

# Fighting anti-Semitism



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*Editor's Note: The following are remarks about Anti-Semitism delivered by Daniel "Doni" Fogel, director of Jewish Community Relations, at the Federation's JCRC Annual Legislative Reception on Nov. 29.*

Good evening. I wish I could present good news regarding a decrease in anti-Semitism and bigotry. I cannot. In the past year, we have done great work partnering with various communities around Richmond. My remarks tonight will not focus on those because so much of our time has been – of necessity – spent fighting anti-Semitism.

The third of our JCRC pillars states: "The eradication of all forms of racism and anti-Semitism" Over the past year and as recently as earlier this month, multiple national groups have reported a significant increase in hatred nationally.

The Anti-Defamation League reported from 2014-2015, there was a 3 percent increase in anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S. This included over a 50 percent increase in the number of assaults. ADL further reported between August 2015 - July 2016 there were 2.6 million tweets containing anti-Semitic language. ADL suggested these "may contribute to reinforcing and normalizing anti-Semitic language on a massive scale." Regrettably, we are seeing the effect of that trend, the normalization of anti-Semitism and bigotry in our community.

Earlier this month, the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported that from 2015-2016, the majority of religious-based hate crime was directed at the Jewish community and there was again a 3 percent increase from the previous year. And I'd remind you the bar for an act being labeled a federal hate crime is very high. However, these are statistics, and they are easily dismissed. Locally, several Rabbis have reported speaking with congregants who feel less safe.

As you know, on Aug. 12-13, a gathering of neo-Nazi, neo-Confederate, white supremacist and alt-Right groups took place in Charlottesville. They cried Nazi chants and threatened the local Jewish community with physical destruction and violence. Jews fled their Saturday morning Synagogue worship in fear. A white Supremacist took the life of a civilian marching against hatred and the event cost two Virginia State Troopers their lives. The JCFR and its JCRC condemned the extremist white supremacist groups and the violence they brought to Charlottesville.

As if the actions of the white supremacists weren't enough, the leadership of those groups

touted the event, the largest such gathering of hate groups in the USA in decades, as a major success and the "coming out" party of their ilk. They boasted, from this day forward, they won't be confined to the internet. They weren't kidding or exaggerating. Since then there have been multiple local incidents.

We have worked with two different schools, in two different local counties after overtly anti-Semitic remarks were made in school settings. One student told another student and her parent to go 'die in a gas chamber.' That Jewish student's grandparents are Holocaust survivors.

Members of the Atomwaffen Division – an overly Neo-Nazi group – which calls for the nuclear solution to the Jewish problem, posted fliers and held group activities in downtown Richmond.

Fliers for the Vanguard Group – another overly neo-Nazi group – have been distributed in campuses statewide and most locally at VCU.

Such events are ongoing. KKK fliers were distributed recently, multiple times, just hours from Richmond and The Confederate States of American II rallied again, in Richmond on Dec. 9. We are actively working with our law enforcement partners to ensure we are ready.

Yet these events are not happening in a vacuum. The polarization of our society is dangerous and we MUST be a force for unity and a central gathering place for the good. I was recently honored to deliver remarks at the Emek Sholom Holocaust Memorial Cemetery here during its Kristallnacht Service. I will repeat some of what I said there as I believe it bears repeating.

The power of hatred is real. The power of denial is real. And they are an exceptionally dangerous combination. Denial of what is going on is dangerous and silence is always consent. Silence in the face of hatred emboldens and empowers the haters.

We must be clear-eyed, and level-headed and vocal in our opposition to the proliferation and normalization of anti-Semitism, bigotry and hatred. We cannot honestly commit to the eradication of racism and anti-Semitism if we cannot acknowledge the trends reported by the ADL the FBI and others.

We fight anti-Semitism and bigotry in youth and in schools through education with partners like the ADL and the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities. We fight anti-Semitism and bigotry in the community through education, with our vocal and proud advocacy, through community-building and to the fullest extent of the law.

We stand for the safety and well-being of Jews in the local community and against racism, we stand for Israel and against infringement on religious freedom. We seek not to ostracize but to unite, not to ignore but to educate; we lead through example.

This has been a very challenging year for the Jewish American community and for all Americans. Now is the time to unify.