

Statement of
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Co-Chair, Columbia Board of Trustees

before the

Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives

April 17, 2024

Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and Members of the Committee, thank you for having us here today to discuss how Columbia University is fighting antisemitism. Since the revolting and horrific terrorist attack by Hamas on Israeli citizens on October 7, 2023, there has been a surge of antisemitism in communities around the country. It sickens me that Columbia's campuses have not been immune to this horrible trend. Antisemitism across the country, including on Columbia's campuses, is a real issue that must be dealt with. We appreciate the opportunity to assist the Committee in its important effort to examine antisemitism on college campuses during today's hearing.

Let me make clear from the outset: any targeting of Jews for hate, harassment, violence, intimidation, discrimination, or exclusion is antisemitic and unacceptable at Columbia. The University's leadership—including President Shafik and the Board of Trustees—is committed to stopping these incidents at Columbia and standing with our Jewish community, of which I am a proud part. While we are working diligently toward this goal, we know this work is not complete.

My name is David Greenwald, and I have been co-chair of Columbia's Board of Trustees, together with my co-chair Claire Shipman, since last September. I am in my sixth year of service on the Board. As a graduate of Columbia Law School, I have been part of Columbia's community for decades.

The Board of Trustees helps oversee the strategic direction of Columbia and advises the President and other senior University officials. While we do not participate in day-to-day operations of the University, we are an active Board, one that is highly involved with advising on matters across the University. We are committed to good governance—governance that includes mission, strategy, and self-reflection. We need to stick closely to our mission, continue to review and renew our strategies, and be candid with ourselves about what we are doing right and what we can do better. Serving as a Trustee is always a great responsibility, but that responsibility is especially pronounced as our community has struggled with the horrific events of October 7 and its aftermath.

In recent years, antisemitism has been on the rise across the world, throughout the United States, and on university campuses. This undercurrent was suddenly brought to the forefront in October. Ever since, the Board of Trustees has played an active role in Columbia's response to antisemitism. We have been in constant contact with the University's leadership, including

President Shafik. Throughout this time, we have prioritized the safety of our students, faculty, and staff. That is our paramount concern.

All universities, including Columbia, have an obligation to foster conversations about complicated and divisive issues in a way that is empathetic toward those with whom we disagree while promoting lively and respectful debate. Difficult inquiries, robust exchange of ideas, and even respectful conflict are at the core of higher education. Columbia is committed to having a pluralistic and positive environment on campus and to remaining a place where differing views and intellectual challenge are welcome and past and present conflicts are analyzed with an eye toward resolution and improvement. However, when those debates devolve into antisemitic harassment, discrimination, or violence—as has unacceptably happened at Columbia after October 7—there must be consequences.

We recognize that despite our best intentions, Columbia has not always gotten it right. We did not always respond quickly and forcefully enough. We, therefore, fell short of both addressing the grief and fear that our Jewish community was experiencing and making them feel safe and welcome on campus. We still have work to do, and we are committed to making progress and overseeing improvements. It is our first imperative that our students feel safe attending classes, sharing their perspectives, and participating in campus life to the fullest.

I will cover three principal topics with the remainder of this statement. First, I will focus on my experience with antisemitism as an American Jew. Second, I will address the role of Columbia's Trustees. Finally, I will discuss some of the steps that the University has taken, including steps the Trustees have taken, to address antisemitism on our campuses.

Background on Antisemitism

I am a Jewish American. I became a bar mitzvah when I was 13. My wife Beth and I were married by a rabbi. I am active in the Jewish community. In 2017 I proudly accepted the American Jewish Committee's Learned Hand Award. The AJC works to combat antisemitism and bigotry in all forms. The Learned Hand Award is given to outstanding leaders in the legal profession who exemplify the integrity and high principles that Judge Hand stood for.

Antisemitism has existed for millennia. It is the oldest hate. Across the ages, Jews have experienced oppression, expulsion, state-run genocide and terrorist attacks like that which took place on October 7. While I am not an expert on the subject, I can speak to it from my own experience. My maternal grandparents fled pogroms in Russia. My parents experienced antisemitism. I also have been the target of antisemitism. All one-off instances, but nevertheless each occurrence was shocking. Some were threatening and intended to create fear.

I, of course, have been aware of antisemitism throughout my life, even when it has not been directed at me or my family. Sadly, I could mention many occurrences before October 7. I will note only two: the march in Charlottesville in 2017 and the 2018 murder of members of the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. While antisemitism has been on the rise in recent years, the explosion of antisemitism on and after October 7 was surprising, no—shocking. I recently heard someone say that “antisemitism is a light sleeper,” and I agree with that sentiment.

I mention these facts regarding my background to make clear that I come to these issues with personal experience. I have been profoundly saddened by October 7, as well as by many of the responses to the terrorist attack by members of the Columbia community. We had a professor glorify the barbaric terrorist attacks by Hamas on Israeli civilians, women, children, and babies. A group of faculty penned a letter saying the horrific terrorist attacks were legitimate military actions. I believe firmly in free speech and recognize that in America people can say terrible things, but these statements are alarming and horrifying. There are protests on campus in which protesters shout “from the river to the sea” and hold banners that say things like “whatever it takes.” Many Jews hear and see that as a call to wipe out Israel and Jews throughout the world. As a result, many Jewish students and other members of our Columbia community have not felt safe.

The Board of Trustees and the University, including the four members of this panel, have taken many steps to make our community feel safe, but fully recognize that we must remain vigilant.

Role of the Board of Trustees of Columbia University

As members of the Board of Trustees, we advise the President and other senior University officials and act in an oversight capacity. We hire and oversee the President, who is responsible for hiring officers and, together with those officers, running the day-to-day operations of the University. The Trustees oversee those operations, the University’s finances, and its compliance with the law. The Trustees also guide the implementation of the strategy of the University that the President and other officers develop.

Other than President Shafik, all 21 current Trustees are volunteers and our roles are part-time. In my case, I had a full-time job as Chairman of the international law firm, Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson, LLP, a position which I held for ten years until my retirement on February 29th of this year. Regardless of our status, we dedicate significant time, energy, and devotion to our service on the Board.

The obvious question is: why would we do this? The short answer is we all love and are dedicated to Columbia. I received an excellent legal education at the Law School and give it credit (along with my undergraduate school) for the success I have had in my career. Further, the mission and values of Columbia resonate with me. Simply put, Columbia is one of the great universities in the world. Our faculty educates the next generation of leaders and prepares students to be good citizens. Our researchers discover new knowledge, theories, and technologies that benefit humanity and the world. Our medical professionals provide unmatched care to patients. While Columbia is engaged internationally (including in Tel Aviv), our home is in New York City in the State of New York and in this great country of the United States. We are integrally involved in the city, the state, and the Nation. This important mission and set of goals are what attracts busy people, all of whom are graduates of one of Columbia’s schools, to become Trustees and to serve and improve the University that they love.

While much of our work is not public facing, we actively assist and advise on matters across the University. The response to antisemitism on campus has been the same, with the

Board involved every step of the way. We have been in constant communication with the University's leadership, including President Shafik, and have observed the University's dedication to student safety and eradicating hate on our campuses firsthand. We were involved in Columbia's decisions to ensure the physical security of our campuses and to provide additional resources to students in the wake of the October 7 terrorist attacks, and are also closely involved with the many other steps the University has taken to combat antisemitism.

Columbia University's Actions to Combat Antisemitism Since October 7, 2023

By their very nature, universities are places for lively debate and disagreement, but those debates must be respectful, peaceful, and collegial. The active participation of our students and faculty on an issue of such importance as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is hardly surprising: Columbia is a university full of enthusiastic students and faculty who make their views known. However, there is a difference between exercising a right to protest and spreading antisemitism, committing violence, threatening violence, or harassing others.

Tragically, since October 7, we have seen an increase in complaints of antisemitic behaviors, threats, and occasionally violence. We take these incidents, and the harm they have on our community, incredibly seriously. President Shafik has published numerous statements making clear that antisemitism (and all forms of hate) are wrong and that antisemitic acts and speech that violate the University's policies and rules will not be tolerated. We have initiated disciplinary proceedings and, where appropriate, we have involved Columbia Public Safety, the New York City Police Department, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Incidents of antisemitic violence have resulted in criminal referrals, and resources have been made available to all members of our community to facilitate healing and productive dialogue moving forward.

The Board is committed to building a University with an active discourse where all students, faculty, and staff can share their views on the issues important to them, but we refuse to tolerate threats, violence, or hatred. It is the Board's responsibility, in conjunction with all University leadership, to build a community where everyone is safe and able to thrive. Our efforts will not be over until that goal is achieved in full.

Below, I address some of the specific steps the University has taken to combat antisemitism on our campuses and ensure the safety of the Columbia community. These steps are important. The test will be whether we can change behavior on campus. In that regard, enforcement of the rules is critical to hold violators accountable and, by sending a message to the broader Columbia community, deterring others who might otherwise violate the rules.

a. Columbia Took Immediate Action to Provide Physical Safety on Campus

Columbia's disciplinary processes and support services were not prepared for the volume and nature of the violations that we saw after October 7. Traditionally, our campuses have been open for public interaction and debate, including for students, faculty, and those not affiliated with Columbia. But the demonstrations and confrontations between student groups after October 7 were unprecedented, and our policies for demonstrations were not designed for the volume of protests that occurred. Nor did Columbia have enough personnel to enforce the rules. Thus, immediate action was needed to ensure the physical safety of our students.

Columbia began restricting access to campus to only Columbia ID holders during major events. In addition, we increased the presence of public safety personnel across all of our campuses, hired outside security firms for additional support, and ensured that the New York City Police Department was present or on standby for major events. We suspended two student groups, Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace, following a series of rules violations and their leaders' failure to respond to our repeated entreaties to comply. President Shafik, the Board, and other University leaders felt these steps were essential to ensure the safety of our students on campus.

b. Enhanced Reporting, Resources, & Student Policies

Columbia maintains rules which prohibit antisemitic harassment and discrimination and set forth other standards of behavior and will punish those who violate them. Columbia took action to ensure that community members could more easily file reports of antisemitism and other hate incidents, receive responses to their complaints, and have their complaints investigated. To better facilitate filing reports and accessing support, Columbia launched the Enhanced Reporting Initiative and telephone hotline. Columbia has also created a Doxing Resource Group to assist students who have been subjected to doxing attacks.

Columbia has issued an Interim Demonstration Policy to allow students to express their views without endangering the safety or violating the rights of others. This policy limits demonstrations to only certain designated locations and requires groups to provide advance notice. Importantly, there will be, and have been, consequences for those who fail to abide by the new demonstration policy. The new time and place restrictions on protests and corresponding penalties for noncompliance appear to be reducing the number of events that violate University rules. Students are asking for more events that involve dialogue on the larger issues and can have more conversations with each other. And in the cases where violations occur, we are seeing faster-paced discipline. Our hope is that the changes described here will enable our Jewish community members to feel safe, secure, and welcome at Columbia. We are optimistic about the power of the Interim Demonstration Policy and will continue evaluating this policy and other relevant policies over the coming months, and will amend them as necessary to help ensure the safety of the Columbia community.

Columbia takes violations of our policies seriously. Since October 7, Columbia has initiated well over 100 disciplinary actions against students and has implemented at least 90 disciplinary measures against students, including 15 students who have been suspended and multiple students subjected to probation. Dozens more are in the disciplinary process.

c. Columbia University Task Force on Antisemitism

Shortly after the October 7 terrorist attack, Columbia University launched a Task Force on Antisemitism led by three prominent Jewish faculty to gain a deeper understanding of the situation on campus and to make recommendations about how the University should respond. The Task Force has been at the core of the University's response to antisemitism.

The Task Force was entrusted with three critical efforts, which they have been relentlessly working on since. First, the Task Force was asked to assess the issues affecting Columbia's Jewish community. Second, they were asked to review the relevant policies, rules, and practices that impact our campus. Finally, the Task Force was empowered to propose additional methods to help the entire community understand the impact of antisemitism at Columbia. To better understand the experiences of the Columbia community, the Task Force hosted listening sessions. During these sessions Task Force members heard from our community about the impact of antisemitism at Columbia in order to inform their actions.

To advance these goals, the Task Force has already released its first report, which focused on Columbia's rules for demonstrations. The report endorsed Columbia's new Interim Demonstration Policy aimed at promoting freedom of speech, while ensuring student safety and allowing students to participate fully in campus life. The report also called for stronger enforcement of our policies—a goal that the Trustees share and are working toward. The Task Force will be releasing additional reports, which President Shafik, the Board, and other University leaders eagerly await. We will continue incorporating their findings and recommendations into our ongoing efforts to make Columbia a welcoming environment for all, and I look forward to the implementation of the recommendations in the Task Force's first report.

d. Trustee Task Force on Antisemitism and Other Efforts by the Trustees

As noted above, the Trustees have been and remain focused on addressing antisemitism on campus. At our Board meeting at the beginning of December, we heard from the three co-chairs of the faculty Task Force on Antisemitism about their plans for the various workstreams of the Task Force. At our January videoconference Board meeting, President Shafik and other senior leaders reported, and the Trustees discussed, what was happening on campus and the steps being taken to address those developments. Antisemitism was also a topic at our Board meeting in March, and it will continue to be an important topic going forward.

The Trustees formed our own task force with a view to developing ideas for addressing antisemitism. I am honored to chair that Committee. Our initial focus was on steps we believed the University could take immediately and in the near-term. We delivered those ideas to President Shafik on December 7, 2023, and were pleased to see that they were included in the December 2023 "Our Community, Our Values" program aimed at addressing antisemitism and anti-Muslim hate on campus. The three co-chairs of the faculty Task Force on Antisemitism have presented to the Trustee task force and we have had reports regarding the enforcement of our policies and rules. The Trustee task force has also focused on the University's Title VI rules prohibiting harassment and discrimination and policies and on enforcement of those rules and policies. We have received reports on these topics from senior leadership of the University. Next steps for the Trustee task force include identifying medium and long-term actions that the University can take to address antisemitism. We believe that the steps we are identifying will be useful to combat not only antisemitism, but also other forms of hate.

Further, the co-Chairs of the Board of Trustees have extremely frequent calls and meetings with President Shafik and her senior staff to discuss the critical issue of addressing

antisemitism on our campuses. Indeed, we had daily calls in the lead up to the announcement of the “Our Community, Our Values” program. Our focus on combatting antisemitism at Columbia will continue.

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The processes, statements of Columbia, and policy changes highlighted above are all important, to be sure. However, in my view, the most important actions taken to date include:

1. Two student groups, Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace, have been suspended.
2. We engaged the Federal Bureau of Investigation in response to a vile and shocking unauthorized event that took place in a special interest community residence in March.
3. Ten students involved in that despicable event were suspended from the University.
4. Consistent with the principles of free speech, protests on campus property have been restricted to locations consistent with our commitment to a safe and inclusive community.
5. Action has been taken against multiple faculty members, and numerous additional faculty members are under investigation.
6. Columbia has implemented at least 90 disciplinary measures against students.

If necessary, additional actions of this nature will be taken to combat antisemitism and to promote the safety of members of our community.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss a topic of critical importance to me, to Columbia University and, more broadly, to our Nation. Eliminating antisemitism takes unrelenting and aggressive effort. We have taken significant steps already, and we are committed to taking more action to address this ancient scourge.