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HB 2299 Prohibiting discriminatory practices on the basis of religion at public educational institutions

Proponent

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Thank you, Miss Chairwoman and education committee members, My name is Leah Abrahamsson.

Thank you for your time today. I have three minutes to speak with you about my experiences as a Jewish woman in the public school system. Three minutes to talk you through the last 17 years of scar tissue that has built up in every American Jew as we carry the stories and memories of endless persecution, the holocaust, and now October 7th. These memories do not get any lighter to carry, we have just gotten used to the weight. However, we can no longer face outright antisemitism and hatefulness alone. Three minutes is not enough time for us to go into all of these intricacies, but it is enough time for me to tell you that this bill would help us feel less alone, less scared, and less targeted.

As long as I have been able to understand that I am Jewish, I have known I have a target on my back, and my experiences in schools only confirmed these fears. In elementary, middle, and high school. I had Jewish friends, but we were of course the minority. When the high holidays came around every year, I needed to advocate for the right to take off school for religious observance. Every single year was always the same discussion. It was my responsibility to go to my Teachers, and tell them I was missing and every year without fail, I had one or two teachers or even professors in college who would ask me, do you have to miss? It's a lot of work for me to

accommodate you. In middle school, I remember the comments people would make. One girl in my class told me she knew I was Jewish by the way my nose entered a room before I did. Then high school came, and nearly every book I checked out from the library had a swastika drawn on one of the pages. I even remember being told I belonged in an oven while at a football game for talking about my Rosh Hashanah plans.

When I started college at CU Boulder I found my community through my Jewish faith, but the antisemitism remained the same and even escalated. During my first semester, I was celebrating Hanukkah and came back to my dorm with the message “Burn All Jews” on my whiteboard. I share all these incidents to highlight a pattern, students are emboldened at school to spew hate and ignorance because the administration fails to protect minority students. As quickly as I came to expect antisemitism at schools, I had to expect the indifference of my administrators towards my wellbeing. The Jewish community was alone in fighting to recognize the corrosive, and pervasive anti-Semitism that was proudly being displayed. No one seemed to care. I was the one who was supposed to toughen it up and simply add it to the baggage. Add it to the scar tissue. But when any form of hate is excused, all types of hate grow.

My roommate freshman year was Hispanic and as she and I discussed this, she said she felt scared. The words did not directly target her, but she was afraid that the same people who were confident enough to be so hateful and antisemitic would also be racist. The same people who are targeting Jews on college campuses are also a threat to every minority.

That is why I am here today to speak strongly in support of HB 2299. We are fighting to be heard, protected, and supported. Not just Jewish students, but every minority. You never get used to handling antisemitism. You just get better at absorbing the impact that the comments make. Schools need to be safe places for **ALL** students and that starts by standing up against antisemitism and making sure education is not synonymous with hate crimes.