

Dear Chairman:

My name is Mara Ruff. I work at the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago as Associate Director of Government Affairs. We fully support the resolution before the committee that affirms the protection and rights of all residents regardless of race, ethnicity country of origin, and religion and commend the City Council for taking a stand against hate and violent actions against Muslims, Jews, immigrants, and people of color.

The Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago is a 116 year old non-partisan organization that represents a diverse community here at home and overseas. Through our critical care network, the Jewish Federation provides health and human services to over 300,000 Chicago area residents of all faiths, that are located in 20 wards throughout the city of Chicago, that include Sinai Health System, Holy Cross Hospital, HIAS Chicago, Jewish Child & Family Services, Jewish Community Centers and EZRA Multi-Service Center.

In doing this work, we have resettled refugees fleeing persecution and are proud advocates that speak out against actions of hate, bigotry and Anti-Semitism. In the aftermath of this election season, there is a renewed focus on the many challenges facing our country and the deep divisions that exist among Americans, including within our own community. We are deeply concerned about the increased rhetoric heard over the past year, espousing hate and bigotry.

Since the election, the uptick in Anti-Semitic actions here at home is beyond alarming. Last month, in the South Loop, a local resident saw a sticker with a red background and a black swastika with TRUMP spelled out in black capital letters, pasted to a street sign on the corner of 14th & Wabash. Prior the South Loop incident, someone spray-painted a swastika on John Hay Elementary School in Austin and a similar incident occurred at Lincoln United Methodist Church in Pilsen, with the words “burn” and “kill” written under a swastika.

I would be remiss to not highlight the parallel between Jewish history and current wave of Islamaphobia. As a Jewish community, times like these remind us of the extreme hatred against our people in Eastern Europe during the Holocaust under Hitler’s rule. Just two generations ago, my grandparents were captured in Poland because they were Jewish, stripped of their Polish identity, and forced to register as Jews. Even upon liberation of their work camp, my grandparents left Europe holding a Jewish passport, rather than a Polish passport. During that time, Jews lived through a time of fear-mongering, scapegoating, and propaganda. As a Jewish people, we have a responsibility to resist the notion of a Muslim registry or any other effort to push out religious and ethnic minorities, right here at home for these very same reasons.

History, as we know, unfortunately repeats itself. Our community is one populated by immigrants and refugees that fled to Chicago and other parts of the United States to secure our safety and freedom for future generations. As Jews, we take seriously our responsibility to speak out against hatred, not only because the security of our own community is intertwined with that of other minority communities, but also because our moral values, as Jews and as Americans, demand it. The Jewish Federation stands with all who are being targeted by those who seek to divide, demonize and intimidate.

For these reasons, we fully support and commend City Council for taking a stand against hate and violent actions.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mara Ruff

Associate Director, State and Local Government

Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago