



WRITTEN STATEMENT OF PROPOSED TESTIMONY

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NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Good morning, Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, Chairman Bean, Ranking Member Bonamici, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, and the honorable members who have waived onto this hearing today. Thank you for inviting me to address antisemitism, the number one religious-based hate crime in America. I am horrified at the resurgence of this age-old hate, and, today, I plan to share concrete actions we are taking at New York City Public Schools to confront the scourge of antisemitism head-on.

As Chancellor of the New York City school system—our nation’s largest—my job is to ensure the safety and learning of nearly 1 million students. I am also tasked with supporting over 140,000 staff members. Our community includes a wide range of faiths, nationalities, and backgrounds. We speak, incredibly, over 180 languages in our schools.

And we have honored and uplifted this diversity for many years. For our New York City Jewish community, the largest outside of Israel, that means our schools observe major Jewish holidays like Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Passover. We provide kosher school food options. We celebrate Jewish American Heritage Month. And we do the same for the dozens of other communities that make up the rich tapestry of New York City.

I believe our multiculturalism is a blessing. The whole world lives in New York City. It’s a phenomenon I experienced growing up in Crown Heights, Brooklyn and later in Cambria Heights, Queens, both home to many cultures and communities, including the Jewish community.

Our diversity, however, means that our classrooms are not insulated from the global stage. On the contrary, they are steeped in it. For New Yorkers, world events inevitably hit home.

Since October 7, our students and staff—Jewish and Muslim, Israeli and Palestinian—have suffered immensely. They have experienced deep pain, trauma, and fear—reactions I’ve heard directly from our teachers, students, and families. I, too, have felt this mix of emotions, reflecting on my own two trips to Israel with the Jewish Community Relations Council. One cannot visit the Western Wall or Yad Vashem without feeling profoundly changed. As a person of faith, these trips deepened my appreciation of the Jewish religion, culture, and experience.

In the immediate aftermath of October 7, New York City Mayor Eric Adams, in whose administration I proudly serve, made powerful, poignant remarks condemning the terror attacks, remarks that resonated with Jewish communities both here and in Israel. I, too, sent a letter to our staff, along with a social media statement to families, strongly condemning the heinous attacks by Hamas. My team and I followed up with multiple other communications promoting respect, including reminders about our regulations around political activity in schools and a joint statement with Mayor Adams denouncing hate speech.

But words are not enough. There have been unacceptable incidents of antisemitism in our schools. I know just how distressing these incidents are. They surface deep-rooted, generational scars; antisemitism has impacted the lives and stories of every Jewish person I know.

I recognize the unique urgency of addressing this crisis from my seat, as the leader of the system responsible for nurturing the next generation of New Yorkers. It is not only our job to produce good readers and writers. We must also build good *people*, people who demonstrate respect and appreciation for our shared humanity.

So, to meet this moment, we initiated a comprehensive plan focused on the safety of our students and staff, engagement with our community, and education as the long-term antidote to ignorance, bias, and bigotry. In all three areas, we are taking strong, decisive action because every student, family, and staff member deserves to feel welcomed in our schools.

Let me begin with safety. Safety is our most fundamental responsibility and a precondition for learning. I was a school safety agent, teacher, and principal. Perhaps most importantly, I'm a father of four. I know we cannot have safe and inclusive schools if there is no accountability when students or staff act inappropriately. When hate or prejudice rears its head, we must respond—it's our legal obligation under the Civil Rights Act. And we have responded, facilitating school leadership changes, suspending students when appropriate, disciplining and removing staff, and involving the NYPD as necessary. We also retrained all our approximately 1,600 NYC Public Schools principals on our Discipline Code, including the need for tangible consequences when this code is violated.

But ultimately, we are not going to suspend our way to inclusion and acceptance. I believe that hate is *learned*—and to reverse it, we must start a conversation. To that end, we have engaged dozens of Jewish and Muslim partners, so that the communities most impacted by this crisis have a seat at the table in designing solutions.

From the Jewish community, the organizations I've continued to consult include the UJA Federation, the Anti-Defamation League, the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance, the Jewish Children's Museum, Project Witness, and many others. I also launched an interfaith advisory council because it is critical to demonstrate for our students how to engage in meaningful dialogue and build bridges across communities.

This work takes patience, thoughtfulness, and skill. It isn't easy. But as I have told our educators, when crises occur, we cannot bury our heads in the sand. This leads me to the final component of our strategy: education. Education is the key to rooting out hate.

In collaboration with our longtime, highly regarded Social Studies partner, Facing History & Ourselves, we have trained every middle and high school principal—approximately 900 school leaders—on how to navigate conversations on difficult topics, events, and issues, such as antisemitism. We are requiring these principals to deliver this same workshop to their staff this spring.

We aren't only focused on *how* to have conversations either. The content matters, too. As I have also told our educators, we cannot inject our personal politics into the classroom. Nor can we abandon our students to the falsehoods and vitriol of social media, especially at such a young and impressionable age. Children—and for that matter, many adults—are not getting their news from newspapers; they're getting it from social media.

So, to ensure our students and staff have access to credible sources and varied viewpoints about complex issues, we have expanded our vetted instructional materials and resources focused on the Middle East crisis, antisemitism, and Islamophobia. Over the coming months, we are providing an array of in-depth teacher workshops on these topics. Additionally, in direct response to family feedback, we are building a brand-new curriculum focused on the Jewish American community and the myriad contributions American Jews have made to our country and world.

But we must also educate about the Holocaust. It is state law in New York—and it's the right thing to do. For a number of years, my family and I lived next door to Holocaust survivors in Teaneck, New Jersey and learned about their stories firsthand. But as survivors pass on, it is essential that we actively work to preserve the memory of this dark chapter in our history. As Yom HaShoah earlier this week reminded us, we must never forget. That's why we include the Holocaust in our Social Studies curriculum in grades 8, 10, and 11 and why we are currently creating a robust Holocaust teaching guide for our educators in collaboration with the Museum of Jewish Heritage.

Of course, there is always more to be done, and this work is not without its challenges. But leaning into these challenges is the only way to make change. That's exactly what we're seeing in many of our schools. We've had Jewish and Muslim students band together to write solidarity statements. We've had schools connect with Jewish organizations to partner on fighting hate. And we've had teachers and leaders rebuild trust in their communities after trust has been broken.

*This* is what it means to create a shared society in a city as diverse as New York. This is how we foster respect, acceptance, and empathy. This is how we are meeting this moment.

Thank you again to the Committee for inviting me to testify on this critical topic, and I welcome your questions.