

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 17, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Cardona:

We write to express our concern about the alarming rise in antisemitism and Islamophobia in the United States following the recent violence in Israel and Gaza. These events have had a profound impact on our college and university campuses, where students of all backgrounds come together to learn and engage.

The United States prides itself on being a nation that values diversity, inclusion, and religious freedom. Unfortunately, hate-fueled incidents targeting Jewish, Muslim, Israeli, Palestinian, and Arab students on our college campuses have shown that we still have much work to do to uphold these values. Incidents such as hateful rhetoric, harassment, vandalism, and threats have been reported,¹ creating an environment of fear and vulnerability for students, many of whom have deep and personal connections to the region and the ongoing conflict.

At Stanford University, an Arab Muslim student was the victim of a hit-and-run, where the perpetrator shouted vulgar and racist remarks during his attack.² At Cornell University, a student posted violent threats online against the Jewish community, subsequently leading to his arrest.³ Sadly, these are just a few of the startling incidents reported across the country, and we must do all we can to prevent it from growing.

We want to commend the Department of Education for the creation of the Antisemitism Awareness Campaign, which lays out a set of initiatives to ensure that all students, including Jewish students, are able to attend school free from discrimination.⁴ Recent events have highlighted the urgency and importance of continuing and expanding this campaign, which we urge you to do.

¹ USA Today, "Jewish and Muslim organizations denounce attacks against college students," November 4, 2023, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2023/11/04/anti-jewish-muslim-attacks-rising-across-the-u-s-colleges/71457844007/>.

² The Washington Post, "Hit-and-run injuring Muslim Stanford student sparks hate-crime probe," November 6, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2023/11/06/muslim-stanford-student-hit-run-hate-crime/>.

³ The U.S. Department of Justice, "Cornell Student Arrested for Making Online Threats to Jewish Students on Campus," October 31, 2023, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndny/pr/cornell-student-arrested-making-online-threats-jewish-students-campus>.

⁴ The U.S. Department of Education, "U.S. Department of Education Launches Antisemitism Awareness Campaign," May 25, 2023, <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-launches-antisemitism-awareness-campaign>.

Similarly, in following the Administration’s recent announcement to establish the first-ever National Strategy to Counter Islamophobia,⁵ we urge you to build upon that and create an Islamophobia Awareness Campaign for educational institutions. Through this effort, it is critical to acknowledge that Islamophobia also hurts those who are not of the Muslim faith. Individuals perceived to be Muslim, such as members of the Christian Arab and Sikh community, have unfortunately experienced the pain of anti-Muslim hate.

As you work to combat these various acts of hate, we also ask you to expand outreach to Jewish, Muslim, Israeli, Palestinian, and Arab student communities. This outreach should aim to address the specific concerns and challenges faced by these communities and provide a platform for support and action. By actively listening and understanding their unique concerns, we can work towards creating an environment where students feel safe, heard, and protected.

Additionally, we were pleased to learn that the Department of Education recently issued a Dear Colleague reminding schools of their legal obligation to provide all students with a learning environment free from discrimination.⁶ This Dear Colleague included an updated discrimination complaint form, which specifies additional protections for students under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. We appreciate these efforts and request that you continue to provide comprehensive information and resources from the Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights to colleges and universities. These tools can empower educational institutions to respond effectively to and report discrimination, harassment, bias, and related incidents.

In the face of these challenges, it is essential that we stand together as a nation against discrimination, xenophobia, and bigotry. Hate has no place in America, and our educational institutions play a pivotal role in ensuring that.

We look forward to your continued dedication to this important issue. We are hopeful that, together, we can create a safer environment for students at our colleges and universities.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator

⁵ The White House, “Statement from White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre on President Biden’s Establishment of First-Ever National Strategy to Counter Islamophobia,” November 1, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/11/01/statement-from-white-house-press-secretary-karine-jean-pierre-on-president-bidens-establishment-of-first-ever-national-strategy-to-counter-islamophobia/>.

⁶ The U.S. Department of Education, “U.S. Department of Education Reminds Schools of Their Legal Obligation to Address Discrimination, Including Harassment,” November 7, 2023, <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-reminds-schools-their-legal-obligation-address-discrimination-including-harassment>.