

May 14, 2024

We are a growing coalition of multi-faith faculty and instructors from colleges and universities across the state of Texas writing to express our opposition to Governor Greg Abbott's March 27, 2024, [Executive Order](#) GA 44 "addressing acts of antisemitism in institutions of higher education." Under the false pretext of combating antisemitism, this Order seeks to curtail freedom of speech and political protest on behalf of Palestinians. It is part of a widespread effort to silence Palestinians and their allies, and it sets a dangerous precedent at Texas colleges and universities by conveying that only speech that conforms with the governor's viewpoint is welcome on our campuses. The recent deployment of multiple police forces and state troopers against pro-Palestinian students at the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Texas at Dallas, among other campuses, has made brutally apparent a widespread effort to repress political speech with which the Governor disagrees and to terrorize those who practice it.

The Governor's Order forces institutions of higher education to revise their free speech policies and follow the state in adopting a corrupted definition of antisemitism, one that uses legitimate critique of antisemitic speech and action to hide an insidious anti-Palestinian agenda. Antisemitism, conventionally understood as "prejudice, hostility, or discrimination towards Jewish people on religious, cultural, or ethnic grounds" ([Oxford English Dictionary](#)) has nothing to do with criticizing or condemning the state of Israel for violating international law or committing war crimes. [Jewish Voice for Peace](#) defines antisemitism as "discrimination, targeting, violence, and dehumanizing stereotypes directed at Jews because they are Jewish" and makes a clear distinction between anti-semitism and anti-Zionism, which critiques "the creation of a nation-state with exclusive rights for Jews above others on the land." By contrast, [the definition](#) of antisemitism required by the Executive Order conflates the two in order to undermine the validity of all political and scholarly critique of the settler colonial state of Israel. In fact, we have already seen how unfounded accusations of antisemitism have been weaponized against [faculty](#) in Texas who have been critical of Israel's actions and supportive of Palestinian freedom.

Governor Abbott's Order also requires institutions of higher education to institute punishments, including expulsion, for those who violate these new policies. It calls out, by name, two student groups leading Palestine solidarity organizing on campuses across the state, implying that their members are inherently antisemitic and should be disciplined. Members of these student groups have already been subject to political repression by university leaders across the state. They have also been the targets of racially motivated [harassment](#) and [violence](#), which Abbott's Order ignores entirely. Furthermore, although Governor Abbott's Order purports to protect Jewish students from harm, it will likely be used to penalize Jewish students who are critical of Zionism or the Israeli state, as [institutions](#) of higher education have already done.

Executive Order GA 44 is part of a dangerous pattern of overreach on the part of Texas lawmakers into education at [all levels](#) in this state. This Order follows [Senate Bill 17](#) banning Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programs at public colleges and universities and [Senate Bill 18](#) giving governing boards and administrators more power to remove faculty. As educators, we encourage our students to think critically about current political issues and to engage actively with local and international events as citizens and community members. By imposing a

corrupted definition of antisemitism on institutions of higher education in Texas, exacerbating punishments for students critical of Israel who have already faced police brutality and arrest, and singling out pro-Palestinian students groups for institutional discipline, this Order poses a serious threat to faculty and students' rights to freedom of expression and assembly. By silencing and intimidating students, staff, and faculty, this Order undermines the very goals of higher education.

We demand this repressive Executive Order be rescinded immediately. We urge all faculty and staff to join us in committing to Palestinian liberation on campus and beyond.

Sincerely,

Texas Faculty for Justice in Palestine, with representatives at the following institutions:

A&M College Station

A&M San Antonio

Palo Alto College

Rice University

San Antonio College

Southwestern University

Texas Christian University

Texas State University

Texas Tech University

Trinity University

University of Houston

University of Texas at Arlington

University of Texas at Austin

University of Texas at Dallas

University of Texas at El Paso

University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley

University of Texas at San Antonio

University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio