

To: The Honorable Susan E. Rice, Domestic Policy Advisor
Dr. Liz Sherwood-Randall, Homeland Security Advisor

Cc: Melissa Rogers, Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based &
Neighborhood Partnerships
Alex Pascal, Special Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy

From: Jamie Beran, CEO, Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
Rabbi Jason Kimelman-Block, Washington Director, Bend the Arc: Jewish Action

Re: Recommendations for Inter-Agency Group To Counter Antisemitism, Islamophobia, And
Related Forms Of Bias And Discrimination

Date: February 9, 2023

We are grateful to this administration for its commitment to countering antisemitism, anti-Muslim and Arab bigotry, and other forms of bias and discrimination in this country. The following are Bend the Arc: Jewish Action's recommendations that we hope will inform the upcoming national strategy to counter antisemitism. With dozens of chapters and affiliates across the country, we are the largest American Jewish social justice organization that is focused exclusively on domestic policy issues. Thank you for your consideration of the below recommendations.

Antisemitism must not be addressed in isolation

Antisemitism does not occur in isolation; it is a key part of the machinery that authoritarian movements and individuals use to build and hold on to power. When we address antisemitism in isolation, we may often (intentionally or unintentionally) reinforce anti-Black racism, anti-Muslim and anti-Arab bigotry, and xenophobia—which not only prevents us from effectively fighting these interlocking oppressions, we also do further harm to Jewish people of Color and fellow targets of white nationalist movements. In considering action steps, we encourage you to examine the ways in which certain steps to combat antisemitism might have a negative impact on other targeted communities. For example, efforts that conflate criticism of the State of Israel with antisemitism can negatively impact many Muslim and Arab Americans. Efforts to protect synagogues that focus exclusively on policing can harm people of color—including among synagogue members, clergy and staff, as well as in synagogues' broader communities—who are often harmed by police.

As an active member of the Hate Crimes Task Force, we want to underline our coalition's key ask from the United We Stand Summit to reinstate the Inter-Agency Hate Crimes Task Force. It's an excellent model of addressing these issues comprehensively, rather than focusing on one impacted community at a time.

On Definitions

Many well-meaning Jewish organizations, elected officials, and policymakers are spending too much time and energy focusing on and advocating for a specific definition of antisemitism. To us, that approach is misguided. There is no other targeted community that is asked to spend this amount of time and energy on how to define the bigotry or oppression that harms us. Bigotries are contextual and so codified, static definitions are neither essential nor helpful tools for fighting bigotry. We also know from decades of work engaging with government entities—both on antisemitism and on other forms of bias motivated harm—that a lack of a codified definition does not prevent or preclude necessary and important training. Specifically, the debate over the proper use and “adoption” of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism has become divisive both inside and outside Jewish communities. We strongly discourage the Administration from any further codification of an antisemitism definition.

Community Safety

In order to enhance community safety, we recommend the following:

- Direct funds, including Nonprofit Security Grant Program funds, towards deescalation training and community-based support led by NGOs rather than law enforcement so communities can be self sufficient in their own security

An example of the kind of efforts we believe support our safety is one that Bend the Arc’s New Mexico Chapter is currently leading. They spent the last year working with one of their local synagogues to develop a safety plan that did not include armed policing, or law enforcement-led training. The work drew from the wealth of wisdom that exists already within impacted communities, particularly Black-led organizations. The feedback from the congregation was positive, appreciative, and promising. One member of the synagogue shared that having a community safety team meant “The whole congregation calmed down. It’s not just horrible things that are so contagious. It’s really the sense of community that is contagious. I felt like it permeated the whole high holiday experience for everybody.” Another synagogue member said “Members of my family who are Jews of Color said they never before felt the congregation was as welcoming.” The Chapter and synagogue are now expanding this program with a vision of bringing these lessons-learned and safety models to additional communities.

We also encourage the administration to consider as part of a longer-term vision, housing a number of community safety initiatives, including the Nonprofit Security Grants Program, within the Department of Health and Human Services, rather than the Department of Homeland Security, as that would more fully align with the administration’s stated goal of taking a public health approach to violence prevention.

- Direct agencies to make funds available for local governments to do trainings on antisemitism, anti-Muslim and Arab bigotry, and anti-Black racism, etc.

More training and education are needed so that government officials not only understand different forms of oppression that harm the communities they serve, but how they are interrelated. Guidelines for trainings and trainers should be strictly vetted so as not to further perpetuate stereotypes against Muslims and other targeted groups, as has [been reported](#) in the past.

- We appreciate the administration's efforts to address extremism in the military, and [improve vetting of new federal law enforcement hires](#), but we encourage a much wider effort to prohibit law enforcement agencies and officers from affiliating with and being infiltrated by violent white supremacist groups.

It is [well-documented](#) that the white supremacist movement has infiltrated law enforcement, and that the government's response to this issue has been strikingly insufficient. We ask the Biden Administration to direct the DOJ to examine law enforcement associations with white supremacist and other far-right militant groups to assess the scope and nature of the problem in a report to Congress, and develop a national strategy based on this review. We also urge the administration to consider executive actions that could fill gaps created by Congress's [refusal to enact](#) provisions in the most recent National Defense Authorization Act that aimed at addressing extremism in the military. A national strategy should ensure U.S. Attorneys and FBI offices across the country properly prioritize these investigations and harmonize their tactics to guarantee equal justice for all. Our colleague Michael German's report [Hidden in Plain Sight: Racism, White Supremacy, and Far-Right Militancy in Law Enforcement](#) contains additional recommendations.