

Milwaukee Jewish Federation: Commends passage of bill to fight antisemitism

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MILWAUKEE, Wisconsin – The Milwaukee Jewish Federation applauds the Senate passage of SB445/AB446, anti-hate legislation based on the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism. The Senate passed a consensus vote today, following an earlier Assembly vote of 66-33 in favor of passage of the companion bill AB446. This legislation now goes to Governor Tony Evers for the signing of this bipartisan legislation.

We are proud that Wisconsin is joining 37 other states and numerous other nations in adopting legislation that traces back to the Obama administration's effort to address a global rise in antisemitism. We commend both bodies, and especially Democratic and Republican legislators who understand that this isn't about partisan politics — it is about ensuring the State of Wisconsin has an important tool to respond to antisemitism in Wisconsin.

Hundreds of members of the Jewish community throughout the state advocated in support of the IHRA bill, along with many local and national Jewish organizations. We are also grateful to Forward Latino, National Association of Social Workers – Wisconsin Chapter, Wisconsin Catholic Conference, and Wisconsin Council of Religious and Independent Schools for their respective support of Wisconsin adopting the IHRA definition.

The IHRA definition of antisemitism defines antisemitism as a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews, or in holding Jews collectively responsible for the actions of the nation of Israel. It includes both rhetorical and physical manifestations directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals, their

property, and Jewish institutions. The definition is accompanied by examples that illustrate how antisemitism appears today, from classic conspiracy theories to rhetoric that denies Jewish people the right to self-determination.

Opponents of these bills alleged that they would prohibit criticism of the State of Israel and would silence free speech, despite no record of anything like this happening in any of the other 37 states. The bills address these falsehoods directly. The IHRA definition does not regulate speech or create penalties. It simply gives governments, educators, and institutions a consistent tool for identifying antisemitic bias when enforcing existing anti-discrimination and hate-crime laws.

Wisconsin has seen an almost 500% increase in reported antisemitic incidents in the last 10 years. Antisemitism is on the rise NOW, and words alone will not help respond to the incidents. We need our leaders to define and enact tools so that when antisemitic sentiment manifests into illegal actions, there are timely and appropriate responses.

No single law can end hate. But this one gives us the tools to name it, to see it and to stop it before it turns violent. We are grateful to the Assembly and Senate leaders who worked to make the passage of this important bill bipartisan and for keeping the focus on the safety and security of the Jewish community throughout Wisconsin.