

Written Testimony of
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Tulane University Class of 2024
Congress of the United States House of Representatives
Committee on Education & The Workforce
“Roundtable With Jewish Students Impacted by Antisemitism”
February 29, 2024

**Written Testimony of Yasmeen S. Ohebsion
Submitted to the United States House of Representatives
Committee on Education and The Workforce**

**For February 29, 2024:
“Roundtable With Jewish Students Impacted By Antisemitism”**

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I: OPENING REMARKS AND INTRODUCTION

Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am relieved and grateful for the opportunity to submit this statement in an effort to provide transparency regarding the rampant antisemitism pervading Tulane University. In this written statement, I will introduce myself, share some of the incidents that have occurred on Tulane's campus, and hope to illuminate the damage brought about by Tulane's repeated failure to recognize the antisemitism that is targeting Jewish students and to protect its Jewish students from this discrimination.

My name is Yasmeeen Ohebsion and I am a student at Tulane University. While Tulane boasts a rich history as one of the first Southern universities to admit Jewish students, our community today has been overcome with anti-Jewish hatred. Last semester, my fellow student and personal friend, Nate Miller, was struck multiple times in the head and face with a flagpole at an anti-Israel rally on campus. Another student, Dylan Mann, was hospitalized after being bludgeoned with a megaphone during the same event, leaving him with a broken nose. These events did not occur in isolation. Since October 7th, 2023, hundreds of Jewish students at Tulane University have been the victims of genocidal threats, verbal abuse, and physical violence.

For me and many other students at Tulane, Zionism – recognition that the Jews are a people with a right to self-determination in the Jews' ancestral homeland – is an important part of how we define our Jewish identity and expresses our connection to the Jewish people's shared ancestral heritage in the Land of Israel. The university continues to enable anti-Zionist forms of anti-semitism by labeling it as "political" speech and refusing to recognize the deliberate effort to malign, disparage, and ostracize Jews on campus who define their Jewish identity as including the Jews' shared ancestral and ethnic connection to Israel. The Department of Education has recognized this form of harassment as a form of national origin discrimination on the basis of shared ancestry. When a woman on campus shouted, "Fuck you Jew!" at me, she did not first ask my opinion on Palestinian human rights. The individuals who viciously attacked my friends did not first inquire what their position was on a two-state solution. We are being targeted, harassed, and assaulted not because of any political opinions we carry, but rather because we are Jews and we take pride in our ancestral heritage that is inextricably linked to the land of Israel.

In response to this swell of hatred, harassment, and discrimination, and in an effort to prevent this form of bigotry from metastasizing on our campus, my Co-President Zoë Silverberg and I have spent the last 13 months urging Tulane's administrators and senior leaders to protect the safety of Jewish Tulane students, put an end to the threats and physical violence that are in violation of Tulane's Code of Conduct and the law, and educate our students, staff, faculty, and

police officers about antisemitism. On December 8th, 2023, following mass pressure from students and donors, I met with Tulane President, Michael Fitts, and on December 11th, 2023 he committed to addressing antisemitism in an email that outlined several key initiatives. Today, nearly three months later, Tulane has yet to wholly implement a single one of these commitments.

II: OVERVIEW OF SELECT INCIDENTS AT TULANE

Since October 7th, 2023, hundreds of Jewish students at Tulane University have been threatened, intimidated, abused, bullied, and physically attacked. The below examples represent a small fraction of the countless incidents reported and not reported.

- Violence at the “Tulane Rally For Palestine” (October 26, 2023): The “Tulane Rally for Palestine” occurred on campus, during which several Tulane students including Dylan Mann and Nate Miller, were violently beaten with a flagpole, a megaphone, fists, and a belt, resulting in severe injuries and Dylan’s hospitalization. This event is the subject of the U.S. Department of Education’s December 5th, 2023, investigation into Tulane’s mishandling of antisemitic incidents.¹ [[Exhibit A](#)]
- Advertising Terrorism (October 2023): The Office for Gender and Sexual Diversity at Tulane University glorified violence against Jews by posting a graphic on its official Instagram account’s story featuring silhouettes of the Hamas paraglider terrorists who slaughtered, raped, and mutilated young adults at the Nova Music Festival massacre in Israel on October 7th, 2023. [[Exhibit B](#)]
- Defacing Property with Genocidal Messaging (October 25, 2023): “From the River to the Sea,” a genocidal slogan calling for the elimination of the Jewish state, was spray painted in three-foot letters on the stone wall opposite the Jewish Studies Department and Tulane Chabad. The graffiti included a depiction of a face with its eyes crossed out. [[Exhibit C](#)]
- Administrative Ignorance and Failure to Respond (Fall 2023): Jewish students at the Tulane University School of Medicine expressed feeling unsafe to their Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) office following a slew of antisemitic incidents, including the carving of a swastika into the wall. The EDI officer instructed the students to create their own document² detailing the incidents and how the university could support them. After submitting this document, the office failed to respond for 6 weeks. Though the office has since responded, they have not addressed any of their outlined requests for support. These

¹ <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/foia/la-tulaneu-1-complaintandnotlet.pdf>

² [JMSO_3.pdf](#)

students confided in me last week that they continue to experience further alienation and antisemitism and have not received any support despite repeated pleas.

- I received a similarly ignorant response after reporting an incident that occurred on campus on October 26, 2023, where a woman approached me on campus and screamed “Fuck you Jew!” at me. I reported this to the university’s official bias and discrimination reporting form and the response was, “I am sorry to hear how impacted you are by the current political climate both on and off campus.” They then offered me mental health resources. No further actions were taken to protect me or investigate the situation further. The university repeatedly mischaracterizes Jew-hatred as “political speech,” refusing to recognize the deliberate effort to malign, disparage, and ostracize Jews on Campus.
- Double Standard for Code Enforcements (November 9, 2023): The university washed off the Jewish students’ pro-Israel chalking but allowed anti-Israel chalking to remain, justifying its selective enforcement of its policies by claiming that only the chalking done by Jewish students was “political.” [[Exhibit D](#)]

III: OUR EFFORTS TO ADDRESS ANTISEMITISM ON CAMPUS

We have spent the last 13 months petitioning Tulane University with 1,500+ student signatures, organizing dozens of meetings with senior administrative leaders at Tulane, and conducting independent research that reveals the severity and extent of anti-Jewish discrimination on campus from hundreds of respondents. Most recently, we met with President Michael Fitts and Provost Robin Forman. During the meeting, we proposed a three-pronged plan to address antisemitism on campus, backed by data collected from about 300 Jewish student respondents.³ Throughout these months we have continuously urged the administration to:

- I. **Track the Issue:** In dozens of meetings with administrators, including Tulane’s Chief Diversity Officer, individuals mentioned a lack of data on antisemitism. To address an issue, it must first be understood. Our survey of about 300 respondents constitutes the first solely focused analysis of Jewish discrimination at Tulane.
- II. **Convene A Task Force:** Task forces, comprised of Jewish students, faculty, and campus leaders, have proven to be an effective way to counter the rise of antisemitism. The task force should report directly to senior university leadership, providing an actionable list of initiatives and a clear timeline for implementation.
- III. **Implement Necessary Programming:** Tulane currently has minimal programming to address antisemitism. It is crucial that Tulane treats antisemitism with the same seriousness it treats other forms of discrimination and implements mandatory antisemitism awareness education for students throughout the first year experience and for faculty, police, and other relevant staff.

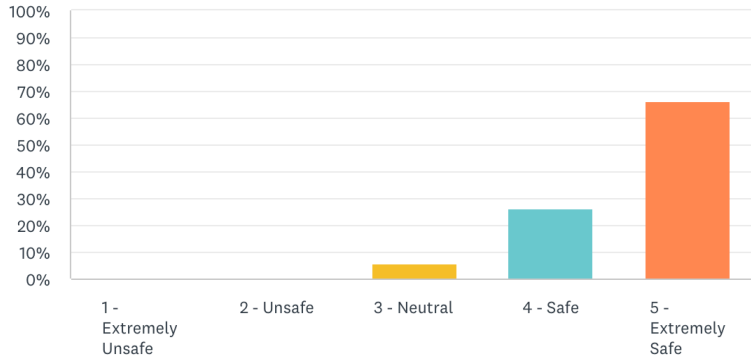
³ ■ [Addressing Antisemitism at Tulane.pdf](#)

IV: THE RESULTS OF OUR SURVEY

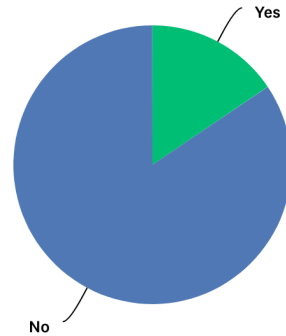
~300 Jewish survey respondents

PRE-OCT. 7, 2023:

93% of Jewish respondents felt extremely safe or safe on Tulane’s campus, and 16% personally experienced or witnessed antisemitism on Tulane’s campus.



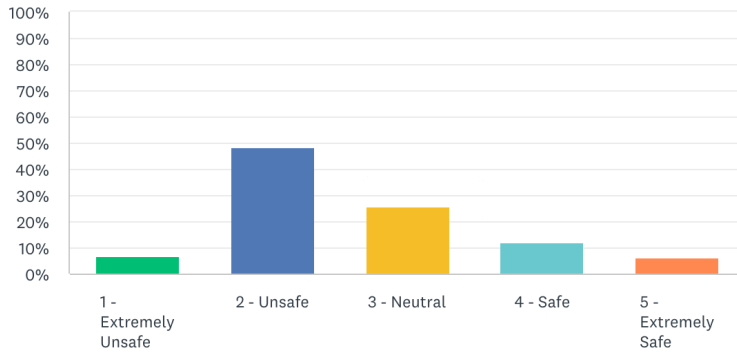
Students Who Feel Safe at Tulane



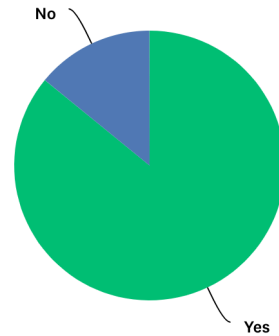
Witnessed / Experienced Antisemitism on Campus

POST-OCT. 7, 2023:

56% of Jewish respondents feel either unsafe or extremely unsafe on Tulane’s campus, and 86% personally experienced or witnessed antisemitism on Tulane’s campus.



Students Who Feel Safe at Tulane



Witnessed / Experienced Antisemitism on Campus

V: TULANE’S FAILURE TO ADDRESS ANTI-JEWISH HATRED

In a meeting with President Fitts and Provost Forman on December 8, 2023, we provided data that we collected about antisemitism at Tulane and suggestions as to how the university should go about combating campus antisemitism. This proposal included tracking the issue, convening a task force, and enforcing mandatory antisemitism sensitivity training.⁴ Three days later, on December 11, 2023, President Fitts and Provost Forman sent out an email to the students and faculty of Tulane committing to taking various measures to combat campus antisemitism.⁵ To my knowledge, Tulane has yet to implement a single one of those commitments concretely.

On December 5th, the U.S. Department of Education opened an investigation into Tulane for failing to respond to incidents of harassment during the Fall 2023 semester. The investigation revolves around the violence against Nate and Dylan. Tulane University spokesperson, Mike Stecker, responded to the investigation, stating the rally, “was deliberately staged on public property contiguous to our campus but over which we have no control.”⁶ **An evaluation of public property borders alongside images and videos from the day of the rally reveals that a significant portion of participants engaged in chants, sign-waving, and protest behavior on Tulane’s property. Tulane had jurisdiction over their property through police and administrative presence and actively chose not to uphold these rules through engagement.** [\[Exhibit E\]](#)

⁴ [Addressing Antisemitism at Tulane.pdf](#)

⁵ [A Message to the Tulane Community.pdf](#)

⁶ [Nola.com article. “Tulane faces U.S. Education Department investigation after fight at Israel-Hamas protest”](#)

VI: CONCLUDING REMARKS

Conclusion: All students, including Jewish students, should be able to feel safe expressing their full identity on campus without fear of shunning and mistreatment. Tulane is rife with antisemitism. Despite 13 months of pleading, data collection, and proposals, the administration has not wholly accomplished a single commitment outlined in the email from President Michael Fitts and Provost Robin Forman to my knowledge. The administration has been given various opportunities to provide us with concrete updates but has not yet reported any tangible progress. It is time for university administrators, at Tulane and elsewhere, to recognize this discrimination as antisemitism and take concrete steps to protect Jewish students from the harassment that is targeting us based on our Jewish identities and denying me and my fellow Jewish students at Tulane an unbiased, equal educational opportunity at Tulane University.

We urge the House Committee on Education & The Workforce to hold Tulane University accountable to its promises to protect its Jewish student body, cease selective enforcement of its conduct code, and address the concerns raised by Jewish students at Tulane who feel unsafe on campus. Thank you for this opportunity and your attention to this important issue plaguing college and university campuses across America.

Yasmeen Ohebsion
President
Movement to Address Antisemitism at Tulane

VI: APPENDIX

Exhibit A: “Tulane Rally For Palestine” (October 26, 2023)

A-1: The Flyer: On October 26, 2023, a rally organized by an unregistered student organization called “Tulane 4 Palestine,” took place both on and off Tulane’s campus. The protest was promoted online and around campus by professors and students via this unregistered and unapproved flyer, despite the university’s policies against such actions. Many of the fliers were not taken down by the university, despite clear violations of the rule.



A-2: Verbal Assault: Before the rally began, I was walking on campus to the Jewish Studies Department, when a woman screamed in my face, “Fuck you, Jew.” I was terrified and had never experienced such hate simply for being Jewish. I reported the incident to the university through its official bias and discrimination reporting form, to which I received a response saying, “I am sorry to hear how impacted you are by the current political climate both on and off campus.” I was then offered mental health resources. No further actions were taken to support me or investigate this incident.

After explaining the incident and poor response to the university's Chief Diversity Officer, she told me that she "expects" to see a rise in these types of incidents when political situations like Israel/Gaza occur, a sentiment she has repeated many times.

A-3: Antisemitic Chanting: At the rally, a mob of Tulane students, faculty, administrators, and New Orleans community members gathered in areas both on and off campus. The individuals present shouted anti-Israel, antisemitic, and genocidal phrases.

- "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free!"
- "Globalize the Intifada!"
- "Intifada Intifada!"
- "Zionism Zionism, you can't hide, we charge you with genocide!" (easily misunderstood in videos as "Zionism, you can't hide, we call Jewish genocide)
- "Your cousins are settlers, fuck you!"
- "Go back to New York!"
- "Gas the Jews!"
- "Not another penny, not another dollar, no more money for Israel's slaughter!"
- "Get in the shower!"

A-4: Physical Violence: During the rally, a red pickup truck occupied by two non-Tulane individuals, one proudly waving the Palestinian flag, drove past the demonstration multiple times. Eventually, one occupant began to burn an Israeli flag in the bed of the truck, prompting Tulane student Nate Miller to protect the flag. In response, he was viciously beaten with the flagpole, sustaining multiple blows to the head. As the altercation escalated, additional assailants from the opposing faction joined and physically assaulted pro-Israel Tulane students. Nate Miller endured further violence, including blows to the head from a megaphone. Dylan Mann suffered a broken nose after being punched in the face by a protester, necessitating hospitalization. One of the attackers wielded a belt to lash Jewish students. The harrowing ordeal left several Tulane students injured and most Jewish Tulane students terrified to identify as Jewish on campus or to be on campus at all.



Exhibit B: Advertising Terrorism (October 2023)

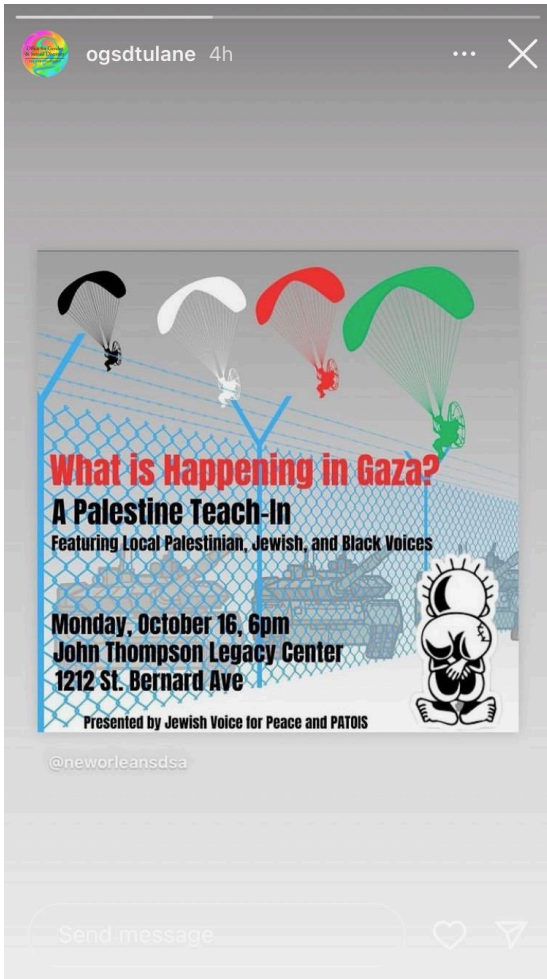


Exhibit C: Defacing Property with Genocidal Messaging (October 25, 2023)



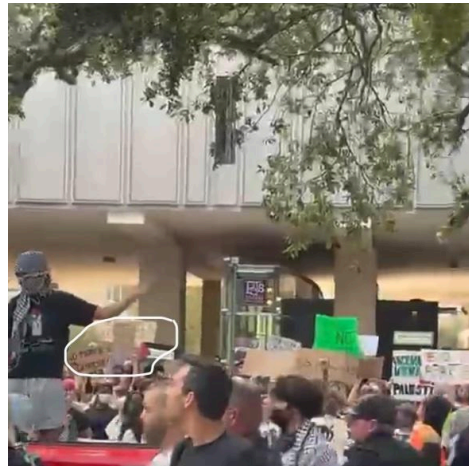
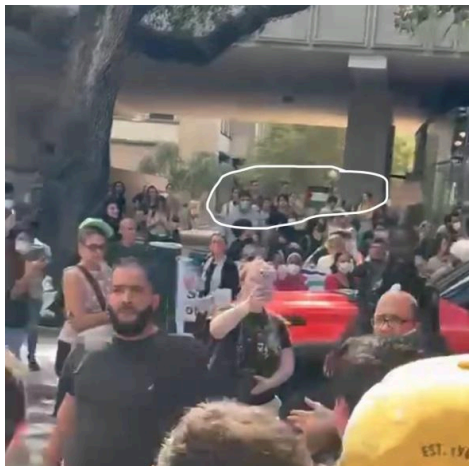
Exhibit D: Double Standard for Code Enforcements (November 9, 2023)

After the anti-Israel demonstration and amidst online threats of further protests, Jewish students at the university came across the names of Palestinians who had been killed written in chalk on campus. In a designated chalk-friendly zone, Jewish students from Students Supporting Israel (SSI) at Tulane group chalked phrases like "there was a ceasefire on October 6th," and "free Gaza from Hamas" as a response. The following morning a student arrived at the chalking location and saw Tulane Cleaning Services removing SSI's chalk with a hose. Tulane Cleaning Services claimed that they were doing so in compliance with an order from the "higher-ups" of the university. Tulane Cleaning Services only erased the chalking made by SSI while the other chalking remained on campus for days to follow. Students who met with administrators questioned why it is acceptable to erase only the chalk created by Israel-supporting students while allowing chalk of the opposing narrative. The administration justified its removal of the Jewish students' chalking, calling it "political." The administrative representative noted that the school would continue to hose off the students' chalk and chided the Jewish students for spending so much time chalking. Not long afterward, Tulane announced that chalking on campus was suspended through the Spring Semester - which will inevitably increase the hostility toward Jews who will likely be blamed for causing the university to shut down this opportunity for students to express themselves.



Exhibit E:

Tulane Property Lines according to the City of New Orleans Property Viewer⁷, showing that Tulane property ends at the sidewalk (multiple feet in front of the overhang, address 6730 Freret).



Protestors are located in front of and underneath the overhang that is Tulane property according to the City of New Orleans Property Viewer. The property lines begin at the edge of the sidewalk, an area populated by protestors.

⁷ <https://property.nola.gov/>

Exhibit F: Anecdotes Shared by Tulane Students:

- Fall 2023: “I was at the initial rally for Palestine on Freret, and I witnessed several of my Jewish classmates getting beaten up by pro-Palestine supporters, one of which was an adult man hitting kids with a belt. **I was actually so terrified for my safety in that moment and almost didn’t make it to my next class** in fear of being attacked on the way. One of my male friends felt the need to walk me to class to make sure as a young Jewish woman, I was not in harm's way on our campus.”
- Fall 2023: “Students ganging up on Jews screaming **gas the Jews.**”
- Fall 2023: “I wanted my roommates to pay me for tickets I had purchased to a football game. They responded by **calling me a dirty Jew** and implied that I was in search of shekels.”
- Fall 2023: “The worst I’ve experienced, however, is how **the medical school has not addressed antisemitism.** We created a whole document with examples and couldn’t even get a response from the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion office.”
- Fall 2023: “I was **too scared to walk past the protest** to attend class and had to email my teachers that **this was the reason for my absence.** Many lacked understanding of the situation.”
- Fall 2023: “**Seeing blood** from the Freret protest on my way to class.”
- Fall 2023: “A man saw my Star of David necklace and **said he is going to kill me slowly.** This happened right outside the law building.”
- Fall 2023: “I was standing silently wearing a Star of David necklace and was told me and my family need to **‘take a shower’ as in gas chambers**”
- Fall 2023: “I have had **professors who have taken antisemitic stances regarding Hamas,** which was very unsettling.”
- Fall 2023: “Hitting a Jew, tearing down hostage signs, getting screamed “free Palestine” at me.”
- Fall 2023: “I saw a **Jewish student get punched.**”
- Fall 2023: “As a student, I’ve had people call me a dirty Jew to my face. I have also had people make fun of Israel to my face and it is where my family lives. I have also been around people making fun of keepahs.”
- Fall 2023: “Someone yelled at my best friend to **go back to the showers.**”
- Fall 2023: “I’ve seen antisemitic graffiti, and heard a mob yelling to make sure all Jews are extinct right outside my house (I live next to Hillel, super close to campus)...I’ve also seen multiple antisemitic and hateful comments on Fizz, an app where people can anonymously post.”
- Fall 2023: “At Freret protest, **people screaming Jews are committing genocide and deserve to die** directly at my friend without even knowing she was Jewish (she was walking to class).”