

Winston & Strawn, The Lawfare Project File Groundbreaking Federal Lawsuit Accusing San Francisco State University of Pervasive Anti-Semitism

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Winston & Strawn and the Lawfare Project filed a [lawsuit](#) in federal court on June 19, 2017 on behalf of a group of San Francisco State University (SFSU) students and members of the local Jewish community against the Board of Trustees of the California State University, SFSU President Leslie Wong, and several other university officials and employees, alleging that SFSU has a long and extensive history of cultivating anti-Semitism and overt discrimination against Jewish students.

The lawsuit was triggered by the alleged complicity of senior university administrators and police officers in the disruption of an April 2016 speech by the Mayor of Jerusalem, Nir Barkat. At that event, organized by SFSU Hillel, Jewish students and audience members were subjected to genocidal and offensive chants and expletives by a raging mob that used bullhorns to intimidate and drown out the Mayor's speech and physically threaten and intimidate members of the mostly-Jewish audience. At the same time, campus police—including the chief—stood by on order from senior university administrators who instructed the police to “stand down” despite direct and implicit threats and violations of university codes governing campus conduct.

The lawsuit states that “SFSU has not merely fostered and embraced anti-Jewish hostility —it has systematically supported ... student groups as they have doggedly organized their efforts to target, threaten, and intimidate Jewish students on campus and deprive them of their civil rights and their ability to feel safe and secure as they pursue their education at SFSU... SFSU continues to affirm its preference for those targeting the Jewish community, according to the lawsuit, by claiming to handle such incidents successfully by removing the Jewish students from their lawful assembly without allowing them the opportunity to exercise their free speech rights.”

Making matters worse, no actions were ever taken by SFSU against the disruptive students, no disciplinary charges were ever filed, and no sanctions were ever imposed against the groups or students responsible for committing these acknowledged violations.

“Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is the underpinning of the modern American ethos of equal protection and anti-discrimination. This case isn't about Jews, it's about equal protection under the law,” says Brooke Goldstein, Lawfare Project Director. “If the courts fail to apply Title VI in this context, we are creating a massive loophole that will ultimately be exploited to target other marginalized minority communities.”

“Anti-Semitism, like any other form of racism, is totally repugnant and cannot be countenanced. This lawsuit intends to address the rampant anti-Jewish animus pervasive at SFSU. Jews are entitled to the same civil rights as all Americans,” says Partner Lawrence Hill, who is also a member of The Lawfare Project’s Board of Directors. “When our universities, which are supposed to be institutions of tolerance that encourage freedom of expression, instead foment prejudice and suppress free speech, we cannot stand idly by. College students are America’s future. Their minds shouldn’t be poisoned with hate and their voices shouldn’t be silenced by a mob.”

The plaintiffs are seeking injunctive relief, declaratory relief, damages for defendants’ denial of equal protection of the laws pursuant to the Fourteenth Amendment and defendants’ violation of plaintiffs’ First Amendment rights.

Plaintiff Jacob Mandel, who just graduated from SFSU, was quoted in the June 19 *Washington Post* [article](#) on the lawsuit: “I didn’t have the right to speak on my own campus, I felt afraid as a Jewish student.’ It wasn’t just that he was being shouted down at events by students politically opposed to Israel,” the article continues, “but that ‘the administration was actively working against me ... I felt really powerless.’”

The Winston team includes Partner Lawrence Hill.

The Lawfare Project legal team includes Brooke Goldstein and Amanda Berman.

The Lawfare Project, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, is a legal think tank and litigation fund that arranges pro bono legal representation for the pro-Israel and counterterrorism communities.

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