



K-12 LEGAL DEFENSE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, MAY 11, 2026

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An \$18M Nonprofit Is Suing California to Erase Palestine From Classrooms. These Families Are Fighting Back.

Jewish and Palestinian families move to join a crucial lawsuit to protect students' First Amendment rights, equal education, and religious freedom.

San Francisco, CA—K-12 Legal Defense and Leonard Carder, LLP today filed a motion to intervene in [Brandeis Center v. California Department of Education](#) pending before the Los Angeles County Superior Court. The motion was filed on behalf of a group of ten California families—Jewish and Palestinian parents and students enrolled in public schools from Los Angeles to the Bay Area.

The families oppose the Brandeis Center's attempt to impose a sweeping judicial censorship regime over California schools—one that would eliminate learning materials from their classrooms, install organizations hostile to Palestinian, Arab, and non-Zionist perspectives as overseers of public school instruction, and silence the very students it claims to protect.

California is home to the [largest Palestinian community in the nation](#). Erasing Palestinian history from our classrooms is erasing American history.

"This case will decide what millions of California students are allowed to learn, and whose identities are recognized and whose are erased in the classroom." Liz Jackson, Legal Director, K-12 Legal Defense

The families are represented by Eleanor Morton, Arthur Liou, Amy Endo, and Gillian Teng from Leonard Carder, LLP, and Liz Jackson from K-12 Legal Defense.

WHAT THE CASE IS ABOUT

The Brandeis Center complaint brings two types of claims:

- Allegations of specific incidents involving Jewish students, many of which have already been addressed at the local level.
- Allegations that Ethnic Studies, including lessons on Palestinian history, culture, and critiques of the modern State of Israel, are discriminatory against Jewish students and should be banned.

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What the Brandeis Center calls reform, the intervenor families call erasure. Brandeis Center settlements have repeatedly gutted ethnic studies of its core—the solidarity frameworks, the liberatory politics, the unflinching histories including Palestine—and replaced them with a sanitized diversity curriculum filtered through a white institutional gaze. The result is an ethnic studies, mandatory for all California high schools, that fails to challenge the conditions that produce privilege and inequality.

Courts have already rejected the censorship approach. On November 30, 2024, a federal judge dismissed with prejudice a similar lawsuit seeking to ban ethnic studies curriculum critical of Israel from Los Angeles classrooms, [ruling](#) that “it would be of great concern for the educational project and for academic freedom if every offended party could sue every time they did not like a curriculum or the way it was taught.” Those plaintiffs are currently appealing that decision.

A BROADER PATTERN OF LITIGATION

This is the Brandeis Center's first lawsuit against an entire state, but it has mounted an aggressive post-October 7 litigation campaign, filing cases or complaints against more than a dozen universities and at least eight school districts—repeatedly winning settlements that imposed sweeping changes on how schools teach and what students are allowed to learn.

- At **Harvard University**, a [2025 settlement](#) required the university to adopt the contested IHRA definition of antisemitism, which includes criticism of Israel, create a new office focused on religious discrimination, and provide mandatory antisemitism training for faculty and staff
- At **UC Berkeley**, a [2026 settlement](#) required the university to restructure their disciplinary and curricular processes centering the contested IHRA definition and to mandate trainings on IHRA throughout the university to repress teaching and learning about Palestine.
- At **Santa Ana Unified School District**, a [2025 settlement](#) required the district to erase Palestine history in ethnic studies courses, because the [Brandeis Center deemed it objectionable](#), a remedy that intervenors warn is precisely the playbook now being aimed at every public school in California.

Central to the settlements is the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism—a contested definition that explicitly includes criticism of Israeli government policy as a potential form of antisemitism. Critics including [many Jewish scholars](#) and [civil liberties organizations](#) argue the definition conflates political speech with discrimination, making it a legal instrument for suppressing Palestinian perspectives rather than a genuine tool for combating antisemitism.

The Brandeis Center's litigation campaign is not a series of isolated responses to antisemitism complaints. It is a coordinated legal strategy—one that systematically suppresses Palestinian history, erases critique of U.S. military policy, by imposing the contested IHRA definition of antisemitism as a mechanism for controlling what students are allowed to learn.

THE HISTORY THEY WANT TO ERASE

One Brandeis Center plaintiff joined the lawsuit because she fears—her exact words—["anti-Americanism in our classrooms."](#) But what she's calling anti-American is teaching Palestinian



K-12 LEGAL DEFENSE

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history, criticizing Israeli government policy, and examining U.S. military support for Israel's operations in Gaza. That is crucial critical inquiry—exactly what American education is supposed to do.

The facts the Brandeis Center aims to suppress are well-documented and serious. Israel maintains a [discriminatory death penalty](#) law that applies to Palestinians but not to Israeli Jewish citizens—a distinction based explicitly on ethnicity. Major human rights organizations including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and B'Tselem have determined that Israel practices [apartheid](#). Leading genocide scholars agree Israel is [committing genocide](#) in Gaza. U.S. military support has [soared and remained critical](#) throughout Israel's operations in Gaza. Israel is also the [largest cumulative recipient](#) of U.S. foreign aid and a [top recipient of U.S. arms](#) sales since World War II and that money and those arms are used by Israel on Palestinians. These are documented findings from credible institutions—precisely the kind of history ethnic studies curricula are designed to engage. Teaching these facts—with attribution and context—isn't anti-American. *Deciding what history is allowed in the classroom—and what isn't—is ideologically motivated repression, anti-Palestinian racism, and miseducation.*

THE INTERVENOR FAMILIES

The proposed intervenor is a group of ten families with children in California public schools, including some in the same districts as the original plaintiffs. They are intervening in the case as an association—California Right to Learn and Belong—whose members are Jewish and Palestinian families sharing a common conviction: schools must be safe from discrimination, but also free from censorship. No student should face discrimination on the basis of their religion, ethnicity, or national origin, whether they wear a keffiyeh or a tallit.

"I joined as an intervenor because I don't want the education policies in California dictated by pro-Israel entities. At stake is my Palestinian children's academic freedom to learn about Palestine. I will not sit idle as their First Amendment rights are taken away from them. If anti-Palestinian organizations can take our rights from us here in Berkeley, then they can do it anywhere in the country." — **Molly Sampson, Parent of Berkeley Unified School District students.**

"As Jews, we can create safety from antisemitism when we learn to act in solidarity with other peoples and cultures who have been subjected to oppression, including Palestinians. Allowing censorship in our schools that imposes false definitions of what it means to act as a Jew, or making it illegal to teach about Palestine, is dangerous, toxic for our children, and must be opposed. I refuse to let the experience and humanity of Palestinian people be erased from our children's education."— **Joshua Rutkoff, Parent of Los Angeles Unified School District student**

"I am the granddaughter and daughter of Holocaust survivors. I will not stand by as the plaintiffs try and erase a people—specifically Palestinians. I object to the idea that the state will have the power to decide what my Jewish child must think and learn about being Jewish. The state has no constitutional role

deciding what Jews agree on, let alone demanding that all students be taught that questioning Israel's actions equates to antisemitism.”— Leah Simon-Weisberg, Parent of Berkeley Unified School District student.

Our Jewish intervenors explicitly reject the plaintiffs' framing of Jewish identity. Their Jewish identities, values, and sincerely held religious beliefs lead them to support, not oppose, an education that includes Palestinian and non-Zionist histories, perspectives, and experiences. The relief the plaintiffs seek would impose a contested political definition of Jewish identity on families who reject it, burdening their own First Amendment and free exercise rights in the process.

For Palestinian-American intervenors, the stakes are equally direct. Ethnic studies curricula are often the only space in public schools where Palestinian students' identities are acknowledged and their history is taught. California is home to more than 28,000 Palestinian-Americans, and a court order built around the plaintiffs' demands would render Palestinian students' own identities suspect, erased, or dangerous in the public school classroom.

WHY THE FAMILIES ARE INTERVENING

The families argue that the outcome of this case directly threatens their children's rights in three areas:

- **First Amendment rights**—including the right to receive information about Palestine and ethnic studies, free from unlawful viewpoint discrimination and a judicially-enforced censorship regime
- **Equal access to education**—free from anti-Palestinian discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or national origin
- **Religious freedom**—including the right to define Jewish identity without state-imposed definitions they do not accept

"Our clients oppose sweeping ideological policy changes that would strip all California students of their fundamental rights to learn about U.S. militarism. Of course we want to see robust civil rights protections for Jewish students alongside all vulnerable communities. But this case is not about protecting Jewish students; it's an attempt to impose on Jewish families a definition of their own identity that they reject. And it would erase honest history about Palestine for thousands of Palestinian-Americans in California classrooms." — Liz Jackson, Legal Director, K-12 Legal Defense

WHY EXISTING PARTIES DON'T REPRESENT THEM

The families argue that no existing party can or will protect their rights:

- The Brandeis Center plaintiffs are hostile to intervenors' interests and have explicitly sought to eliminate learning materials from their classrooms
- The California Department of Education has already, under pressure, compromised students' First Amendment, equal education, and free exercise rights by censoring education about Palestine—giving the families no reason to believe the state will defend their interests

WHAT'S NEXT

If the motion to intervene is granted, the families will become full parties to a case that could shape public school instruction across California and set a national precedent.



The court is expected to rule on the motion to intervene at a hearing scheduled for June 10, 2026.

THE STAKES FOR CALIFORNIA STUDENTS

California's public schools serve over 6 million children, 8 in 10 of whom are Black, Brown, or Asian, and 6 in 10 of whom are economically disadvantaged. These are schools that routinely cannot afford basic classroom supplies. Yet the Brandeis Center, a pro-Israel nonprofit reporting [\\$18.7 million in revenue and \\$16 million in assets](#), along with Stand With Us, is directing those resources toward litigation aimed at shaping what California's most vulnerable students are allowed to learn. The result is a publicly funded school system forced to spend scarce dollars defending itself against a privately funded campaign to remove classroom materials about Palestine and ethnic studies—a campaign whose costs will ultimately be borne by the same students who can least afford it. In a related Los Angeles case brought by a separate group seeking similar remedies, plaintiffs posted a \$750,000 appeal bond to keep their lawsuit alive after a federal judge dismissed it with prejudice and ordered them to pay nearly \$600,000 in the defendants' attorney fees—underscoring the financial firepower behind efforts to reshape what California students are allowed to learn.

ABOUT K-12 LEGAL DEFENSE

Across California, teachers and students face surveillance, censorship, and legal threats. We offer legal, strategic, and community-based defense for educators, students, and families facing coordinated attacks for teaching Palestine, U.S. militarism, and interconnected liberation struggles in California classrooms. Learn more on our [website](#).

Court documents and attorney/client availability upon request.

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