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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 Barry Kaseff and I'm proud to serve as the board president for the Jewish Community Relations Bureau | AJC, which represents the Jewish communities of Kansas in matters of public policy. Today, I'm here to testify in support of House Bill 2299.

One of the most important elements of this legislation is its use of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of antisemitism as the framework for our public schools to recognize this complex form of hate. Antisemitism has been referred to as the world's oldest hatred, and it has shifted and evolved throughout history, making it at times challenging to identify and, by extension, challenging to address. The IHRA definition ensures that we are able to clearly identify antisemitism however it manifests, whether through what we might recognize as familiar antisemitic tropes, or through its newer, modern-day manifestations.

And there's never been a more urgent time to be taking antisemitism seriously and creating mechanisms for accountability. We see that urgency in the data, whether through the FBI's hate crime statistics, which consistently find that while Jews make up just 2% of the U.S. population, we find ourselves to be the targets of over 60% of religion-based hate crimes. We see it in the heat maps and research studies coming out of the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee. We hear it from the students the JCRB|AJC staff work with every day. We hear it from the incidents being reported to us from members of our community, painful stories of insults, threats, discrimination, vandalism. We are in a reality many in the Jewish community hoped we would never have to experience.

It wasn't always like this, and it certainly doesn't have to be this way. We need clear-eyed, collective understanding of antisemitism, this hateful phenomenon we all seek to combat. We need mechanisms to address it when we see it.