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Via email – clerkoftheboard@ventura.org

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January 23, 2023

Re: Support for Ventura County International Holocaust Remembrance Day Resolution

Dear Chair LaVere and Members of the Board,

I am writing on behalf of the Anti-Defamation League's Tri-Counties office, which serves Ventura County, to express our support and appreciation for the proposed resolution to recognize January 27, 2023 as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. As you may know, ADL is a leading anti-hate organization with a 110 year-old mission "to stop the defamation of the Jewish people, and to secure justice and fair treatment to all." ADL's educational programming has long included professional development and classroom materials for middle and high school educators who teach about the Holocaust.

Recognizing International Holocaust Remembrance Day is important to honor the memory and tragedy of those who experienced genocide, extreme antisemitism, and other forms of bigotry. It is also important to reinforce the lessons we learned from that era to address and prevent bigotry. The number of living survivors from whom we can hear of those events first hand is sadly dwindling, and so we will need to rely on recordings of their accounts, on the accounts of their children, on historical sources, and on a commitment to preserving and continuing to explore and tell these truths.

Antisemitism historically has increased in times of political polarization, distrust in government institutions, and threats to public welfare, including pandemics, and we have clearly seen that occur in recent years both nationally and locally. ADL's 2021 Annual Audit of Antisemitic Incidents (released in May of 2022) reported 2,717 credible antisemitic incidents that year – a 34% increase over the number reported in 2020 and the highest on record since ADL began its annual reporting in 1979. Three of the four prior years were also among the highest five years ever recorded.

ADL also just released a survey of antisemitic attitudes in the United States, which found that 20% of the diverse pool surveyed believe in six or more antisemitic conspiracy theories, demonstrating extensive antisemitic prejudice. This result is nearly double that in ADL's 2019 survey and represents the highest level we have seen in three

decades. It suggests that as many as 66 million Americans may believe in classic antisemitic notions and tropes. 20 percent of respondents, for example, believe Jews have “too much power” in the United States; 21 percent agree that Jews “don’t care about anyone other than themselves;” and 53 percent say that Jews will go out of their way to hire other Jews. These findings reveal substantial belief in tropes that Jews are too powerful, selfish, and clannish. While young adults show less belief in anti-Jewish tropes (18% believe six or more tropes), the difference is substantially less than measured in previous studies. Coming at a time when antisemitic incidents are already at historic levels, the disturbing increase of antisemitic attitudes indicate that we are reaching a dangerous inflection point.

These trends are present locally as well. Our Tri-Counties region experienced a 34% increase in antisemitic incidents reported in 2022. Incidents in Ventura County included hateful slurs and assaults targeting Jews, antisemitic vandalism and graffiti in public places, and virulently antisemitic flyers distributed in Moorpark and Thousand Oaks neighborhoods.

Effective response starts with words. Clear support for the Jewish community and condemnation of antisemitism are important – particularly from our public officials. Resolutions like these are important too, for the absence of words leaves antisemitism unchecked and allows our memory and understanding of the most extreme example of it to fade.

Words alone, however, cannot stem the rise of this antisemitism. We urge the Board to consider actions it can take to help prevent antisemitic attitudes and other forms of bigotry within the County. Many of the factors that contribute to rising antisemitism also negatively impact other minority or marginalized communities, and we have seen a rise in hate crimes and incidents against those groups as well. The following actions by the Board could help address and prevent bigoted attitudes in the County:

- (1) Recognize January 27 of every year going forward as International Holocaust Remembrance Day;
- (2) Direct the County Administrator to survey County staff each year, if the County does not already, on whether the County’s own practices and policies are respectful of minority and marginalized populations and cultures, and report results of those surveys to the Board each year;
- (3) Direct the County Administrator to return with proposals for training or education of County staff about antisemitism and a plan for including training about antisemitism and other forms of bigotry as part of orientation for new staff going forward;
- (4) Direct the County Administrator to investigate the establishment of a Human Relations/Cultural Relations Commission to focus on addressing and

preventing hate crimes, hate incidents, and bigotry in the County. Los Angeles County's *LA vs. Hate* initiative could serve as a guiding example of an effective structure for enabling reporting of incidents and organized access to community resources in response.

Thank you for your consideration of the proposed resolution, your commitment to addressing and preventing antisemitism, and your support for victims of hate and bigotry.

Sincerely,



Dan Meisel
Regional Director