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State Representative Simon Cataldo (D-Concord) and State Senator John Velis (D-Westfield) Announce Commission to Combat Antisemitism

We are grateful to the Senate President and House Speaker for appointing us as co-chairs and entrusting us to lead Massachusetts' first statutory commission on combating antisemitism. The work is urgent and the mission is critical. Over the past several years, our Commonwealth has earned the ignominious reputation as a hub of antisemitic activity. We have heard it through harrowing accounts from Jewish students, parents, educators, and people of all backgrounds who feel it on a visceral level in our communities. And we see it in the 2023 data:¹

- Last year, there were 440 antisemitic incidents recorded in Massachusetts, a 189 percent increase from 2022.
- The 189 percent increase in antisemitic incidents in Massachusetts outpaced the 140 percent increase in such incidents nationwide.
- Massachusetts recorded the fifth-highest number of incidents per state in the country, behind only California, New York, New Jersey, and Florida.
- Of these incidents, vandalism increased by 70 percent, harassment increased by 444 percent, and the number of assaults doubled.
- 127 cities and towns in Massachusetts saw at least one antisemitic incident last year.

This is not ok. These trends must be -- and can be -- reversed through concerted action. As co-chairs, we will ensure that this commission will work with great dispatch to meet our statutory charge, established by Session Law (Acts of 2024) Ch. 140: namely, to provide specific, evidence-backed guidance on how to implement the White House's national strategy to counter

¹ Center on Extremism. *Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2023*. New York, NY: ADL, 2024. <https://newengland.adl.org/news/antisemitic-incidents-in-new-england-soared-205-percent-in-2023/>.

antisemitism, improve awareness in schools and the workplace, address harassment and hate crimes, bolster security for places of worship, build upon existing best practices, and more.

We will approach this exercise with humility and care, recognizing that antisemitism is a fraught and complicated topic in today's society. Our work will not, however, be compromised by those who believe the problem of antisemitism is being exaggerated -- it is not -- or who feel that a singular focus on antisemitism for a commission is inappropriate. Antisemitic fear mongering, conspiracy peddling, and hate have for millennia been a harbinger of wider threats to democracy and peace throughout the world. This commission will work towards stamping it out in Massachusetts. As we do so, we will be mindful of one of the core tenets of Tikkun Olam, a Hebrew phrase that translates to "repair the world," that there is virtue in engaging in work you know you cannot complete.

We will be joined on the commission by leaders from around the Commonwealth who have subject matter expertise in our statutory mandate, including appointees of the Senate President, one of whom shall have expertise in combating antisemitism and one of whom shall represent a Jewish community organization in the Commonwealth; appointees of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, one of whom shall have expertise in combating antisemitism and one of whom shall represent a Jewish community organization in the Commonwealth; appointees of the House and Senate Minority Leaders; appointees of the Governor, one of whom shall have expertise in legal issues related to civil rights and civil liberties; appointees of the Massachusetts Municipal Association, Inc.; the Attorney General or a designee; the chair of the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination or a designee; the Commissioner of Higher Education or a designee; the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education or a designee; an appointee of the Massachusetts District Attorneys Association; an appointee of the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association Incorporated; and an appointee of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, Inc.

L'shana tova.