

100+ Chicagoland Jewish clergy stand against attacks on democracy being carried out in the name of Jewish safety

This letter appeared in the [Chicago Tribune](#) on Tuesday, April 22nd. [Rabbis & clergy: please sign on using this link.](#)

We are Jewish leaders and clergy from across the Chicagoland area. The congregations we serve and communities we support are politically, racially, and economically diverse, and represent multiple denominations of Jewish practice. We write this letter with a unified voice to stand against the attacks on civil liberties and democratic norms being carried out in the name of combating antisemitism.

In recent weeks, students and others, many with legal status, have been detained or had their visas revoked without explanation or due process, including at the University of Illinois, University of Chicago, and Northwestern University¹. Federal funds for higher education have been frozen or withdrawn, including \$790 million at Northwestern². The administration has also announced plans to surveil immigrants' social media³.

Many of these actions have been presented as in defense of the Jewish community. Yet in truth, Jewish fear is being used as a fig leaf for an anti-democratic agenda of mass deportations, civil rights rollbacks, and attacks on higher education.

We know that many Jews, including Jewish students on campuses, have felt unsafe in recent months and years. We take those concerns seriously. And we know that throughout history, Jews have been safest in multiracial democracies where the rights of all people, regardless of race, religion, national origin, or political opinion, are protected.

Education is a core Jewish value, and the institutions that uphold civil liberties and democratic norms have long been essential to Jewish safety and flourishing. As Jewish leaders, we reject the exploitation of our fears and experiences of antisemitism to justify the dismantling of those institutions. Such actions do not protect our community — they use us, and they put us in danger.

We recently celebrated the Jewish holiday of Passover. Each year, we recall the oppression of our ancestors in Egypt and pray for redemption from all forms of violence. We are commanded to retell

¹<https://www.chicagotribune.com/2025/04/09/trump-administration-revokes-student-visas-from-u-of-c-students-at-siu-and-u-of-i-also-targeted/>

²<https://www.chicagotribune.com/2025/04/09/trump-administration-funding-freeze-northwestern-university/>

³<https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/news-releases/dhs-to-begin-screening-aliens-social-media-activity-for-antisemitism>

our stories of persecution and deliverance "in every generation," reminding us that our story remains relevant at all times, including today.

In the Passover story, it is an *erev rav*—a mixed multitude—who journeyed together out of Egypt. We are obligated not only to seek justice for ourselves, but to protect the rights and freedoms afforded to all people. We must speak out against deportations without due process, suppression of free speech, attacks on higher education, and the dismantling of democratic norms. Doing so is an expression of our Jewish and American values.

Signatories:

Rabbi Donielle C. Aaron

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Rabbi Max Antman

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Rabbi Lily Goldstein
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Rabbi Rachel Heaps
Rabbi Sidney Helbraun
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Rabbi Brian Immerman
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