



**Jewish Community
Relations Council**
MILWAUKEE
JEWISH FEDERATION

Sept. 8, 2025

Dear Jewish Community Members and Allies:

The Wisconsin Legislature is considering a bill to support the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance \(IHRA\) working definition of antisemitism](#) as a tool to define and respond to the rise of antisemitism in our community and throughout Wisconsin. To date, more than 1,200 entities including 73 nations and 37 U.S. states have adopted the IHRA definition.

Wisconsin's reported antisemitic incidents reflect a cumulative increase of 459% since 2015, a staggering rise that shows no signs of reversing course. Despite this data, as a society we continue to struggle with what constitutes antisemitism and when or even if to apply the label - having a global framework as a starting point is critical.

Before we talk about what this bill is, let's talk about **what this bill is NOT**:

- The IHRA definition is meant to be used as a tool to identify instances of antisemitism, including denying the right for Israel to exist as the Jewish homeland, only in the context of other law violations. It **does nothing** to infringe on First Amendment Rights.
- The IHRA **cannot be used to punish protected expression**, *even if that expression is antisemitic*.
- The IHRA **does not limit free speech**. The First Amendment safeguard ensures that offensive or hostile speech remains protected unless tied to an otherwise unlawful act such as threats, vandalism, or assault.
- The IHRA **does not criminalize criticism** of the Israeli government or Israeli political leaders.
- The IHRA is **NOT** itself a law and violating it is not punishable.

What does the IHRA do?

The IHRA Definition **outlines several common manifestations of antisemitism**, including the targeting of Jewish individuals, institutions, or property; denying the Jewish people the right to self-determination; claiming the existence of a Jewish conspiracy; and questioning that the Holocaust occurred. The definition does not infringe on free speech. **It does not criminalize criticism of Israel or legitimate political discourse**.



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The definition is about clarity, not censorship.

Our Jewish Federation supports free speech rights. While free speech is a cornerstone of democratic societies, when laws are broken it must not be used as a shield for hate. No community should have to live in fear or be singled out based on religion or ethnicity.

Key Components of the Wisconsin Bill

- **Who does the bill apply to?** It applies to all state agencies, local governments, and their employees. School districts are explicitly included.
- **What does the bill direct?** It directs officials to *consider* the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism and its examples when assessing potential antisemitic incidents.
- **When is the IHRA definition used?** It guides the evaluation of discriminatory intent when applying:
 - Existing anti-discrimination laws, ordinances, or policies.
 - Existing criminal laws that carry “hate crime penalty enhancers,” meaning on its own the IHRA definition is not a law, and violating it carries no punishment UNLESS antisemitism was a factor in the carrying out of other crimes such as assault.
- **How are free speech rights protected?** It states clearly that nothing in the bill may infringe on First Amendment rights or conflict with federal or state anti-discrimination laws.

We are asking members of the Jewish community and our allies to please reach out to your State [Senator](#) and [Representative](#), as well as many others as you are willing to reach out to via a phone call or email. We need strong statewide outreach with the following messaging:

- You support the adoption of a Wisconsin IHRA bill to help state leaders be able to correctly identify and respond to instances of antisemitism.
- As of today, over 1,200 entities across the globe - including 43 countries; 37 U.S. states – Republican-led and Democratic-led alike, the European Union, and major institutions such as the United Nations and NATO - have adopted or endorsed the IHRA definition.



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- Universities, law enforcement bodies, and civil society organizations are increasingly using the definition to guide training, monitor hate incidents, and develop more inclusive policies.
- IHRA definition is meant to be used as a tool to identify instances of antisemitism or anti-Zionism and does nothing to infringe on First Amendment Rights. IHRA cannot be used to punish protected expression, even if that expression is antisemitic.
- IHRA does not limit free speech. The First Amendment safeguard ensures that offensive or hostile speech remains protected unless tied to an otherwise unlawful act such as threats, vandalism, or assault.
- IHRA does not criminalize criticism of the Israeli government or Israeli political leaders.
- Wisconsin should pass an IHRA bill as a matter of principle, not politics. In the face of rising hate, silence is complicity. Words must lead to action, and action begins with understanding.
- Members of the Jewish community deserve to be protected by all elected officials. Effectively responding to antisemitism requires a bipartisan approach.

In the last eighteen months, the world has witnessed a disturbing and unprecedented surge in antisemitic rhetoric, violence, and harassment. Jewish communities around the globe - on campuses, in public spaces, online, and even in the workplace - have reported a dramatic escalation in hate-fueled incidents. To respond effectively, societies need clear definitions and consistent frameworks. The **International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism** has emerged as a vital tool in this fight. It provides a practical guideline that helps governments, law enforcement, educators, and institutions recognize and confront antisemitism in all its modern forms.

Calling out antisemitism is not a matter of politics—it is a matter of principle and a matter of collective responsibility.