooms Online Course</p> <p>Letter from Newton Public Schools leaders with testimony about Facing History's partnership</p> <p>Presentation on Psychological Impact and Effects of Antisemitism on Students – Dr. Miri Bar-Halpern, PsyD</p>
February 10, 2025	To discuss countering antisemitism in K-12 education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Roll Call ● Approve Prior Meeting Minutes: January 23, 2025 ● Opening Statements of the Chairs and Announcements – Sen. Velis and Rep. Cataldo ● Overview of Meeting Agenda ● Discussion on Countering 	

		<p>Antisemitism in K-12 Education: Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) – Max Page, MTA President</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion on Viewpoint Diversity, Training, and Curriculum Relating to Countering Antisemitism in K-12 Education: Together for an Inclusive Massachusetts – Elsa Auerbach, UMass Boston Professor Emerita, Jewish Voice for Peace Boston; Emilia Diamant, LCSW, educator, Board Member, Boston Workers Circle; Merrie Najimy, elementary STEM lab teacher; Sana Fadel, Sawa: Newton-Area Alliance for Peace and Justice, public school parent • Discussion on K-12 Curriculum and Teacher Licensing: Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) – Katherine Craven, BESE Chair • Adjourn 	
March 11, 2025	To focus on antisemitism in Western Massachusetts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll Call • Approve Prior Meeting Minutes: February 10, 2025 • Opening Statements of the Chairs and Announcements – Sen. Velis and Rep. Cataldo • Overview of Meeting Agenda • Discussion on concerns in Berkshire County and small rural Jewish communities - 	<p>Genocide Education Session Law</p> <p>Genocide Education General Law</p> <p>DESE History and Social Science Framework (2018)</p> <p>FY2025 Budget Section 106</p>

		<p>Rabbi Jordie Gordon, Hevreh of Southern Berkshire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discussion on trends in Western Massachusetts and community responses to antisemitic incidents - Molly Parr, 1st Vice President of the Jewish Federation of Western Massachusetts ● Discussion on trends in Western Massachusetts and responses from Jewish communities – Rabbi Amy Wallk, Temple Beth El ● Discussion on genocide and Holocaust education curricula and resources provided to schools on antisemitism - Dr. Russell Johnston, Acting Commissioner of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) ● Discussion on community education efforts on antisemitism and Holocaust – Henia (Henny) Lewin, past Board Member of the Jewish Federation of Western Massachusetts and former Professor at University of Vermont ● Discussion on viewpoint diversity, and balancing different perspectives in responding to antisemitism – Rabbi Ariella Rosen, Congregation B’nai Israel ● Discussion on experiences in school settings and research on Jewish issues and antisemitism – Dr. Nicole Collins, Faculty at 	<p>DESE Resources Relative to Antisemitism and Societal Bias</p>
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		<p>John F. Kennedy Middle School (Springfield), Asnuntuck Community College, American International College</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting is Adjourned 	
April 7, 2025	To discuss antisemitic violence and gather testimony from public on the work of the Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll Call • Welcome Remarks from Mayor Ruthanne Fuller • Approve Prior Meeting Minutes: March 11, 2025 • Opening Statements of the Chairs, Announcements, and Reminder of Special Commission's Commitment to Principles of Free Speech and Civil Liberties – Sen. Velis and Rep. Cataldo • Overview of Meeting Agenda • Presentation – Eric Olshan, Former U.S. Attorney, Western District of Pennsylvania, lead prosecutor in <i>U.S. v. Robert Bowers</i> (Tree of Life Synagogue Case) • Discussion on the Orthodox Perspective on Antisemitism – Ariella Hellman, Director of Government Affairs Agudath Israel of America, New England Office • Public Comment • Meeting is Adjourned 	
May 5, 2025	To discuss law enforcement responses to antisemitic incidents and hate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll Call • Approve Prior Meeting Minutes: April 7, 2025 • Opening Statements of the Chairs and Announcements 	

	crimes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sen. Velis and Rep. Cataldo ● Overview of Meeting Agenda ● Discussion on Trends and Tracking of Extremist Activity – Ben Popp, ADL Center on Extremism ● Discussion on Existing Hate Crime Statutes – David O’Sullivan, Asst. District Attorney, Essex District Attorney’s Office ● Discussion on Federal, State, and Local Partnership in Combating Antisemitism and Incidents of Hate – Detective Lieutenant Ryan Czepiel, Mass. State Police Anti-Terrorism Unit/Hate Crimes Awareness and Response Team (HART) Unit ● Discussion on Mass. Exec. Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) Nonprofit Security Grants – Jeremy Yamin, VP, Security and Operations, Combined Jewish Philanthropies and Lily Rabinoff-Goldman, President/CEO, JCC Greater Boston ● Meeting is Adjourned 	
June 9, 2025	To discuss the weaponization of antisemitism and the prevalence of antisemitism online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Roll Call ● Approve Prior Meeting Minutes: May 5, 2025 ● Opening Statements of the Chairs and Announcements – Sen. Velis and Rep. Cataldo ● Overview of Meeting 	Hate Speech vs. Hate Crimes: Key Points for Law Enforcement

		<p>Agenda</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discussion on weaponization of antisemitism – Amb. Alan D. Solomont (ret.), Nexus Project Board Member ● Discussion on the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement and connection to antisemitism – Professor David Webber, Boston University School of Law ● Presentation by Foundation to Combat Antisemitism on insights around the digital landscape of antisemitism – Adam Katz, President, Foundation to Combat Antisemitism ● Observations on response to Jewish advocacy on municipal level and local school district, and comparison to other Massachusetts communities – Owen Zaret, Former City Councilor and Jewish Community Organizer ● Meeting is Adjourned 	
July 9, 2025	To discuss preliminary K-12 education findings and recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Roll Call ● Approve Prior Meeting Minutes: June 9, 2025 ● Opening Statements of the Chairs and Announcements – Sen. Velis and Rep. Cataldo ● Discussion on Draft Preliminary K-12 Education Findings and Recommendations ● Meeting is Adjourned 	Draft Preliminary K-12 Education Findings and Recommendations

August 7, 2025	To explore antisemitism in higher education and on college campuses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Roll Call ● Approve Prior Meeting Minutes: July 9, 2025 ● Discussion on Resources Provided to Schools on Antisemitism and Societal Bias – Commissioner Pedro Martinez, Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education ● Discussion on Jewish Student Experience on College Campuses - Professor Eitan Hersh, Professor of Political Science, Tufts University ● Discussion on the State of Jewish Life on Campus from the Perspective of Hillel - Rabbi Aaron Fine, Executive Director, UMass Hillel ● Discussion on Student Perspective of Jewish Life on Campus - Skye Landau, UMass Amherst ● Discussion of Antisemitism on College Campuses: Using Data to Inform Policy – Dr. Leonard Saxe, Professor and Director of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University ● Discussion on Identifying Root Challenges and Best Practices for Addressing Antisemitism in Higher Education - Dr. Rachel Fish, Special Advisor to the Brandeis University President's Initiative on Antisemitism ● Discussion & Vote on Endorsing Draft Preliminary K-12 	SCCA K-12 Preliminary K-12 Findings and Recommendations_08.07.25
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		Education Findings and Recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting is Adjourned 	
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IV. INITIAL FINDINGS AND PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MASSACHUSETTS SPECIAL COMMISSION ON COMBATING ANTISEMITISM FOR K-12 EDUCATION IN MASSACHUSETTS

MSCCA K-12 INITIAL FINDINGS

1. Antisemitism in Massachusetts K-12 public schools is a pervasive and escalating problem, with a large number of reported incidents of hate, bullying, harassment and discrimination experienced by families and teachers. There has been a stark escalation of incidents in recent years, especially after the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. Many Jewish students in Massachusetts schools are scared to publicly display their Judaism or let others know they are Jewish for fear of disparate treatment or bullying.³
2. Antisemitic hate crimes in Massachusetts are rising – by over 20% in 2024 alone – at the same time as overall violent crime is decreasing in the Commonwealth.⁴

³ See ADL, *Audit of Antisemitic Incidents in 2024* (Apr. 22, 2025), available at <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/audit-antisemitic-incidents-2024>; see also *First Hearing of the Special Comm’n on Combating Antisemitism* (Oct. 29, 2024) (statement of Melissa Garlick, Associate Vice President, CJP’s Center for Combating Antisemitism at 1:42:35); *Fourth Hearing of the Special Comm’n on Combating Antisemitism* (Feb. 10, 2025) (statement of Katherine Craven, Chair of Mass. Board of Elementary and Secondary Education at 2:58:08); *Fifth Hearing of the Special Comm’n on Combating Antisemitism* (Mar. 11, 2025) (statement of Molly Parr, First VP Jewish Federation of Western Massachusetts at 2:56:20).

⁴ See The Boston Globe, *Violent Crime Went Down Last Year in Mass., but Anti-Jewish Hate Crimes Spiked, Officials Say* (July 1, 2025), available at <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/07/01/metro/violent-crime-down-mass-hate-crime-anti-jewish-incidents-up/>; Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, *2023 Massachusetts Hate Crime Report* (2023), available at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/2023-massachusetts-hate-crime-report-0/download>; Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, *Massachusetts Crime Rates Continue Downward Trend Ahead of Summer Season; Preliminary 2024 Data Shows Fewer Violent and Property Crimes Statewide* (June 6, 2024), available at <https://www.mass.gov/news/massachusetts-crime-rates-continue-downward-trend-ahead-of-summer-season-preliminary-2024-data-shows-fewer-violent-and-property-crimes-statewide>; United State Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation, *UCR Summary of Reported Crimes in the Nation, 2024* (August 5, 2025), available at <https://www.fbi.gov/news/press-releases/fbi-releases-2024-reported-crimes-in-the-nation->

3. Antisemitism is a distinct type of hate that takes various forms and manifests in a variety of ways in Massachusetts K-12 schools.⁵ These include, but are not limited to: swastika graffiti; Holocaust jokes, distortion, or denial; harassment or discrimination based on Jewish identity, perceived relationship to Israel, or actual Israeli citizenship; and harassment directed towards Jewish individuals while using the term “Zionist” as a replacement slur.⁶
4. Antisemitic incidents and the more pervasive climate of antisemitism are causing serious harm to the mental health of Jewish and/or Israeli students and families.⁷
5. Antisemitic incidents and hate crimes in the Massachusetts K-12 school environment are likely to be significantly underreported. Many school districts and schools do not provide teachers and staff with clear instructions as to when and how they should report potential hate or bias incidents of all types, including antisemitic incidents. The Commonwealth lacks a centralized mechanism for compiling and tracking such incidents. Many victims of antisemitic incidents do not report cases due to fear of retaliation and harassment or the sense that reporting an incident will not lead to any response by the school.⁸
6. Since October 7th, 2023, antisemitic speech and harassment in Massachusetts K-12 settings has had a particularly serious impact on Israeli-American students, families and teachers, as well as many Jewish students, families and teachers who have not lived in Israel but who have a personal or religious connection to the State of Israel.⁹

statistics. While it is not possible to disaggregate changes in reporting behavior from the reported statistics themselves, the Special Commission does not believe that the increase in reported incidents is due to a change in reporting behavior rather than an actual increase in incident occurrence.

⁵ See *Fifth Hearing of the Special Comm’n on Combating Antisemitism* (Mar. 11, 2025) (statement of Rabbi Amy Wallk at 0:59:05); *Fifth Hearing of the Special Comm’n on Combating Antisemitism* (Mar. 11, 2025) (statement of Rabbi Ariella Rosen at 3:45:10).

⁶ See Facing History and Ourselves, *Explainer: Antisemitism and Its Impacts*, available at https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/202402/Explainer_Antisemitism_and_Its_Impacts_1.pdf.

⁷ See *Second Hearing of the Special Comm’n on Combating Antisemitism* (Nov. 19, 2024) (statement of Jessica Goldberg, School Counselor at 2:39:34); *Third Hearing of the Special Comm’n on Combating Antisemitism* (Jan. 23, 2025) (statement of Dr. Miri Bar-Halpern at 2:33:40); *Fourth Hearing of the Special Comm’n on Combating Antisemitism* (Feb. 10, 2025) (statement of Katherine Craven at 2:59:00).

⁸ See *First Hearing of the Special Comm’n on Combating Antisemitism* (Oct. 29, 2024) (statement of Peggy Shukur, Vice President of the East Division of ADL at 1:15:22). It is noted that student privacy concerns or reputational harm to a school district may hinder reporting of antisemitic and other types of bias-related incidents.

⁹ See *Third Hearing of the Special Comm’n on Combating Antisemitism* (Jan. 23, 2025) (statement of Dr. Miri Bar-Halpern at 2:48:32); *Second Hearing of the Special Comm’n on Combating Antisemitism* (Nov. 19, 2024) (statement of Debbie Coltin, Executive Director of

7. Programs for students, staff, and educators on combating hate and bias often neglect to include antisemitism as a form of bias and, as a consequence, fail to address it as a legitimate issue.¹⁰ This is true even in school districts that have a demonstrated pattern of antisemitic incidents.
8. There is a lack of understanding among some K-12 educators and administrators in Massachusetts as to what forms of speech and expression constitute antisemitism and should therefore be subject to or prohibited under school codes of conduct, anti-harassment, anti-discrimination, and anti-bullying policies.¹¹
9. There is a hesitancy in many schools across the Commonwealth to address antisemitism, both proactively through education and reactively when it occurs, that stems from a variety of factors. These include a lack of understanding around what types of speech are harmful to Jewish students and staff including the impact of such speech, a perception that proactive education is only necessary in communities with prominent Jewish populations, and a lack of familiarity with the programs and resources available to support efforts to combating antisemitism.¹²
10. There is inconsistency in responses from districts when antisemitic incidents or concerns of antisemitism are raised and no wide availability of best practices for Massachusetts schools. As a result, some districts respond ineffectively, and others fail to respond at all.¹³
11. Massachusetts public school students have reported being exposed to content and curriculum that contains inaccurate, decontextualized, and harmful material around Israel and the Jewish people. Massachusetts public school educators have reported that similar

Lappin Foundation at 2:48:17); *Fifth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Mar. 11, 2025) (statement of Rabbi Amy Wallk at 0:49:27).

¹⁰ See *Third Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Jan. 23, 2025) (statement of Dr. Miri Bar-Halpern at 2:52:57).

¹¹ See *Second Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Nov. 19, 2024) (statement of Acton-Boxborough Regional School District Superintendent Peter Light at 0:26:14).

¹² See ADL, *Antisemitism in Schools and Support for Holocaust Education* (Dec. 23, 2024), available at <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/antisemitism-schools-and-support-holocaust-education>.

¹³ See *Second Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Nov. 19, 2024) (statement of Superintendent Peter Light at 0:28:09); *Second Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Nov. 19, 2024) (statement of Maddie Katzen, UMass Lowell student at 0:49:50); *Second Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Nov. 19, 2024) (statement of Rabbi Noach Kosofsky at 1:57:56).

problematic content or resources have been endorsed or promoted through the Massachusetts Teachers Association and professional development opportunities.¹⁴

12. The Commonwealth, through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), has limited visibility into the curricular materials and programs utilized by individual districts to teach about antisemitism, Jewish history, and Jewish identity. As a result, neither DESE nor this Commission knows what curriculum materials each local district and school uses to address antisemitism and the history of the Jewish people.¹⁵
13. In 2018, DESE published a revised content standard relating to Israel, Palestine, and conflict in the Middle East.¹⁶ DESE plans to issue a rubric in the fall of 2025 to establish basic standards relating to classroom education on the topic of antisemitism itself. However, there are significant limitations on DESE's authority to require a school district to use or cease using particular curricula and classroom materials.¹⁷ There are also limits on DESE's ability to address or investigate reports of antisemitism that are reported to it.
14. In 2023-2024, DESE conducted a genocide education survey in part to monitor compliance with the Commonwealth's Genocide Education Mandate. The survey demonstrated a need for greater visibility into the implementation of the mandate across the Commonwealth, and suggested poor adherence to the law by school districts. DESE sent the survey to 187 of the Commonwealth's 389 districts. 58% of districts responded to the survey. Of the districts that responded, 76% provide genocide education through required courses, not only electives. Of those districts providing required genocide education courses, 89% teach about the Holocaust as part of that curriculum and 11% do not teach about the Holocaust.¹⁸

¹⁴ See Massachusetts Teachers Association, *MTA resources on Israel and Occupied Palestine*, available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gLzllkhtAD1ki-UHbrfBcHM2lgzVDxn7/view?usp=sharing>; see also *Fourth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Feb. 10, 2025) (statement of Katherine Craven, BESE chair at 3:02:47, 3:03:47); Sobey, Rick, "Stunned Massachusetts Educators, ADL Call for MassCUE Apology after 'Hateful' Anti-Israel and Holocaust Rhetoric at Conference," *Boston Herald* (Dec. 20, 2024), available at <https://www.bostonherald.com/2024/12/20/stunned-massachusetts-educators-adl-call-for-masscue-apology-after-hateful-anti-israel-and-holocaust-rhetoric-at-conference/>.

¹⁵ See *Fourth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Feb. 10, 2025) (statement of Katherine Craven, BESE chair at 3:00:42, 3:01:23).

¹⁶ See Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *History and Social Science Curriculum Framework: Grades Pre-Kindergarten to 12, Content Standards 6.T3e, 6.T3g, and WHII.T5* (2018), available at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/hss/2018-12.pdf>.

¹⁷ See *Fifth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Mar. 11, 2025) (statement of Dr. Russell Johnston, Acting Commissioner of DESE at 2:06:40).

¹⁸ See Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Genocide Education in Massachusetts Middle & High Schools: A Statewide Landscape Analysis & 2023-2024 School Year Grant Outcomes Report* (2024), available at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/2024/10-genocide-education.pdf>.

15. Students are increasingly exposed to neo-Nazi, pro-Hamas, and other extreme right- and left-wing ideologies through social media and other online platforms, often without critical context. This exposure fosters the spread of hateful conspiracy theories and antisemitic beliefs, and may be causally linked to a rise in Nazi-related and/or terrorist sympathizing graffiti, gestures, and speech by students in K-12 settings.¹⁹

MSCCA PRELIMINARY K-12 RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Measures to Increase Awareness and Understanding of Antisemitism and Broaden Appreciation of Jewish American Heritage

- a) The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) should establish an Advisory Council on Holocaust and Genocide Education within the next six months to ensure timely support for schools in the implementation of the Genocide Education Mandate and to track its implementation.²⁰ As part of its charge, the Advisory Council should:
 - i) assess the demand for and adequacy of Genocide Education Trust funding to ensure effective implementation of the mandate, including teacher training, instructional materials, and community engagement efforts.
 - ii) ensure that age-appropriate curriculum and resources are developed and made available for all grade levels, including younger students in elementary school, to build foundational understanding.
- b) In accordance with existing legislative requirements, DESE should develop model curricula and best practices/resources around teaching antisemitism and Jewish identity in schools, including through enhancements to its Frameworks. Initial model resources should be published within one year, with annual updates thereafter. This may include Jewish history, positive Jewish contributions to America, Jewish diversity, and manifestations of contemporary antisemitism.²¹

¹⁹ See *Sixth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (April 7, 2025) (statement of Eric Olshan, Former U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania at 0:46:30); see also *Seventh Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (May 5, 2025) (statement of Ben Popp, ADL Center on Extremism at 0:17:22); see also *Eighth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (June 9, 2025) (statement of Adam Katz, President, Foundation to Combat Antisemitism at 2:09:35).

²⁰ For a full list of BESE Advisory Councils, see <https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/councils/>; see also *Fourth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Feb. 10, 2025) (statement of Katherine Craven, BESE chair at 3:14:44, 3:17:13); *Sixth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (April 7, 2025) (statement of Eric Olshan, Former U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania at 1:13:45).

²¹ See U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism at 17, available at <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/U.S.-National-Strategy-to-Counter-Antisemitism.pdf>; see also *Fifth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating*

- c) DESE should provide resources that are appropriate for classroom instruction at various grade levels to teach about Ancient Israel, Palestine, the modern State of Israel, and related conflicts in the Middle East that align and relate to the Content Standards for History and Social Science, specifically, Standards 6.T3e, 6.T3g, and WHII.T5. Schools should address antisemitism, extremism and antisemitic myths/tropes²² as part of a broader focus on digital literacy, civics, and the critical evaluation of misinformation and disinformation.²³
- d) Public school districts should institute mandatory anti-bias education for school committees and all K-12 faculty and administrators that includes antisemitism. The mandatory anti-bias education should include antisemitism education and training²⁴ aligned with a DESE-developed framework. DESE's framework should be informed by the IHRA non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism with examples, which is the official working definition of the government of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.²⁵

Antisemitism (Mar. 11, 2025) (statement of Rabbi Jodie Gordon at 0:22:16); *Fifth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Mar. 11, 2025) (statement of Dr. Nicole Collins at 3:57:50).

²² For examples of common antisemitic myths/tropes, see Facing History & Ourselves, "Antisemitic Tropes" (Nov. 3, 2022), available at https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/202211/Handout_%20Antisemitic%20Tropes.pdf.

²³ For examples of resources addressing antisemitic myths/tropes in online spaces, see Facing History and Ourselves, *Confronting Online Antisemitism*, available at <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/confronting-online-antisemitism>; ADL, *Antisemitism Uncovered*, available at <https://antisemitism.adl.org/>; see also *Third Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Jan. 23, 2025) (statement of Matt Williams, VP ADL's Center for Antisemitism Research at 0:29:05); *Eighth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (June 9, 2025) (statement of ret. Ambassador Alan D. Solomont, Nexus Project Board Member at 1:41:45).

²⁴ For a state-based framework for mandatory anti-bias education inclusive of antisemitism, see Md. H.B. 1386, 2024 Reg. Sess. (Md. 2024), Chapter 128 (approved Apr. 25, 2024; eff. July 1, 2024), available at <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgaweb/Legislation/Details/HB1386?ys=2024RS>; see also *Fourth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Feb. 10, 2025) (statement of Katherine Craven, BESE chair at 2:59:30).

²⁵ Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Proclamation Endorsing the Working Definition of Antisemitism Established by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance* (Feb. 8, 2022), available at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/antisemitism-proclamation/download>.

In recommending that DESE consult the IHRA definition in crafting its framework or elsewhere in these recommendations, the Special Commission does not propose using the IHRA definition or any other definition of antisemitism as legally binding for purposes of any state law. The Special Commission notes that the 2024 Biden White House National Strategy ([available at https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/U.S.-National-Strategy-to-](https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/U.S.-National-Strategy-to-)

- e) Schools and districts should work with community organizations to create and implement programming for Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM)²⁶ each May to promote awareness and appreciation of Jewish contributions to American society, and to treat JAHM in an equivalent fashion to other history, identity and heritage months recognized by the schools throughout the year. Districts should be prepared to implement JAHM programming by May of the upcoming school year.
- f) The Commission calls upon the Association of Independent Schools New England to adopt similar recommendations for its schools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

2) Measures to Improve Safety and Security for Jewish Communities

- a) The Commonwealth should establish a statewide Bias Reporting Program that explicitly includes antisemitism as a form of bias. This program should be piloted in select districts within the next school year and evaluated for statewide rollout within 18 months. This program should encompass efforts to collect centralized hate crimes data, including efforts by the Mass. State Police Hate Crimes Awareness and Response Team (HART).²⁷ Additionally, this program should collect data on bias incidents - which may not rise to the level of a hate crime - in all K-12 schools. Some incidents, particularly in school settings, may not constitute crimes but are nonetheless harmful and require tailored, non-punitive,

Counter-Antisemitism.pdf), which is incorporated into the Special Commission's statutory charge, endorses the IHRA definition as a "non-legally binding 'working definition.'" The Strategy also notes the usefulness of the Nexus Framework, and suggests reference to other possibly helpful definitions or tools. The Special Commission has received a significant volume of input from the public, in support of and in opposition to using the IHRA definition, with those opposed focusing on a concern that some of the examples could be interpreted or used to suppress legitimate criticism of the State of Israel. The Special Commission reiterates here, as the Commissioners have done publicly throughout the 9 public meetings held thus far, that criticism of Israel's government, even harsh and uncomfortable criticism of Israel's government, cannot be regarded as antisemitic in and of itself [(see *Sixth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (April 7, 2025) (statement of Co-chairs Cataldo and Velis at 0:08:50)]. This position is consistent with IHRA's language when taken at face value, since IHRA states that "criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitism."

²⁶ See, U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism at 19, *available at* <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/U.S.-National-Strategy-to-Counter-Antisemitism.pdf>; for a list of resources to support teaching about and celebrating JAHM see, Jewish American Heritage Month, *Educator Resources*, *available at* <https://jewishamericanheritage.org/educator-resources/>.

²⁷ See *Seventh Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (May 5, 2025) (statement of Det. Lt. Ryan Czepiel, MA State Police HART Unit at 1:25:40).

and supportive responses, including but not limited to restorative justice. DESE and the Attorney General's office should instruct all districts that every incident that might potentially constitute a case of bias, bullying, harassment or discrimination against individuals or groups of a protected class should be reported to this response program. The program should include an anonymous reporting option to encourage safe and accessible reporting for students, families, and staff. The program should include annual public reporting by DESE of the number of reported incidents by category, as well as pertinent details (anonymized to protect privacy and personal identity).²⁸

- b) School counseling departments should:
 - i) work to deepen their understanding of the effects of antisemitism on the mental health of Jewish young people;
 - ii) apply trauma informed interventions to incidents of antisemitism; and
 - iii) expand access to mental health resources for Jewish students targeted by antisemitic harassment or bullying.²⁹
- c) Schools should have a clear, transparent, and publicly available protocol for how a community member can report to the school administration an incident of hate, bias, or discrimination in consultation with the Guidance on School's Legal Obligations to Prevent and Address Hate and Bias Incidents" by DESE and the Attorney General's Office."³⁰ As part of this protocol, schools should establish

²⁸ For Massachusetts DESE example *see*, DESE Student Discipline Data Report, *available at* <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/ssdr.aspx>; *see also* *First Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Oct. 29, 2024) (statement of Peggy Shukur, Vice President of the East Division of ADL at 1:15:22); *Sixth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (April 7, 2025) (statement of Ariella Hellman, Director of Government Affairs at Agudath Israel of America at 1:41:10); *Seventh Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating antisemitism* (May 5, 2025) (statement of ADA David O'Sullivan at 1:17:05). The Special Commission intends to explore, in future meetings, the possibility of expanding the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination's (MCAD) charge to include incidents that occur in the K-12 school setting.

²⁹ *See, e.g.*, Miri Bar-Halpern and Jaclyn Wolfman, *Traumatic Invalidation in the Jewish Community after October 7*, *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*; Association of Jewish Psychologists Webinar, *Exploring the Psychological Toll of Antisemitism on Mental Health* (Feb. 27, 2024), *available at* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7clRtE_eBmk; Association of Jewish Psychologists, *Resources Menu and Downloadable Content*, *available at* <https://associationofjewishpsychologists.com/resources/#links>; *see also* *Sixth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (April 7, 2025) (statement of Ariella Hellman, Director of Government Affairs at Agudath Israel of America at 1:28:45).

³⁰ Office of the Attorney General, *Guidance on Schools' Legal Obligations to Prevent and Address Hate and Bias Incidents*, *available at* <https://www.mass.gov/doc/guidance-on-schools-obligations-to-prevent-and-address-hate-incidents-september-2024/download>.

clear and public whistleblower protections for anyone who reports such an incident, including safeguards against retaliation.

- d) Schools should have a clear, transparent, and publicly available protocol for how reports of hate, bias, or discrimination are handled by the district. The protocol should include procedures for how and when such incidents are reported to law enforcement, the community, and the potential victims.

3) Measures to Reverse the Normalization of Antisemitism and Counter Antisemitic Discrimination

- a) Before the start of each school year, DESE and the Attorney General's Office should circulate their "Guidance on School's Legal Obligations to Prevent and Address Hate and Bias Incidents"³¹ to all school districts. This guidance should explain the obligations of schools to prevent bias-related incidents and harassment by students and staff and how to respond effectively when it occurs as required by the Massachusetts Anti-Bullying Law (G.L. c 71 sec. 37O) and the Student Anti-Discrimination Act (G.L. c 76 sec. 5). The guidance should also make clear that the protections against harassment provided by the Student Anti-Discrimination Act are closely analogous to those provided by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, though the Student Anti-Discrimination Act provides greater protections based on religion. DESE and the Attorney General's Office should annually update this guidance, which should be informed by the IHRA non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism and the examples identified by that working definition (which is the official working definition of the government of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts) and any updates to Massachusetts law.
- b) DESE should issue guidance for Massachusetts public and private schools on creating safe and supportive school environments with respect to shared national origin, shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics similar to its existing guidance on Gender Identity and LGBTQ+ students.³² The guidance should include materials specific to creating safe and supportive environments for Jewish students. The Special Commission notes that the current landing page on DESE's website titled "Resources Relative to Antisemitism and Societal Bias" *includes barely anything about antisemitism* besides vague references to antisemitism. See Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Resources Relative to*

³¹ *Id.*

³² Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Principles for Ensuring Safe and Supportive Learning Environments for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Students* (March 24, 2015), available at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/lgbtq/Principles-SafeEnvironment.html>.

Antisemitism and Societal Bias,

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/safety/antisemitism-societalbias.html>.

- c) School officials should adopt these best practices when communicating about antisemitic incidents and awareness, including:
 - i) School officials should make strong, clear statements that antisemitism is unacceptable and will not be tolerated, both at the start of each school year and regularly on other appropriate occasions, such as on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, January 27 of each year.³³
 - ii) When an antisemitic incident occurs, school officials, particularly superintendents and principals, should speak out clearly, forcefully, and with specificity as to the type of hate, rather than using vague language around all forms of hate.³⁴ Communication to the school community should be timely following an incident.
 - iii) School administrators should communicate clearly and consistently to the entire school community (inclusive of the community in which the school is located), including all students and families, about school values and rules, including policies governing bullying, harassment, discrimination, protests, walkouts, postering, vandalism/graffiti, and social media. School administrators should make it clear that antisemitism falls under the umbrella of such values, rules and policies.
- d) DESE should coordinate with the Attorney General's office to provide schools with clear guidance around First Amendment law, including students' right to free expression as provided in G.L. c 71 sec 82.³⁵
- e) At the start of each school year, DESE should remind districts of their obligation to teach curriculum that adheres to the frameworks and guidance issued by DESE.³⁶
- f) DESE should develop a mechanism for reporting problematic curriculum in use in class including materials that promote bias, bigotry or discrimination against any person or group of persons on the basis of protected characteristics.³⁷ This reporting mechanism should clearly explain how concerns are evaluated, decisions made, and actions taken, as well as define its scope, limitations, and

³³ See *Third Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Jan. 23, 2025) (statement of Jonathan Burke, Asst. Attorney General, Civil Rights Division at 0:40:50).

³⁴ See *Second Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Nov. 19, 2024) (statement of Superintendent Peter Light at 0:20:34).

³⁵ See *Third Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Jan. 23, 2025) (statement of Jonathan Burke, Asst. Attorney General, Civil Rights Division at 1:23:50).

³⁶ See *Third Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Jan. 23, 2025) (statement of Jonathan Burke, Asst. Attorney General, Civil Rights Division at 0:49:20).

³⁷ See *Fifth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Mar. 11, 2025) (statement of Dr. Russell Johnston, Acting Commissioner of DESE at 2:38:18).

review timelines. This mechanism should be developed and made publicly available within one year.

- g) Schools and districts should expand efforts to ensure kosher and halal foods are available to meet students' religious dietary needs.³⁸
- h) The Special Commission notes the existence of 603 CMR 26.05, and encourages its robust implementation by DESE.
- i) Schools should have clear policies that assist students observing religious holidays not observed with a day off on the school calendar with making up missed classes or assignments.³⁹

4) **Measures to Build Cross-Communal Solidarity and Collective Action to Counter Hate**

- a) Schools should promote and invest in after-school programs and clubs that encourage cross-identity or cross-communal bonding through shared experiences.⁴⁰
- b) Schools should leverage best practices for the US National Youth Sports Strategy to spotlight how activities like sports, fitness, dance, cooking, volunteering and more can build community solidarity to counter antisemitism and other forms of hate and ensure that such activities are not hostile environments for Jewish students.⁴¹

³⁸ See, e.g., Boston Public Schools, *Halal and Kosher Meals*, available at <https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/bps-departments/food-and-nutrition-services/halal-and-koshermeals#:~:text=BPS%20offers%20halal%20and%20circle,available%20at%20your%20child%27s%20school>; Sharon Public Schools, *Food and Nutrition Services*, available at <https://sharon.healtheliving.net/>. For a statewide example, see, Illinois, Senate Bill 457 (103rd Gen. Ass'y, Public Act 103-1076, eff. March 21 2025), amending 105 ILCS 5/1B-22, 110 ILCS 330/8j, 410 ILCS 637/25, 410 ILCS 645/1.5 et seq., and 730 ILCS 5/3-7-9 to require halal and kosher meal options at public schools, state-operated hospitals, and Department of Corrections facilities, available at <https://www.ilga.gov/Legislation/BillStatus?DocNum=0457&GAID=17&GA=103&DocTypeID=SB&LegID=144205&SessionID=112>; see also *Sixth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Apr. 7, 2025) (statement of Ariella Hellman, Director of Government Affairs Agudath Israel of America, New England Office at 1:29:10).

³⁹ In accordance with *Massachusetts General Laws*, c. 151C, sec. 2B

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Emerson College, *Youth Lead* (Sharon, Mass.), available at <https://emerson.edu/social-justice-collaborative/elma-lewis-center/programs-projects/youth-lead>; Mosaic Interfaith Youth Action, <https://mosaicaction.org/our-programs/>; see also *Fifth Hearing of the Special Comm'n on Combating Antisemitism* (Mar. 11, 2025) (statement of Rabbi Jodie Gordon at 0:29:35).

⁴¹ See Center for the Study of Sports in Society and Northeastern University, *Exploring Diverse Opportunities for Engagement and Empowerment*, available at <https://sportinsociety.sites.northeastern.edu/programs/>.

- c) Schools and districts should implement active bystander training to equip students and staff with the skills to safely intervene in incidents of bias, harassment, or discrimination.