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HB 2299 Prohibiting discriminatory practices on the basis of religion at public educational institutions
and authorizing the attorney general to investigate violations and assess civil penalties under
Proponent
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I'd like to thank this committee for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Neta Meltzer. I am here on behalf of the Jewish Community Relations Bureau | AJC, which represents the Jewish communities of Kansas in matters of public policy, to testify in support of House Bill 2299. I'm also here as an Israeli American, born in Israel and raised in the state of Kansas.

I grew up in what has been referred to by some as the golden age of Jewish life in America. Growing up, I was never afraid to share my story: where I was born, what my name means and how to pronounce it. I was never ashamed to be a native Hebrew speaker, to wear my cultural symbols in public. But the reason I'm here today is because the world changed on October 7th, and if we're being honest, it was shifting in a deeply concerning direction for many years before that devastating day. Many students today don't feel comfortable, don't feel safe, showing up to school in the fullness of their identities. More and more, students are either choosing to hide the Jewish part of who they are, or face the very real possibility of antisemitic backlash if they choose not to.

I know this because at JCRB|AJC, we talk to Jewish students every day. And we survey them, asking questions about their experiences among their peers and in their classrooms. I want to share just a few of the comments we heard in our most recent survey of K-12 Jewish students, conducted in the fall of 2024.

One student told us, "I've experienced more antisemitic incidents this year than any year before." Another said, "I'm constantly being told I should be harmed, how people wish I was dead, and how I am 'being dramatic' about the amount of Israelis who were killed on October 7th." And I want to share one more thing, which is that the majority of students who experienced antisemitism in the last year chose not to report it, one student citing how it wasn't "out of the ordinary" at this point and the "futility" of seeking help. This is a far cry from my experience as Jewish and Israeli-American student in Kansas public schools years ago.

Our institutions play a powerful role in the norms and values we pass down to the next generations. Empowering them to deeply understand antisemitism in its various manifestations, and ensuring we have the tools to address it where we see it arise, is critical in today's deeply concerning environment. Thank you.