



Jewish Community Relations Council



January 12, 2024

In his recent "State of the State" address, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis announced a series of measures to make it easier for students enrolled at institutions nationwide who might have experienced - or feel fearful of - antisemitism or other religious discrimination, harassment, intimidation, or violence at their current institutions to transfer to Florida. Specifically, the Governor called on Florida's public universities and colleges to help students by:

- Waiving certain minimum credit hour requirements for transfer applications that would typically be a hurdle for otherwise academically eligible first- and second-year postsecondary students seeking to transfer to Florida.
- Waiving application date windows for transfer students that might also burden otherwise academically eligible students who are seeking to flee discriminatory circumstances.
- Urging that Florida public universities and colleges use, at their discretion, existing statutory authority to grant out-of-state tuition waivers on a case-by-case basis for those students who may have a financial hardship when transferring from another state to a Florida postsecondary institution.

We applaud the steps announced by Gov. DeSantis, which will be immediately implemented by the University of South Florida. We stand ready to accept transfer students from across the nation in accordance with Gov. DeSantis Executive Order. These measures will further the work being done by USF and leaders in the Tampa Bay region's Jewish community to support Jewish students on campus.

USF is home to over 2,000 Jewish undergraduate and graduate students. We have several highly engaged organizations for students at USF, including chapters of Hillel and Chabad, whose goal is to provide a 'home away from home' where every Jewish student, from any background or affiliation, feels accepted.

We're proud that the USF Hillel: *Morris & Bertha Escoll Center for Jewish Campus Life* is located on the USF campus in Tampa, giving students their own facility to feel comfortable gathering, socializing and observing Jewish traditions.

USF's location in the rapidly growing Tampa Bay region provides a large network of Jewish alumni and community organizations who engage with students to connect, find mentorship and open doors to successfully obtain a job in their chosen field after graduation.

USF is not just any university; it's our region's vibrant community hub, actively nurturing robust and mutually beneficial partnerships with the local community to elevate the overall student experience. The commitment transcends academic excellence, continuously cultivating a cohesive and supportive environment where students, alumni, and the broader community can thrive collectively.



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Attending USF offers an opportunity to study at one of America's leading research universities. In 2023, USF was invited to join the Association of American Universities, a group of the top 71 public and private institutions in North America, and U.S. News and World Report ranked USF as one of the nation's top public universities for the fifth consecutive year. USF provides students with a world-class education at a great value, as in-state tuition in Florida is the lowest of any state in the country. Immediately following the Hamas terrorist attacks in October, USF joined the local Jewish community in declaring that antisemitism will not be tolerated on campus or in Tampa Bay and actions were taken to maintain a safe environment for Jewish students. There has been an increase in the visibility of USF police officers on campus, including a dedicated presence outside the Hillel building 24 hours a day.

University leaders continue to meet with members of the Jewish community, facilitating productive conversations, listening to concerns and suggestions, proactively incorporating recommendations into actions whenever possible and ensuring valuable perspectives are considered.

We want to reaffirm that Jewish students, and students of all faiths and backgrounds, are welcome at USF and in Tampa Bay, where they will be respected and can study in a safe environment with their peers. We encourage any students who feel a change is in their best interests to consider the University of South Florida as their new home institution.

Co-signed:

Tampa JCCs and Federation's
Jewish Community Relations Council

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan J. Ellis".

Jonathan J. Ellis, Chair

Jewish Federation of Florida's Gulf Coast

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Doug Weiland".

Doug Weiland, President

University of South Florida

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Will Weatherford".

Will Weatherford, Board Chair

University of South Florida

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rhea F. Law".

Rhea F. Law, President