

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

Full Committee Hearing

*"Calling for Accountability: Stopping Antisemitic College Chaos."*

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

Thursday, May 23, 2024 | 9:45 a.m.

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Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you to our witnesses for appearing today.

There is no question that we can do more to combat antisemitism – not just on college campuses but everywhere. No one should be threatened, harassed, or attacked because of who they are or who they worship. Moreover, students cannot learn if they feel unsafe.

Yet, here we are, for the fifth time in six months, holding another hearing to complain about the problem of antisemitism, but no work is being done to find a meaningful solution to address animus on college campuses. Complaining about a problem is not a solution. It certainly riles people up, generates a lot of media coverage, but it does not solve anything.

To the best of my knowledge, the only change that has resulted from these hearings is that a handful of individuals have lost their jobs, schools have had to dedicate hours that they could have spent working to combat discrimination on campus instead of responding to the Majority's legal requests, and law firms advising college presidents have made a lot of money preparing their clients to testify in these hearings.

In 2017, after white supremacists marched through the grounds of the University of Virginia chanting slogans such as, "Jews will not replace us", I wrote a letter to my Republican colleagues asking for a hearing to discuss rising tensions and discrimination on college campuses. Regrettably, the Committee did not hold any such hearings and we did not address the issues at the time.

Jewish students, in fact all students have a right to attend college free from hostility and in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. There is no excuse for antisemitism on campus, and everyone is entitled to a safe harbor. And this is why we should ensure that the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights has the resources it needs to investigate where campuses are failing to protect against antisemitic acts or otherwise not protecting against civil rights violations. I believe we should increase funding for that office in light of the increased number

of complaints. But last year, my Republican colleagues called for a 25 percent *cut* in funding to that office. This would have been a significant impediment for the Department of Education's efforts to investigate these issues. Meanwhile DEI programs, which try to bring people together are being disparaged and eliminated.

As I have said before, hateful incidents of antisemitism do not happen in isolation. They are the byproduct of this country's centuries-long history of white supremacy and antisemitism. So, we cannot feign surprise at hate speech on our college campuses.

And I will again note that college campuses are polarized, as is our society. We've unfortunately seen a disturbing rise in incidents not only of antisemitism but also Islamophobia, racism, homophobia, and all other forms of hate, all of which need to be addressed.

As Mr. Lawrence notes in his testimony today, "Colleges and universities exist to examine complex issues, challenges, and ideas and to provide a forum in which issues and opinions can be explored and can be debated. Freedom of inquiry and expression must include the right to protest."

As he also notes that, “the limits of this expression are reached when actual threats or undue disruption of the university’s operations are involved.”

No one on this panel is advocating for violence, harassment, or disruption the university’s operations. But students have the right to peacefully protest and express their opinions, regardless of whether or not those opinions are politically unpopular or morally abhorrent.

And at public colleges and universities, two of which are with us today, the First Amendment protects both popular and agreeable speech and speech that people can reasonably disagree with, including, sometimes, hateful words. But again, in painting with a broad brush, the Majority has attempted to remove any distinction between hate speech and genuine political protest.

I would like to remind everyone that the civil rights movement of years past has always moved public opinion rather than just waiting for it to change.

Today, 81 percent of Americans report a favorable opinion of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

But, in 1966, a Gallup survey found that nearly two-thirds of Americans had an *unfavorable* opinion of Dr. King. Two years later, in the immediate aftermath of his assassination, another survey found that roughly one third of Americans felt that he brought it on himself.

In closing, as Members of Congress, we have the responsibility to hold ourselves to a higher standard and be role models for our communities. By fueling culture wars, as I believe these hearings have done, we are setting an example for others to feed into and continue to escalate the tensions on college campuses.

To that end, our students deserve more from us. They deserve a thoughtful, deliberative conversation about the constitutional questions before us that can lead to meaningful change. I hope my colleagues will rise to that challenge.

Thank you Madam Chair, and I yield back.