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May 19, 2021

Via email: gzondervan@cambridgema.gov

Dear Councilor Zondervan:

We are aware that on May 17, 2021, the Cambridge City Council offered a public comment period on Policy Order #6, despite having been notified of a Jewish holiday that would prevent observant Jewish residents from participating in the process. In reviewing the video transcript of that meeting, we were concerned and dismayed by a statement you made about your rationale for deciding to proceed with the hearing and public comment on the measure:

"I appreciate that is the Shavuot holiday, but last week it was Eid. That didn't seem to prevent the Israeli government from bombing and evicting and terrorizing Palestinian people."

It is of grave concern that a city leader would imply that observant Jewish residents of Cambridge should be held accountable for the actions of Israel and accordingly denied the opportunity to participate in a civic process here in Cambridge. Jewish people are not a monolithic group, nor are they responsible for the Israeli government's treatment of Palestinians. We are concerned that your statement implied the very opposite, and also worked to reinforce misinformation and harmful bias against Jews. Our goal must always be collective freedom and safety.

We stated in our previous letter to Mayor Siddiqui, which was also sent to each member of the City Council, that holding this meeting during Shavuot would effectively prevent observant Jews from participating in a hearing on a topic of great concern to many in Cambridge. Considering this context, your comment presented Jewish residents with the dilemma of choosing whether to practice their religious customs and traditions or exercise their rights to participate in a civic process on a matter of significance to them as residents and as Jews.

We would encourage you to reflect upon your stated justification for proceeding with the hearing, and to issue an apology. Securing the safety and civil liberties

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of both Israeli and Palestinian lives means holding space for all identities—observant Jews included—to participate in this crucial effort. We appreciate that this moment has provoked many emotions for all. As an elected official, however, we encourage you to use your voice to ensure that no community is silenced, and that all Cambridge residents have the same opportunity to participate in the civic process and to make their voices heard.

Sincerely,

Robert Trestan
Regional Director
ADL New England

Jeremy Burton
Executive Director
JCRC Boston

Lital Carmel
Regional Director, Boston
Israel American Council

Robert Leikind
Regional Director
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