

Project Esther
Statement by Kulanu Workgroup Fighting Antisemitism and Hate

Kulanu is Hebrew for “all of us”—all of us united in our fight against antisemitism, hate, and dividing communities from each other (othering).

Kulanu of Ohavi Zedek is the name of our workgroup fighting antisemitism and hate; we are members of Ohavi Zedek Synagogue. We are making this statement on behalf of our workgroup, not on behalf of any other group.

We are part of a network of synagogues fighting antisemitism who were brought together by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). We utilize the resources of our community and many organizations including the ADL. The ADL provides access to nationwide experts, webinars, and conversations with other synagogues challenging antisemitism and hate.

As Jews, no matter how long we have been in America and in Vermont, we have been and still are the “other.” We know antisemitism when we see it, hear it, and when we experience it.

We are witnessing an increase in antisemitic acts from across the political spectrum. In the New England region during 2024, the ADL Annual Audit of Antisemitic Incidents recorded 638 incidents of assault, harassment, and antisemitism constituting a 213% increase from 2022.

<https://www.adl.org/resources/report/audit-antisemitic-incidents-2024>

Kulanu of Ohavi Zedek opposes the actions of Hamas, Hezbollah, or any other terrorist groups within the United States or around the world.

We were shaken by images of a recent antisemitic act from Boulder, Colorado. A man used a homemade flame thrower and Molotov cocktails to burn marchers during their walking vigil for the remaining hostages in Gaza, leading to the death of one woman. These actions open painful memories from the fires of the Inquisition, the ovens in concentration camps.

We recognize that antisemitism is one of the many forms of baseless hatred directed at different communities also considered “other.” Today, we see increasing prejudice against immigrants, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and other groups.

We have not lost sight of the dangers and risks behind the persistent antisemitism on the far left. We condemn antisemitism wherever and whenever it occurs whether it be from the far left or the far right. Yet today we witness the federal government using this real problem as a wedge to broadly target (1) foreign students exercising first amendment rights, (2) immigrants, (3) educational institutions, (4) law firms, and (5) the judiciary. Arrests of students by ICE agents remind us of the actions taken by authoritarian regimes.

Current federal government actions derive from a playbook called Project Esther, which was developed by the Heritage Foundation, as part of Project 2025. See *Project Esther: A National Strategy to Combat Antisemitism*.
<https://www.heritage.org/progressivism/report/project-esther-national-strategy-combat-antisemitism>.

Despite its title, Project Esther is not about combating antisemitism in America. Rather, it is an effort by radicalized right wing Christian nationalists to weaponize “antisemitism” and embraced by our federal government to undermine constitutional protections for all Americans. We note the following:

- Project Esther was created without input from the Jewish community.
- Project Esther does not address or acknowledge antisemitism by right wing groups, nor acknowledge the history of antisemitism within the United States.
- Project Esther targets progressives, nonprofits, and liberals with a stated goal to undermine communities, and to discourage cooperation among all of us, by creating fear and distrust.
- Project Esther specifically targets pro-Palestinian activity by creating a fictional entity called the “ Hamas Support Network ” whose purported goals are to attack American democracy and capitalism, and by painting any individual, organization, or institution that has shown sympathy to Palestinian rights as part of that nonexistent network.
- Project Esther targets universities and institutions, as well as individuals engaging in constitutionally protected speech.
- Project Esther's defining document makes no bones that its broad purpose is the diminution or elimination of influence in American politics of anyone whose views the Heritage Society deems insufficiently “ American . ”
- Project Esther’s defining document states that the execution of its recommended actions by the government could be unlawful or unconstitutional but that, essentially, the ends justify the means.

- Project Esther accuses the American Jewish community of “dangerous complacency and indifference” towards antisemitism with no basis. The report is filled with antisemitic tropes and a misunderstanding of both Jewish and American history.

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All persons within our country are entitled to due process of law, free speech, and free assembly. We may not agree with an individual’s speech and may find that speech hateful. Yet, we recognize that such speech is constitutionally protected unless such speech is an incitement to violence and is likely to produce such action.

We recognize that diminishing constitutional protections for one group or one viewpoint diminishes those protections for all of us.

We reject any policy of arresting, detaining, and deporting people without charges and due process; we are frightened to see people being punished without a trial and being kept from legal representation. Absent due process, absent judicial review, there is no way to know if law enforcement agents are apprehending the right people, much less whether they are being seized and tried fairly. We expect federal government officials to follow court orders designed to ensure due process and to uphold their sworn oaths of office.

We respect the rule of law of our state and our country.

We believe the academic independence of universities and institutions is one of the nation’s safeguards for marginalized groups, including Jews. We believe that asking for control of their private functioning and acting to censor information, discussion, and the free exchange of ideas does not fight antisemitism but threatens to increase it.

We reject all actions taken by any federal or state government administration that weaponizes antisemitism in a manner that dilutes any rights held by all persons under the Constitutions and laws of the United States and any individual state.

We reject all actions taken by any federal or state government administration that will result in a “blame the Jews” trope.

Dated this 7th day of July 2025.

Kulanu of Ohavi Zedek

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If you have any comments, please use the following link:

<https://ohavizedek.shulcloud.com/form/antisemitism.html>