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The Honorable Don Bacon
1024 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Via Email: mark.dreiling@mail.house.gov, tanisha.lewis@mail.house.gov

The Honorable Henry Cuellar
2372 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Via Email: jacob.hochberg@mail.house.gov, travis.knight@mail.house.gov

RE: Caucus for the Advancement of Torah Values Threatens American Jews

Dear Congressmen Bacon and Cuellar:

As a rabbi and leader of an interfaith coalition, I watched in horror this week as the hostage crisis at Congregation Beth Israel unfolded. I knew that this could have just as easily been my own synagogue, just as Tree of Life in Pittsburgh or Chabad in Poway could have been. From the halls of Congress to our own houses of worship, combating antisemitism must be a priority as attacks against American Jews rise.

I and many of my partners in the Jewish community hold significant concerns over the creation of the Caucus for Advancement of Torah Values as a means to address rising antisemitism.

There is no question that antisemitism must be addressed, but this is not the way to do it. The name of the coalition suggests an enmeshment of religion and government prohibited by our Constitution's Establishment Clause. While individual legislators may be moved by their personal faiths, establishing a governmental group to advance values held in the sacred text I myself observe is a clear violation of the First Amendment.

Of further concern is the apparent lack of Jewish representation in the caucus. To discuss combating antisemitism without one of the 37 Jewish members of Congress present is a significant oversight. Congressman Cuellar said himself, "We have to be able to have the strength so we know what's good, what's bad, what's moral and what's not moral." With all due respect, is that possible without the input of your Jewish colleagues?

Furthermore, I caution the caucus away from its conflation of Israel with the Jewish people. The state of Israel has broad support in the Jewish community and I count myself among those supporters. However, the implication that Jewish Americans have a separate national identity that takes precedence over their American identity is dangerous. Antisemitism on our college campuses is real and must be addressed. But drawing parallels between anti-Israel sentiment and



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discrimination against American Jews plays into the trope of “dual loyalty” – an antisemitic accusation that has long been used on both sides of the political spectrum, and that a caucus of this nature would do well to investigate.

I also offer a caution about the phrase “Torah values.” Within the wider Jewish community, that phrase is often deployed to object to certain aspects of American civil rights. This includes equal treatment under the law for LGBTQ+ individuals, people and institutions that promote secular values, people seeking legally available reproductive health care, and those who expect that all citizens will uphold the educational and fiscal mandates legitimately established by law. Interfaith Alliance has always sought to protect people of faith and of no faith on the basis of the constitutional mandates that translate into the “Torah value” that “the law of the land is the law.”

Antisemitism has a significant impact on the lives of American Jews, contributing to a culture in which Jews are afraid to openly express their faith. In a nation founded by those seeking religious freedom, we cannot allow this phenomenon to become normalized. Unfortunately, this caucus does little to address the concerns of everyday American Jews. Rather, it politicizes our existence and erodes the longstanding wall of separation between government and religion, endangering the very people it claims to defend.

Respectfully,

Rabbi Jack Moline

President

Interfaith Alliance

jmoline@interfaithalliance.org