



Toolkit for Union Members Responding to Antisemitism Within their Unions

Together—we can
fight hate for good.

Nothing in this toolkit constitutes legal advice, nor is it intended to be a substitute for legal advice. It is a resource to assist union members seeking to use their voices to make change within their unions. Any and all concerns about legal rights and remedies that may attach to particular factual circumstances should be addressed to an attorney.

If you have experienced antisemitism in your union, you are not alone. This toolkit will empower you to use your voice as a union member to fight back against antisemitism and help strengthen your union by making it a truly inclusive space for all members, uniting members around the issues central to the union's purpose.

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Background

Why did ADL create this toolkit?

In the wake of October 7, ADL received a significant volume of reports of antisemitic and anti-Zionist activity within unions, which has in many instances created a hostile environment for Jewish union members. Many rank-and-file Jewish members feel hurt and isolated by the actions of their union but are unsure what they can do to address it. ADL developed this toolkit for those who want to push back against antisemitic and biased, anti-Israel activity and rhetoric within their union. This resource is designed to empower you to advocate for yourself, other union members, and the integrity of your union.

Examples of Union Incidents Reported to ADL

Below are some examples of union-related antisemitic incidents and problematic activity that have been reported to ADL:

- Members of union propose a resolution to be voted on that seeks divestment of pension funds from companies that do business with or are associated with Israel. Resolution singles out Israel alone for this treatment and uses inflammatory and problematic language of “apartheid” and “genocide” in the body of the resolution.
- Caucus within professional union circulates literature advocating for an anti-Zionist union.
- Union holds a training that is supposed to be about antisemitism but contains inflammatory anti-Zionist content.
- Teachers’ union publishes list of teaching resources or curriculum reflecting anti-Israel bias and containing overtly antisemitic content.
- Union holds votes on Shabbat or Jewish holiday and will not provide religious accommodation to observant Jewish member.

Glossary of Terms

Below is a glossary of terms that may be useful to members navigating the union space. This list, by no means exhaustive, is intended to provide a foundation for beginning to engage in some union-related advocacy.

Affiliate: A local or state union that is connected to a larger national or international union. Affiliates often follow the broader policies and guidelines set by the national body but operate independently in their specific regions.

Bylaws: The rules and regulations that govern the internal operations of a union. Bylaws outline the structure, roles, and responsibilities within the union and guide decision-making processes.

Collective Bargaining: The process by which a union negotiates with an employer on behalf of the members of a collective bargaining unit to establish the terms of employment, including wages, hours, and working conditions.

Collective Bargaining Agreement ("CBA"): A written and negotiated contract that exists between an employer and the union representing its employees. The CBA typically establishes employee pay, benefits, and other terms and conditions of employment.

Collective Bargaining Unit: A group of workers represented by a single union in collective bargaining with their employer. Members of the same bargaining unit share some common interest, which is frequently their particular skills, duties, working conditions, and geographic location. The union acts on behalf of all bargaining unit workers to negotiate pay, working conditions, and benefits with management. In some unions, the negotiations occur at the national level, while in others the negotiations occur at a state or even local level.

Committee: A group within a union tasked with focusing on specific areas, such as education, health and safety, or diversity and inclusion. Committees can be permanent or temporary and are instrumental in addressing ongoing concerns or specific projects or issues that arise.

Delegate: A union member elected or appointed to represent their local union at meetings or conventions of the larger state or national union. Delegates play a crucial role in shaping union policies and initiatives.

Executive Board: A group of elected union officials responsible for making decisions on behalf of the union. The board typically includes positions like president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer.

Grievance: A formal complaint filed by a union against an employer, alleging a violation of the collective bargaining agreement.

International Union: A union that represents workers across multiple countries. International unions often have national and local affiliates in different regions.

Local Union (or “Union Local”): The most basic unit of union organization, representing workers in a specific geographic area or workplace. Local unions handle day-to-day operations and member concerns and are often the group that conducts collective bargaining with management on behalf of workers in that bargaining unit.

National Union: A larger union organization that encompasses multiple local and state unions across the country. National unions provide support, resources, and guidance to their state and local affiliates, and pursue national policy that benefits the workers within their umbrella.

New Business Item (“NBI”): A term used in some unions to refer to new topics, proposals, or issues introduced for discussion and decision-making. New business items can include proposals for new policies, resolutions addressing current issues, or suggestions for changes to union procedures.

Resolution: A formal statement or decision adopted by a union's governing body or membership. Resolutions can address a wide range of issues, including social justice initiatives.

Shop Steward: A union member elected or appointed to represent and assist fellow workers in dealing with management and addressing workplace issues. Shop stewards are often the first point of contact for members with concerns.

Solidarity: The unity and mutual support among union members and affiliates. Solidarity is a core principle of unionism, emphasizing collective action and shared goals.

Union Dues: Regular payments made by members to support the union's activities, including collective bargaining, legal representation, and advocacy efforts. Union dues do not support unions' political activities.

Union Meeting: A gathering of union members to discuss and make decisions on union business. Meetings can be local, state, or national, depending on the level of the union.

Union Representative: An official who represents the union and its members in dealings with employers. Union representatives may be elected or appointed and are responsible for advocating on behalf of members.

My Union is Engaged in Antisemitic Activity. What Can I Do?

As a dues-paying union member, you hold rights that non-members do not. If your union is engaged in actions or statements that are harmful or offensive to you, you have the power to do something about it. You also have the power to initiate positive action in your union that promotes true inclusivity and helps educate membership and leadership about Jewish identity and antisemitism.

I. Get to Know Your Union, How it Functions, & Your Rights as a Member

A. Understand Your Union Structure and Mechanics

To understand how to use your voice to advocate as a union member, you must first understand the structure of your union, and how it operates. This will help you identify the decision points and forums where you can weigh in and advocate – preventing a harmful action or proposing an alternative or positive one.

So, for example, if your local union is promoting an anti-Israel resolution that is offensive or harmful to you, find out who gets to vote on local resolutions, where, and when. If resolutions are voted on by an Executive Board at local meetings, find out when and where those meetings are held so that you can attend and be heard. Identify who the members of the Executive Board are so that you can direct your advocacy to them before the vote – whether in person, or in writing.

It's also important to understand the process by which a proposed action by the union can be introduced. Is there an opportunity to debate and defeat a harmful action before it comes to a vote? If not, can you use the process to promote an alternative action that is not harmful? So, for example, let's say the state federation affiliated with your local union is considering a problematic resolution seeking divestment of pension funds from companies that do business with Israel. Find out what the process is for those resolutions/actions to be submitted for consideration. If they are submitted through the local union, you may have an opportunity to propose your own action offering an unproblematic alternative, if possible.

If it is the national union, and not the local affiliate, that will be voting on a harmful resolution, your advocacy will look different and depend upon the processes employed by the national union. Often the national union will have delegates from state/local affiliates who vote on resolutions at a national assembly. If this is the

case, you may wish to direct your advocacy to your local delegate, urging him/her to vote against the measure. You may also consider becoming a delegate so that you can have a direct impact on the statements and actions of the national union down the road.

B. Union Constitution & Bylaws

The Union Constitution typically contains language enshrining the fundamental principles by which the union is governed, and the rights and responsibilities of union members and officers broadly. Union bylaws set forth all the rules and procedures by which the union operates. The bylaws are a critical resource for understanding how you, as a union member, can make your voice heard. Union bylaws cover all aspects of union activity, including but not limited to how union officers are elected, how union dues are handled, how to introduce a resolution or other action, how committees are formed and structured, how and under what circumstances a member can be subject to discipline, etc. It is helpful to familiarize yourself with at least the portions of the union bylaws that may be relevant to the activity you are concerned about. For example, if a union committee is hosting a problematic training on antisemitism, consult the bylaws to understand how the committee was formed, who is a member, how to become a member, and how decisions are made. If you have raised your concerns in the correct channels, and the training still goes forward, consider how you might educate members better on antisemitism. Perhaps there is a DEI committee that you can join and suggest hosting an antisemitism training. If there is no committee that exists relating to the topic, consider following whatever process is set forth in the bylaws for forming your own committee to address issues of inclusivity and belonging, and to make sure Jewish voices are at the table.

As a general matter your union bylaws will be an invaluable resource for answering many of the questions that will come up for you as you become more involved.

C. Roberts Rules of Order

Roberts Rules of Order, which is used by most unions, is a written set of rules and procedures providing a structured framework for meetings and decision-making. The intent of these rules is to help ensure fairness, efficiency, and respect for the rights of all individual members. *Roberts Rules of Order* can be a helpful resource in understanding the mechanics of how union meetings are run, including how union business is introduced, debated, and voted on. Likewise, these rules can provide insight into how to oppose a proposed action, or how to challenge an action that was taken, to the extent that there was a violation of a rule.

II. Engage in Targeted Advocacy

Your approach to advocacy will of course depend on the particular issue you are concerned about within your union. Below are some tips and broad considerations to help you tailor your advocacy and maximize the potential for impact.

A. Preparation

Like most things in life, a little preparation goes a long way. You will be more effective in communicating your message if you take some time to prepare. If you are giving a floor speech at a union meeting against some particular resolution, plot out everything you want to say. Then practice saying it out loud. Have a friend listen to you to make sure it makes sense, and to identify any weaknesses you should address. Practicing will also help you build confidence.

If you are drafting a letter raising concerns with leadership, take some time to organize your thoughts and gather all the key information you want to reference before drafting. Make yourself an outline first. Check your bylaws so that you can include any necessary citations. Think about who to address the letter to (e.g. union president or committee chair) and who to copy on the letter. Prepare any evidence you want to attach so that you don't miss anything important.

B. Tone

In whatever forum you are advocating, it is crucial to keep a respectful tone. While topics relating to antisemitism and anti-Zionism bring up a lot of strong emotions for members of the Jewish community, many in your audience will have no emotional connection and perhaps very little understanding of these issues. As much as possible, be the calm and reasonable voice. You can be passionate, but with control. Do not engage in personal attacks. It is important to stay focused on your message and not let yourself get distracted by the inflammatory remarks or behavior of other members.

C. Hierarchy of Arguments

Focus your advocacy on the best arguments available to you. Begin with the strongest and then proceed to the next strongest, and so on if time/space permit. Below are some general guidelines to inform your thinking on which arguments will be the most compelling.

1. Process/Procedure/Rule

If you can identify a process, procedure, or other rule that was or will be violated or ignored by the proposed action, this is almost always your best argument – you should lead with it, and place significant emphasis there. Union processes are democratic, and the rules set forth in the bylaws and Roberts Rules of Order (to the extent they are incorporated by the bylaws) govern how those processes work. If a rule was violated or would be violated by the particular action, you will argue– the union cannot take this action because this rule prohibits it, as opposed to the union should not take this action because I disagree for this reason.

2. Union-Centered arguments

After process-related arguments, the second most powerful arguments will be those tied to the role of the union and the impact of the action on the strength of the union.

a. Inconsistent with or Irrelevant to Union's purpose:

Arguments rooted in the union's purpose and mission can be very powerful. The union's constitution and bylaws will likely provide helpful language to ground an argument that whatever action is being considered is either at odds with or totally irrelevant to that foundational purpose. Quote that language, whether in a speech or letter to union leadership.

b. Harmful to Union Solidarity:

Solidarity is a key theme in the labor movement – i.e. workers standing together united. Harm to one is deemed a harm to all. Where applicable and possible, address how the proposed action divides membership, creating unnecessary conflict, and thereby weakening the union. The union likely represents a broad range of individuals with different backgrounds and viewpoints. Actions that focus on the things that unite membership will ultimately strengthen the union. In contrast, permitting union business to be hijacked for various political causes that are not germane to the union's purpose risks alienating and potentially losing members.

3. Substantive

The third category of arguments you can raise is substantive – i.e. why the action proposed is a bad idea on the merits. While every set of facts is different, these arguments may be the most challenging, especially on controversial topics like Israel. That does not mean you should not make these arguments, but it is important to think about which substantive arguments will be most compelling and accessible for the audience and the least divisive.

So, for example, let's say a public school teachers union is considering a BDS measure that would divest state pension funds from companies that do business with Israel. Explaining why a BDS resolution is bad to a group of teachers who are not versed in the history of Israel or the BDS movement may prove quite challenging. Rather than focusing on the antisemitic double standard of BDS, for example, you could instead address the harmful economic impact on teachers – i.e. teacher pension funds should be invested with one goal in mind – to ensure financial growth and stability; injecting politics into investment decisions can hurt teachers' financial stability. This argument would likely resonate with more members than an argument focused on fairness to Israel or the Jewish community. If you do decide to address BDS head-on, or if you determine that this is a stronger approach, make sure you consider all possible arguments against it.

By way of example, the [Appendix](#) provides key substantive arguments/talking points to support opposition to a hypothetical resolution seeking divestment of pension funds from companies associated with Israel. Consult the "Resources" section in this guide for links to backgrounders and other data that may aid your substantive arguments relating to biased anti-Israel or antisemitic resolutions or other actions of your union. Finally, always feel free to connect with the [ADL regional office](#) in your area for further assistance in your advocacy on substantive issues relating to antisemitism.

III. Amplifying & Organizing Jewish Member Voices & Building Alliances

A. Amplify Jewish Voices

Strength in unions comes from the collective voice, and the same principle applies to Jewish voices within a union. Your advocacy will be far stronger if you join with other rank-and-file members who share your interests and concerns. By joining or launching an affinity group, an Employee Resource Group ("ERG"), or a formal caucus, you move from being "the lone Jewish member who objects" to part of an organized constituency that can monitor resolutions, share research, line up speakers, and mobilize votes.

A Jewish affinity group or ERG is a great way to find other Jewish union members, to strategize together and to amplify your voices on issues that matter to you. Not only can you use the affinity group to collectively oppose actions that are harmful to Jewish members, but the group can sponsor

helpful programming that celebrates Jewish identity, promotes inclusion, and educates on antisemitism. For example, your Jewish affinity group could host a Passover seder and invite other affinity groups or provide a meaningful training on identifying and responding to antisemitism.

Find out if your union or employer has an affinity group or Jewish ERG, and if not, find out if there is a process for creating one and start one yourself. In the union context, consult the bylaws. Formal affinity groups are sometimes allocated funds, which can help defray the cost of forming and/or running the group and hosting programs. For employer-sponsored ERGs, consult your employee handbook, DEI initiatives, and other human resources materials, or ask your human resources department. If there is not an ERG/affinity group or any process for creating one, you can create one informally with whatever tools are available to you.¹ For example, start a WhatsApp group for members who share your concerns. Even if you only know one or two others at first, you may be surprised how quickly that number can grow as more people learn about your group and you build momentum.

Caucuses are another vehicle within unions that can be used to amplify minority voices. A union caucus is an organized group of members—often united by shared identity, craft, region, or political outlook—who work inside the union’s formal structure to influence policy, elect leaders, and advocate for their collective interests. Find out if your local, state, or national union has a Jewish caucus, and how you can get involved with it. Or if there is not, and you can find other Jewish members, consult your bylaws for any processes required to form your own.

Though they may be relatively few in number, Jewish caucuses in labor do exist, and provide a platform to come together with others who may share your concerns and push for change from within the union. For example, the National Education Association (“NEA”) – one of the two major national teachers’ unions – has a Jewish Affairs Caucus. This caucus, like other NEA caucuses, is made up of delegates to NEA’s national assembly – elected representatives from state and local affiliates of NEA who vote on national union business, including NEA’s strategic plan, budget, and resolutions.

B. Build Alliances

No one can do this work alone, and though many in the Jewish community have felt isolated or even betrayed since 10/7, we are not alone, and we must not miss opportunities to build true allyship. Building relationships

¹ For example, in Massachusetts a group of Jewish teachers concerned about antisemitism in their state union – the Massachusetts Teachers Association – came together and formed the Massachusetts Educators Against Antisemitism (“MEAA”). These teachers have done targeted advocacy through tabling at annual meetings, social media campaigns, and even press releases, under the name MEAA.

of trust and respect takes time, but it is critical to long term success. Start by showing up for others in your union, and don't make assumptions about what their views are. Seek out potential partners—Black, Latino, LGBTQ+, immigrant, disability and women's caucuses, faith committees, and affinity groups – by attending their meetings, promoting or co-sponsoring trainings, or volunteering on their campaigns.

IV. Get Involved in Union Governance

An excellent way to influence the activities and decision-making in your union is to become involved in union governance. Consider running for union office. As a delegate for your local union or an executive board member of your state affiliate, you will be in a position to directly impact your union's actions in a positive way. With your voice and your vote, you can help make your union a more welcoming place for all members, including Jews. While there might be very few union members who care about the anti-Zionist and antisemitic activities of the union, many more might support your efforts to help the union course correct – turning away from divisive political causes and back towards issues central to the union's mission, which unite all members and strengthen the union.

Resources

Core Definitions & Frameworks

IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism

<https://extremismterms.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/about-ihra-working-definition-antisemitism>

Antisemitism Uncovered—A Guide to Old Myths in a New Era

<https://antisemitism.adl.org/>

Israel-Focused Myth-Busting

Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions (BDS): Frequently Asked Questions

<https://notoleranceforantisemitism.adl.org/resources/article/faqs-boycott-divestment-sanctions-bds-movement-campus>

Jewish Voices For Peace (JVP): Backgrounder

<https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/jewish-voice-peace-jvp>

Data You Can Cite

ADL Audit of Antisemitic Incidents (Annual Report)

<https://www.adl.org/audit-antisemitic-incidents>

HEAT Map (Hate, Extremism, Antisemitism & Terrorism)

<https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-to-track-hate/heat-map>

Workplace Guidance

Workplace Pledge to Fight Antisemitism

<https://www.adl.org/workplace-pledge-fight-antisemitism>

Antisemitism 101 Workplace

<https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/2023-02/Antisemitism-101-for-the-Workplace-flyer.pdf>

Toolkit on Employee Resource Groups

https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2022-06/2668_ADL_ERG%20Toolkit.pdf

Action & Reporting Tools

ADL Incident Report Portal

<https://www.adl.org/reportincident>

CALL – Campus Antisemitism Legal Line

<https://www.legal-protection.org/>

K-12 Antisemitism Legal Line (California, Massachusetts, and New York only)

<https://www.legal-protection.org/k-12>

Appendix

Background on the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement:

The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement is an international campaign aimed at exerting pressure on Israel through various forms of isolation, including diplomatic, financial, professional, academic, and cultural means.

BDS campaigns frequently target institutions, pushing for divestment from companies associated with or doing business with Israel. In the union context this may come up by a resolution to divest teacher pension funds from companies that do business with Israel. This document outlines key substantive arguments/talking points against such a divestment resolution, emphasizing the potential negative impacts on financial returns, legal obligations, and the broader implications for antisemitism. Any substantive arguments raised against a BDS resolution, or any other union resolution or action, must of course be tailored to the specifics of the resolution. The below points are offered as a resource to aid union members in their efforts and are not a substitute for such fact-specific advocacy.

Substantive Arguments/Talking Points:

Economic Impact:

- **Financial Returns:** Divesting from companies associated with Israel could lead to lower returns on investments. Historical data shows a performance gap of 1.8% between portfolios that include BDS-targeted companies and those that do not, potentially resulting in significant financial losses over time.¹
- **Diversification:** Over 100 companies in the S&P 500 conduct business in Israel, including major corporations like Apple, Microsoft, and Amazon. Divesting from these companies could lead to a less diversified portfolio, affecting the financial health of pension funds.

Legal and Fiduciary Concerns:

- **Fiduciary Duty:** Investment committees managing pension funds have a legal responsibility to act in the best financial interests of their beneficiaries. Allowing political considerations to influence investment decisions may result in a breach of this duty.
- **State Legislation:** More than 30 states have laws prohibiting or discouraging BDS activities. Engaging in divestment could lead to legal challenges and actions from state attorneys general.

¹ See, e.g., “The Legal Risks of Divestment From Israel for University Endowments,” JLens Report, (available at https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024-09/JLens-The-Impact-of-Israel-Divestment-on-Equity-Portfolios-Fall-2024_0.pdf)

Moral, Social, & Broader Considerations:

- **Unfair Singling Out:** The BDS movement often unfairly singles out Israel, contributing to the demonization of the country and potentially fueling antisemitism. This can harm Israeli and Jewish union members and create division within the union.
- **Precedent Setting:** Divesting pension funds from Israel could set a precedent for similar demands from activists supporting various causes, limiting investment options and affecting returns. The sole consideration for investment should be the long-term financial security and growth of pension funds – not political or social beliefs.
- **Impact on Antisemitism:** Divestment campaigns often present a skewed narrative that disproportionately targets and demonizes Israel, which can contribute to rising antisemitism.

Don't Let Antisemitism Go Unchecked

Whether or not you decide to use this toolkit to advocate for yourself as a union member, please [report](#) any and all antisemitic incidents you witness or experience to ADL. ADL regional staff can provide additional information and resources to support you. All reports submitted to ADL are treated as confidential, unless you grant permission for ADL to share information for purposes of advocating on your behalf.

Additionally, your reporting is critical to ADL's work tracking antisemitic incidents both regionally and across the country. Data collection and analysis are crucial to ADL's advocacy and fight against antisemitism and all other forms of hate.

Report incidents to ADL

adl.org/report

Legal Helplines

CALL – Campus Antisemitism Legal Line

legal-protection.org

The helpline aims to provide free legal protection for college and university students who have experienced antisemitism.

K-12 Antisemitism Legal Line
(California, Massachusetts, and New York only)

legal-protection.org/k-12

This helpline provides pro bono legal assistance to parents of students in K-12 school settings in California, Massachusetts and New York who are experiencing antisemitism.

About ADL

ADL is the leading anti-hate organization in the world. Founded in 1913, its timeless mission is “to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” Today, ADL continues to fight all forms of antisemitism and bias, using innovation and partnerships to drive impact. A global leader in combating antisemitism, countering extremism and battling bigotry wherever and whenever it happens, ADL works to protect democracy and ensure a just and inclusive society for all.

