



The Louis D. Brandeis Center, Inc. (LDB) is an independent, non-partisan institution for public interest advocacy, research and education. The Center's mission is to advance the civil and human rights of the Jewish people and to promote justice for all.

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Religious Bullying Significant and Pervasive Problem in U.S. Schools

Brandeis Center Calls for Immediate Federal Action In Testimony Before U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

Washington, D.C., May 11: Testifying as an expert witness before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, [The Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law](#) (LDB) today urged the federal government to take immediate action to stem increasing religious bullying and harassment in U.S. schools.

“Religiously-motivated harassment and bullying are on the rise across our country, and are infiltrating our nation’s schools,” testified Aviva Vogelstein, LDB’s director of legal initiatives, at the Commission’s briefing entitled, *In the Name of Hate: Examining the Federal Government’s Role in Preventing Hate Crimes*. “Until recently, though, this problem has been almost entirely ignored by the federal government. It is unconscionable that this category of hate, averaging approximately 30 incidents per school day, 150 incidents per school week, and 602 incidents per school month, has, up until now, been largely unaccounted for and unaddressed.”

According to a 2014 [Sikh Coalition report](#), over half of Sikh children in the U.S. said they were bullied in school, and over two-thirds, or 67% report being bullied if they were wearing a turban. A February [ADL report](#) found that anti-Semitic incidents in K-12 schools and on college campuses nearly doubled over 2016. [A Brandeis Center/Trinity College study](#) found that 54% of Jewish college students reported experiencing or witnessing anti-Semitism in 2014. And a [U.S. Department of Education report](#), released just last month, which at the urging of the Brandeis Center, for the first time, included statistics on religiously-motivated bullying and harassment, found an alarming 10,848 incidents based on religion in 2015-2016.

Recent incidents include: A Muslim student was spit on, called a “Muslim b*tch” and an attempt was made to pull off her hijab at a New York City public school; a 14-year-old Sikh boy wearing a turban in Washington State was punched and knocked down by a classmate; at a Florida school, a classmate drew a swastika and a fake concentration camp number on a Jewish student’s arm; in New York, a Jewish boy was verbally harassed, pinned to the ground and had hot wax poured on his skin; in Maryland, two Jewish students were followed by two suspects shouting, “F*** the Jews” and then punched in the face; and in San Diego a man assaulted a female Muslim student by grabbing her headscarf and choking her with it, calling her a terrorist and telling her to “Get out of this country.”

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, bullying “is linked to many negative outcomes including impacts on mental health, substance use, and suicide.” Kids who are bullied can experience negative physical, school, and mental health issues, and kids who bully others can engage in violent and other risky behaviors into adulthood.

For many years, the Brandeis Center has been pushing the federal government to gather data on hate crimes against religious minorities, with a particular emphasis on anti-Sikh, anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish discrimination. Brandeis Center Director, Kenneth L. Marcus, has testified before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights about this issue.

“Our government cannot continue to turn a blind eye to religious bullying taking place in our nation’s schools. Congress and the President must address the longstanding problem of religious hate crimes, harassment, and bullying. We should all have known about this problem for quite some time. But if any question remained, the Department of Education’s

staggering findings of 10,000 incidents in one year provides us with 10,000 indisputable reasons to act. Religious harassment and bullying in our schools is a major problem that the federal government is inexplicably failing to address. We need better data, and we need serious and immediate action,” added Vogelstein.

The Brandeis Center recommended three steps to combat religiously-motivated bullying and harassment. First, Congress must enact legislation to protect students from religious-based harassment. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of “race, color, or national origin” does not protect students from harassment based on religion, absent an ethnic or ancestral component. Congress should amend existing legislation or pass a stand alone bill to address this omission. Second, the Department of Education should issue clear guidelines as to what is prohibited and what is permitted under Title VI. Lastly, the Department of Education’s agreement to collect data is important but the way the data is currently collected is not useful beyond general figures. The Department of Education should collect detailed information on individual religions, the specific types of harassment and bullying, locations where incidents are occurring and the context behind each incident. More and detailed information is required to properly identify trends and develop effective strategies for addressing past incidents and preventing future ones.

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About The Louis D. Brandeis Center: The Louis D. Brandeis Center, Inc., or LDB, is an independent, nonprofit organization established to advance the civil and human rights of the Jewish people and promote justice for all. The Brandeis Center conducts research, education, and advocacy to combat the resurgence of anti-Semitism on college and university campuses. It is not affiliated with the Massachusetts university, the Kentucky law school, or any of the other institutions that share the name and honor the memory of the late U.S. Supreme Court justice.