



Commonwealth of Virginia
Office of the Governor

Executive Order

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COMBATING ANTISEMITISM AND ANTI-RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY IN VIRGINIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

By virtue of the authority vested in me as Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, I hereby issue this Executive Order to reaffirm the Commonwealth's commitment to safe educational environments free from discrimination and continue to act against antisemitism and anti-religious bigotry in Virginia's public schools and institutions of higher education.

Importance of the Initiative

The Commonwealth of Virginia has long stood as a beacon of religious freedom, enshrined in the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, penned by Thomas Jefferson, which declared that no person "shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief." Today, that foundational principle is actively threatened by an alarming rise in anti-religious bigotry, specifically antisemitism. Across the United States, and within Virginia, Jewish students and faculty are facing increasing incidents of discrimination within educational settings. These threats are not abstract, but rather real and continuous. In April 2024, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reported that FBI investigations into antisemitic hate crimes had tripled following the terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. The Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM) recorded an astounding total of 6,326 antisemitic incidents around the world in 2024 and 742 incidents on college and high school campuses in the U.S., a 200 percent increase compared to 2022. A CAM survey also found that 3.5 million American Jews have personally encountered antisemitism since October 7, 2023, including 380,000 Jewish children.

In April 2025, CAM recorded 554 incidents in Virginia, indicating an annual pace even greater than 2024. Harassment cases surged from 50 to 158, vandalism from 19 to 62, and Virginia experienced three assaults—a dramatic increase given there were no recorded assaults the year prior. These alarming trends placed Virginia 11th in the nation for the number of

reported antisemitic incidents—many of which took place in our public schools and universities—and year to date we are fourth in the nation.

This disturbing pattern evokes a troubling national crisis. According to a recent Gallup poll, 81 percent of Americans now consider antisemitism to be either a “very serious” or “somewhat serious” issue, a striking increase from 57 percent two decades ago.¹ The discriminatory and blatant attacks on the Jewish community that are unfolding in Virginia mirror the surge occurring on the national and international stage. A recent survey revealed that 63 percent of millennials and Gen Z did not know that six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust and over 50 percent could not name one of the 40,000 concentration death camps or ghettos.² While Israel-related antisemitic incidents have frequently taken place in public spaces such as libraries and transportation hubs, they have increasingly occurred on school grounds, with 156 of these incidents being reported in K-12 public schools within the last two years.

Rising Antisemitism in Virginia’s Education System

Jews in Virginia are facing an onslaught of antisemitic discrimination based on their religion, ethnicity, and shared ancestry. In Fairfax County Public Schools, Jewish students often have faced ongoing harassment for years leading to multiple complaints still under investigation by the Virginia Office of the Attorney General’s Office of Civil Rights. Hitler salutes, swastikas, inappropriate Holocaust and Jewish “jokes,” and threats of violence against Jewish students often go ignored and uncorrected. Statements in support of terrorist organizations or the use of the symbols of terrorism in school performances go unaddressed. Textbooks and teaching materials minimize and erase the historical Jewish connection to the Land of Israel and historical inaccuracies about Jewish history, the Holocaust, and Israel are taught often unchallenged.

In Arlington County Public Schools, Jewish students have often faced ongoing harassment from students and teachers. Slurs and threats are made against Jewish students with no apparent disciplinary consequences. Teachers share materials from activist curricula organizations that seek to demonize Israel and force Jewish students to renounce their connection to Israel. Teachers are allowed to wear threatening clothing associated with violence against the Jewish people. The effect of the inaction by school administrators has made Jewish students feel unsafe and intimidated.

In December 2024, a freshman at George Mason University was charged with plotting a mass casualty attack at the Israeli consulate in New York City. This arrest followed an earlier incident when two sisters who served as leaders of the campus Students for Justice in Palestine were indefinitely suspended for vandalizing school property with anti-Israel slogans.

At the University of Virginia, officials have acknowledged dozens of reports of antisemitic activity. Jewish students have received death threats, been physically assaulted, intimidated from attending class, and subjected to slurs. A Spring 2024 referendum, passed by the student body, calling for divestment from companies that conduct business with Israel was preceded by threats and followed by an anonymous letter to the UVA Hillel that ominously referenced Kristallnacht.

In April 2024, an anti-Israel protest on Grounds escalated into a violation of university policies and was eventually dispersed by state police. This protest was described as “upsetting, frightening, and sad”³ by the University President.

Virginia is committed to providing our law enforcement professionals with tools and training to keep our communities and campuses safe. On September 17, 2024, the Office of the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM) and George Washington University, Program on Extremism in conjunction with the George Mason University Police Department, Virginia State Police, Fairfax County Police and the Prince William County Police Department, hosted a training session on Global Extremism, Domestic Extremism, Campus Extremism and Antisemitism. Approximately 475 officers have been trained in two sessions at the George Mason University and one at Virginia Tech. A fourth training event is already planned at Old Dominion University.

The Commonwealth will continue to respond with resolve to the onslaught of antisemitic discrimination being faced by the Jewish community. Every educational institution in Virginia, at all levels, owes it to our Jewish brothers and sisters to meet that resolve with intentional effort to cultivate an environment rooted in connection, compassion, and mutual respect.

Administration Action to Confront Antisemitism to Date

On my first day in office, I signed Executive Order Eight, creating the Commission to Combat Antisemitism. The Commission was charged with studying antisemitism in the Commonwealth and recommending actions to address it, including supporting schools in teaching about antisemitism and the Holocaust. In 2023, I signed House Bill 1606, formally adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of antisemitism as a guiding tool for training, education, and enforcement. This has driven incorporation of antisemitism awareness, Holocaust awareness and Jewish history into our K-12 History and Social Science *Standards of Learning* adopted by the Virginia Board of Education that year.

The Virginia Department of Education recently published relevant high-quality instructional guides that align with the 2023 History and Social Studies *Standards of Learning*, integrating Jewish experiences in the United States pre- and post-American Revolution, pre- and post-World War II and the Holocaust, and in modern times. The Department in partnership with the Board of Education will continue to publish high-quality instructional materials with the History Social Science instructional guides, thoroughly review and adopt textbooks aligned to the 2023 *Standards of Learning* and will include high-quality instructional materials on the Department's GoOpenVA Hub that are accurate and complete in their coverage of Judaism, Jewish heritage and history, and Israel.

In addition to our work on education, last year I signed bipartisan legislation, House Bill 18 and Senate Bill 7, which reinforced Virginia's commitment to protecting individuals from discrimination and hate crimes by ethnic origin. Following Hamas' terrorist attack on October 7, 2023, I issued Executive Directive Six, to combat the rise in antisemitism and anti-religious bigotry. This directive enhances security coordination for houses of worship and educational institutions, expedites \$2.7 million in protective grants, and calls for targeted campus safety plans and awareness initiatives to safeguard Jewish, Muslim, and other religious communities across the Commonwealth.

Although Virginia has made tremendous strides in combating the rise of antisemitism, not all legislative efforts have succeeded. Several bills, introduced in recent years were supported and encouraged by my administration to prevent the boycott of Israel in Virginia and would strengthen the support for our Jewish community. Combating antisemitism is not a partisan

issue, it demands unity, and that is why I remain committed to providing strong, sustained leadership in this fight.

All Virginians—no matter their beliefs, heritage, or background—should be able to live, work, learn, and raise a family in a Commonwealth free of hateful acts. Antisemitism is not an isolated issue affecting only the Jewish community; it is a broader societal threat. It erodes the integrity of our education systems and strikes at the core values that sustain our democracy. Virginia’s commitment to religious freedom and equality demands more than words; it demands action. We must meet this moment with clarity and courage and ensure that hatred has no home in Virginia. This Executive Order will put in place ongoing policies within the Virginia Department of Education and the State Council for Higher Education of Virginia that will continue our efforts to combat antisemitism, as well as anti-religious bigotry and any other form of discrimination.

Directive

Accordingly, pursuant to the authority vested in me in Article V of the Constitution of Virginia and as the Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth, and pursuant to § 2.2-103 of the Code of Virginia, I hereby,

- I. Direct the Virginia Department of Education to:
 - A. Publish actionable resources that support the inclusion of the following within local school division Student Codes of Conduct:
 - i. The definition of antisemitism, found in Chapter 471 of the 2023 Acts of Assembly, being the same as defined by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance in its working definition of antisemitism, including its contemporary examples, as it was adopted on May 26, 2016;
 - ii. Prohibition of conduct as it specifically relates to antisemitism, which shall incorporate, but not be limited to:
 1. harassment and discrimination against Jewish individuals, in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-352;
 2. antidiscrimination regulations issued by the United States Department of Education and the United States Department of Justice; and
 3. relevant state-level antidiscrimination laws.
 - iii. The resources shall make clear that the prohibition and other uses of the definition cannot diminish or infringe upon any right protected under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution or the Constitution of Virginia.
 - B. Encourage treatment of harassment and discrimination that is motivated by or includes antisemitic intent, or bigotry against any religion, by any individual or as a result of school policies or programs on the school campus in the same manner as any other form of discrimination prohibited by state or federal law.
 - C. Encourage local school divisions to review with teachers and principals their policies and procedures for approving additional ancillary teaching resources to ensure that teachers are using high-quality and accurate instructional materials to teach about Judaism, Jewish history, the Holocaust, and Israel.

- D. Continue to make available high-quality instructional materials within the History and Social Science instructional guides and on the Department's GoOpenVA Hub that are accurate and complete in their coverage of Judaism, Jewish heritage and history, and Israel.
- II. Direct the State Council of Higher Education of Virginia to:
 - A. Publish a model resolution for institutions of higher education which shall when adopted:
 - i. Include in all Student Codes of Conduct the definition of antisemitism, found in Chapter 471 of the 2023 Acts of Assembly, being the same as defined by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance in its working definition of antisemitism, including its contemporary examples, as it was adopted on May 26, 2016;
 - ii. Treat harassment and discrimination that is motivated by or includes antisemitic intent, or bigotry against any religion, by any individual or as a result of school policies or programs on the school campus in the same manner as any other form of discrimination prohibited by state or federal law;
 - iii. Include in all campus Codes of Conduct prohibited conduct as it specifically relates to antisemitism and anti-religious bigotry, which shall include, but not be limited to:
 - 1. harassment and discrimination against Jewish individuals in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-352;
 - 2. antidiscrimination regulations provided by the United States Department of Education and the United States Department of Justice; and
 - 3. relevant state-level antidiscrimination laws.
 - iv. The model resolution shall make clear that the prohibition and other uses of the definition cannot diminish or infringe upon any right protected under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution or the Constitution of Virginia.
- III. Direct the Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Public Safety & Homeland Security to establish a working group with representatives from the Virginia Department of Education, the State Council of Higher Education of Virginia, the Department of Criminal Justice Services, stakeholders from the Jewish Community, and any other relevant federal, state, local or community partners to design a comprehensive reporting and tracking mechanism for alleged incidents of antisemitism and other anti-religious bigotry. The working group shall provide recommendations for executive, legislative, and budgetary actions to the Governor and leadership of the General Assembly by September 1, 2025.

Effective Date

This Executive Order shall be effective upon its signing and shall remain in force and effect unless amended or rescinded by further executive order or directive. Given under my hand and under the Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia, this 19th day of May 2025.



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Glenn Youngkin".

Glenn Youngkin, Governor

Attest:

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kelly Gee".

Kelly Gee, Secretary of the Commonwealth