

President M. Elizabeth Magill, University of Pennsylvania

Testimony before the

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Committee on Education and the Workforce

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Thank you, Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and distinguished members of this Committee, for the opportunity to discuss the important issue of rising antisemitism in our society and the actions we are taking in response at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn).

My name is Elizabeth Magill. For just over a year, I have had the honor of serving as the 9th President of the University of Pennsylvania, a 283-year-old institution founded by Benjamin Franklin. Prior to joining Penn, I was Executive Vice President and Provost of the University of Virginia, the Dean of the Stanford Law School, and for many years a professor of law at the University of Virginia. Early in my career, I worked as a law clerk for J. Harvie Wilkinson of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Let me begin by saying that I, and the University of Pennsylvania, are horrified by and condemn Hamas's abhorrent terrorist attack on Israel on October 7th. There is no justification—none—for those heinous attacks. The loss of life and suffering that are occurring in Israel and Gaza during the ensuing war are heartbreaking. The pain extends to our campus. I know it from my daily conversations with our students, faculty, and staff, as well as parents and alumni.

This hearing was called to discuss antisemitism on college campuses. I value this opportunity to reaffirm my and Penn's unyielding opposition to antisemitism and to outline the urgent, university-wide actions we are taking to combat this centuries-old and resurgent threat.

As President, my first priority is to members of the Penn community and, above all, to their safety and support. I must also ensure that our academic mission thrives; that academic freedom and the free exchange of ideas endure; and that we swiftly address any violation of the law or our University's policies. These are the priorities Penn is seeking to achieve in the actions I will discuss today.

Penn's Relationship with the Jewish Community

The vibrant engagement of Jewish faculty, students, staff, and alumni has long been an integral part of Penn. To see this sense of belonging shaken by recent events is deeply troubling. We trace our history back to 1772 with the enrollment of Penn's first Jewish student, Moses Levy, who later became the first Jewish Trustee of the University. The Jewish Students' Association at Penn was established in 1924. In 1970, Martin Meyerson became the first Jewish Ivy League

President. Since 2012, we have partnered with the USC Shoah Foundation Institute's [Visual History Archive](#) to make available to students and researchers more than 50,000 video testimonials of Holocaust survivors and other witnesses.

We—and I—are proud of our history and the prominent role our Jewish community plays in campus life and, broadly, in Penn's academic excellence. Under my leadership, we will never shrink from our moral responsibility to combat antisemitism and educate others to recognize and reject hate.

Addressing Antisemitism

Prior to October 7th, antisemitism—a pernicious, viral evil—was already rising in our society, and global events have dramatically accelerated the surge. No place is immune, and campuses, including ours, have recently experienced an unacceptable number of antisemitic incidents. We are combatting this evil head on with immediate action.

I have condemned antisemitism publicly, regularly, and in the strongest terms possible and today want to reiterate my and Penn's commitment to combatting it. For decades our Division of Public Safety has learned from and worked with the Anti-Defamation League office in Philadelphia, and we are working closely with them, as well as local, state, and federal law enforcement to promptly report and investigate antisemitic acts against any member of the Penn community. Where we have been able to identify individuals who committed these acts in violation of existing University policy or law, we have initiated disciplinary proceedings and referred these matters to law enforcement where appropriate.

We have also acted decisively to ensure safety throughout and near campus. We have expanded the presence of Penn Public Safety and Allied Security at our religious life centers including Penn Hillel, the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, and the Lubavitch House. We also enhanced security at every event, rally, protest, and vigil on campus. Penn Public Safety works in close collaboration with law enforcement, including the Philadelphia Police Department.

Like many communities around the world, Penn has also experienced protests, rallies, and vigils related to the terrorist attack and the subsequent war. Protest—and all it entails—has long been a feature of university life. Penn's approach to protest is guided by the U.S. Constitution, outlined in decades-old open expression policies, and supported and upheld by trained Open Expression Observers. We recognize the right of peaceful protest and assembly, and we give broad protection to free expression—even expression that is offensive. At the same time, we have zero tolerance for violence or speech intended to incite it. Our public safety officers are present at every protest, rally, or vigil, trained in de-escalation techniques, and, if necessary, they are ready to act.

Protests playing out on campuses and in cities worldwide demonstrate the challenges of fostering robust debate during difficult times. In addition to respecting the right of protest, Penn is offering many ways for students to come together in classrooms and in small groups to discuss these issues. Making space for this sort of debate is in keeping with the best traditions and educational

missions of institutions like Penn. Educating citizens requires engagement with real-world challenges and hard topics—topics that often inspire passionate responses. University leadership must provide guardrails that encourage free and open expression while also ensuring a secure environment, and that is what I am seeking to do.

These immediate actions are only the first step. I am also committed to lasting change and laying the foundation for a Penn that leads on these issues. On November 1, 2023, I announced Penn's [Action Plan to Combat Antisemitism](#), which builds on our anti-hate efforts to date and is anchored in the *U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism*. Developed in collaboration with faculty, staff, students, campus leaders, alumni, and national organizations like the American Jewish Committee, our Action Plan centers on three key areas: (1) Safety and Security, (2) Engagement, and (3) Education. In each of these areas, we announced both immediate and medium-term actions.

As part of that Action Plan, I have convened and charged an Antisemitism Task Force, with membership across Penn's schools and communities, to identify concrete, actionable recommendations. I have directed the Task Force to provide me with their recommendations in real time and to deliver their final report by this spring.

We are making certain that all our educational efforts aimed at addressing bigotry include antisemitism and other forms of hate.

To ensure our Jewish students have a direct channel to share their experiences with me, I have invited and received over 80 applications for membership to a new Student Advisory Group on the Jewish Student Experience.

I also sent a delegation of university leaders to attend the Brandeis Leadership Symposium on Antisemitism in Higher Education. They have reported back to me and are already contributing best practices and lessons learned toward our efforts.

As these efforts progress, I know we will have more to report.

The Rise of Other Forms of Hate

While I know this hearing is focused on antisemitism, we, and society broadly, are facing another significant challenge in this moment as well. We are seeing rising harassment, intimidation, doxing, and threats toward students, faculty, and staff based on their identity or perceived identity as Muslim, Palestinian, or Arab. Some have lost family members in this war, and many are worried about the safety of their loved ones in the region. Many are also afraid for their own safety, and the horrifying shooting of three Palestinian students in Vermont has only deepened their fears.

I am appalled by and have publicly condemned these acts of harassment, threats, and intimidation. We are investigating all allegations, even when threats have come from outside our campus. We are providing resources and advice to assist individuals with online doxing, harassment, and threats. Safety and security for individuals and places of worship has been

increased across the board, and we are deploying all necessary resources to support any member of our community who is the target of hate.

In addition to these immediate steps, I have created a Presidential Commission on Countering Hate and Building Community to empower our campus leaders to address antisemitism, Islamophobia, and hate in all forms, and to lay the groundwork for a stronger, more connected community. I will direct the Commission to provide me their recommended actions by spring.

Changing Penn for the Better

In challenging times, leaders must make many choices. The most important choice is to take the full measure of what we face, act decisively, communicate clearly, and lay the foundation for a stronger institution in the years to come. Our immediate actions—safety and support of our community, investigation and enforcement of policies and laws, and condemnation of hate—are essential. We will remain vigilant. We are also setting the stage for long-term change. I am committed to ensuring that Penn not only takes immediate action to combat antisemitism, but also creates lasting change and emerges as a higher education leader in this regard. Penn’s all-in efforts today, I believe, will bring about that better tomorrow.

Closing

Higher education institutions create knowledge, share it for good, and educate the next generation—missions that have never been more essential. Leading Penn is the honor of a lifetime because, even in these challenging times, we have never been stronger than we are today. Penn has attracted and is home to more-talented faculty, students, and staff than ever before. Each day, our faculty educate students while producing life-changing and award-winning insights and discoveries. Our health system provides world-class clinical care. Our students grow in their respective fields and go on to lead.

If you visited Penn’s campus today, you would see vibrant university life. Students are walking to class and preparing for exams. Faculty are teaching seminars and undertaking research. Doctors, nurses, and health care providers are tending to thousands of patients. Dedicated staff are enabling the work of the University. You would also see many people engaged in serious and respectful conversation—despite disagreement—about difficult topics, including those related to the Israel-Hamas war.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the topic of this hearing, the disturbing rise of antisemitism. As the President of Penn, I join you—emphatically—in addressing these concerns and fostering solutions. That is why we are urgently taking both immediate and lasting action to make Penn an even better, stronger institution now and for the future. We must and we will stand together in unyielding opposition to antisemitism, hate in all its forms, and all forces that would seek to divide us.

I look forward to your questions.