



Congressman Lee M. Zeldin
First Congressional District of New York

August 3, 2021

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

The Honorable Betty A. Rosa
Commissioner
New York State Education Building
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12234

The Honorable Meisha Porter
Chancellor
New York City Department of Education
52 Chambers St-rm 320
New York, NY 10007-1222

Dear Secretary Miguel Cardona, Commissioner Rosa, and Chancellor Meisha Porter,

I am deeply concerned to hear of the antisemitic and anti-Israel letter led by a group known as “New York City Educators for Palestine” regarding the recent Hamas-Israel escalation¹ and I urge you to do everything in your power to combat antisemitic and anti-Israel bias and discrimination in public schools.

The letter accuses Israel, our nation’s greatest ally and beacon of democracy in the region, of terrorism, ethnic cleansing, and other talking points all too commonly used to fuel violent attacks on and discrimination against Jews. For example, this hateful letter makes claims such as “Israel killed at least 212 Palestinians last May”², without mention of the more than 4,300 rockets fired indiscriminately at Israel, nor the terrorist organization Hamas using civilians as human shields. In addition to this one-sided framing of recent events, this letter encourages teaching these kinds of hateful, biased views and promotes the fundamentally antisemitic Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel, whose founder, in referring to Zionism, said “I, for one, support euthanasia”.

¹ Palestine, NYC Educators For. “Statement of Solidarity with Palestine from NYC Educators.” Medium, NYC Educators for Palestine, 11 June 2021, nyceducatorsforpalestine.medium.com/statement-of-solidarity-with-palestine-from-nyc-educators-ba037f493c1a.

² Ibid.

Unfortunately, we have also recently seen an increase in antisemitic attacks across the United States. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reported that antisemitic incidents in the United States increased by 75% while Israel was under attack by Hamas. Using anti-Israel rhetoric in our children's schools will only escalate and embolden antisemitic attacks and vitriol throughout our country.

As the Jewish state faced thousands of rocket attacks from the terrorist organization and Iranian proxy, Hamas, Jewish people throughout the US have been subject to violent attacks and blatant antisemitism, including in New York City, where Hamas sympathizers resorted to violence, burned Israeli flags, and displayed blatant antisemitism.

Executive Order 13899, which was signed in 2019, combats antisemitism and reaffirms the principle that antisemitism and discrimination against Jews based on an individual's race, color, or national origin may violate Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Additionally, EO 13899 requires that federal agencies consider the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition and contemporary examples of antisemitism in enforcing Title VI. Pursuant to EO 13899, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) at the Department of Education is obligated to investigate and take decisive action if a case of antisemitism is substantiated.

The OCR at the Department of Education has an office in New York City, and has the authority to investigate claims of discrimination in New York City schools. Additionally, the Office of School Personnel Review and Accountability (OSPRA) at the New York State Education Department has an obligation to investigate allegations against the moral character of individuals who currently possess or are in the process of obtaining their New York State teaching certificate. Now that we are aware of our educators perpetuating anti-Jewish and anti-Israel rhetoric, the OCR and OSPRA must remain vigilant and root out any cases of antisemitism at the source.

This anti-Jewish hatred needs to be singularly and unequivocally identified, called out, and eradicated in all forms. I urge you to enforce Executive Order 13899 and do everything in your power to combat this antisemitic and anti-Israel bias in schools.

Sincerely,



Lee Zeldin
Member of Congress