

CONGREGATION BETH EL
107 Adams Street
Bennington, Vermont 05201

February 18, 2026

Subject: Support for H.310 Antisemitism in Vermont Education and Concerns About H.R.13

Dear Chair Bongartz, Vice Chair Weeks, Clerk Williams, and Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

On behalf of Congregation Beth El in Bennington and its Board of Directors, we write to express our strong support for H.310, “An act relating to education on the evolving nature of antisemitism,” and to share our concerns about H.R.13, “House resolution relating to the end of apartheid and support for the people of Palestine.”

Beth El has been part of the Bennington community since 1909. Our congregants live in Bennington, North Bennington, Shaftsbury, and many surrounding towns, and our synagogue was founded with strong interfaith support that we very much hope continues today. In recent months, however, Town Meeting–style “Apartheid-Free Community” campaigns and local commentary declaring Israel an “apartheid state” have created a more hostile and confusing environment for many Jewish residents, including students and families in our schools.

Whatever one’s views on Israeli or U.S. policy, these efforts have real consequences in our classrooms and hallways. They:

- Import a distant and complex conflict into local civic spaces in highly simplified, accusatory terms.
- Single out the world’s only Jewish-majority state for uniquely harsh treatment, which many students and parents experience as directed at them.
- Make it harder for Jewish students to feel they can speak openly, participate fully, or be seen simply as classmates rather than as representatives of a foreign government.

H.310 is, in our view, precisely the kind of measured, constructive response this moment requires. By providing education on the evolving nature of antisemitism - including how it can appear in debates about Israel and Zionism -it would help schools:

- Distinguish between legitimate criticism of any government and rhetoric that crosses into hatred of Jews.
- Equip educators to recognize newer forms of antisemitism that students encounter online and bring into school.

- Address antisemitic incidents alongside other forms of bias in a consistent, principled way.

By contrast, H.R.13, while no doubt well-intended, adopts language and framing (“the end of apartheid”) that mirror the most polarizing Town Meeting resolutions. In singling out Israel in this way, it risks reinforcing the very patterns of double standards and stigmatization that H.310 is meant to help educators understand and counter. We are concerned that, read together with local “apartheid-free” campaigns, H.R.13 will be understood by many students and community members as the State House itself endorsing a one-sided narrative that leaves Jewish Vermonters feeling targeted rather than protected.

We therefore respectfully ask the Committee to:

- Give H.310 a favorable report and recommend its passage to the full Senate
- View H.R.13 with caution, being mindful of how its framing may be received in school communities already struggling with polarization and rising antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents.

We have attached a recent letter to the editor from Congregation Beth El, submitted to the Bennington Banner, describing how these local dynamics are affecting our community. We offer it as a concrete illustration of why thoughtful, nuanced education about antisemitism is so urgently needed in Vermont’s schools.

Thank you for your attention to this issue and for your work on behalf of all Vermont students. We would be glad to serve as a resource or to participate in your hearing, and we appreciate the opportunity to share our perspective.

Sincerely,

Lance Allen Wang
President, Congregation Beth El

Shawn Paper
On behalf of the Board of Directors, Congregation Beth El

Congregation Beth El
Bennington, Vermont

- Cc:
 - Sen. [Seth Bongartz](#), Chair
 - Sen. [David Weeks](#), Vice Chair
 - Sen. [Kesha Ram Hinsdale](#)
 - Sen. [Nader Hashim](#)
 - Sen. [Terry Williams](#), Clerk
 - Sen. [Steven Heffernan](#)
 - Daphne Kinney-Landis, *Committee Assistant*

- Attachment: Letter to the Editor re: “Ending Israeli apartheid starts right here” and “Apartheid-Free Community” resolutions