
LOCAL

Antisemitism task force takes shape in Ithaca: Why group is sharing concerns

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Key Points

There have been several high-profile antisemitic attacks across the country recently, including a Molotov cocktail attack on demonstrators in Boulder.

Whether its due to political tensions or rising threats in the Middle East, acts of hostility or prejudice against Jews continue to occur in Ithaca as they do elsewhere.

The group has documented several incidents, including a Jewish resident allegedly being refused service at an Ithaca eatery.

Editor's Note: This article was edited to correctly name members of the Antisemitism Task Force

Concerned citizens and prominent figures in the [Ithaca Area United Jewish Community](#) have banded together in an attempt to find solutions to growing antisemitism concerns in the city and Tompkins County.

The effort was formed following the Oct. 7, 2023, attack by Hamas on Israel, which resulted in the deaths of approximately 1,200 people and the taking of 250 hostages.

The organization is encouraging people who may have experienced antisemitism to contact it for advice on going to police and the [New York State Division of Human Rights](#).

"We are a reflection of what's going on nationally," said Howard Erlich in a statement. Erlich is a co-chair of the task force and former dean of Ithaca College's School of Humanities and Sciences.

"Jews are 2% of the population, but we experience over half of the discrimination complaints in the United States."

The task force is planning educational events surrounding the history of antisemitism and its impact on the Ithaca Jewish community, according to a June 9 statement from the group.

Tracking antisemitism cases across the US

There have been several recent high-profile antisemitic attacks across the country, including a [Molotov cocktail attack](#) on demonstrators in Boulder, CO, the [murder of two Israeli Embassy employees](#) at a Jewish Museum in Washington, and an [arson attack on the Pennsylvania governor's mansion](#) during Passover.

An [August 2024 report](#) from New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli signaled a near 70% surge in hate crimes between 2019 and 2024.

It describes hate crimes as offenses motivated by a perception or belief about the victim's race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity or expression, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation or another protected characteristic.

The most common bias motivation reported in New York in 2023 was for religion, with 543 incidents – or nearly half of the reports for that year.

According to the report, 44% of hate crimes and 88% of religious-based hate crimes targeted Jewish victims in 2023. Between 2018 and 2023, hate crimes against Jews and Muslims rose by 89% and 106%, respectively.

How the IAUJC task force is highlighting concerns

The Ithaca-based group has documented several incidents, including a Jewish resident allegedly being refused service at an Ithaca eatery after attending a march to free Israeli hostages in Gaza.

To raise awareness and address these issues, the IAUJC task force organized a panel discussion May 5 at the First Congregational Church of Ithaca. The event featured speakers such as Rev. David Kaden, Rabbi Caleb Brommer, and Menachem Rosensaft, and was attended by nearly 80 residents. The discussion focused on how Jewish and Christian communities can collaborate to combat antisemitism.

"We wanted to let people know that there is an organization in town that is concerned with the welfare of the Jewish community," IAUJC board chair Marcia Zax said in a statement from the group. "We have established this task force for people to report incidents to us and for us to examine ways in which we can address this issue."

Other members of the task force include: Sherrie Negrea, Carole Stone, Richard Rosenfield and Patrick J. Stevens.

The task force encourages residents to report antisemitic incidents at info@iaujc.org and offers guidance on reporting to local police. Future events are planned to educate the public about the history and impact of antisemitism on the Ithaca and wider New York Jewish community.

More: [Cornell one of 60 universities at risk of losing funding amid antisemitism concerns](#)

Antisemitism behind federal government's investigations of campuses

Whether it's due to political tensions or rising threats in the Middle East, acts of hostility or prejudice against Jewish people continue to occur in Ithaca as they do elsewhere.

Passions flared in the wake of threats lodged in Cornell University forums by an anonymous online figure, [later revealed to be 21-year-old Patrick Dai](#), shortly after the Hamas attacks.

He threatened to “shoot up 104 west” and “bomb Jewish house” under online monikers that included “hamas soldier” and “jewevel,” pleading guilty to the act in October 2023. He was later sentenced to 21 months in jail.

Cornell was one of 60 universities warned in March by the National Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights and was told there would be federal investigations following allegations of antisemitic harassment and discrimination.

[According to a report from Reuters](#), the list of schools was seemingly haphazard, and many of the universities had already resolved the complaints and four had no record of a recent discrimination complaint. But the threat from the federal government sent shockwaves on campuses because of the risk of losing funding.

Five other institutions were under investigation for discrimination against Muslim, Arab and pro-Palestinian students and faculty.

According to Reuters, the letters to the universities marked an expansion of the administration's war against the institutions Trump has disparaged as “infested with radicalism.”