

For many Jews in Durham, the April 16 City Council vote felt like a punch in the gut. That all six members of Durham's City Council signed a petition blaming Israeli police training for helping local police "terrorize Black and Brown communities here in the US" is extremely concerning for many Durham Jews. The fact that the petition was circulated by other Jews provides no comfort to many Jews who interpreted Council members' signing of the petition as, at best ill-informed and insensitive and, at worst, offensive.

Last week, Rabbi Jill Jacobs, a prominent human rights activist who often speaks on issues of Palestinian rights, writing in the Washington Post, used the Durham resolution as an example of action that drew on anti-Semitic themes, noting "There are reasonable questions to ask about the content of training programs in Israel, but the suggestion — absent supporting evidence — that Jews bear guilt for U.S. police killings merely updates the old anti-Semitic trope that falsely accused Jews of managing the global slave trade."

Many Jews in our congregation and the larger Jewish community feel at best, invisible and unimportant to the city of Durham, and at worst, they fear that antisemitism is a growing and present threat for our community. City Councilmembers did not reach out to the Jewish institutions in Durham to invite their comment on the resolution before it was considered, and they ignored a letter from myself and 7 other rabbis in the Triangle, who urged additional due diligence and rejecting the petition.

Rabbi Jacobs' op-ed is just one example of the negative national and international attention the city's resolution has received. Beth El has had to field concerns from current and former members of the community considering withdrawing from our synagogue and questioning our policies and practices as a result of the resolution. The time we have spent addressing pain and conflict in our own community has been a time-consuming distraction from our own efforts to build a thriving and growing Jewish community in Durham, one that has established meaningful collaborative relationships with many local organizations that contribute regularly to civic life, often interfaith collaborations.

Jewish tradition teaches we should assume the best of others whenever possible. We do not believe that our City Council members are anti-Semitic or that they wish ill upon the Jews of Durham. We believe the City Council reached a hasty decision that made many Durham Jews feel marginalized and unjustly singled out. We believe they profoundly misunderstand what the modern State of Israel means to Judaism as it is understood by much of the American Jewish community and we invite City Council members to increase their outreach to Jewish institutions and local community members to foster meaningful relationships and restore trust between the Jewish community and the city of Durham. According to its website, the Human Relations Commission provides open channels of useful communications among the various racial, religious, ethnic and economic groups in Durham and between those groups and the city council so that misunderstandings and wide differences leading to conflict may be ameliorated. We ask that the Human Relations Commission formally conclude that this governmental decree was discriminatory and to call upon the City Council to take important corrective action.

Most importantly, part of why this hurts so much is that the Jewish community loves Durham. We have been here since 1887. It was Mutt Evans, Durham's first Jewish mayor who served from 1951-63, who found a way around the law, which prohibited racially integrated seating, by

removing the seats out of his store's lunch counter area so his customers could continue to eat together while standing. Today's Jews are active in civic organizations and committed to building a Durham for tomorrow that is progressive, diverse, affordable and a beacon of what's possible in North Carolina. We pray we can come together as a community, heal, and rededicate ourselves to building a city of equality, justice and understanding for its citizens.