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WATCH LIVE : Michigan Attorney General to host antisemitism roundtable

DATE

July 30, 2026

DURATION

1h 16m 37s

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[00:00:37] Elyssa Schmier, Regional Director, ADL Michigan

Okay, great. Um, thank you, everyone, for being here. And thank you so much to Attorney General Nessel for hosting this event today. Um, and for all of your leadership on the issues that the ADL advocates on. I'm Elyssa Shamier, the regional director of the ADL Michigan. The Anti-Defamation League is the leading Anti-Hate organization in the world. Founded in 1913 to protect the Jewish people. ADL's timeless mission is to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all. More than 110 years later, this mission is even more urgent. Antisemitism in Michigan was once a rare occurrence, but today it has entered our campuses, our neighborhoods, our houses of worship, our politics and our screens. And it's becoming more dangerous. Antisemitism is a belief or behavior hostile towards Jews just because they are Jewish, and it shows up in many forms. Sometimes it appears in the way it always has, historically, the same age old conspiracy theories, the same age old dehumanizing tropes, and the same age old lies that Jewish people have had to confront for more than 3000 years. The very same hatred my great grandparents faced in their lifetime, but anti-Semitism has also evolved. Today we see a more modern strain that is just as hateful and just as dangerous, one that hides behind political language and focuses relentlessly on Israel holding the world's only Jewish country and, by extension, Jews everywhere to a standard applied to no other nation on earth.

[00:02:18] Elyssa Schmier, Regional Director, ADL Michigan

Whether it comes wrapped in old hatred or new, it is still antisemitism. It deserves to be called out and confronted every single time. According to Adl's 2025 audit of antisemitic incidents, there were 156 recorded antisemitic incidents in Michigan, a 38% decrease from 252 incidents in 2024. Of those 135, there were incidents of harassment, vandalism and violent assaults. Michigan experienced a disproportionately high number of incidents on college campuses and at Jewish institutions, including synagogues and schools, placing Michigan sixth in the United States in both categories. While any decline is notable, the total of 156 incidents represent the third highest year on record in Michigan. And since ADL began tracking the data, and this was still 40% higher than Pre-october seventh levels. We also strongly believe that in a reversal of last year's decline, both nationally and in Michigan, are 2026, numbers will sadly look different. We've seen a marked increase in incidents reports to our office since the March 12th terrorist attack at Temple Israel.

[00:03:36] Elyssa Schmier, Regional Director, ADL Michigan

From January through June 2025, 159 incidents were reported to our office. From January through June 2026, the number rose to 190. Each of these numbers represents a person, a family or a community that was targeted. It's its neighbors in Berkeley waking up this past weekend to vile anti-Semitic fliers scattered across their driveways. It's a college seniors student government campaign, posters vandalized with hateful slogans. It's the Jewish Community Center in Ann Arbor, spray painted with symbols from a far right extremist group and its preschoolers in West Bloomfield, running for their lives as a terrorist rammed a car filled with explosives into their synagogue. Sadly, anti-Semitism has become mainstreamed and normalized. Far too much of it is accepted or excused. Oftentimes it leads to violence, but we do not accept the sad new reality. We will not stand by silently as the Jewish community in Michigan is harassed, scapegoated, physically attacked or terrorized. And we are so glad to be joined here today by Attorney General Nessel and Assistant Attorney General Ganatra and representatives from Governor Whitmer's office. We want each of them to know how much the Jewish community appreciates their partnership and leadership at this difficult time in our state's history. Thank you.

[00:04:59] Attorney General Dana Nessel

Before I speak, I'd love to hear from everybody else. Do you want to?

[00:05:03] Dr. Michael Ambrose, parent of student in Beverly Hills

Yeah. So, um, I share the story from my community. So in the Birmingham School district in Beverly Hills this past spring, this is an event that I imagined you are aware of. Uh, there was a culture that was presented as an evening of inclusion to celebrate our. Uh, celebrate the communities, celebrate our different communities. And, uh, the Jewish community had a room there with, uh, members of my family and, uh, members of the community. Uh, and we were extra careful understanding the environment in which we live in to make sure that there was nothing political, that there was nothing that would ever make anyone feel uncomfortable. On the flip side, there was another room in which there was significant politically charged messaging, and even scarier, there were stickers being handed out by by parents of children at this school with expletives and with assault rifles. Um, and we're certainly here to talk about anti-Semitism. Um, but forget, forget the nature of it. The fact that there were parents handing out assault rifles in the scary world in which we live. Um, right. Or stickers of assault rifles in the scary world in which we live was quite concerning. Um, and so the parents of Beverly Elementary, along with the parents of the Birmingham school district, uh, banded together to really try to, to make an effort to make sure that our students feel safe and secure when they're going off to school and most importantly, working towards policy change.

[00:06:55] Dr. Michael Ambrose, parent of student in Beverly Hills

And so one of the things I'm interested in hearing from you in your office, right? There was a lot of concern from the parents in our district, um, in what little could be done right in this world in which we, we believe that there's sort of this zero tolerance for guns and violence, um, let alone, uh, right. Hateful speech towards a particular religion. Uh, there wasn't really much that felt like it could be done. And so we've, we've worked very closely with the principal of the school and the district. The superintendent, Doctor Roberson, has been wonderful and fantastic. Uh, the principal of the school at Fairchild has been wonderful as well. Um, and we're really working towards policy change. We understand that, right? This isn't a problem that's going to go away overnight, uh, that there's likely to be more incidents, unfortunately, but right. Understanding kind of what your office or other offices might be able to help with outside of kind of policy change at the district level is of great interest to the families of Beverly Elementary.

[00:07:59] Attorney General Dana Nessel

Thank you.

[00:08:01] Rabbi Ariana Gordon, Temple Israel in West Bloomfield

Oh, I. I unfortunately, have had the sad opportunity to share my story several times over the last four and a half months. Um, but I appreciate the opportunity to today to share a little bit more detail and to talk about it with other members of our community in the context of antisemitism and what we're experiencing. So for me, the morning of March 12th was not an extraordinary morning. It was a normal day. I dropped my children off at school. I arrived at temple really expecting it to be a typical day where I had a professional staff meeting. I met with a student who was going to be going through conversion. I actually was waiting for another student to come in while I was in a brand new office space that I just moved into 48 hours earlier with members of our Early Childhood center. We are combining to become one educational suite when we heard an ungodly, terrifying crashing noise, and my colleague describes it as the sound of a ceiling coming in crashing in. To me, it sounded like a huge cart of glassware from our catering company being overturned because in our minds, we couldn't possibly imagine what it actually was. It never occurred to us that we were about to be the victims of a terrorist attack. We went immediately to something that made sense to us. She and I both ran into the hallway, and I saw one of the double strollers that our daycare room uses overturned, surrounded by glass.

[00:09:24] Rabbi Ariana Gordon, Temple Israel in West Bloomfield

Um, and so my first thought was not really about me and my safety. It was, where are those babies? What happened to our children who are often rolled around the building in those strollers? A security guard came around the corner with his gun drawn and shouting at us to get back in the office and stay there. So we did. We locked down. I called 911. I was in our office, locked down with three colleagues, and we stayed in there not knowing what was happening, but hearing round after round of shots being fired until finally our director of security, who my colleague had seen hit by a truck and who was knocked unconscious, opened the door and said, you guys good in here? Okay. Stay here. And left again. Um, and having actually recently seen the video of him being hit, the fact that he was able to sort of rise from the dead to even come check on us, much less function at all, is unbelievable. And really one of the miracles of the day. While we were in that space, my colleague who was the director of the SEC and I continually were messaging our teachers through our playground, through our texting app, checking on where they were, what they were doing. Were the kids okay? Where in the building, reminding them of the protocols Everyone had recently been trained on what happens during a lockdown procedure, and they all knew exactly what to do, but no one knew anything else.

[00:10:49] Rabbi Ariana Gordon, Temple Israel in West Bloomfield

No one knew what was happening in the building where they were supposed to go. When they heard knocking on the door and they were being told it was police, they didn't know if they should open the door or not. Was it actually police? Was there another gunman in the building? And those were questions that Rachel, our director and I couldn't answer because we didn't know either. And we were locked down in our office. We started seeing smoke, smelling smoke, and not knowing what that was coming from, what it was going to look like, because I had just moved into a brand new office. Um, and we were sort of locked down in the corner. I remember telling my colleague that if they needed to throw a chair to get out through one of the windows, that was the window to do it through because we really weren't sure we were going to be able to leave through the door to exit eventually won. A few police officers came and evacuated us and we ran out with our hands up running out the building. So two of my colleagues went one way, and Rachel and I went the other way. But my two year old was in the building at the time, and I knew where he was because I had been messaging with his with his teachers.

[00:11:54] Rabbi Ariana Gordon, Temple Israel in West Bloomfield

I knew he was alive. I knew he was okay. In that moment. But leaving the building without him was one of the hardest things as a parent I literally ever done in my life. So one thing that when I talk about, I continue to get emotional. I thought all my tears were gone four and a half months later. But when I talk about that moment, they come back. But because he was in the building and because I feel like all of our children are my children who are in our preschool, I didn't run away from the building. I sort of ran to the side with my hands up, shouting questions to one of the police officers, should our teachers open the door? Should they leave the building? They're smelling smoke. What should they do? And I actually ran across a police officer who happens to be a security guard, often at West Bloomfield is on our premises all the time. I knew him, he knew me, and he said, you have to get back. I said, I promise I will get back, but I just need to be able to answer teachers. So he sort of gave me an answer and had one of the other police officers escort us, just kind of over the berm near neighbors houses, where I could still see what was happening. But we were far enough away from the building until I saw kids coming out, being evacuated out, being held in the arms of police officers and their teachers, running out the side to the playground, and I ran across the street to get back to them, which was probably not what I was supposed to do.

[00:13:10] Rabbi Ariana Gordon, Temple Israel in West Bloomfield

But both with educator, rabbi, and parent instincts, I knew I needed to be with our kids, and together they ended up evacuating us to a neighbor's garage where our teachers sang songs and held babies in their lap. And I eventually got my child back. And because it was nap time, he, two years old, oblivious to everything, fell asleep in my arms and had his nap because it was 1:00 in the afternoon. But our teachers were unbelievable heroes that day. Getting those kids out, getting them to safety and then keeping them calm. I later heard that in my son's class, a teacher played Zootopia and gave the kids lollipops to keep them in a dark, quiet corner so they wouldn't be making noise. But all of the teachers did that, and all of the different classrooms, doing things to really make sure that our kids felt okay. That community helpers were coming, that they weren't so scared, that they knew that they were going to be safe, despite the fact that our teachers were terrified and really didn't know what was going to happen. Eventually, we were evacuated to Shenandoah. They put us on school busses, school busses. But because of the overwhelming number of law enforcement that were there, there were over 600 law enforcement members who showed up that day.

[00:14:23] Rabbi Ariana Gordon, Temple Israel in West Bloomfield

We couldn't even get across Walnut Lake Road, so we ended up having to get out and walk across the street. Um, and those pictures have been pretty widespread of all of us carrying babies across the street where we ran into parents who were sobbing and hysterical and joyful. Also, that they were reunited with their children and devastated that their children had just experienced this terrorist attack. And Shenandoah was amazing. They provided chicken tenders and chocolate chip cookies and M&Ms, and made sure our kids were fed and opened their doors to us so that parents could reunite through all of this time. I hadn't called my parents. I hadn't called my husband. I waited until I was out of the building because I didn't know what to tell them. I didn't have any information. And the first time I spoke to my husband, I didn't. My son was still in the building. The second time I talked to him, I said, I see our son. But I didn't say I see our son alive. So he drove home from work in Ann Arbor. Hysterical, not knowing if our child was alive or not. But I managed to hold it together because that's what you do, right? That's what we do in those moments. Until he walked in the door at Shenandoah, and then we all totally lost it.

[00:15:34] Attorney General Dana Nessel

Do you regret not finishing that sentence all the way?

[00:15:38] Rabbi Ariana Gordon, Temple Israel in West Bloomfield

What is.

[00:15:38] Attorney General Dana Nessel

That? When you saw your son. Oh, yeah.

[00:15:41] Rabbi Ariana Gordon, Temple Israel in West Bloomfield

Yeah. Um. Yes, I do regret it. I do regret it for his sake. And it didn't even occur to me, right. Because I knew all along where he was and that he was alive and that he was safe. And so it didn't. I didn't know that I needed to finish that for him. But the fact that that haunts him still, I feel terrible about that. I hadn't finished that sentence. Um, and we have been rebuilding since that time. We are healing, but it has been an unbelievable moment for our community, a surreal moment. And, uh, we are going to be recovering for a long time. We're not in our building. We're not going to be in our building for months still, uh, fully back in our building for months still. And the fact that so much of the world has moved on because thank God nobody was killed that day, thank God. Even our security guard who was injured is doing okay. Um, but most of the community, most of the world has moved on and we're still so displaced and we're going to be recovering and healing for a really long time. As we talk about beginning the new school year, we're talking about how we can help parents and kids who feel anxious.

[00:16:51] Rabbi Ariana Gordon, Temple Israel in West Bloomfield

We talk about how every time there are sirens that go off or a fire alarm goes off, how all of our hearts start racing, and how we can manage that, and how we can support our teachers and our students as they come back to school. And so to me, that's what antisemitism is really looking like. How are we managing that? How are we supporting our families? How are we protecting our families? Um, at Temple Israel, the cost that we are putting in to secure our building right now is unbelievable. And that's a cost that insurance doesn't cover. That's a cost that although I know there is some government funding, it's not enough. And fortunately, at Temple Israel, we're going to figure out how to do it. But it's not just Temple Israel. It's all of our Jewish institutions that have to pay to really become an incredibly secure place so that our community feels safe going into those institutions. Um, so really, I think those are sort of our messages right now about what anti-Semitism looks like, what we're experiencing. And I really appreciate you taking the time today to hear all of our stories.

[00:17:55] Attorney General Dana Nessel

Thank you for sharing your story. Um, as horrific as that had to have been. Oh, sorry. Thank you. I appreciate that.

[00:18:08] Jennifer Stewart, parent of a middle school student in Brighton

I think they gave us a little mix, but, um, I also just wanted to say thank you to Leah and Elyssa and the ADL for having me talk about this, which is very important to me. Um, to give you some background about our family, I grew up actively Jewish outside of Boston in a diverse area where public schools were closed on major Jewish holidays. I went to U of M for college, where I met my now husband and again experienced four wonderful years in a highly diverse area floating in and out of my own Judaism. We moved to Baltimore where I got my graduate degree, and again, we were in a highly diverse area for six years. In 2013, we moved to Livingston County. I worked in Ann Arbor at the time, and my in-laws lived up north, and it seemed like the perfect area for us. Maybe six months to a year after moving here, we realized the diversity that we had taken for granted in other parts of the state and the country did not exist in Livingston County. I would joke that myself and my two sons were the only three Jews in our town. We've since adopted our daughter and increased our population by 33%. Fast forward to present day, and our 11 year old has experienced two dreadful acts of anti-Semitism in just one month, both under school supervision.

[00:19:14] Jennifer Stewart, parent of a middle school student in Brighton

The first incident consisted of two boys yelling Jew and gas chamber at my son on the playground, and then confronting him in front of his locker to the point of a physical altercation. A few weeks later, a girl on the bus chanted Ju ju ju both during the ride and then directly at him as he exited for his stop. In my 40 plus years, I've never experienced as much antisemitism as my son has in one month and the direct aftermath of these incidents. Beyond close discussions with the school, we leaned on the ADL, our Jewish friends and family, the rabbi helping us prepare for our oldest son's bar mitzvah and other minority friends. How to navigate through this. Now we have the challenge of not only dealing with the emotional fallout with our son, but feeling that we were under a microscope for how we would respond if we press charges on the student for a hate crime. Will we be those dirty Jews who ruined this boy's life? And if we are people pleasers who try not to ruffle any feathers, we're just perpetuating the problem. Additionally, we had to think of our daughter who will go to this school in the next few years. In addition to being Jewish, she is also black, adopted, and female. She is a conglomeration of minorities that have little to no representation in Livingston County.

[00:20:20] Jennifer Stewart, parent of a middle school student in Brighton

The overwhelming response from our support partners was to see how the school responds to these incidents and how they're committed to changing the culture of the school going forward. So far, we have been underwhelmed. While the students who participated directly in these acts were punished, there's been little to no effort by the school to engage in any type of education, whether it be for the students or the educators. The ADL sent wonderful tools, and while the school is talking the talk about reviewing these materials, they've yet to walk the walk. They would not commit to a school wide assembly, a cultural day to celebrate all cultures, or even a letter home to parents explaining the uptick in hate language at school and to speak to their children about it. And that school should be a safe place for everyone. A small blurb was added to the weekly school newsletter newsletter home. A month after the first incident and with four days left of school. And that is the most we have seen the school do to attempt to defuze the situation. My biggest frustration is how to get the school administration in a predominantly white and Christian area to understand how severe this is and how it cannot and should not be treated like other bullying cases. There are They're resistant to understanding how antisemitism presents itself differently from other forms of hate and therefore need specialized attention.

[00:21:27] Jennifer Stewart, parent of a middle school student in Brighton

I've learned long ago I cannot control the actions of others. I can only control my own. So for now, I take comfort in taking the high road while continuing to fight. Education will always be our top priority. Thankfully, one of the families from the first incident has agreed to join our family on a trip to the Holocaust Museum, which we have done already, and we had a wonderful hour or two with them in the museum, and I hope to have broadened their circle, if even only for the day, to give them a peek into a Jewish family trying to save to live a Jewish life. While some good has come of these incidents, such as speaking here today, there is much more to be done in Non-diverse areas of Michigan. There is little to no exposure to other cultures and races. Sadly, one of the biggest lessons we have had to teach our children from this is that it will most likely not be the last time this will happen. We all need to live in the world with people who do not understand us and do not like us, purely because they don't know us. We now face the impossible decision to be the diversity in our community versus keeping our kids safe at school, which is a decision no parent should have to make.

[00:22:26] Attorney General Dana Nessel

Thank you. Thank you Karen.

[00:22:28] Erin Starr

Good afternoon. My name is Erin Starr. I'm a rising senior at Michigan State University studying pre-law, and I am a proud member of MSU's Jewish community. I was a freshman when the October 7th attack on Israel occurred. I do not know what it is like to be a Jewish student on a college campus without having to worry about being targeted for my identity. I remember sitting in my dorm room. My friend, who is an IDF soldier, texted me that Israel was under attack and shared some information about what was going on. I could not seem to wrap my head around the horrific news I was being told. My phone began buzzing with notifications from all social media platforms Instagram, Facebook, iMessage, and more. I then turned on the news and listened to the anchor sharing details about the attack. It was not long before the Jewish people at MSU experienced impacts from this attack. Even though we are thousands of miles away, my sorority, Sigma Delta Tau, hired a 24 over seven security team to ensure the safety of our members. My friends and I were advised to remove our last names from our Uber profile to protect ourselves from any potential threat. Although my mom was very adamant about it before, I am reminded now more than ever to keep my head on a swivel.

[00:23:41] Erin Starr

Today, almost three years later, not a whole lot has changed. There has been a recent attack on our Chabad house, where a repeat offender targeted the exterior structure structure with hateful rhetoric and destruction of the property. This was a scary reminder of how much anti-Semitism still lives. These acts of hatred do not stop myself nor my community from living on our Jewish legacy and lifestyle. I attend Shabbat dinner every Friday in the same building that had swastikas spray painted on it seven months ago. I attend Chabad yearly Mega Shabbat event at the Spartan Stadium. I celebrate the Jewish holidays with my fellow Jewish peers. I proudly wear my Jewish star around my neck and invite any conversations regarding my Jewish identity. I keep my head on a swivel, but that does not stop me from participating in Jewish events on campus. I do not share my last name on Uber, but that does not stop me from getting in the vehicle wearing my Jewish star pendant. Of course, it is okay to be to acknowledge that our community is fearful, but it does not mean that this fear should stop us from being who we are and being proud of who we are. Thank you.

[00:24:48] Attorney General Dana Nessel

You want to talk a little bit about your work with the department?

[00:24:51] Assistant Attorney General Nimish R. Ganatra (PNG) as the new head of the Department of Attorney General's Hate Crimes and Domestic Terrorism Unit

Yes. Thank you. So I was fortunate enough to start working for the Attorney General's office in April. And Attorney General Nessel was kind enough to consider me to be the next person to handle the hate crimes and domestic terrorism cases. I've been lucky to have a great group of attorneys and the Attorney General's office to work with as I handle these responsibilities. The other benefit is that this is a unit that's been going on for seven years now. It was one of the first priorities of the attorney general when she got elected in 2018. And, uh, it's, uh, it's great to be able to take care of something that's been well handled by other people in the past. Um, one of the things that I've benefited from having been a prosecutor for over 25 years in counties in Michigan, is that, uh, law enforcement likes to coordinate law enforcement, likes to work together. And one of the opportunities of being new to this position is being able to engage with the various law enforcement communities around southeastern Michigan and the state of Michigan as well. Um, and so I've been looking forward to continuing the great work that we're doing with these issues. Thank you.

[00:26:06] Attorney General Dana Nessel

Thank you. Thanks so much. Um, so, uh, This is a much needed conversation, and I'm grateful that you're here to help coordinate this. And thank you to everybody who's attended. And thanks for all of you who are here, especially the media. Um, I will say that as of late, um, this issue, it's not, I, I can't just say that it's caused me, um, a good deal of depression. I often feel despair. Um, when I came to this office, I thought that what was notable about me as attorney general, as I was the first openly gay person to serve in this position, but also as any statewide elected official. And I thought that would be the thing that would bring more attention to me, maybe even more threats. And it has been really surprising to me that what is most interesting to people, I guess, is that I'm the first Jewish person to serve as attorney general of this state. Um, and the, the number of threats that I personally have received in this position, um, have been too numerous to count. Um, ordinarily at any given time, there'll be 2 or 3 people who are either in jail or prison, state or federal for threats against me or my family, um, uh, you know, or on probation. Um, and this has been consistent since my first year in office. Uh, the threats that I received are almost exclusively anti-Semitic threats. Um, people aren't interested in the fact that, uh, you know, that I'm gay.

[00:27:58] Attorney General Dana Nessel

They're not interested in the fact that I'm a woman. They are very interested in the fact that I'm Jewish. And so that just sort of that is a barometer as to the focus that people have. And it's very strange because I came here, you know, having been in sort of a high profile attorney for having handled LGBTQ cases and also for establishing, uh, a, you know, a foundation that helps to combat and investigate and prosecute hate crimes against the LGBTQ community. And back then, some ten years ago, it, it never would have occurred to me that the thing that would be needed most. As time went on, uh, not to say that there isn't still, you know, threats to the LGBTQ community and threats to other communities, but seeing the exponential rise of Semitism in a way that I've never seen in the state of Michigan, never seen in this country before. Um, I was privileged to grow up during a time where, like, there were very few of those threats and especially growing up in West Bloomfield. Um, you know, we were one of the few school districts that had the high holidays off, um, when the event happened at Temple Israel. My son, who lives with my parents right down the street from there and called to see what was going on because he heard all the commotion. And I had to say, you know, stay inside.

[00:29:23] Attorney General Dana Nessel

I'll find out what's happening. I knew many of the, the children that were, you know, with your son, um, they were the kids or the grandkids, people that I knew who were also calling to find out what was going on. Um, and, um, I should tell you that, um, my entire family plans to join Temple Israel in solidarity. Thank you. Um, and so I look forward to, uh, to seeing you more there. Uh, but as time has gone on, and especially since October 7th, what has become clear to me is firstly, uh, how few people know anything about our religious beliefs. Um, how little many people know really about Israel or about any connection that the Jewish community has with Israel? Um, but really how, how recent events, especially those that occurred in the Middle East, um, have just opened up the floodgates to, to anti-Semitism in ways they never could have possibly imagined. And I will tell you, uh, candidly, frankly, that I, I've seen it on the right for quite some time on the far right fringes, um, where you, you saw sort of, um, the peripheral proliferation of sort of neo-Nazi type of organizations, whether they were Patriot front or Proud Boys, um, or other, um, uh, iterations of that. Uh, but we're now seeing the same thing happen on the left and in my party in the Democratic Party, which is something I never experienced before.

[00:31:10] Attorney General Dana Nessel

And, um, you know, the things that I routinely see on a daily basis, first of all, definitely on my social media comments, I mean, I could say Happy Mother's Day, everyone. And in response, I will just get a litany of anti-Semitic responses. Uh, and then things that people will just say very openly to me, people that I know, um, where they think that if they substitute the word Zionist for Jew, it's not anti-Semitic, or they think if they substitute the word AIPAC for Jew, it's not anti-Semitic. And the number of people who will say, if I disagree with them on anything, you're bought and paid for by AIPAC. Aipac doesn't give money to state candidates. I've never received a dollar or, of course, the, the good old, um, George Soros funded, which is another way really of saying that. Um, but, you know, I routinely now on not, I'm not talking about my political Facebook page, my personal Facebook page, people that I know, like I had to friend them at some point and they will routinely post, um, very anti-Semitic memes, but then not appreciate, like have no appreciation that saying certain things are anti-Semitic in nature. And when I say I find that to be deeply offensive, the response that I get oftentimes is like, we'll decide what's offensive, not you. Which is very strange because to me, and I'll say this like, again, you know, proud member of the Democratic Party, if somebody said to me, if I made a statement or remark to somebody who was African American, if they said to me, I don't like that phrase, or I don't like that terminology, I find it to be racist.

[00:32:56] Attorney General Dana Nessel

I would say, I'm so sorry. I did not appreciate or understand it. But now that you've indicated that to me, I'm never going to say it again because I don't want to offend you. Same thing to members of the LGBTQ community, right? If you use a certain phrase or certain verbiage and somebody said, I don't like that, it offends me. Here's why I would do my best to never use that, that phrase anymore. But then when I get told when I say what you're saying right now is, is deeply anti-Semitic, here's why. But like, I don't think it is. That's your problem, not mine. Like why for any other group of people can, can we, we say, um, that something to us is anti-Semitic and not have people, um, step back and say, I don't want to offend you. What I hear instead is I don't care if I offend you, it doesn't matter to me. Uh, and it's been, it's been deeply troubling and seeing the tropes being recycled that we've heard about for generations, right? The the Jews own the media. Um, or just, I mean, various other things that I just can't even believe that I'm seeing all this stuff again because I haven't seen it.

[00:34:08] Attorney General Dana Nessel

I don't want to say I haven't seen it for years. I've never seen it in my lifetime. I appreciate that my parents did. Certainly my grandparents did. But being the the granddaughter of, you know, of people who fled Eastern Europe and, uh, you know, but for the grace of God would not be here and that their entire families were wiped out. Uh, and that you can go to Yad Vashem and you can literally go through and catalog, you can look at all the vessels that are listed that died, uh, you know, in the extermination camps. You can look at the gorons, you can look at other members of my family and what happened to them to see some of the same language that was used during that time period. And we're seeing it emerge now in modern day America. If you would have told me that even though we know that what we're taught is always to expect it to happen and be ready for it if it happens, and to do everything you can to combat it. Um, I still will say I was very naive and I didn't think ever that this could happen in modern day United States of America. And, and it is and I'm going to make this statement, um, I'm not going to be attending the nominating convention for the Michigan Democratic Party, uh, in August.

[00:35:33] Attorney General Dana Nessel

And that is because I don't feel safe going. I feel like my presence is not going to be welcomed. Uh, I don't want to get chased around. I don't want to get harassed. I don't want to get yelled and screamed at. And I don't want to get booed off the stage, irrespective of what I'm saying. And I believe that if I go, that is what will happen because it's been happening to me. Um, I made a complaint just recently to the chair of the Michigan Democratic Party, and it was about an individual who was on the state Central Committee, who's on the rules committee, who's been, you know, kicked out of the DNC convention. Um, you know, harassed people at the MDP, uh, endorsement convention, um, writes diatribes, um, on a Substack, calling me, uh, a neo-Nazi, calling, uh, Haley Stevens a neo-Nazi because of some of her beliefs. And I said to him like, well, why is why is this person more accepted in our party than me, the attorney general of the state of Michigan, who has, you know, tried her best to do all the things that I had pledged to do when I ran for this office. And, you know, it's just deeply troubling to me. And I know that the person that I'm talking about, he's going to be there, but I don't feel like I can be there. And I feel like that's that's wrong.

[00:37:02] Attorney General Dana Nessel

I think it's something certainly that my party has to address. I can't speak for the Republican Party because I'm not a member of that party, but I will speak as a member of the Democratic Party here in Michigan that something's got to change. This cannot continue. And the fact of the matter is, we have to be able to be a society where we can have intelligent discourse and debate about ideas without people being threatened, and certainly without people carrying out those threats. And I think about, you know, even having done a town hall about data centers in, in Brighton and having Nazis protest me at the event, that was about data centers. Uh, I mean, it's just shocking and not anything that I could have possibly anticipated. So as Nimish indicated, that was one of the first new initiatives that I set up when I got here to this office, the Hate Crimes and Domestic terrorism unit. And, you know, I wanted to make sure that irrespective of where you were in the state of Michigan, irrespective of what the resources were or capabilities were or interests were of your local police department, you could always make a complaint directly to our department. We have our own special agents. We will investigate those cases, and if there's the evidence to do so, we will prosecute those cases. And we have and we've certainly prosecuted some hate groups and we've prosecuted many, many threats, cases and domestic terrorism.

[00:38:39] Attorney General Dana Nessel

And I'm proud of that work. I very much hope, irrespective of who succeeds me in this office, that that unit will remain and not be disbanded because it is needed now more than ever. Um, but, uh, I also had the opportunity during the course of this time to work with, um, members of the legislature so that we could, uh, bolster the, the, the actual statutes that we had available to us in order to prosecute hate crimes. And I'm very glad that we have a new hate crimes law that, that passed, um, that gives us better tools in order to combat hate crimes. Uh, that the institutional desecration, um, act passed. So that gives us a better opportunity to maybe, uh, obviously what happened at Temple Israel is, is an entirely different set of circumstances. But when you're talking about some of these other incidences that start perhaps is something that is vandalism or start, um, something much less than a full on, bombing and attack of that nature that happened at Temple Israel. Were able to to intervene at an earlier stage and to identify somebody who. Who has the kinds of issues that might lead to something like a Temple Israel event. Um, and to get them under the jurisdiction of the court and to, you know, get them help or if need be, um, for them to be serving jail or prison time to protect the community.

[00:40:12] Attorney General Dana Nessel

Um, so I, I'm grateful that I had an opportunity to have a hand in trying to combat some of this, but as the years have gone by me now, having served for over seven and a half years, it doesn't get better. It's just been getting worse and worse and worse. And I have profound fears about what is going to happen to this state and what is going to happen to this country if we don't have a significant, um, change, of course and what's going on, and we don't do a better job of educating people about it. And we don't do a better job of holding people accountable when they violate the law to ensure that people feel safe. And that's the worst part, are the voices that have been silenced, people who have certain thoughts, ideas, concerns that they'd like to contribute, but they don't feel like they can because they're so afraid that they'll be attacked. They're so afraid they'll be doxxed, they're afraid they'll be swatted. They'll afraid that they'll just be outright attacked physically. Um, and, uh, that is unsustainable. And that is not the United States of America that all of us know and love. Uh, so I really appreciate the opportunity to, to have this conversation. It is much needed. Um, and it is, like I said, of a time of like incredible concern to all of us. Thank you.

[00:41:47] Elyssa Schmier, Regional Director, ADL Michigan

Um, so do you want to do you have any questions for the group? Do any of you have any questions?

[00:41:53] Attorney General Dana Nessel

Yeah. I mean, I guess you know what, at the ADL, I mean, obviously you guys keep track of these incidences. Um, and so you're you're seeing the rise, but do you have, you know, what plans do you have? And what do you think are our best action items? Um, for, for the community moving forward? And more than that, how do we, how do we educate people in a way that again, is more. The ability to have intelligent discussion that people are afraid to have now. Yeah.

[00:42:30] Elyssa Schmier, Regional Director, ADL Michigan

So obviously, there's not a silver bullet that the ADL has, um, to end anti-Semitism. If there was, we would have used it by now, but I think that education is very key working within, you know, K through 12 education spaces and college. Um, I think part of it is just like the actual education piece and making sure that Jewish identity and Jewish American history and anti-Semitism and Holocaust education are weaved in. And luckily in Michigan, we actually do have a Holocaust education, um, that anyone, all students need to get six hours of Holocaust and genocide education, which is a start. Um, but I also think that, you know, there's a lot of, um, schools and colleges and workplaces that technically have pretty good standards and guidelines on the books and they're just not upholding them in this particular situation. So it's kind of speaking to what you talked about that, and you see this a lot on college campuses that, um, When it comes to Jewish students and anti-Semitic acts, they kind of are hiding behind, uh, free speech and First Amendment rights, which we very much uphold. But there's also a lot of activity that is violating the rules that they already have on the books, and they're just choosing to kind of turn a blind eye. Um, I think the other thing that is just truly needed is leadership at all levels to stop normalizing anti-Semitic rhetoric and tropes and letting it kind of, you know, this is business leaders, media leaders, uh, you know, political leaders.

[00:44:17] Elyssa Schmier, Regional Director, ADL Michigan

I think that there's a base level that has been changed over the past couple of years of what is allowable language. And we know that that language leads to vandalism, normalization. People become immune to kind of the impact of some of those symbols. Like, I mean, I've seen, you know, with the firing that happened recently, um, in some of the Detroit suburbs, people were questioning, they're like, well, it just had swastikas on it. What's the big deal? I'm like, are you kidding me? Like when I was a kid, that would have been the biggest deal. And so I think that base level of normalization and the unwillingness to kind of really call out what's happening. And I think that I really do think the majority of Michiganders do not stand for this type of activity. They certainly don't stand for this level of hate. They don't like to see the language, but they're too afraid to do anything. So I think encouraging leadership so it trickles down to really take a strong stand. Um, and I think that there's like a number of actions that are leaders here in Lansing can take as well. Like we don't have an anti-Semitism task force. So therefore we don't have an official way to kind of, um, examine what is happening specifically in our state and come up with some solutions at all levels of government. Um, so that would be a really good start. I think, you know, a task force with teeth in it is really important.

[00:45:47] Elyssa Schmier, Regional Director, ADL Michigan

And I will say that here in Michigan, like we really do have a unique situation, um, compared to some of the other states, like it's bad across America, but it's the particular problems that we have in Michigan in terms of antisemitism are unique. So we're going to need some unique solutions as well. Um, but yeah, I mean, I think that, you know, we're always open to ideas as well, um, to find out, you know, the best way to protect our community. Um, I mean, the other thing is what Rabbi Gordon touched upon, um, unfortunately there is an extreme need for security costs at this point. Um, and I like to say like, you know, we need to protect ourselves and we need that money from the federal and state government to partner with us to do that until the rest of the world kind of decides that this level of hatred and violence towards our community is wrong. Um, I know that there's a lot of people that feel different ways about turning our synagogues and Jewish institutions into like fortresses and stuff, but the security needs are real. Um, and the threats against us are real. And, um, you know, there's a lot of Jewish institutions and synagogues in places outside of West Bloomfield that are just kind of like sitting there with no security mechanism. And so that's a big piece of what, you know, we need as well.

[00:47:10] Attorney General Dana Nessel

Notice the rabbi, this question. Are you aware, I mean, Temple Israel is fortunate. I mean, you know, the biggest reform temple in the world. Um, and so you have, you know, because of the, you know, the significance of the, the number of congregants that you have, you are going to be able not without some difficulty, but you're going to be able to keep your congregation and keep them safe. Uh, but what about smaller congregations? Are you seeing temples that are just disbanding because they're just not gonna be able to afford the massive security costs?

[00:47:44] Rabbi Ariana Gordon, Temple Israel in West Bloomfield

So I haven't seen any, at least locally disband. But it is a source of conversation all the time that places who can't afford regular security or any of the security measures that we are putting into place. It is a worry, and there are certainly people who are leaving those congregations to go to other places where especially those who have children, um, who don't want their kids learning about Judaism in a building that is not secure. And so they're switching congregations. And that's not great for the community, right? As much as I am happy to have any student in my religious school, I don't think it's good for the Detroit community. I don't think it's good for the country, that these smaller places that can't afford security are losing members to bigger places that can afford it. So I don't think we've seen any disband right now, at least at this point in the Detroit community. Um, fortunately, we have the Detroit Jewish Federation who has a really robust security team, and they work with the smaller congregations to also help support them and their security needs. Uh, but we're also unique in Detroit because we have that. So I feel very fortunate that this is where I grew up. This is where I get to be a rabbi. Um, but it's a bigger conversation across the country, but certainly in our community about how we can support all of our congregants.

[00:49:05] Attorney General Dana Nessel

You know, I think as, Aaron, this question, um, about, you know, I have such fond memories of my time in college at the University of Michigan. Um, the issues that are pervasive involving, um, you know, Palestinian Israeli issues. I mean, these aren't new. They didn't start yesterday. They've been around for a very long time. But I would say what the difference is, when I was in college, we had conversations about the issue. And oftentimes, you know, and I really enjoyed the fact that you could go to a lecture hall and you would have various different experts on an issue who were able to have an intelligent debate. And we all listened, you know, intently. And maybe we came away with different opinions and maybe we went in with different opinions, but you could have those conversations and you could have that dialog on campus. And again, nobody felt afraid or scared. It wasn't that kind of environment. And what I'm wondering about Michigan State and this is, you know, um, you may know that both of my sons graduated from Michigan State and they were there also during some of the same time period. And, you know, what I heard is that there was a real fear of even engaging in that discussion because of what it might lead to in terms of, first of all, you know, Potentially as a Jewish student, feeling as though you wouldn't be welcome into many different areas on campus. And I don't mean necessarily physically, but you just wouldn't wouldn't feel welcome, um, in that environment. And that also what I've seen is instead of the kind of scholarly discussion and debate, just people getting shouted down where you can't even express an idea if it is not a certain way of thinking or a certain idea, um, or, you know, certain viewpoints on, on various subjects related to the Middle East. If you didn't subscribe to that idea, you just weren't welcome at all. And you certainly weren't, weren't safe to have that conversation. And I guess I'm just wondering what your thoughts are.

[00:51:14] Erin Starr

Yeah, I think that it's the same as what your children have told you. When I'm in a big lecture hall and something along the lines of the Middle East or being Jewish comes up, my heart almost sinks because I'm like preparing myself as if like, okay, so is the professor going to start talking poorly or are they going to introduce something? And then it's going to get, you know, good attention. But then again, it's like most of the time being Jewish or Israel, the whole topic in general in a lecture hall at Michigan State completely avoided because of the fear of being attacked rather than just listened to, which is unfortunate.

[00:51:55] Attorney General Dana Nessel

And, and in the, you know, the school districts that we're talking about, um, have you I mean, you've described your experiences, but have you noticed sort of palpable changes in general besides the ones that you've described?

[00:52:13] Dr. Michael Ambrose, parent of student in Beverly Hills

I think we're maybe having some slightly different experiences. We have a district that is quite engaged. I get the sense I don't know and can't speak for your district. I'm curious to get your thoughts on it. It feels like we talk about how sometimes it is. There is fear and speaking up. It feels often that perhaps even maybe the district is worried, very much worried about saying the wrong thing or doing the wrong thing. Right. And so we're talking with Birmingham Public Schools about implementing a parent code of conduct. Right. Our situation was unique in that it wasn't necessarily student on student A student on student issue. This was an issue with a parent, right. Who did something right to the to the school and the community. And so certainly the students, their students shouldn't have repercussions based on what the parents did. But there was no district policy, you know, to, to sort of guide them. And I think they're taking and they've committed to, you know, making policy change. They've committed to implementing a parent code of conduct before the start of this next school year, which is fantastic. But I still do get the sense that they've got to be there walking on eggshells, and they have to be. They're worried about being so careful that they don't want to upset anybody, and it call out anti-Semitism for what it is, and they've done that. But any, you know, any advice that you have based on your personal experiences or experiences in an office to, you know, how, how how do you imagine these districts should think about it? Right. I mean, as, as they're, they're working towards, you know, implementing change.

[00:54:00] Attorney General Dana Nessel

Yeah. Well, I'm not going to give advice to the school districts. I don't think they would appreciate that very much, you know, except for the fact that, you know, one would hope that whatever policies they put in place, obviously you have to balance, you know, the First Amendment with people's right to feel Safe and not feel threatened or disparaged. And for the most part, I think that we've seen that. It's funny. Aside from, uh, you know, issues that we're talking about today, again, this is the big change that I think has occurred over time. But I just remember, um, when my children were in middle school and having a student that would just routinely, uh, disparage my family to my sons because my sons had two mothers and, you know, uh, my children would be like, I feel uncomfortable in this environment. And it was that balance for the school district to be like, okay, on one hand, yes, this child has a First Amendment right, and this child has the ability to have the thoughts that he has. And on the other hand, you're in school, you don't just start attacking somebody else's family while you're in math class, you know, and that there had to be a weighing and a balancing of that. And of course, to me, I was like, why aren't you suspending this kid? You know, that that, you know, this is not appropriate. Um, so I, I mean, there is that balance and I think a lot of people are, are afraid of anything that looks like you're, you know, impeding on the First Amendment. But this is a school, right? Um, it's not the same.

[00:55:38] Dr. Michael Ambrose, parent of student in Beverly Hills

Feel safe.

[00:55:39] Attorney General Dana Nessel

Yeah. Everyone should feel safe. Everyone should feel welcome. And you don't want kids who literally are, don't want to go to school because they feel like, you know, they're being either threatened or the language that's being used. Um, you know, is just making them feel unsafe and also unwanted. Uh, and I mean, those are, those are significant concerns that I have. And I just, I don't what, what bothers me so much is the fact that, that we're just moving into a place where people feel like, again, people can have their, their viewpoints, but the need to perpetually share those viewpoints at times where it doesn't seem as though it's appropriate to be doing that. Um, uh, but I think that's something all the school districts are going to need to look at. Uh, so that people know exactly, you know, what, what is deemed to be appropriate about school district, what isn't. Um, and under what circumstances, you know, uh, because it's becoming more and more of an issue. I, I will say in talking about the First Amendment and this again, you know, we're seeing this leafleting right all the time now in communities all over the state, uh, where what they'll be like plastic baggies and there's some sort of messaging in there that is anti-Semitic in nature and like thrown on people's lungs or driveways.

[00:57:03] Elyssa Schmier, Regional Director, ADL Michigan

Yeah. They're standing. So what we've been seeing is, um, they, there's, I mean, deeply anti-Semitic language and traditional kind of tropes and imagery about the Jews, and they put them into plastic baggies. They put either like birdseed or popcorn kernels in it to weigh it down, and then they're throwing it from either the sidewalk or a vehicle so they're not trespassing. Um, and they're very good at knowing what they can and cannot do in terms of First Amendment speech. Um, and so they're tossing it on to, you know, lawns and maybe hitting like 4 or 5 streets and then, and then they leave. Um, and it's happened, I mean, it's been happening for years throughout Michigan. Um, but it's more recently kind of we've had in the last three months, you know, maybe 6 or 7 reports of it. Um, and it's, you know, it's an act of intimidation. Um, it's a recruiting mechanism for the groups that do it because they also have their website usually right on the fliers in case someone, um, is into their ideology. Um, you know, we, some other states have, uh, anti leafleting laws that have to do with like harmful and hateful speech. Um, and here in Michigan, like some of the cities, the closest thing they have is like an anti loitering ordinance, which is really hard to uphold. Um, and first you need to catch the people who are doing it as well. Um, but yeah, I mean, I think that what we're seeing is the sentiment I'm getting from people who are calling me about it is they feel that, um, it's an act of terrorizing an already terrorized community. Like they just are like, it's just a pile on of everything else that they've seen. Their synagogue has been attacked. They, they see spray paint when they walk down the street. Um, you know, things are happening on their kids college campuses and now it's right at their doorstep.

[00:59:05] Attorney General Dana Nessel

Yeah. And I guess the question is for any kinds of potential city ordinances or state laws that everything you know, can it be done in a content neutral way so that you're just saying you can't just throw it doesn't matter. Even if you're saying like, hey, I have a lawn service that I'd like for you to consider using or whatever it is that you just can't throw things technically with that.

[00:59:28] Elyssa Schmier, Regional Director, ADL Michigan

Like you can't put 50 of your lawn service leaflets on someone's lawn, right? In these ordinances. And I mean, we're seeing that like, it's not just 1 or 2 baggies. Some of the households are getting, you know, 25 or 30. Um, and they're trying to collect it before the kids wake up and start walking to school. Mhm.

[00:59:48] Attorney General Dana Nessel

You know, I wonder, um, I wonder if you could talk a little bit about I, I think for me, I was, I was sort of stunned at some of the, the things that I routinely hear about, about Jews. Um, and also about Uh, any, uh, the Jewish relationship with Israel. I, I think that there, um, is a fundamental misunderstanding sometimes of like, like what our religion, um, dictates, but like, you know, just in the scribes, like, you know, I don't know if you guys use the same, um, Maxwell house Haggadah that I use, but I think there's just a fundamental misunderstanding, really, of the tenets of our religion in a way that is shocking to me because we obviously were a Christian, we're still a Christian majority country. And I was like, have you not read the Old Testament, though? Because that pretty much encapsulates most of it, you know? And it's always just kind of surprising to me. Just, um, again, the lack of education about, about our religion, also the lack of education about just like fundamentally true things about, about Israel. Um, and, you know, it's sort of shocking to me and I don't know if it speaks to like, we're not doing great at educating people in, you know, a variety of different ways. But now we're at the point where when I try to have these conversations with people, like we're already at the point where it's people have their belief systems set in stone.

[01:01:27] Attorney General Dana Nessel

And I will say this social media is the devil. I mean, it's just, I feel like personally, not just on this issue, but on a variety of issues, it is the worst thing that has ever happened to humanity. And please quote me on that. Uh, and that part of the reason that we're not able to have the kinds of conversations that we used to have about sensitive subjects subjects is because before we even meet a person, we know their viewpoint on everything. So we don't get to know them in another setting before we start to have these conversations. Um, but, but also some of the rhetoric that's out there or really, you know, just what can be shown in a 30 to 60 second video, even if it's using AI, even if it's just wildly inaccurate, you know, it's I feel like people are, for lack of a better word, being brainwashed to believe certain things that may or may not be true. And it's very hard later on to say, well, let's have an intelligent discussion about this, a nuanced discussion about it, because already they've seen so many of these videos that that is going to now sort of encapsulate their belief system, and they're not going to be open to anything else because everything they've learned, they've learned via social media, and they don't even know where these, you know, these videos are coming from necessarily.

[01:02:56] Rabbi Ariana Gordon, Temple Israel in West Bloomfield

So I, I think that is really spot on. Hamas actually has done an excellent job with their propaganda for really the last 30 years. Um, in a way that we as Jews and Israel as a country did not do well. So they're sharing their version, which is not actually real or fact driven. And it's really hard to your point to undo that and to undo that at this point. And it's been really interesting for the last two years, I've been teaching a college level class to our high school students about Israel and Israeli history. And I teach Palestinian history, right? I, we go back many generations to really have students understand what actually happened. Now I'm teaching it. So certainly, like there is a bias and there is a lens, but we try really thoughtfully and intentionally to incorporate viewpoints from both sides to be able to have a conversation. And part of why it has been so important that I'm doing that is so when our students get to college campuses and face professors or other students who are saying things. They have the resources and they have learned in a safe space taught by their rabbi that this is actually real history. And that doesn't mean we can't understand and empathize with what Palestinians are experiencing and have experienced in their history. But also, here's a real story, and let's have a real conversation and have the language and the knowledge to be able to do that. And I would say it's one of the most important things that I've been doing for the last two years, and I'm doing it for such a small percentage, right? So what really needs to happen is that needs to be global and so widespread, and not just for a handful of high school students in one congregation, but for so many, so much more of the world to be able to have deeper conversations and to really know what's real and not know what Hamas has been putting out there for 30 years.

[01:04:53] Elyssa Schmier, Regional Director, ADL Michigan

Yeah. And I think that, like the online piece of this, right is just like, you know, it's like a cesspool of the worst of humanity in a lot of ways. But I think, like the average person is not recognizing that half the time they're not even engaging, like with the real person. I mean, there was this study that was done that there was all these influencers and voices and online spaces. And when, you know, and it was like a lot of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish pieces. And then when the blackout happened in Iran during the start of the war, all of a sudden those bots got silent. And now that things are starting to come back online there and they're getting internet access, those are coming back up, right? And so these are, you know, young people are engaging with this and seeing it, thinking that this is an American student that lives in Ohio or something, right. And is a real person who's had real experiences. And there's just like a, like, you know, online is not real. It's not the real world. There's so much misinformation. Um, critical thinking basically goes out the door. And social media companies, like their whole reason is to keep you on that site for as long as possible. And it's kind of like the old news feeling of like, if it bleeds, it leads. If this, if you feel outrage, if you feel anger, if you feel hatred, if you see something that is horrible, people tend to stay online longer. Unfortunately, pictures of puppies and babies aren't doing it for some reason. Well, welcome.

[01:06:25] Attorney General Dana Nessel

To my Instagram reel of all kittens. All the time. I think so, yeah.

[01:06:31] Elyssa Schmier, Regional Director, ADL Michigan

Um, but I think that that's part of what we're going to have to do in our education system is teaching young people. But also I will say that this is not just a young person problem. I have this problem with my own parents sometimes. So, you know, it's just people who are perpetually online being unable to kind of see and understanding the algorithm and what's being fed to them is and there's different news sources. So therefore there's different facts that exist in our society. And we're just so divided and it's leading down a path of separation. Instead of people coming together and being able to have those conversations, maybe not agree, but at least talk to each other.

[01:07:10] Attorney General Dana Nessel

Yeah. And just see each other as like human beings who might have fundamental differences of opinions on certain things, but we can still be friends and neighbors and colleagues. And that used to be how it was in part, I think, because you got to know the person before you started having political conversations with them. Um, and I will say, I always talk about my many years I spent at the Frank Murphy Hall of Justice as an assistant prosecutor and then later as a defense attorney. And how before social media, like I had no idea who, who were Democrats or Republicans or who were pro-choice or, or if you, you know, how you felt about LGBT rights or gun safety laws. Like, I had no idea. You know, we talked about talked about like people's kids or like where you went on vacation or whatever case you were handling that day, or the weather. Like we didn't just all of a sudden start talking about events in the Middle East, like the second that you met a person. And, um, so again, getting to know people, just as people allowed us to say, hey, people can have different viewpoints and we don't have to hate each other's guts.

[01:08:12] Attorney General Dana Nessel

Um, but I get all the time. Um, and this is just, you know, this has a little bit to do with what we're talking about, but it's a little bit removed. The thought that, you know, if somebody is, uh, an elected member of, of government that, you know, you, you have to agree with everything they do all the time. And if not, you hate them, you know, like we're not perfect. We're not going to have agreements on everything. Um, but just like you don't expect your spouse to be perfect, uh, all the time. Um, you, you really shouldn't expect that your, uh, you know, elected leaders are going to agree with you on 100% issues 100% of the time. Um, and that's, you know, that's just human nature and that's life. But everything is just, there's, there's just seemingly like a purity test that we do for all people now. And people have to be in agreement with you on everything, or you can't have a relationship with them at all. And I would say that I think that is one of the things that's having, you know, a significant impact on the Jewish community right now, too.

[01:09:19] Elyssa Schmier, Regional Director, ADL Michigan

Um, so I know that we're almost at time. Did you want to see if any of the media have any questions? If any of the media here has any questions, otherwise I think we could. No. Oh.

[01:09:34] Reporter

Hi. Um, listen, I wanted to ask a little bit more about the security measures. Um, there was \$23 million, I think, put up in the legislature for security measures for places of worship. It was in response to the Temple Israel attack. Um, I'm just wondering, you know, what does this security burden look like financially? And what would. I don't believe that money came through. So what would that \$23 million really look like, especially statewide? What are your conversations with other temples as well?

[01:10:05] Rabbi Ariana Gordon, Temple Israel in West Bloomfield

So the cost for the Jewish community to secure our institutions is \$1 billion every single year. Um, you know, that's spread across schools, congregations, nonprofit organizations, but Jewish institutions as a whole. Uh, and most places can't take on, you know, even a small percentage of that burden. Um, for us temple Israel, we're figuring out how to do it because we feel the need to increase our security measures in response to the attack on March 12th. And so we are reaching out to donors. We're reaching out to our congregants. We're reaching out to other organizations who might be able to support us. Um, we're writing grants. We will receive some of the federal funding, which will be incredibly helpful. But once again, like that's going to be a small percentage of what we need to do. And I think the same is true for other communities and other institutions in the area who are writing grants, who will get some federal funding, and to similarly look to their community and look to generous donors to help fill in those gaps.

[01:11:11] Elyssa Schmier, Regional Director, ADL Michigan

And in Michigan, we don't have a state level nonprofit security grant. So we just have we can access the federal program, which is, you know, great in many ways. Um, although it needs to be reformed to make it an easier process, but we don't have state level. So what you're speaking to is some line items in the budget that is not guaranteed from year to year. Um, there's a couple of different ones for different population groups. Um, but if we were to have a state level nonprofit security grant that would be available to any houses of worship, I mean, you know, listen, the Jewish community spends \$1 billion a year, but we also have, um, you know, our friends in the Church of Latter day Saints that had a horrific attack. Um, just in the past year. There's many mosques that need to unfortunately, um, create more security in their spaces and any nonprofits would be able to access it as well. So that's something in the future that we're looking towards. That's something that at the state legislature they would have to pass. Um, but there's a number of other states that have taken that step to have, um, a state level nonprofit security grant that could, that people can access, you know, after if they are unable to get the federal dollars.

[01:12:27] Attorney General Dana Nessel

Yeah. And I would just follow up, I mean, this is the price of hate in our society, right? And as you indicated, you know, like I remember, I went to Genesee County after that incident, that LDS church, just horrific. And like, so, I mean, terrible, the loss of life that occurred, but just incredible that it wasn't just like it was like, I can't believe that that you didn't have dozens, even hundreds of people who were killed. It just the circumstances, the way they played out, people got very fortunate and lucky. Um, but it's so deeply concerning. You know, we did sort of trainings out there in Genesee to any houses of worship. But here are the things that you need to have if you want to continue to have congregants. And, you know, as we're talking about it, I mean, it was it was just sort of astonishing that the first aid kits in the, for surveillance equipment, uh, and having, you know, people there to serve as security and the communication system. And the more that we talked about the things that you needed to do to remain safe, the more I thought, like, there's not enough money in the world for all of this. And what are we telling people that you can't, you can't practice whatever it is that is your, your chosen religion anymore because, um, it's too expensive. Uh, and it's again, it's not just one, uh, you know, it's not just one religion.

[01:13:49] Attorney General Dana Nessel

It's, it's many of them. Uh, and just the thought that you're not safe in a house of worship is so deeply disturbing and so deeply un-American. Uh, and that's why I think it's so important of all the things that we're talking about, not just some constraints that I think we should have on social media. And yeah, I'm going to keep on talking about it. And I should tell you that those kinds of constraints are being upheld in the courts. Everyone thinks everything should be First Amendment all the time, but time, place and manner, there are things that can be, um, that we can, uh, have better guardrails on for sure. But I want to say this as well. And I, this is like a message, you know, to all of our elected leaders, to all of our candidates for elected office. People have to stop talking like this because when you have people in positions of great authority who disparage people based on their race or their religion or ethnicity or sexual orientation. On and on and on it. It helps to develop and to disseminate that, that hatred. Um, and it, it makes society worse for all of us. No one's life is better because of that hate. Everybody's life is worse. We're all worse off for it. Um, and I think again, we have to stop electing people who speak about their fellow Americans that way. It's it's, um, it's terrible for our society.

[01:15:23] Elyssa Schmier, Regional Director, ADL Michigan

Is there any other questions?

[01:15:27] Attorney General Dana Nessel

All right. Well, thanks all for, uh, for joining us and for having this conversation. Please continue to use the Department of Attorney General as a resource in whatever way that, uh, that could be helpful. Thank you to the ADL for the work that that you guys do. And thank you all for for sharing your very powerful stories. Um, and, um, let's all commit to doing everything we can in our power to helping to, um, create less hate in this world and more acceptance and more love.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



Automated transcription curated by MIRS' staff. We apologize for any misspellings.