

LETTER TO GOUCHER PRESIDENT BOWEN RE: CIVIL RIGHTS VIOLATION OF JEWISH STUDENTS

President José Antonio Bowen
Goucher College
President's Office
1021 Dulaney Valley Rd.
Baltimore, MD 21204

Sent VIA EMAIL

November 19, 2015

Dear President Bowen,

We are 36 organizations deeply concerned about Jewish students at Goucher College following an incident in which their civil rights were violated and their sense of safety and well-being threatened. We are writing to urge you to address this matter in a forthright and vigorous manner.

Here are the facts as we understand them:

- Prior to a November 5 event sponsored by Goucher Hillel and Gopher Israel featuring a screening of the documentary "Mom and Dad I Have Something to Tell You" and a talk by Israeli TV star Assi Azar about how parents cope with their children "coming out of the closet," members of the Goucher student organization TALQ BIG sent an email to Hillel students threatening to "take immediate grassroots action for the event to be shut down."
- During the November 5 event, approximately 15 members of TALQ BIG engaged in a pre-meditated and coordinated series of disruptive actions, which included brandishing anti-Israel posters, chanting anti-Israel slogans, and verbally disrupting and arguing with the speaker. According to Azar, "the protesters were trying to shut down all dialogue and were aggressive toward those students who were trying to have a calm, respectful discussion."
- Although the Goucher administration was apprised of the intention of TALQ BIG members to shut down the event, these students were permitted by numerous college officials who were present at the event to enter the hall with posters in hand and were not ejected following any of their disruptive actions. However, when college officials "became concerned about the dynamic of the dialogue" during the Q&A, they decided to shut down the event without consulting the sponsoring organizations or the guest speaker.
- According to [Azar](#) and other eye-witnesses, Jewish students in attendance felt "threatened," "targeted," "under attack" and "bullied into silence." Many students were afraid and distraught after the event, and several were reduced to tears.

We are aware that on November 10 you issued a letter to the Goucher College community describing steps that you intend to take in the wake of this incident. Commendably, these include investigating whether any Code of Conduct violations have occurred and committing your administration to dealing with any violations "as set forth in college policies." We believe that your investigation will reveal that TALQ BIG members violated several subsections of Article IV of the Goucher Code of Conduct, including: B.4 (disorderly conduct); B.6 (disruption of authorized activities); B.12 (harassment or intimidation); and B.23 (violation of any federal, state, or local law, regulation or ordinance – since the protesters' behavior is likely in violation of Baltimore County and Maryland State laws proscribing disturbing and conspiring to disturb the public peace and disorderly conduct; the first amendment protecting the right to free speech and assembly of Hillel and Gopher Israel members; and other federal laws protecting the civil rights of Jewish students).

However, we are troubled by several aspects of your letter. First and foremost, nowhere do you single out and unequivocally condemn the hateful, harmful and discriminatory actions of the members of TALQ BIG who disrupted and sought to shut down a college-authorized event. Their behavior was illegal, immoral and reprehensible, and it should have been immediately and vigorously condemned by your office. Furthermore, nowhere do you identify the obvious victims of this illegal, immoral and reprehensible behavior -- the Jewish and pro-Israel students who organized and attended the event and whose rights were violated, safety threatened, and event ruined -- nor do you acknowledge the harm that has been done to them or express a sincere commitment to remedying that harm. Finally, nowhere do you admit that college officials mishandled this incident by allowing TALQ BIG members, who came to the event fully intending to shut it down, to disrupt that event and intimidate, bully and threaten those in attendance. Instead of removing the protestors, which was clearly warranted by their behavior, college officials unilaterally took action to stop the event altogether, thereby adding insult to injury for the Jewish and pro-Israel organizers and attendees.

We are seeing anti-Israel activity veer into ugly antisemitic actions at an alarming rate, with anti-Israel student groups planning and executing actions which violate the civil rights and threaten the safety and well-being of Jewish and pro-Israel students on dozens of college and university campuses across the country. Just a few days ago several members of an anti-Israel group at University of Texas Austin [disrupted](#) an event hosted by the UT Institute for Israeli Studies, blocking entry to the event and heckling the speaker with anti-Israel and antisemitic canards. Last week at the University of Minnesota Law School an Israeli academic was shouted down by two dozen protesters as he tried to begin a lecture.

As University of Minnesota Law Professor Dale Carpenter eloquently pointed out in a *Washington Post* [article](#) about the recent incident on his campus, “a university cannot accept any moral legitimacy in such an act or equivocate in denouncing it. It is fundamentally illiberal and destructive to the core values of an educational institution.”

We encourage you to demonstrate unequivocally your commitment to protecting the safety and civil rights of all Goucher students – including Jewish students – by taking the following actions regarding this incident and all similar incidents in the future:

- Swiftly, forcefully and publicly condemn the perpetrators and their behavior.
- Publicly commit to investigating the perpetrators for violations of university policy and local, state and federal law, and to carrying out appropriate disciplinary measures in a timely manner.
- Publicly commit to investigating any administrative failures in the handling of any incident involving the suppression of students’ civil rights and threats to student safety on your campus.

Thank you for considering our recommendations.

Sincerely,

Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity (AEPi)

Alums for Campus Fairness

AMCHA Initiative

AMCHA UCLA Alumni

American Institute for Jewish Research

Americans for Peace and Tolerance

BEAR: Bias Education, Advocacy & Resources

Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law

Club Z

Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA)

CUFI on Campus

Davis Faculty for Israel

Eagles Wings

Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET)
Fuel For Truth
Goucher GOP Club
Hasbara Fellowships
Institute for Black Solidarity with Israel
Iranian American Jewish Federation
Israeli-American Council (IAC)
Jerusalem U
Jewish Law Students Association at UCLA
National Conference on Jewish Affairs
Middle East Political and Information Network (MEPIN)
Proclaiming Justice to the Nations
Project Genesis - Baltimore, MD
Scholars for Peace in the Middle East
Simon Wiesenthal Center
StandWithUs
Stop BDS on Campus
Students and Parents Against Campus Anti-Semitism
Students Supporting Israel at UCLA
The Israel Christian Nexus
The Israel Group
Training and Education About the Middle East (T.E.A.M.)
Zionist Organization of America

Cc: Dr. Leslie W. Lewis, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Bryan F. Coker, Vice President and Dean of Students