



# FOCUS ON COMMUNAL PRIORITIES

February 2024

The Jewish community values the support of our New York congressional delegation and the many initiatives sponsored by our representatives and senators. These measures reflect a deep and abiding commitment to matters of concern to the Jewish community. We are grateful for the steadfast support from our New York congressional delegation and senate leadership over the years. Sadly, since the events of October 7, 2023, these concerns and priorities have only become more urgent, and we urge both the White House and Congress to pay heed to the vital matters outlined below, which have the robust backing from a broad section of the Jewish community. JCRC-NY's Congressional Breakfast is generously sponsored by Craig Newmark Philanthropies, and we extend our gratitude to all of our partners for making the 2024 Congressional Breakfast possible.

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# OCTOBER 7TH AND THE AFTERMATH



In an unprecedented move, as many Israelis were celebrating the festive Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah, the Iranian-backed terrorist group Hamas ruthlessly attacked Israeli civilians in the early morning hours of the Sabbath on Saturday, October 7, 2023. The subsequent days unfolded with an unsettling stream of reports detailing the widespread devastation and chaos across southern Israel, leaving a nation reeling in grief, and the worldwide Jewish community in shock over the depths of Hamas' barbarism and cruelty towards innocent civilians.

This day would come to be known as the single worst day of violence against the Jewish people since the Holocaust. Hamas terrorists savagely murdered an estimated 1,200 Israeli men, women, children, and babies while filming and uploading footage of their barbaric acts to their own social media channels, or the accounts of their victims using the victim's facial recognition function on their phone. 6000+ Israelis and foreign nationals working in the country,

## **ACTIONS NEEDED**

**BRING AN END TO THE HOSTAGE CRISIS.** In order to cause maximum physical and psychological harm, Hamas violently kidnapped over 240 hostages to Gaza and also paraded the bodies of dead Israelis in the streets of Gaza to cheers of onlookers. It is unclear exactly how many of the 132 estimated hostages remaining in Gaza, which include

American citizens and those of over a dozen other countries, are still alive, but as many as 23 have been declared dead. We know that they are being held under unimaginable circumstances, many underground in Hamas' terror tunnels, and all without adequate food, access to hygiene, or medical attention for their wounds. They continue to experience ongoing physical and mental trauma, and the International Committee of the Red Cross is denied access to the hostages by Hamas to ensure they are properly cared for. This is a global humanitarian crisis. *We ask Members of Congress to vigorously champion the immediate return of the remaining hostages and insist that this becomes an uncompromising prerequisite for any discussions or endorsements of a ceasefire.*

**PEACE WITH SAUDI ARABIA.** Foreign policy experts widely agree that Hamas strategically chose the timing of the October 7th attacks to disrupt positive advancements in Israeli-Saudi Arabian peace negotiations. Peace with Saudi Arabia would further reshape the geopolitical dynamics in the Middle East, building upon treaties signed with other Arab nations including Egypt in 1979, Jordan in 1994, and most recently the Abraham Accords with UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan in 2020. *JCRC-NY strongly encourages Congress to actively support the strengthening of relationships between Israel, Arab, and Muslim nations, whether through the Abraham Accords or other frameworks.*

**MISUSE OF UNITED NATIONS FUNDING.** The United Nations (UN) has a history of disproportionately condemning Israel, with bias only escalating since October 7th. JCRC-NY is delighted that the United States recently temporarily suspended funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the humanitarian body that works with Palestinians, in light of evidence that at least 12 UNRWA employees took part in the Oct. 7 Hamas terror attacks in Israel. UNRWA has since terminated the contracts of these individuals and is conducting its own investigation. The US is the UN's largest contributor; as an overall measure,

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we believe that enhanced oversight is required to scrutinize how billions allocated for humanitarian aid over two decades were redirected to fund Hamas terrorism instead of fostering peace efforts post-Israel's Gaza withdrawal in 2005. JCRC-NY demands that the complete funding pause by the US remain in place so long as the senior management of UNRWA, including Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of UNRWA for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, remains in place, due to its well documented bias and its proactive opposition to a peaceful resolution to this crisis.

## IRAN AND RELATED THREATS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Emerging details about the October 7th attack reveal alarming aspects of Iran's involvement and broader intentions involving Syria and Hezbollah. Iran's potential nuclear capabilities add another layer of concern, and Jihadist rhetoric about broadening targets to other democratic locations only heightens worries, posing significant threats to the U.S., Israel, and nations worldwide. Urgent and decisive action is imperative for international security. Congress plays a crucial role in countering their destabilizing activities. In light of these developments, the New York Jewish community prioritizes the following.

### **ACTIONS NEEDED**

#### **PREVENT IRAN FROM REACHING NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES.**

Iran reaching nuclear capacity poses one of the greatest risks to world peace. We commend the Biden Administration's previous actions against Iran's nuclear weapons program. *We urge Congress and international governing bodies to take action in the face of Iran's developing nuclear program. Congress and the Administration should collaborate with global allies to establish a fresh framework compelling Iran to dismantle, not merely delay, its nuclear program.*

#### **DEMAND IRAN END SUPPORT OF GLOBAL TERROR.**

Iran has long been involved in the sponsoring and support of worldwide terror groups. Congress must actively counter Iran's use of proxies and terrorist organizations for global aggression. *We call on Congress to insist on a complete*

*withdrawal of Iranian forces and their proxies from Syrian territory, particularly away from the Israeli border. Additionally, we urge Congress members to introduce legislation aimed at limiting Iran's capacity to support terrorist groups, including Hezbollah and Hamas.*

#### **IMPLEMENT SANCTIONS/DENY PAY TO SLAY.**

The firing of tens of thousands of missiles at targets within Israeli civilian neighborhoods had become commonplace before the October 7th attacks. Hamas continues to build and use a vast network of tunnels underneath hospitals, schools, and residential buildings in the areas it controls, putting innocent Gazans, including children, in danger. *We urge our partners in Congress to put even more economic pressure on Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and any affiliate or successor groups. We also urge Congress to continue to pressure the Palestinian Authority to end financial incentives to commit acts of murder and terror against Israelis.*

#### **ACCOUNTABILITY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS.**

No less important are the human and civil rights violations of all of these bad actors who violate and disregard the rights of their own citizens, especially those of women, and stamp down freedom of the press, freedom of association, and freedom of religion, as well as disparage the rights of its women and children. *We urge members of Congress to demand a comprehensive UN investigation into Iran's human rights violations; this is not only essential but a moral imperative.*

# SURGE OF ANTISEMITISM & ANTI-ZIONISM



The urgency to combat the alarming rise in antisemitic incidents cannot be overstated. Over the past few years, antisemitic incidents have been on the rise globally, including in the U.S. Since October 7th, antisemitic incidents in the U.S. have surged by 337%, setting a record, as reported by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). Between October 7th and December 7th, the ADL recorded 2,031 incidents — the highest two-month total since tracking began in 1979.

***...according to NYPD's 2023 data, from October to December 2023, hate crimes targeting Jews in New York City totaled more than in the entire rest of the year.***

The global rise in antisemitic incidents over the past year has cast a dark shadow over the U.S.. Here in New York City, according to NYPD's 2023 data, from October to December 2023, hate crimes targeting Jews in New York City totaled more than in the entire rest of the year, with 155 incidents of anti-Jewish hate crimes from January through September

and then a startling 162 incidents from October through the end of the year. When compared to 2022 data: antisemitic hate crimes increased 214% in October 2023 vs. October 2022. Recognizing the urgency of addressing antisemitism, JCRC-NY and UJA-Federation of NY established the Community Security Initiative (CSI) in 2020. This initiative serves as a vital security liaison between Jewish institutions and law enforcement agencies, offering safety training, terrorism vulnerability assessments, security procurement assistance, and incident response. The Jewish community in New York heavily relies on the support of law enforcement, particularly the New York City Police Department (NYPD), and we express our gratitude for its dedication to our safety.

Given the escalating levels of antisemitism and the imperative of Jewish safety, combating this surge remains the primary concern for the Jewish community.

## **ACTIONS NEEDED** CONTINUED ADOPTION OF IHRA DEFINITION OF ANTISEMITISM.

The Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of Antisemitism, adopted by the U.S. in 2016, includes both traditional forms of antisemitism and manifestations of Jew-hatred in the context of the State of Israel, also called anti-Zionism. The IHRA definition is designed to serve as a practical tool to recognize and combat

## ***Antisemitism and anti-Zionism persist as urgent challenges on college campuses...***

all forms of hatred and discrimination against Jews. We call upon Congress to persist as a vocal advocate for the global adoption and application of the IHRA Working Definition as a tool for education and data collection. This definition is a public service tool that aids in the identification and comprehensive addressing of antisemitism in all its manifestations.

**ADDRESSING ANTISEMITISM & ANTI-ZIONISM ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES.** Antisemitism and anti-Zionism persist as urgent challenges on college campuses, demanding immediate Congressional attention. The upswing in incidents within classrooms, student clubs, and campus life has left Jewish students feeling fearful and isolated, and often harassed due to their values and identity. It is vital that Congress clearly define antisemitism to help empower universities

to keep Jewish students safe amid the wave of threats and attacks they face. *JCRC-NY and UJA urge the passage of the bipartisan Antisemitism Awareness Act, H.R. 6090 introduced by Representative Lawler (R-NY), which would require the Department of Education to consider the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism and its contemporary examples when enforcing federal antidiscrimination laws. Defining and differentiating between antisemitism and legitimate critiques of Israeli policies will help universities, elected officials, and other stakeholders to differentiate criticism of Israel and its policies more easily from antisemitic hate speech. This bill would empower officials to more forcefully counter antisemitism and help keep Jewish students and communities safe.*

**CONTINUING BIPARTISAN CONGRESSIONAL TASK FORCE ON ANTISEMITISM.** *We urge our federal legislators to take action in response to increased hate crimes against Jews by advocating for the safety of Jewish communities through the continuation of the Bipartisan Congressional Task Force on Antisemitism in the 118th Congress.*

# **ISRAEL & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

The alliance between the U.S. and Israel is founded on a joint dedication to democratic principles, common strategic and security concerns, and mutually advantageous economic advancements. In a region where democratic principles are rare, the State of Israel stands as a resilient model of democracy. Since October 7th, Hamas and other terrorist organizations in the region have carried out constant attacks against Israeli civilians, including the indiscriminate firing of over 12,000 rockets and mortars at Israeli cities, towns, and kibbutzim across the country, causing deaths, physical injuries, mental anguish, destruction and damage to property and the displacement of over 150,000 Israelis.

## **ACTIONS NEEDED**

### **REPLENISHING IRON DOME AND RELATED FUNDING.**

The Hamas charter calls for the annihilation of Israel, and Hamas leaders continue to publicly vow to repeat the October 7th attacks until Israel is "wiped off the map." In addition, Hezbollah has been agitating along Israel's northern border with Lebanon by launching missiles at Israeli targets. The threat of a full-scale war along Israel's northern front is a possible reality. The Houthis in Yemen have also commenced attacks on the Red Sea preventing ships that they believe to be affiliated with Israel from crossing this vital shipping route. As the Biden administration and Congress develop funding

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plans for fiscal year 2025, the disbursement of military aid to Israel remains a top priority. Despite pressure from some constituencies, we thank the Biden administration for remaining adamant that it will not place conditions on military aid it provides to Israel. *While more must be done, we urge our Members of Congress to remain dedicated to maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge, consistent with H.R. 6126, the Israel Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, which passed the House on a bipartisan basis and was the beginning of the Israel Aid process. The bill provides critical funding towards Israel's defense, including, but not limited to, the continuation of funding for the Iron Dome, Iron Beam, David's Sling, Arrow III, and Arrow II programs, which are critical in saving the lives of Israeli civilians.*

# HUMAN SERVICES AND NONPROFITS

UJA-Federation of New York cares for New Yorkers of all backgrounds and responds to crises close to home and far away. As the largest local philanthropy in the nation, UJA provides approximately \$180 million annually in targeted and unrestricted grants to nonprofits in New York, in Israel, and around the world to further this mission. UJA's partnership with a network of nonprofit providers throughout New York City, Long Island, and Westchester complements and leverages the fiscal and policy foundation our government provides to care for New Yorkers. This public-private partnership is essential to keeping communities strong and vibrant, and UJA is committed to sustaining our nonprofit agency partners.

UJA's federal policy and programmatic priorities, which illuminate the values of caring for those in need and responding to crisis have been impacted dramatically by the horrific events of October 7th and beyond.

In the wake of the devastating events of October 7, UJA immediately allocated \$10 million in emergency funding to support needs on the ground in Israel. UJA has since raised more than \$170 million through our Emergency Campaign and has distributed \$71 million to provide critical support for our nonprofit partners in Israel. We also have distributed \$5.5 million in emergency funding to meet emergency needs in New York resulting from the war.

In addition, since October 7, UJA has been continuing our work with our federal partners to support Israel and combat the national rise in antisemitism. With Jewish students on college campuses threatened, discrimination in the workplace and incidents in our schools on the rise, UJA and our partners are taking steps to enact policies that will protect and enhance the Jewish community.

Several examples of UJA's federal policy concerns are highlighted below.

## COMBAT ANTISEMITISM

**SUPPORT AND IMPLEMENT WHITE HOUSE STRATEGY TO COUNTER ANTISEMITISM.** As we know well, antisemitism began escalating in America long before October 7. Last May, the White House released the first-ever "National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism" which included detailed action plans to raise awareness of antisemitism and its threat to American democracy, protect Jewish communities, reverse the normalization of antisemitism, and build cross-community solidarity.

UJA has been leading the charge in moving these strategies forward in New York, particularly in the area of education. Last fall, we convened over 100 key federal, state, and city officials to discuss what is needed to address the growing

antisemitism in K-12 public and independent schools. The participants, people of many diverse backgrounds and beliefs, came together to discuss specific strategies for creating school environments that have zero tolerance for antisemitism and other forms of hate.

We're leading efforts to implement the White House's "National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism" and providing training and material to DEI and HR professionals to help them understand the contemporary face of antisemitism and support Jewish employees in the workplace. We also continue to work with the Governor and the New York State Legislature to take steps to secure our communities against hate crimes.



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**INCREASE FUNDING FOR THE NONPROFIT SECURITY GRANT PROGRAM (NSGP):**

In 2023, insufficient funding levels for the NSGP meant that only 42% of applications were accepted, even though the program was funded at \$305 million annually. UJA requests Members of Congress to include \$500 million for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program in the final FY24 appropriations bill, and urge the highest possible funding for NSGP in any national security emergency supplemental package. This emergency funding would help Jewish communities secure synagogues, day schools, and other institutions in providing the necessary security infrastructure as communities grapple with the aftermath of the October 7th attacks.

We support an annual, aggregate funding level of \$500 million for the NSGP to meet the needs of Jewish and other community organizations that rely on grants to support their

security plans. In addition to the FY24 appropriations bill, UJA also supports Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer’s (D-NY) proposal that Congress provide \$1 billion in emergency funding to the NSGP.

***UJA has been leading the charge in moving these strategies forward in New York, particularly in the area of education.***

*It is critical that Congress appropriate the highest possible funding to meet the rising demand and address the increased dangers facing the Jewish communities. UJA and JCRC-NY also urge the New York congressional delegation to work with FEMA to ensure that New York State receives*

*an appropriate share of NSGP funding.*

The Nonprofit Security Grant Program is one of UJA’s most important federal priorities and is essential to the Jewish community’s ability to enhance our physical security by providing greater access to resources that keep our communities safe.

# HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



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**THE HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (HSAP)** is a critical federal grant that has been a lifeline for vulnerable Holocaust survivors. The Administration for Community Living has supported expanding the program's capacity to assist other seniors as many older adults in the United States have been exposed to trauma, including veterans, first responders, refugees, and survivors of natural disasters.

*Congress should enhance HSAP's modest appropriation to \$10 million annually, in step with the program's progress and opportunity for greater development and applicability. This increased funding would ensure that serving Holocaust survivors remains a priority of the program, while at the same time enhancing services and opportunities for other older adult populations.*

Approximately 40 percent of the Holocaust survivors who reside in the metropolitan New York area live in poverty.

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As survivors age, their needs become more complex and the cost of care rises. Many survivors subsist on fixed incomes that do not accommodate the escalating costs of food, rent, healthcare, and utilities. Survivors experience health complications beyond the normal scope of aging. They live with the aftermath of severe trauma and many experience chronic post-traumatic stress disorder, including higher rates of depression and anxiety, especially when combined with the effects of Alzheimer's and dementia.

The horrific events of October 7 and the following surge of antisemitism has retraumatized many Holocaust survivors. Today, survivors range in age from late 70s to more than 100 years old, and as they age, they require even more care. While the number of survivors declines each year, the cost of care per individual continues to increase.



# ALLEVIATE FOOD INSECURITY

**SUPPORT THE PROTECTION AND EXPANSION OF FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS:** For over a century, UJA has worked to provide access to appropriate nutrition for those who face food insecurity. UJA is deeply committed to food supports that offer quality, encourage health, are dignity-giving, and are culturally appropriate. An estimated 2.3 million New Yorkers, including 1 in every 6 of the State's children are struggling with hunger, according to Feeding America. The Covid crisis and the challenges of the economy that followed compounded this situation. *The pandemic highlighted the importance and effectiveness of federal child nutrition programs in combating hunger, and UJA supports the protection and expansion of federal nutrition programs. Several programmatic expansions that permitted the expanded reach of these programs during the pandemic, with increased funding and broadened eligibility, should be adopted permanently, including the expansion of community eligibility for free school meals and continued WIC delivery flexibility.*

***Given this insufficient access to government food sources and no additional federal funding, kosher pantries are compelled to rely on philanthropy and private funds...***

**INCREASE AVAILABILITY OF KOSHER FOOD IN THE EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TEFAP):** Currently, the TEFAP commodities list requires that out of 133 total products, only nine are required to have kosher certification. Given this insufficient access to government food sources and no additional federal funding, kosher pantries are compelled to rely on philanthropy and private funds to procure appropriate food items to meet demand. Many food banks' abilities to provide communities with appropriate food are hindered by a lack of knowledge of kosher requirements, certification needs and cultural norms. The federal government must act to increase access to kosher products in TEFAP, and to educate food banks about kosher food to more effectively serve those who require culturally appropriate food.

# ENHANCE CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE MEALS IN SCHOOLS

UJA urges the government to ensure that school meal programs meet the appropriate kosher standards required by students. School lunch is critical to student health and well-being and ensures that students have the nutrition they need to learn

throughout the day. However, thousands of children are at risk of being left out of meal programs because of the lack of culturally appropriate options, specifically kosher food at levels reflecting religious standards.

# EMERGENCY FOOD AND SHELTER PROGRAM

**THE EMERGENCY FOOD AND SHELTER PROGRAM (EFSP)** is a critical backstop to assist families and individuals facing economic emergencies. Since its inception in 1983, EFSP has been a major unemployment and poverty safety net for millions of Americans at risk of food insecurity and homelessness. This public-private partnership between FEMA and six national agencies provides income support to low-income New Yorkers on an emergency basis to prevent hunger, provide shelter, and support basic energy needs. In New York City, EFSP is part of an essential support system,

funding soup kitchens, pantries and shelters and assisting thousands of households on the verge of eviction or loss of essential utility services.

*Since its inception in 1983, EFSP has been a major unemployment and poverty safety net for millions of Americans at risk...*

The EFSP reimburses organizations, including Jewish agencies across the country, for providing shelter and housing to families and individuals in dire need, as well as supporting migrants who have crossed the southern U.S. border. *Robust funding*

*is critical to ensure that social service providers can support every individual and family in crisis.*



# FIGHT CHILD POVERTY

**THE CHILD TAX CREDIT (CTC) IS A PROVEN BIPARTISAN PROGRAM THAT SUPPORTS CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, AND THE UJA WOULD URGE ITS EXPANSION.** The American Rescue Plan's CTC expansion helped to lift millions of families out of poverty. Several months ago, the Census Bureau released new data confirming that increases in the

Child Tax Credit led to a record decline in child poverty rates, totaling a 46 percent decrease bringing levels to 5.2 percent in 2021 overall. These figures represent the lowest recorded level of child poverty in recent history. The CTC payments also brought real economic benefits to local economies and small businesses by putting dollars in the pockets of consumers.

# ENCOURAGE CHARITABLE GIVING



## **UJA BELIEVES THAT TAX POLICIES SHOULD INCENTIVIZE CHARITABLE GIVING, ENABLING NONPROFITS TO SERVE THE PUBLIC GOOD AND ADDRESS COMMUNITY NEEDS EFFECTIVELY, WHILE MAINTAINING STRONG SAFEGUARDS AGAINST USING PUBLIC FUNDS FOR RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY.**

It is paramount that public policy strengthen incentives for individuals to contribute their time and money to the nonprofit organizations whose missions they support. We will continue to encourage the efficient and responsible

administration of national tax policy to support and encourage philanthropic activity.

Charitable tax deduction, donor-advised funds, and the IRA charitable rollover encourage donors to support the causes they value most strongly. We advocate for these tax vehicles and others, such as enhancing and safeguarding an “above the line” charitable deduction for those who do not itemize, as well as policies that help nonprofits work smarter and better.

# ENACT SENSIBLE GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION MEASURES

Firearm deaths remain a profound and growing public health problem in the United States. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveals that in 2020, 79% of all homicides and 53% of all suicides involved firearms. From 2019 to 2020, the firearm homicide rate increased about 35%, and the firearm suicide rate stayed high. The 2020 firearm homicide rate was the highest recorded in over 25 years.

**UJA CALLS ON ELECTED OFFICIALS TO ADVANCE COMMUNITY SAFETY, WITH REASONABLE GUN SAFETY MEASURES.** We urge Congress to adopt a comprehensive and multipronged approach to achieve sensible gun violence prevention measures through status-based restrictions, more regulation of gun sales and criminal law enhancements, new ownership responsibilities, consumer safety protections, hardware and ammunition limits, data-driven study of gun impacts, and robust efforts to ensure that every person in need has access to quality mental health care.



## OUR MISSION

JCRC-NY builds relationships to advance the values, interests, and security of the Jewish community and to create a more interconnected New York for all.

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