



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WCC TESTIFIES IN SUPPORT OF ANTISEMITISM DEFINITION

On October 22, the Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the public policy voice of Wisconsin's Catholic bishops, [testified](#) in support of [Assembly Bill 446](#), a bipartisan proposal to require that each governmental body in Wisconsin use the official [definition](#) of antisemitism adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) on May 26, 2016. The IHRA antisemitism definition reads:

Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.

This definition is accompanied by a list of examples and a statement that “criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic.”

The United States and 45 other countries, including most Western democracies, and 35 U.S. states, as well as the District of Columbia, have adopted the definition.

In the U.S., Jews make up 2 percent of the population, but according to the FBI's 2024 statistics (Reported Crimes in the Nation Quick Stats 2024), they experienced 69 percent of all hate crimes motivated by religious bias. Here in Wisconsin, the Jewish community has seen an increase of over 450 percent in antisemitic incidents since 2015. Jewish synagogues, schools, community centers, and other Jewish organizations have been threatened and vandalized.

In the testimony, WCC Executive Director Barbara Sella explained that as a result of these attacks, “Wisconsin's Jewish community ends up paying millions of dollars in enhanced security to protect its members. No one should live in such fear. It is for this reason that Wisconsin laws must recognize when antisemitism is at work and must be ready to combat it.”

Under Assembly Bill 446, government bodies must use the IHRA definition when evaluating evidence of discriminatory intent for any law, ordinance, or policy in this state that prohibits discrimination based on race, religion, color, or national origin or that provides for enhanced criminal penalties.

To address concerns about free speech, the bill further states that nothing in the bill “may be construed to diminish or infringe upon any right protected under the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution or to conflict with federal or state antidiscrimination laws.”

Sella testified that the Catholic Church opposes antisemitism in all its forms. Quoting the Vatican II declaration on the Church's relationship with non-Christian religions, she said that the Church “decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone” ([*Nostra aetate*](#) [*In our time*], no. 4).

Sella added that on October 5, Pope Leo XIV [expressed](#) concern about “the rise of antisemitic hatred in the world, [while] continu[ing] to be saddened by the immense suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza.”

Sella noted that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has also called on everyone to combat antisemitism. She pointed to the USCCB’s website [page](#) devoted to combatting antisemitism, which includes a [Catholic commentary](#) on the American Jewish Committee's *Translate Hate* glossary of antisemitic terms, tropes, and memes.

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