

## Democratic lawmaker smears anti-racist faculty at Rutgers University

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New Jersey representative Josh Gottheimer smeared Rutgers University professors who support Palestinian rights. (Michael Brochstein / SIPA)

Faculty at [Rutgers University \(https://electronicintifada.net/tags/rutgers-university\)](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/rutgers-university) in New Jersey are demanding that college officials defend them – and their students – against false accusations of anti-Jewish bigotry.

The accusations have been leveled by a Democratic lawmaker and Israel lobby groups.

Following Israel's assault on Gaza earlier this year, the executive board of the Rutgers adjunct faculty union released a [statement of solidarity \(https://rutgersaaup.org/ptlfc-aaup-aft-executive-board-statement-in-solidarity-with-the-palestinian-people/\)](https://rutgersaaup.org/ptlfc-aaup-aft-executive-board-statement-in-solidarity-with-the-palestinian-people/) with Palestinian people.

Expressing their support for the May 2021 [call \(https://cpress.org/post/palestinian-trade-unions/\)](https://cpress.org/post/palestinian-trade-unions/) by Palestinian trade unions, the board called on the American Federation of Teachers “to divest itself of all Israeli bonds and for the United States government to cease all financial support to Israel at once.”

This followed an [earlier statement \(https://rutgersaaup.org/executive-council-resolution-in-solidarity-with-palestine/\)](https://rutgersaaup.org/executive-council-resolution-in-solidarity-with-palestine/) by full-time faculty and graduate employees demanding that the Rutgers administration and US President Joe Biden stop all aid funding Israel’s human rights violations and occupation of Palestinian land.

The adjunct statement, signed by 13 of the 14 executive board members, “signals that at a moment when Palestinian lives were under renewed assault from the apartheid Israeli regime, union representatives – from our union and others – felt they could use their platforms to take a public stand with Palestinians,” board member and signatory David Letwin told The Electronic Intifada.

This is something that “would have been unthinkable only a few years ago,” Letwin, also a member of Jews for the Palestinian Right of Return, added.

However, lawmakers [close to Israel lobbies \(https://zoa.org/2021/04/10442813-zoa-strongly-supports-bipartisan-bill-to-review-palestinian-authority-textbooks-for-anti-israel-content/\)](https://zoa.org/2021/04/10442813-zoa-strongly-supports-bipartisan-bill-to-review-palestinian-authority-textbooks-for-anti-israel-content/) continue to defend Israeli crimes at the expense of academic freedom.

In late June, Josh Gottheimer, a Democratic member of Congress, wrote to Rutgers’ president, [slamming \(https://gottheimer.house.gov/uploadedfiles/rep\\_gottheimer\\_letter\\_to\\_rutgers\\_president\\_holloway\\_6.28.21.pdf\)](https://gottheimer.house.gov/uploadedfiles/rep_gottheimer_letter_to_rutgers_president_holloway_6.28.21.pdf) the adjunct faculty’s statement and accusing the union of anti-Jewish bigotry.

The New Jersey lawmaker claimed that Jewish students could be “singled out” and harmed by the union’s support for Palestinian rights – a well-worn trope used by lobby groups to shield Israel from criticism.

Gottheimer urged Rutgers’ president Jonathan Holloway to “speak out clearly and quickly against this hate-filled misinformation campaign and rhetoric.”

Rutgers is a public university and is therefore bound by constitutional protections for free speech.

In response, Rutgers Students for Justice in Palestine [organized a petition \(https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WJKjyEKT8xk7ulm-Rh3Ufd4YtpemiMIge3j1HYmJKRM/edit\)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WJKjyEKT8xk7ulm-Rh3Ufd4YtpemiMIge3j1HYmJKRM/edit) in defense of the faculty union, signed by nearly two dozen human rights, civil society and political groups.

Gottheimer, they point out, “ignores the two real threats to Jewish safety today: white supremacy and Zionism itself, which shamefully tries to tie all Jews to the Israeli regime and, by extension, its crimes.”

## False accusations

A representative of Students for Justice in Palestine, who did not wish to be named as members of the group have been harassed online, told The Electronic Intifada that it “was very important for us that the union put out this message of solidarity.”

It was crucial, the student added, that the Rutgers administration recognizes the broad support for Palestinian rights on campus – and ensure the safety of college community members by taking action against the backlash and harassment they face.

A few weeks after Gottheimer issued his letter, Israel lobby groups began [falsely accusing](https://www.jta.org/2021/08/04/united-states/did-a-pro-palestinian-campus-group-actually-call-for-the-defunding-of-hillel) (<https://www.jta.org/2021/08/04/united-states/did-a-pro-palestinian-campus-group-actually-call-for-the-defunding-of-hillel>) Students for Justice in Palestine of attempting to defund the [pro-Israel](https://rutgershillel.org/about/history/) (<https://rutgershillel.org/about/history/>). Jewish students organization Rutgers Hillel.

Rutgers [Hillel](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/hillel) (<https://electronicintifada.net/tags/hillel>) is affiliated with Hillel International, an [explicitly Zionist organization](https://www.hillel.org/jewish/hillel-israel/hillel-israel-guidelines) (<https://www.hillel.org/jewish/hillel-israel/hillel-israel-guidelines>).

Anonymous, right-wing Zionist accounts spread a false rumor about SJP calling to defund Rutgers Hillel—and then the establishment orgs. signal boosted the claim without checking its veracity.

Great reporting on this by [@BenjaminSales](https://twitter.com/BenjaminSales) ([https://twitter.com/BenjaminSales?](https://twitter.com/BenjaminSales?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)  
<https://t.co/egFMOF64gg> (<https://t.co/egFMOF64gg>)).  
[pic.twitter.com/mzvckizt29](https://t.co/mzvckizt29) (<https://t.co/mzvckizt29>)).

— Joshua Leifer (@joshualeifer) [August 4, 2021](https://twitter.com/joshualeifer/status/1422932277567401988?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)  
([https://twitter.com/joshualeifer/status/1422932277567401988?](https://twitter.com/joshualeifer/status/1422932277567401988?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)  
[ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/joshualeifer/status/1422932277567401988?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw))).

The effort targeting SJP was led by anonymous right-wing social media accounts and boosted by Jewish On Campus, an organization that [boasts of partnerships](https://jewishoncampus.org/about-us-1) (<https://jewishoncampus.org/about-us-1>) with notorious anti-Palestinian groups such as the Amcha Initiative, the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee and the Israel on Campus Coalition.

Jewish On Campus claims it has reported more than 1,000 instances of anti-Semitism and works with the lawfare firm Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights to initiate “administrative action.”

The Brandeis Center’s founder, [Kenneth Marcus](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/kenneth-marcus) (<https://electronicintifada.net/tags/kenneth-marcus>), was the head of the US Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights under the Trump administration.

Marcus pioneered the strategy of filing complaints to the OCR under [Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act](https://electronicintifada.net/tags/title-vi-civil-rights-act) (<https://electronicintifada.net/tags/title-vi-civil-rights-act>) alleging that universities fail to protect Jewish students by allowing Palestinian rights activity to take place.

Marcus [resigned in 2020](https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/nora-barrows-friedman/israel-lobbys-kenneth-marcus-resigns-trumps-civil-rights-enforcer) (<https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/nora-barrows-friedman/israel-lobbys-kenneth-marcus-resigns-trumps-civil-rights-enforcer>) amid [accusations](https://palestinelegal.org/news/2020/7/10/statement-kenneth-marcus-resignation-from-dept-of-ed-following-complaint) (<https://palestinelegal.org/news/2020/7/10/statement-kenneth-marcus-resignation-from-dept-of-ed-following-complaint>) that he violated federal law by prioritizing certain civil rights complaints over hundreds of others.

One of the complaints to which Marcus allegedly gave special treatment was filed by the Zionist Organization of America against Rutgers University.

He returned to the Brandeis Center as its chair.

Students and faculty say that in order to protect them and prevent meddling in academic affairs by lobby groups and politicians, the university should meet the demands laid out in the recent solidarity letters.

Adjunct faculty union member David Letwin noted that the office of the president at Rutgers “has previously issued statements of solidarity with targeted communities,” denouncing [systemic racism](https://www.rutgers.edu/president/from-president-and-chancellors-the-chauvin-verdict) (<https://www.rutgers.edu/president/from-president-and-chancellors-the-chauvin-verdict>), [xenophobia](https://www.rutgers.edu/president/presidents-chancellors-affirming-our-asian-community) (<https://www.rutgers.edu/president/presidents-chancellors-affirming-our-asian-community>) and [bigotry](https://newbrunswick.rutgers.edu/chancellor/on-hatred-and-bigotry) (<https://newbrunswick.rutgers.edu/chancellor/on-hatred-and-bigotry>).

“The same sentiments and support should be extended to Palestinians at Rutgers and around the world, their advocates and indeed, all those subjected to settler-colonial dispossession and violence,” Letwin said.

*Editor’s note: The number of adjunct faculty executive board members who signed the statement has been clarified.*

👉 [Josh Gottheimer](/tags/josh-gottheimer) (</tags/josh-gottheimer>) [Rutgers University](/tags/rutgers-university) (</tags/rutgers-university>) [Rutgers Hillel](/tags/rutgers-hillel) (</tags/rutgers-hillel>) [Students for Justice in Palestine](/tags/students-justice-palestine) (</tags/students-justice-palestine>) [academic freedom](/tags/academic-freedom) (</tags/academic-freedom>) [David Letwin](/tags/david-letwin) (</tags/david-letwin>) [Jewish On Campus](/tags/jewish-campus) (</tags/jewish-campus>) [Amcha Initiative](/tags/amcha-initiative) (</tags/amcha-initiative>) [ADL](/tags/adl) (</tags/adl>) [American Jewish Committee](/tags/american-jewish-committee) (</tags/american-jewish-committee>) [Israel on Campus Coalition](/tags/israel-campus-coalition) (</tags/israel-campus-coalition>) [Israel Lobby](/tags/israel-lobby) (</tags/israel-lobby>) [Kenneth Marcus](/tags/kenneth-marcus) (</tags/kenneth-marcus>) [Zionist Organization of America](/tags/zionist-organization-america) (</tags/zionist-organization-america>)