



Ted Deutch
Chief Executive Officer
Edward and Sandra Meyer
Office of the CEO

Jacob Blaustein Building
165 East 56 Street
New York, NY 10022
T 212.751.4000
F 212.891.1450
AJC.org

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Harmeet Dhillon
Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Division
Department of Justice
Civil Rights Division
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Assistant Attorney General Dhillon,

I am writing to reiterate deep appreciation—shared by all of us at AJC—for your participation in last month’s National Leadership Council Fly-In. I was also so grateful for your remarks this week at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Council Swearing-in Ceremony. Your strong, unequivocal support for the Jewish community at a time of national crisis resonated profoundly with our audience.

We have witnessed a continuing surge in antisemitic incidents across the United States: protests targeting synagogues, bomb threats, acts of vandalism, and organized attempts to intimidate Jewish communities. In November, Park East Synagogue in New York City was confronted by a hostile anti-Israel protest marked by violent chants, prompting thousands to rally in solidarity and call for legal protections against intimidation at houses of worship. In December, anti-Israel activists stormed an event hosted by the Israeli Consulate at Wilshire Boulevard Temple in Los Angeles, damaging property and leading to multiple arrests for battery and vandalism.

These are not isolated episodes. Jewish institutions nationwide are facing an escalation of coordinated hostility—echoing recent IRGC-linked assaults on Australia’s Jewish community, including the arson attacks on Lewis’ Continental Kitchen in Sydney and the Adass Israel Synagogue in Melbourne in late 2024.

While we do not deny the rights of protestors to spew even vile hatred, their rights cross a line when they restrict the ability to worship freely. Given this troubling pattern, we strongly hope the Department of Justice will investigate whether the perpetrators of the New York, New Jersey, and Los Angeles synagogue-related incidents are conspiring in coordination, and whether malign foreign actors may be providing support, direction, or encouragement.

We also urge the Department to issue clear guidance to federal, state, and local law enforcement outlining all available tools to ensure that individuals can safely access religiously affiliated institutions—free from intimidation, obstruction, or threats—and to bring to justice those who violate these protections. Statutory mechanisms such as the Church Arson Prevention Act, which since 2018 has covered threats against religious institutions, and the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act, which prohibits force, threats, or physical obstruction targeting those exercising their First Amendment right to religious freedom, remain essential but underutilized.

Further clarification on whether the FACE Act applies to all individuals entering a religiously affiliated institution for any lawful purpose—not only for worship—would be especially valuable, ensuring protection for educational, cultural, and community programming as well as religious services. If you believe a statutory amendment is required, AJC is prepared to lead the effort.

We cannot forget the devastating murders of Israeli Embassy staffers Sarah Milgrim and Yaron Lischinsky or the violent antisemitic attack on Jews in Boulder, CO, and we are grateful to your department for investigating these with appropriate seriousness. We would welcome both a DOJ investigation into the most recent incidents targeting synagogues and the issuance of comprehensive DOJ guidance to law enforcement on existing statutes that safeguard congregants and ensure that America’s houses of worship remain places of safety rather than targets of intimidation and hate.

Thank you again for your leadership at this critical time.

Respectfully,

Congressman Ted Deutch
AJC Chief Executive Officer
Edward and Sandra Meyer Office of the CEO
Member of Congress (2010-22)