

Jewish Community Relations Council

‘All politics is local’: Forging bipartisan relationships to support the Jewish community

By **Daniel Pearlman, JCRC Director**

The phrase “all politics is local” could not be truer, particularly regarding a recently passed Ohio Senate bill that was inspired by events that took place here in Sylvania. In October 2019, a Muslim student athlete named Noor Alexandria Abukaram, who competed for Northview High School, was disqualified from a race because she was wearing a hijab. The Ohio High School Athletic Association required athletes to obtain a waiver to wear clothing for religious purposes, and her coach had not obtained a waiver.

When Ohio Senator Theresa

Gavarone, whose district includes Sylvania, heard about this incident, she was inspired to sponsor a bill to ensure it does not happen again. Senate Bill 181 seeks to bar schools and athletic conferences from preventing student athletes from wearing religious apparel while playing sports. It passed the Senate in early June in a unanimous bipartisan vote, and it will soon move to the House of Representatives.

“When I first read about what happened to one of Ohio’s student-athletes, I was stunned,” remarked Senator Gavarone. “No student should have to choose between a sport they love or their religion; and that is what the end result of this

bill will be. I truly appreciate the support for Senate Bill 181 by the Jewish Federation and Foundation of Greater Toledo and many other organizations as we work to get it across the finish line.”

The Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) applauds the passage of this bill in the Senate and hopes for its quick passage in the House so that Governor Mike DeWine can sign it into law. We strongly believe that this is a First Amendment issue; students have the right to compete in accordance with their religious beliefs.

There is another bipartisan bill focused on religious students that was introduced in the Ohio House.

Representatives Gary Click and Jessica Miranda are co-sponsoring House Bill 353 that seeks to require institutions of higher education to adopt a policy providing students with religious accommodations, permitting a student to be absent for up to three days each academic year to observe religious holidays with no penalty. It would also require that students be provided with alternative accommodations during examination periods. This bill is modeled after similar bills that have passed in other states.

Our partners at Ohio Jewish Communities (OJC), which repre-

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sents Ohio's eight Jewish Federations, their partners and agencies on a range of state, federal, and international issues in Columbus and in Washington, DC, are working with elected officials from both parties to get these bills passed. This comes several months after Ohio Governor Mike DeWine created the Ohio Holocaust & Genocide Memorial & Education Commission by amending it into the Capital Budget. Thanks in part to efforts from OJC, this year's Ohio budget is funding the Commission at \$200,000/year (\$400,000 total), which is double the initial proposed amount by the House.

Among its responsibilities, the Holocaust commission can take inventory of current statewide Holocaust and genocide memorial and education programs and initiatives, and propose programming to fill program and initiative gaps; secure appropriate recognition of the accomplishments and contributions of Holocaust and genocide survivors, liberators, and Ohioans active in rescue and resettlement efforts, and make their stories accessible for educational purposes; promote public awareness of issues relating to Holocaust and genocide memorial and education through public education programs; advise and

educate the governor, general assembly, and state departments and agencies regarding the nature, magnitude, and priorities of Holocaust and genocide memorial and education, and develop policies and programs to address those needs; seek opportunities to provide resources for schools to teach effectively about the Holocaust and genocide; and coordinate with and provide information regarding available state services to meet the needs of Holocaust and genocide survivors, liberators, educators, students, and public safety and law enforcement.

Howie Beigelman, executive director of Ohio Jewish Communities, explained that "the lack of Holocaust knowledge today is surprising, and especially so in Ohio. With survivors and liberators still with us, now is the time to make sure this history and its lessons are never forgotten." He also thanks our elected officials who created this commission. "When political leaders like these make such powerful, public, comments condemning antisemitism and hate, it is the most telling repudiation of the ideology that created the Shoah."

Howie was also instrumental in organizing a meeting with Governor DeWine and 30 lay and professional Jewish communal leaders at the Governor's Residence in August. Representing Toledo at this meeting in addition to myself, was

Stephen Rothschild, JFGT Executive Director. We discussed college campus safety, defining antisemitism for hate crimes legislation and other purposes, and providing emergency funding for local law enforcement and local government to deploy technologies and personnel to fight hate broadly and antisemitism specifically. Governor DeWine agreed to speak with the presidents of all 14 of Ohio's four-year public colleges and universities about the threat of rising antisemitism on college campuses before the school year begins.

Outside of state politics, efforts to pass federal laws can have implications for our local community as well. One such example is the Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act, which will promote better hate crimes data collection as well as a more informed approach to hate crime prevention at the federal, state, and local levels. This bill was signed by President Biden in May 2021 as part of the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act and was supported by Senators Sherrod Brown and Rob Portman and Representatives Marcy Kaptur and Bob Latta. The Jewish Federations system and other Jewish organizations joined many others lobbying for its passage, as it will keep our community and other minority communities safer. "No one should have to live in fear of vitriol and violence perpetrated by those possessed with the depravity of hatred," expressed Representative Kaptur. "Our nation must strive to live up to its highest ideals, and reject bigotry in any form. I was honored to support the NO HATE Act and join our local law enforcement partners in supporting those who have been victimized. I urge our local law enforcement to avail their agencies of the tools and support made available by the Department of Justice to prevent and address hate crimes."

Specifically, the Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act provides federal grants for states and local governments implementing the National Incident-Based Reporting System, a more sophisticated and detailed crime reporting system that replaces the former federal crime reporting system. This will improve the quality of hate crimes data collected by the federal government. It also authorizes federal grants for states to establish hate crime reporting hotlines designed to assist victims who might otherwise be reluctant to report hate crimes, and funding for state and local law enforcement agencies to develop and adopt policies on identifying, investigating, and reporting hate crimes. Finally, the Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act allows courts to require individ-

uals convicted under the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act to participate in educational programs or community service as a condition of supervised release.

During an August visit by Representative Latta to the Federation/YMCA building in Sylvania, JCRC thanked him for his support of the Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act and for his co-sponsorship of House Resolution 396, which condemned the deadly and indiscriminate rocket attacks perpetrated against Israel by Hamas in May and expressed that the United States must continue to invest in and support Israel's security and sovereignty. We also discussed rising antisemitism, community safety and security gaps, energy efficiency and infrastructure, and Toledo-Israel partnerships. Joining the Congressman on his visit was Jolie Brochin, his legislative correspondent and scheduler, who grew up in the Toledo Jewish community. Jolie and the Congressman also received a tour of the building to learn about the recently announced YMCA expansion plans. "In May, the world watched as rockets fell upon Israeli cities killing innocent men, women, and children. Israel has an undeniable right to exist and defend themselves," noted Representative Latta. "As a proud member of the House Republican Israel Caucus, I have cosponsored H.Res 396 because it condemns the deadly rocket attacks on Israel by Hamas. Furthermore, I supported the Hate Crimes Act when it was considered in the U.S. House of Representatives earlier this year because it instructs the Department of Justice to designate a point person to expedite the review of hate crimes related to COVID-19. The United States must continue to support our greatest ally as they defend their sovereignty." The Congressman's district includes most of Greater Toledo's Jewish community and almost all our communal institutions.

Our community is unified, not uniform. Community members may disagree with one another on certain issues, but we all want what is best for our community. By standing together to support issues that directly impact our Jewish community, we can make a positive difference.

Look out for JCRC action alerts in the new "Behind the Scenes at JCRC" e-newsletter to contact your elected officials about specific bills as they come up. If you have any questions or would like to get involved in JCRC's government affairs work, please contact Daniel Pearlman, JCRC Director, at 419-724-0315 or daniel@jewishtoledo.org.