

Good evening Commissioner's. My name is Jill Madsen and I serve as the CEO of the Jewish Federation of Durham Chapel Hill. The Federation has been a vital piece of the local Jewish community since the early 70's. We are an umbrella organization which includes the Levin Jewish Community Center, Jewish Family Services, the Jewish Community Foundation, the Israel Center, and the Jewish Community Relations Council. Beyond our internal scope, we are also an umbrella organization for the community, working closely with the local congregations Beth El Synagogues, Chabad, Etz Chayim, Kol Haskalah, Kehillah Synagogue, Judea Reform Congregation, and Triangle Family Shul. We also work in partnership with the Lerner Jewish Community Day School, Hillel, Jewish Life at Duke, the Moishe House, Voice for Israel, and Carolina Jews for Justice. The blend of all of this ensures we have the broadest reaching scope of embracing and supporting the local Jewish community, one of the fast-growing Jewish communities currently in the United States.

The recent actions of the Durham City Council is of great concern to the Federation and the broader Jewish community. The number of emails, telephone calls, and meetings that I have received in the past two months connected to this is as astounding. If I needed to synthesize the concerns into two themes that emerged from these countless conversations, they would be:

1. The singling out of Israel in the statement. Including Israel in the statement was not needed for the purpose and its inclusion leads community members to fear strong anti-Semitic notions are at play.
2. Absence of the larger, broader, Jewish voice of the community.

I would like to take a few minutes to speak about each of these in greater detail.

First, simply put Israel does not need to be mentioned at all in the statement. The purpose and vision of the statement was to communicate the council's vision for improving community relations between police and residents. Israel has nothing to do with this. The reason one has to believe Israel was included was due to the inflammatory petition that was submitted to the council that was filled with both anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist rhetoric - the petition that all the council members, but the Mayor were comfortable signing. If this event would have happened in isolation community members may not have been as concerned regarding the clear anti-Semitism present in this action, but the event is not isolated. During the council meeting when the statement was being discussed anti-Semitic slurs were spouted by one of the speakers. In weeks following the council's decision anti-Semitic hate flyers were found around Durham. In just the past year and a half, the Jewish campus was victim of a bomb threat and there was no public response from local government condemning such actions. This past fall when there was threat of a KKK protest in downtown Durham a local shul was forced to take precautions and remove the Torah's from the building and sending staff home to be prepared. Even these past winter months with the terrible weather we experienced community members with school aged children expressed concern that once again there would end up being a battle about having make-up days on Shabbat. So when the majority of the council supports a hateful petition singling out Israel, the Jewish homeland, and then the council passes a watered down version which still includes Israel, one cannot ignore the presence of anti-Semitism in our community.

Second, as mentioned in the creation of the statement that was passed, the absence of the larger, broader, Jewish community voice cannot be ignored. In other communities when such a statement would be on the table that impacted or had correlation to the Jewish community, Federations and Rabbis are sought out to share insight and perspective, representing the broader community. In case of the recent statement, neither happened, in fact the opposite, as both the Federation and the local Rabbi's reached out with their concern and prior to the vote and this was ignored. One has to wonder why this was - was the broader Jewish perspective and voice not included by it contradicts the actions the council took?

I appreciate your time this evening regarding these concerns. Consistent with your mission to provide open channels of useful communication among various groups and the city council so that misunderstanding leading to conflict may be ameliorated, we ask that the Commission formally conclude, based on what you have heard and will see, that this City Council Decree is discriminatory and consequently you call upon the Council to take important corrective action.