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WE MUST PROTECT JEWISH STUDENTS AS THEY HEAD BACK TO SCHOOL

By Rabbi Noah Farkas, President & CEO, Jewish Federation Los Angeles

As Jewish students prepare to go back to college, we must all acknowledge what happened on campus to Jewish students last year was a national failure and moral tragedy. As the President and CEO of Jewish Federation Los Angeles and a leader of [the second largest population of Jews in the world outside Israel](#) I have seen firsthand just how tenuous and frightening this climate has become.

The failure to uphold rules around protests, the slow and inept response by security, and the lack of uniform rules enforcement, led to students and faculty being harassed, doxed, and denied entry to parts of campus just for openly identifying as Jewish. Things have gotten so bad that [Congress has stepped in to investigate](#) and, in some cases last year, [forced Jewish students to question their place on campus and create their own graduation](#).

This must never happen again.

Just as the [anti-Israel protesters have promised to return to disrupt campus life](#), we too have been planning a strategy based on democratic values that will support our local students and faculty and educate others. The strategy has three components.

1. Supporting the Campus Jewish Community

Unlike the anti-Israel protest groups who use students to [further their political agenda](#), we need to center the experience of our Jewish students and faculty through partnerships. Here in Los Angeles, we organize and work closely with Hillel, Chabad, Jewish Graduate Student Initiative, the Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus, and other partners to ensure students are supported, protected, and have the resources they need to be safe.

Creating a strong community on campus is not just about safety. It's also about sparking joyful experiences. Alongside our partners at the Board of Rabbis of Southern California, we routinely sponsor events such as the Passover Shabbat dinner for over 100 students at Hillel at UCLA to unite our community.

2. **Uniting Jewish Students Across Los Angeles**

Jewish students must know that they not only have allies on their own campuses, but are part of a welcoming community of students around Los Angeles. Last year, we launched our [Campus Impact Network](#) (CIN), a program that cultivates a coalition of informed Jewish student leaders on local college campuses, while also empowering these leaders to effect positive change at their schools.

Focused on education, training, civic engagement, and community organizing, CIN gives Jewish and like-minded student leaders the tools they need to take an active on-campus role in civic and Jewish issues, build coalitions with allies, and use their voices to elevate the Jewish experience. Working in coordination with the Hillel at UCLA, USC Hillel, Hillel 818, Hillel at Santa Monica Community College and Occidental College Hillel, CIN seeks a unified approach to engaging the student body.

3. **Ensuring Universities Uphold Their True Purpose**

Universities are meant to maintain open inquiry and encourage critical thinking. On college campuses, burgeoning minds can learn - and practice - the expression of free speech, the right to assemble, and the importance of rules-based self-regulation. Unfortunately, the campus environment fostered in the current climate around Israel has failed to live up to this ideal. Universities regularly refused to follow their own codes of conduct, did not apply discipline fairly and clearly, and allowed illegal behavior by both students and faculty.

We do not believe in using students to advance our political positions, which sets us apart from the organizers of the anti-Israel protests, many of whom are not students. Rather, we are using our skills and resources to support students and faculty so they can freely and safely share their ideas.

We stand firmly with rules-based democracy. At UCLA, [we sent a letter](#) to Chancellor Block, Executive Vice Chancellor Hunt, and Administrative Vice Chancellor Beck calling for order. We also authored and [sent a letter](#), signed by 38 California-based organizations, to the University of California Regents urging them to take 12 proactive steps to protect Jewish students and create clear solutions to support a thriving Jewish life. Along with Jewish Public Affairs Committee of California and JCRC Bay Area, we [sent a letter](#) to UC President Drake and CSU Chancellor Garcia urging them to adopt clear guardrails to ensure that boycott and divestment tactics are not considered.

Our hope is that this model of creating community and supporting the free and safe expression of ideas inspires others like it across the country. Not just for Jewish students, but for any marginalized group experiencing pain and fear. By centering

both the student and faculty experience, and advocating for a strong, rules-based order, we can return campus life to what it is meant to be - a vibrant, positive, constructive civic incubator that produces leaders who will propel our great democracy forward.