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Dear ,

Over the last several years, I have written Shabbat messages about antisemitism, or rising antisemitism many times. The concerns sometimes felt distant; warning signs of what was a rising tide that could either simply be a high tide or a brewing tsunami. Once again antisemitism is the topic of this message, and it feels like the storm is washing over us. The question is, how much worse can it be, and more importantly, what can we do about it? Let us think about how we actively participate in our future rather than responding to what is happening around us.

The last several weeks have been particularly tumultuous and I want to share what has happened and some opportunities to help.

A month ago, anti-Israel and antisemitic rallies started at 12 Corners during school dismissal time. The protestors targeted Brighton particularly because of our Jewish population. The signage and chanting was vulgar and several students walking through 12 Corners reported being taunted with antisemitic slurs. Our children were scared. Our parents were horrified.

One of the protests became violent, with an Israeli being severely injured, and another was broken up by the police because they felt the peaceful Jewish counter-protestors were in danger. Yes, this was in Brighton. No, these protestors are not doing the same thing at dismissal time in any other district.

We are deeply concerned about the safety and welfare of our students who are being targeted by these demonstrators and hold deeply antisemitic beliefs. At a recent Brighton Town Board meeting, several of the demonstrators suggested

that they needed to protest so they could teach our children the truth.

Brighton does not have any parameters on protests and permits are not required on public property, like the triangle in 12 Corners, or on the sidewalks. I am so proud of how our community has rallied to address the Town of Brighton to put time, place, and manner restrictions on demonstrations, which are perfectly legal. Contrary to what our detractors say, we are not trying to limit free speech or assembly. We are trying to preserve those rights by ensuring everyone can assemble and speak freely.

Many community members, myself included, attended both the Brighton Safety Committee Meeting and the Town Board meetings to express our public safety concerns about protests during dismissal. Fortunately, there have not been any more since the initial ones a few weeks ago. It does not mean they will not start again and if they do, we need to be protected, especially after what we have experienced lately.

We will continue attending these meetings, speaking up on behalf of the safety of our children and we will continue to meet with town board members to express our concerns.

A petition is being circulated also asking the Brighton Town Board to address these safety concerns. Please sign the petition and share it with your family and friends. This is really important for the safety and well-being of our children and community.

[Petition · Creating a Safer Community in Brighton, NY - United States · Change.org](#)

In many cities around the country, demands for a ceasefire now resolution have been brought to city councils. These resolutions tend to be very one-sided, placing most of the blame on Israel for the October 7 war. Rarely do they call out Hamas or call for an unequivocal release of hostages. I think we all agree that a ceasefire is imperative, as long as it is even-handed, and that it calls on Hamas to immediately release all of the hostages, living or otherwise. In the last several months, since the last ceasefire, Hamas has refused every ceasefire offering with an unwillingness to return hostages. Right now, negotiations are still ongoing for a ceasefire and release of hostages.

Rochester City Council has not been immune from a resolution being proposed.

Dan Kinel and I began to learn that protestors would be coming to the city council in January to demand a ceasefire resolution. We attended the City Council meeting in January where we were shouted down and I was called both a "Nazi bitch" and a "Nazi genocidal bitch." I could not complete my two minutes of remarks because the protestors would not stop yelling and jeering. These are the same protestors who come to 12 Corners and have protested outside the Federation office building with fake bloody body bags and have screamed obscenities at us.

The ceasefire resolution came to a head in the last couple of weeks when Councilmember Stanley Martin officially proposed a memorializing resolution. With the support of the Federation's Executive Committee, we galvanized the community to attend the Speak to Council meeting on March 14. As expected, the meeting was completely chaotic. There was a huge turnout with 150 speakers who signed up to address the council. Kudos to Chair Miguel Melendez who not only oversaw a 5.5-hour meeting effectively but also worked very hard at keeping the room calm and ensuring everyone had the opportunity to speak. During the meeting, several of the anti-Israel activists were asked to leave because they interrupted speakers with antisemitic rants.

We were very proud of our Jewish community. More than 20 people spoke at the meeting and each of the comments were unique and delivered gracefully through taunting and a tough crowd, including our youngest 16-year-old speaker. During the meeting, many people experienced run-ins with people who said things like, "We should kill the Jews" or "shut up Jewish bitch." The antisemitic nature of the remarks of those who spoke on behalf of a ceasefire was staggering. One of the lead protestors invoked the Nazi salute at the end of remarks from an eloquent and heartfelt Israeli American woman. The antisemitism was rampant. A significant number of community members turned out to support those who spoke. Nearly everyone stayed until the end of the meeting, 11:15 PM, to make sure everyone had the support they needed.

There have been many meetings and phone calls since the Speak to Council meeting to follow up with council members. Additionally, we launched a letter-writing and phone-calling campaign to city council members asking them not to sign the resolution.

There were questions about whether the resolution was antisemitic. Here is my take on it. Going back to Natan Sharansky's 3 D's of antisemitism is a helpful tool to answer this question. Sharansky explained that legitimate criticism of

Israel is not antisemitic and many, myself included, criticize Israel and the government. Legitimate criticism crosses the line into antisemitism when Israel is either **Delegitimized**, **Dehumanized**, or treated with a **Double standard**. This resolution crossed those lines. The mere fact that this resolution came to city council constitutes a double standard. No other world conflict has been taken on by city council, including ongoing, horrific, violent conflicts: The raging civil war in Syria, Russia/Ukraine, and Sudan where more people have been killed in the last three years than any other place, the Uyghurs in China, Yemen, the school children kidnapped in Nigeria and the list goes on. If other world conflicts are not being addressed by the city council or brought up in a resolution, this is a double standard.

In the resolution, it says that Israel “upholds a system of legitimized racial segregation,” which is a way of saying Apartheid. Israel is not an Apartheid state because all citizens have the same rights, regardless of race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. This statement is intended to dehumanize and delegitimize Israel. Additionally, the statement equates Israeli hostages with Palestinian prisoners. Israeli hostages are innocent civilians, and the prisoners are members of Hamas who have been arrested in Israel in connection with October 7 or in the war in Gaza. This resolution dehumanizes hostages by equating them with political prisoners. Kfir Bibas, the one-year-old hostage, who has spent almost half of his life in captivity can never be equated with a political prisoner.

The resolution is one-sided and biased putting the vast majority of the blame on Israel, and it does not call out Hamas as a terrorist organization. All of this makes it quite clear that this resolution is indeed antisemitic.

I am so very happy to share that with the hard work of our community and in allyship with several council members, the **ceasefire resolution failed** because only four council members agreed to sign onto it, which is not a majority. The city council now can continue its very important work, on behalf of the City of Rochester, where it absolutely has an impact. Moving forward, we hope the city council will create a new policy not to address international issues. This is the job of our federal government and not city councils.

We were very proud of how our community came together from across denominations and backgrounds. We are so appreciative of everyone who attended meetings, sent emails, and made calls. Thank you – it took our village!

If you could take a few minutes to [thank the city council members](#) who did not sign the ceasefire resolution, that would be very helpful.

The positive result at city council was sadly diminished on Tuesday with the release of a horribly antisemitic letter and vile cartoon reminiscent of 1930s Nazi propaganda from a member of the Green Party and the Party for Socialism and Liberation sent to the Monroe County Legislature. Originally, this was anonymous, and fairly quickly the author and artist, Jason Yungbluth was outed. He is now proudly sharing this on his website.

I simply cannot share this cartoon because it is far too degrading of me to include in a message for Shabbat. If you feel the need to see it, you can find it on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or online. I will briefly describe it. The cartoon depicts me as the Dragon Queen with County Executive Adam Bello in a subservient role licking my boots with the Israeli flag on them. County Majority Leader Michael Yudelson (also Executive Director of TBK) is standing over Adam with a branding iron that is the Federation logo and Michael is imploring Adam to lick my boots for fear of retribution. The cartoon is not only horribly antisemitic in its use of tropes relating to Jewish power, but it is also deeply misogynistic in its sexualization of me.

The cartoon and letter are in reference to the Israeli flag flying at the Monroe County offices downtown. We are grateful that the flag has been flying and Adam Bello chose to fly the flag to show solidarity after October 7 because he supports our community and the victims of October 7.

[Both the County Legislature and County Executive Adam Bellow released statements and we are grateful for their support.](#)

You can thank the county for its support. [Here's how.](#)

Yesterday we held a press conference to thank city council members who did not sign the ceasefire agreement, to thank the county legislature for its support (all but two members signed the letter of condemnation), and to discuss the rampant rise in antisemitism. You can view the clips below:

- [WROC Channel 8](#)
- [WHEC Channel 10](#)
- [WHAM Channel 13](#)

Needless to say, this is all very disturbing, and it has been A LOT. As we settle into Shabbat, I remain unabashedly and deeply grateful to our community members who tirelessly stand up to the hate every day and come out to serve when called upon, often on very short notice. We are small in number yet mighty in our efforts. The support from our community has been tremendous and as difficult as this has been we should be so proud of who we are and what we represent. On Tuesday night, with great inspiration, the author of *Jewish Pride*, Ben Freeman reminded us that we inherited the beauty of the Jewish people with the opportunity and obligation to preserve our people for generations to come so that they too may benefit from our many blessings. We do this through active participation – whether ritual, practice, or advocacy and grounded in our values. This is exactly the legacy our community is putting forth and I could not be prouder of you. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom.



Meredith



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