



April 30, 2025

The Honorable Members of the Senate Special Committee on Aging
G16 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Gillibrand,

Thank you for your work to address antisemitism and for holding the hearing, *Never Again: Addressing the Rise of Antisemitism and Supporting Older Americans*, on April 30, 2025. It is an honor to submit testimony for the record.

The Jewish Federations of North America proudly represents 146 independent Federations and a network of 300 smaller communities across the continent. Our mission is to build flourishing Jewish communities. We protect and enhance the well-being of Jews worldwide through meaningful contributions to community, Israel, and civil society. In 2024, Jewish communities experienced 8,354 reported antisemitic incidents – the highest number recorded in a single year according to the Anti-Defamation League. As we know, antisemitism affects us all, including older people in our community. Too often, older voices are not heard. This is why we work to give voice to Holocaust survivors and other older Americans. Here are some stories of how Holocaust survivors are experiencing antisemitism around the country.

Survivors Speak: Facing Antisemitism in America Today

In **Chicago, Illinois**, a Holocaust survivor's front door was vandalized with antisemitic language. A neighbor was the first to notice, and when they remarked that the survivor seemed relatively unfazed, the survivor said, "I cannot show fear. It's not an option. I cannot show them I'm afraid." She refused to take down her mezuzah and continued to live her normal life. On the other hand, the agency serving Holocaust survivors recently received a generous donation of mezuzot for their clients' doorposts. Almost no clients wanted one, presumably out of concern for identifying their home as a Jewish home.

A Holocaust survivor couple in **Boca Raton, Florida**, shared a story about their Jewish grandson who was harassed during anti-Israel protests at a

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university in the northeast. The grandson was pressured by his friends to join anti-Israel protests, and when he refused, he was shunned and antagonized for being Jewish and supporting Israel. It was devastating for him to learn he could not trust people who previously had been cordial and with whom he had enjoyed activities together. The Holocaust survivor grandparents were deeply affected.

Other survivors in **Boca Raton** articulated that “it feels like Germany all over again,” retraumatized by current events in Israel and antisemitism. Survivors were saying, “It feels so much like Germany. It started with casual remarks, then rallies, we didn’t think this would ever happen again and here it is.”

A Holocaust survivor in **Columbus, Ohio**, applied for an Austrian Passport. “Even though I never thought I would ever go back to Austria after my father was taken away to the camps,” he wrote, “I now look at Austria as a potential safe place to run to with the rise of antisemitism and destruction of all social services here in the U.S.”

Several Holocaust survivors have stopped attending public events that have a Jewish focus because they are concerned about their safety. They have reason to be concerned. When the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra performed in **San Diego, California**, protestors blocked some cars with survivors in them from getting to the concert hall. The survivors were rattled by the experience.

While giving a speech at a Holocaust remembrance gathering in **San Diego**, a 90 year old Holocaust survivor shared how much anxiety she is living with because of what she sees and hears around her. She feels we are on a precipice of another Holocaust, as she once again experiences behaviors, rhetoric and propaganda that appears to blame the Jewish people for today’s societal problems. Another survivor warned that “Never Again” is happening once more.

A prominent Holocaust survivor from **Queens, New York**, has been extremely traumatized by the increasing antisemitism. Seeing Jewish college students being accosted on the college campus has brought back terrible memories from the past. An elderly Bukharian victim of trauma living in Queens has heard about how people who are visibly Jewish have been verbally abused on the streets of New York. Survivors have also drawn a parallel between the hostages being held in Gaza to people being held by the Nazis.

The wife and daughter of Holocaust survivors in **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**, said that every time she experiences antisemitism, she feels the urge to flee. When instances of antisemitism had become prevalent in Ukraine where she previously lived, she made the decision to leave within two days. When she hears about antisemitism now, she feels her trauma resurfacing.



There is a Holocaust survivor in **Cincinnati, Ohio**, who frequently shares her Holocaust story with public audiences because she knows how important it is to teach the lessons of the Holocaust. However, after she experienced antisemitism in some schools and public settings where she had been speaking, she is now worried about someone coming to her house to harm her.

As a group, Holocaust survivors in **Cincinnati** have taken action. Upon learning about antisemitism on college campuses, the survivors expressed their sadness and disappointment that after everything they lived through during the Holocaust, young people today were still experiencing this hatred. Guided by their belief in the resilience of the Jewish people, the survivors penned an inspirational letter to offer wisdom, comfort, and encouragement to the students. The University of Cincinnati Hillel invited the survivors to read the letter to students at a Shabbat gathering. The local news covered the event on TV, and the newspaper published the letter. Finally, the Holocaust survivors read the letter at Cincinnati's October 7th commemoration to a standing ovation. Through these activities, the survivors turned a feeling of helplessness into a feeling of power and influence.

Holocaust survivors in **New York, NY**, who attend a weekly virtual class together often reference the similarities between today and the antisemitism they experienced in Europe. They are shocked this is happening in the United States, the country that became their new home and provided safety and the ability to build a new life. They ask, "How could this be happening again? When will they leave us alone in peace? How could this country allow this?"

Also in **New York, NY**, members of a support group for children of Holocaust survivors shared how they are removing their mezuzot from their doorposts or not wearing their star of David necklace to try to protect themselves. One person expressed fear and worry about having a medical procedure done by someone who wasn't Jewish, and another specifically only sees doctors who are Jewish. Another shared that she was considering leaving her synagogue because antisemitism wasn't talked about, despite it being very present in the community, and as a result it made her feel very alone and isolated. Another group member talked about how she was bullied and ridiculed as a child for being Jewish in a school where she was one of the only Jewish people and this trauma is coming back up for her now.

These stories demonstrate how Holocaust survivors and their families have been re-traumatized. Many are avoiding public gatherings, concealing their Jewish identities, and planning their "escapes" from the antisemitism of the United States. Others are taking action. These are mechanisms to cope with the trauma.



From Survival to Support: Meeting the Needs of Holocaust Survivors Today

Holocaust survivors are resilient people who are once again having to face hatred and withstand fear because they are Jewish. The attacks on Israel on October 7, 2023, and the continued captivity of innocent hostages is excruciatingly painful to all Israelis, to all Jews, and to all of humanity. But for Holocaust survivors, the pain evokes deep torture from their past, laced with the sorrow and disappointment that the world did not learn their lessons.

Holocaust survivors need our continued love and care. They need outlets to channel their sadness into action, to help, to make a difference. And, importantly, they need to be able to access supports, especially those who are living in poverty, so they can age and live comfortably at this stage in their lives.

This is why JFNA runs the “national resource center for older individuals experiencing the long-term and adverse consequences of trauma,” which is authorized in the Older Americans Act of 2020. JFNA’s Center on Aging, Trauma, and Holocaust Survivor Care improves the quality of care for Holocaust survivors like the ones described, and all older people in this country.

This national resource center, which is funded in part by the Holocaust Survivor Assistance Program (HSAP), has developed the person-centered, trauma-informed (PCTI) approach to care, using lessons learned from serving Holocaust survivors over decades. To be person-centered, trauma-informed means to recognize that a history of trauma impacts people as they age, and therefore develop services and supports that minimize the risk of re-traumatization.

Take, for example, a congregate meal serving older adults. For this meal to be person-centered, trauma-informed, you would have plated meals. You would not have a buffet line, because the person at the end of the line may worry there will not be enough food by the time he gets to the front of the line. Due to ongoing or past experience with food insecurity – or in a Holocaust survivor’s case, starvation – he may experience anxiety or re-traumatization waiting in line, and he may not even know why. But if he is uncomfortable, he will not come back for the next lunch program. He may go hungry, lack vitamins, or become socially isolated, which can lead to falls and a host of other health problems.

In a PCTI meal program, you would have plated meals, with Ziploc bags or containers already on the tables, so that everyone knows there will be an abundance of food and you are welcome to take it home.

This is a low-cost intervention. Plastic Ziploc bags are cheap. But the knowledge and training of staff to know to do this takes investment.



The investment is well worth it – keeping people healthier, avoiding hospitalizations, and enabling older Americans to live at home with their families and communities. Indeed, if the PCTI approach were universal, more older individuals would be able to access and thrive with the services.

The Holocaust Survivor Assistance Program’s (HSAP) role in supporting the Center and its work cannot be underestimated.

Over the last decade, the Center on Aging, Trauma, and Holocaust survivor care has funded over 400 PCTI programs across the country. Each of these grants takes a program that meets needs such as food, housing, or transportation and uses the PCTI approach in every aspect of the program – from intake, to service delivery, to program evaluation.

Since HSAP’s inception, the Center has served approximately 48,000 Holocaust survivors, 19,000 older adults with a history of trauma, 9,000 family caregivers, and provided 23,000 professional service providers and volunteers with training – all using the PCTI approach.

Indeed, if the PCTI approach were universal, more older individuals would be able to access and thrive with the services. If services are not person-centered, trauma-informed, survivors and others will not access services. They will go without, and they will not get their basic needs met. They may end up in a hospital or nursing home. This would be costly.

We can’t afford to offer services that people don’t use – or don’t respond well to.

In addition, families and friends who take care of Holocaust survivors and other older adults need to recognize that past trauma in their loved ones’ lives impacts their ability to access and accept care today. Families need this training to best care for their loved ones. The market value for the labor provided by unpaid family caregiving is an estimated \$522 billion per year, according to an Administration for Community Living 2024 report to Congress. If the family and friend caregivers are not able to provide care in a PCTI way, and if they are not able to receive support for themselves in a PCTI way, they will not be able to keep giving their free labor. Health and quality of life will suffer. Our county cannot afford this.

PCTI services lead to more affordable aging and enable Holocaust survivors and other older Americans to age in place in their homes and communities, where people want to remain.

Oftentimes, if a provider does not use the concepts of PCTI care, the sights and sounds of medical settings and institutions can lead to re-traumatization



in Holocaust survivors. On top of this inadvertent re-traumatization, Holocaust survivors and others are dealing with outright antisemitism in health care.

Antisemitism in the Healing Professions: A Threat to Care and Public Trust

Discrimination and bias against the Jewish community in the healthcare sector, including medical schools and major hospital centers, have grown to new heights since the October 7th attacks. Antisemitism in healthcare is a threat not only to those directly targeted but also to the entire medical care system, impacting medical students, practitioners, and patients who face harassment and exclusion based on their beliefs.

The Journal of General Internal Medicine found in a survey that 88.8% of Jewish medical professionals experienced antisemitism in the year after Hamas's October 7th terrorist attack on Israel, compared to 40% in the year prior – a dramatic and alarming increase. More than a quarter reported feeling “unsafe or threatened due to antisemitic incidents.” A survey from the Journal of Religion and Health also found that nearly 75% of Jewish medical professionals had been exposed to antisemitism online.

In the mental health space, antisemitic bias has become increasingly apparent and institutionalized. A notable example is the emergence of the “decolonizing therapy” movement, which has at times advanced narratives framing Zionism as a form of mental illness and depicting Jews as inherent “oppressors.” Such rhetoric dangerously misrepresents Jewish identity and history, while also fostering animosity toward Jewish therapists and clients. This atmosphere compromises the safety and ethical foundation of therapeutic environments.

There have also been reports of Jewish individuals being dropped by their therapists following the events of October 7th, and “referral blacklists” have circulated aiming to exclude Jewish or Zionist providers. The organizer of a Facebook group for “anti-racist” therapists created a list of suspected “Zionist” therapists – Jews – to be blacklisted, accusing them of “white supremacy.” Another Facebook group with 25,000 members requires members to be “Pro Palestine,” a requirement apparently added after October 7th. These actions are clear violations of core ethical standards, professional responsibilities, and anti-discrimination principles.

Antisemitism within medical institutions remains a significant concern. Harmful statements made by influential figures have led many Jewish families to question whether their loved ones can expect fair and empathetic treatment. Jewish doctors and practitioners have felt increasingly ostracized within professional associations, prompting the formation of groups such as the American Jewish Medical Association, the Association of Jewish Psychologists, and Psychologists Against Antisemitism.



This kind of bigotry not only endangers the well-being of Jewish patients including older Americans but also erodes the ethical principles at the heart of medical practice, where commitment to the patient should be paramount. The presence of unchecked antisemitism in healthcare not only endangers Jewish professionals but corrodes public trust in medical institutions and violates the ethical foundation of the profession.

At a time when Holocaust survivors and others in the Jewish community are facing antisemitism, they are turning more and more to Jewish organizations, agencies, and providers to meet their healthcare needs.

Honoring The Lessons, Meeting Today's Challenge

In conclusion, Holocaust survivors and others in the community are experiencing antisemitism at alarming levels. We must listen when Holocaust survivors are telling us their experiences. We must fight antisemitism while caring for older people who are experiencing it. And our care must be person-centered, trauma-informed. Holocaust survivors are our teachers, and now their lessons are helping us to improve healthcare in homes, communities, and medical settings for everyone.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

The Honorable Eric D. Fingerhut
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