



THE GENERAL COURT OF MASSACHUSETTS
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

**Special Commission on Combating Antisemitism
Representative Simon Cataldo & Senator John C. Velis, Co-Chairs**

**Commission Meeting #12
September 25, 2025 - 11 A.M.**

**Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02133
Gardner Auditorium**

AGENDA

1. Roll Call
2. Approve Prior Meeting Minutes: September 8, 2025
3. Opening Statements of the Chairs and Announcements – Sen. Velis and Rep. Cataldo
4. Public Comment
5. Adjourn

This virtual meeting will be viewable by the public via a livestream that can be found on the <https://malegislature.gov/> website. Please be advised that the schedule and agenda are subject to change at the discretion of the co-chairs. You may contact the Commission Chairs with any questions at SCCA@malegislature.gov.

Massachusetts Special Commission on Combatting Antisemitism

Meeting Minutes 9.8.2025

Date: September 8, 2025

Time: 1pm-4pm

Location: Massachusetts State House, Hearing Room A2

Attendees:

- State Senator John Velis (In-person)
- State Representative Simon Cataldo (In-person)
- Jeremy Burton, CEO of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston (In-person)
- Jody Kipnis, CEO of the Holocaust Legacy Foundation (In-person)
- Peggy Shukur, Vice President of the East Division of the Anti-Defamation League (In-person)
- Robert Leikind, Regional Director of the American Jewish Committee New England (In-person)
- State Representative Steven Howitt (Virtual)
- David Friedman, Governor's Appointee (In-person)
- Dara Kaufman, Executive Director at the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires (In-person)
- Jamie Hoag, Senior Counselor to Massachusetts Attorney General Andrea Campbell (In-person)
- Karen Sampson, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Virtual)
- Aaron Polansky, Superintendent of Old Colony Regional Vocational Technical High School (Virtual)
- Rita Blanter, Board Member of Congregation Ahavat Olam in North Andover (In-person)
- Jill Hai, Member of the Lexington Select Board (Virtual)
- Constantia Papanikolaou, Chief Legal Counsel, Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (In-person)
- District Attorney Paul Tucker, Essex County District Attorney (Virtual)
- Mayor Ruthanne Fuller, Mayor of Newton (Virtual)

1. Roll Call

- **Commission Co-Chair Velis** called the meeting to order and asked Anna O’Sullivan to conduct the roll call.
- **Roll Call:** Conducted by Anna O’Sullivan.

2. Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes

- **Commission Co-Chair Velis** requested a motion to approve the minutes from the August 7, 2025, meeting.
- **Commission Co-Chair Velis** motioned to approve.
- **Commissioner Kaufman** seconded.
- **Vote:** The minutes were adopted by a voice vote.

3. Opening Statements and Announcements

- **Commission Co-Chair Velis** welcomed commission members and the public, noting that the Commission continues to focus on higher education. He emphasized the upcoming November 30th final report deadline and previewed future hearings, including another public comment session at the State House.
- **Commission Co-Chair Cataldo** highlighted a new Microsoft Form on the Commission’s website to collect written public feedback more efficiently.

4. Overview of Meeting Agenda

- **Commission Co-Chair Cataldo** reviewed the meeting format and outlined that the agenda planned for the day would continue focusing on antisemitism in higher education. He noted that the agenda was full and asked individual speakers to keep remarks to 7–10 minutes, with Q&A following each presentation.

5. Discussion on the Impact of Antisemitism on STEM and Research in Higher Education

Speaker: Dr. Mark Poznansky, Harvard Medical School

Discussion Highlights:

- Shared background as a descendant of Holocaust survivors and his experiences with antisemitism.
- Noted that many Jews respond to rising antisemitism by keeping a low profile.
- Stressed that boycotts of Israeli ideas harm research collaboration.

- Recommended definitive statements against antisemitism, mandatory education, and strong reporting/disciplinary measures.

Q&A Highlights:

- **Commissioner Friedman** asked about Harvard's trainings; Dr. Poznansky noted Project Shema is being developed.
- **Commissioner Friedman** asked about antisemitism spillover into teaching hospitals; Dr. Poznansky confirmed it occurs.
- **Commissioner Shukur** asked if students are reconsidering fellowships in Boston; Dr. Poznansky confirmed some have declined offers.
- **Commissioner Blanter** asked about discrimination against Jewish patients; Dr. Poznansky said isolated cases exist, though the student impact is more significant.

6. Discussion on Antisemitism at Harvard: Perspective of a Jewish Mom

Speaker: Lindsay Gabow, Harvard Law School

Discussion Highlights:

- Introduced self as a veteran, mother, law student, and Jewish American.
- Deferred the start of law school after the events of October 7th, 2023.
- Described loss of intellectual freedom on campus, where Israel cannot be discussed outside anti-Israel protests.
- Called for more venues for open discussion rather than restricting speech

Q&A Highlights:

- **Commissioner Leikind** asked about efforts to restore dialogue; Ms. Gabow said administration acknowledged antisemitism but took no concrete steps.
- **Commissioner Friedman** asked about the aftermath of the BDS vote; Ms. Gabow said the student council focused solely on the Israel/Palestine conflict.
- **Commissioner Friedman** asked about pro-Palestinian phrases; Ms. Gabow said most use them out of ignorance of the Middle East.
- **Commission Co-Chair Velis** asked about attention to other genocides and Commission Co-Chair Cataldo inquired about her opinion on those that say antisemitism is less of a problem than other forms of bias; Ms. Gabow said the narrative frames Jews as "white and privileged," justifying oppression.
- **Commissioner Papanikolaou** asked about Harvard's revamped antisemitism training; Ms. Gabow said she had not taken it.
- **Commission Co-Chair Velis** asked about mental health concerns; Ms. Gabow said openly Jewish/Zionist students feel isolated.

7. Combating Antisemitism the Massachusetts Way; and a Word of Caution

Speaker: Frances Tanzer, Rose Professor of Holocaust Studies and Jewish Culture, Clark University; Jeremy Menchik, Associate Professor of International Relations and Political Science, Boston University; Hilary Lustick, Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction, UMass Lowell; Jonathan Feingold, Professor of Law, Boston University

Discussion Highlights:

- Jeremy Menchik emphasized the need for reliable data and noted that anti-Zionist Jews often feel pressure to hide their identity.
- Frances Tanzer explained “philosemitism” and raised concerns that the IHRA definition conflates antisemitism with anti-Zionism.
- Hilary Lustick provided real and hypothetical scenarios of antisemitism in education.
- Jonathan Feingold discussed discriminatory impacts of the IHRA definition and warned against conflating criticism of Israel with antisemitism.

Q&A Highlights:

- **Commissioner Leikind** expressed concern about dismissing antisemitism as “manufactured” and questioned the panel’s reliance on certain data; Jeremy Menchik clarified that comparisons between prejudices help distinguish issues requiring urgent policy action.
- **Commission Co-Chair Cataldo** pointed to EOPSS hate crime data; Menchik emphasized federal enforcement gaps.
- **Commission Co-Chair Velis** challenged the framing of antisemitism as a “problem” versus a “crisis”; panelists stressed that framing is essential for shaping policy responses.
- **Commissioner Friedman** pressed on how to protect students with differing political views; panelists agreed exclusion should not occur.
- **Commissioner Shukur** raised the balance between combating antisemitism and avoiding its weaponization; Feingold stressed the importance of pursuing both.

8. Discussion of Hillel Experience on Public and Private Campuses

Speaker: Miriam Berkowitz Blue, Executive Director, Hillel Council of New England

Discussion Highlights:

- Shared experiences of Jewish students being pressured to hide their identity.

Q&A Highlights:

- **Commissioner Shukur** requested examples of positive interventions; Ms. Berkowitz Blue emphasized strong policies and leadership.
- **Commission Co-Chair Cataldo** raised the issue of inclusivity for anti-Zionist Jews; she acknowledged students often feel forced to take a stance.
- **Commissioner Friedman** inquired about mask bans; Ms. Berkowitz Blue said that is more of an issue on urban campuses which see a lot of protest and interaction with the surrounding community.

9. Discussion on the Role of State Government in Responding to Antisemitism in Higher Education

Speaker: Douglas Hauer, Former Adjunct Faculty, Boston University School of Law

Discussion Highlights:

- Recommended creating an ombudsman in the Attorney General's Office to handle antisemitism cases, citing concerns with campus Title VI/IX offices.

Q&A Highlights:

- **Commissioner Friedman** asked about antisemitism in curriculum; Mr. Hauer believed a dedicated course would have been welcomed.
- **Commission Co-Chair Velis** pressed whether campus offices themselves are part of the problem; Mr. Hauer confirmed they can be.

10. Discussion on Addressing Antisemitism and Intellectual Culture in Higher Education

Speaker: Sara Coodin, Director of Academic Affairs, American Jewish Committee

Discussion Highlights:

- Raised concerns about toxic intellectual culture and politicization of unrelated academic spaces.
- Opposed academic boycotts, citing conflict with academic freedom.

Q&A Highlights:

- **Commissioner Leikind** asked about effective strategies; Dr. Coodin said some universities are revising faculty handbooks.
- **Commission Co-Chair Velis** observed that many administrators want to act but fear social consequences; Dr. Coodin confirmed this is common among graduate students and untenured faculty.

- **Commissioner Burton** sought guidance for universities; Dr. Coodin recommended securing Jewish events and supporting faculty in difficult classroom conversations.
- **Commissioner Friedman** questioned whether reliance on university presidents is enough or if anti-BDS laws are necessary; Dr. Coodin said boycotts create unfair environments that need reassessment.

11. Adjournment

- **Commission Co-Chair Velis** thanked commission members and the public for participation and asked for a motion to adjourn.
- **Commissioner Burton** motioned.
- **Commissioner Kaufman** seconded the motion.
- Meeting Adjourned.