

February 21, 2024

W. Quinn Buckner, Chair, Indiana University Board of Trustees

Dr. Pamela S. Whitten, President, Indiana University

Dr. Rahul Shrivastav, Provost, Indiana University, Bloomington

Dr. Latha Ramchand, Chancellor, Indiana University, Indianapolis

Dear Indiana University Leaders:

We are writing to you as members of a new group at Indiana University, **IU Faculty and Staff for Israel**. We came together after the horrendous October 7 attacks by Hamas in Israel to help keep IU free of the anti-Israel and often antisemitic hostility we were seeing expressed at Harvard, Penn, Northwestern, and other universities. We are a religiously and politically diverse, non-partisan group with over 60 members on both the Bloomington and Indianapolis campuses. Our goal is to support our students and one another, provide advice and assistance to university leadership, and promote an accurate understanding of the conflict in the Middle East at a time when erroneous or distorted accounts have been multiplying on campuses and elsewhere.

Although IU has historically been a welcoming place for Jewish students, faculty, and staff, we have seen an increasing amount of antisemitic speech and antisemitic incidents in both Bloomington and Indianapolis in the past few years. The Hamas attacks and subsequent outbreak of war turbo-charged such speech and incidents, which typically focus polemically charged and hostile attention on the Jewish state and go well beyond normative criticism of this or that policy, this or that leader, to demonize and delegitimize the state's very existence. Many such incidents have occurred in classrooms, forums, IDS columns, and in the public spaces of the university. And we know of plans to raise the visibility and intensity of such activities later this semester, with outcomes that may considerably worsen the campus climate.

In addition to an upsurge in antisemitic speech, there has also been an upsurge in antisemitic incidents that violate the University's Code of Conduct, by objectively threatening members of the IU community and preventing them from

engaging in legitimate activities protected by the Code. For example, some Jewish students feel they need to avoid disclosing their religious identities, that they are often excluded from forums for celebrating and educating about diversity and inclusion, and that the university's mechanisms for responding to complaints insufficiently appreciate the distinctive forms of anti-Jewish bias and discrimination. (See the attached list of incidents that we have recorded.)

It is important to note that antisemitic speech is not protected speech under IU policy, and that antisemitic incidents comprise conduct, not speech at all. Therefore, claims that proscription of such speech and conduct violate free speech or academic freedom are not merely misleading, but simply incorrect.

We have no doubt that IU's leadership recognizes, as President Whitten has written, "the pain and fear that is affecting the Jewish community on our campuses" and is focused on "taking care of our classmates, colleagues and peers – particularly everyone directly and indirectly impacted" by the war in the Middle East. Despite receiving strong criticism, the administration has taken steps to address concerns we and others have had about tolerance for antisemitism on campus. In 2018, Indiana University endorsed – and reaffirmed in 2022 -- a widely used definition of antisemitism that offers numerous examples of contemporary expressions of it, including some that we have seen on campus in the past months.

More needs to be done, especially now that antisemitism at IU has become a national issue. As you probably know, national publications like *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *The New York Times* have printed lengthy stories about it. Although our group was not involved, a complaint has been made against IU, charging that it is violating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which bars Federal funding for schools that discriminate based on race, color, or national origin, including actions rooted in antisemitism. At least two members of the Indiana Congressional delegation have requested information about what IU is doing to curtail antisemitism.

We believe there are further steps IU can take. Several members of our group serve on the Provost's Antisemitism Advisory Board; it should be meeting more often and be used to shape university policies and actions during this period of heightened tensions. A similar group should be created for the Indianapolis campus. Some of our members, who are regularly in touch with Jewish students, have received numerous reports of antisemitic activity on campus, which should be used to guide responses by IU's leadership. Among our group are faculty and

staff with considerable experience in law, public policy, psychology, political science, research on antisemitism and other fields, which can be useful in constructing a comprehensive strategy for dealing with expressions of antisemitism at IU.

These steps only require that IU implement its own, long-standing policies on faculty and student rights and responsibilities, including those on antisemitism. These policies can be usefully applied not only to Jewish students but also to students of any background. We are writing to let you – and others outside IU who may be interested -- know that there is a group of faculty and staff that has been created to support such efforts, help put an end to the expressions of antisemitism we have been witnessing in recent months, and make IU the kind of “caring” community that President Whitten – and all of us – want it to be.

As faculty and staff devoted to the well-being of IU, we and other members of our group look forward to further discussions with you about the matters discussed above.

Respectfully,

Professor Alvin H. Rosenfeld

Professor Leslie Lenkowsky

Rabbi Sue Silberberg

Gale Gold Nichols

Ralph Gaebler

[Members of the Outreach Committee of **IU Faculty and Staff for Israel**]