

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (VA-03)

Full Committee Hearing

"Beyond the Ivy League: Stopping the Spread of Antisemitism on American Campuses"

Wednesday, May 7, 2025 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank our witnesses for being with us today.

The month of May marks Jewish American Heritage Month, when we celebrate the generations of Jewish Americans who have made incredible contributions to this country. This month, we reaffirm our commitment to combat the rise of antisemitism, both on and off college campuses. No one should be discriminated against because of who they are or how they worship. All students have the right to learn in a safe environment free from discrimination, in compliance with Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*.

Unfortunately, instead of properly enforcing Title VI, this committee is holding the eighth hearing describing the problem and complaining about antisemitism on college campuses, instead of taking any meaningful action to actually *solve* the problem. Curiously, my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have not held any hearings addressing other forms of discrimination and hate, such as racism, Title IX gender violations, Islamophobia, homophobia, or the challenges of meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

This is particularly concerning since we know from reports from the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights that as of January 11th of this year, there were over 12,000 open cases alleging discrimination and violation of Title VI—12,000. And of those 12,000 cases, only 144 could be Title VI violations involving antisemitism. We know that the solution to this problem is better enforcement of Title VI. So instead of holding another hearing that complains about the problem, we ought to hold a hearing about what is going on in the Office for Civil Rights, or OCR, in the Department of Education.

This Administration is in the process of dismantling the Office for Civil Rights, and it raises reasonable doubt about the plans for addressing antisemitism on campus, as well as racism, homophobia, sexism, Islamophobia, or the needs of students with disabilities. Again, we should be focused on trying to solve the problem, rather than just complaining about it.

For centuries, college campuses have served as centers for debate and discussion on polarizing issues in our country. Unfortunately, this also means that they can become flashpoints for controversy. But it is fundamental for us to understand that we *must* protect students' safety while also fostering college campuses as places of learning where difficult topics can be discussed civilly, without fear of retribution.

OCR has typically and historically played a vital role in preserving that balance. When a suspected incident of discrimination occurs on a college campus, OCR can investigate the claim. When I say 'investigate,' you have produced a letter from Jewish students on campus, the Administration has letters from Jewish students on campus — it would be nice to have an investigation to find out what the facts are. OCR can investigate the claim, and there is an established process.

Should an institution be found to violate its duty to provide a safe learning environment, OCR's process to work with the school will allow it to redress the harm. Specifically, the institution is expected to take the appropriate action to "end the harassment, eliminate the hostile environment, prevent its reoccurrence, and address its effects, as appropriate." And if this does not happen, the Department of Education can begin to withhold funds from the part of the institution that is in violation.

However, in its first three months, the Trump Administration has closed seven out of twelve OCR regional offices, all of which conduct investigations into discrimination on campus, whether it be based on antisemitism or race, national origin, gender, or disability. According to public reports, nearly half of the OCR staff have also been laid off. One is left to wonder how the OCR can carry out its important responsibilities with half its staff. My concerns have been confirmed by public reporting of students struggling to get assistance with ongoing cases because their attorney has been laid off.

Moreover, instead of conducting investigations according to the law, the Trump Administration has taken a sledgehammer to due process rights of institutions. The public has seen a barrage of reports of this Administration taking action without any investigation, such as taking away federal funding; students and professors having their international visas revoked; students who have been disappeared into detention centers; and threats to revoke the tax-exempt status of multiple universities. Schools are also told to accept a list of the Administration's demands, all without OCR first conducting a fact-finding investigation. In short, that is not due process.

For some of us, this does not come as a surprise. After all, just this past weekend, when the President appeared on NBC News and was asked whether he believes he should uphold the Constitution, he responded, "I don't know." Of course, one cannot forget that this is the same President who thought there were "very fine people on both sides" after white supremacists marched through Charlottesville in 2017, chanting "Jews will not replace us!"

Everyone, including people you may disagree with, is entitled to due process, and all students should be able to seek recourse if they have been discriminated against. Similarly, institutions should be given a chance to address the harms on their campuses without fear of political retribution. Perhaps we should be proactive and utilize agencies in the federal government, like the Community Relations Service at the Department of Justice, that can serve as peacemakers when there are problems in communities. Of course, regrettably, the Community Relations Service is on the chopping block right now at the Department of Justice.

I hope we can have a productive conversation today that centers on students and the future of higher education — and hopefully, one day, we will begin having hearings on solutions rather than complain about the problem.

Now, before I yield back — when I said 12,000, that's the total cases in backlog, not the total number of cases. But the point, obviously, is that the number of antisemitism cases, of all of the cases, is a very small number. If we're going to investigate Title VI violations, we ought to be investigating all of them. And we ought to be looking at what is going on at OCR, because that will ultimately be the solution to the problem.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.