

To President Jonathan Alger,

We come to you as a diverse group of Jewish faculty, faculty emeriti and staff with various intersectionalities to express common, widespread concerns in the JMU Jewish community.

The planning of the January 26 “Holocaust-Centered” program disrespected and disparaged Jewish individuals, dismissed Jewish participation and failed to reflect the inclusive values that JMU purports to foster. These issues are especially pertinent in light of a recent letter from Attorney General Jason Miyares’ office warning of rising anti-semitism on college and university campuses in Virginia.<sup>1</sup> **Accordingly, we will not attend the program.**

We seek here to voice to you our feelings of isolation and to bring to you our concerns, to share our perspectives, and to ask for your action and response to our alienation. Please understand that we seek to work with you to make JMU the inclusive and welcoming community it promises to be.

**Had JMU succeeded in making adequate preparations to remember the Shoah,**

JMU would have listened when *descendents of survivors* explained the ways in which they were comfortable participating and would not have trivialized their trauma by continuing to push for JMU’s agenda and preferences.

JMU would not have casually diminished the presence of Jews, most recently by ignoring the implications of the resignation of all Jewish members of the Holocaust Remembrance committee. There are currently no Jewish members on the planning committee as a result.

JMU would have marked the somberness of the occasion, remembering it not only in the content, but also in the language and tone of the programming.

JMU might have recognized the complexities of referring to the musical portion of the event as a “refuge.” There was no refuge for those targeted by the “Final Solution”. It was genocide.

JMU would not have had to turn over responsibility for the public-facing event to someone who lacks expertise in the Shoah or Judaism and who is unaccustomed to dealing with audiences at Jewish-themed events.

JMU would not have sought to tell the members of the Jewish community who could or should speak for us.

**Had JMU succeeded in creating an inclusive climate for Jews,**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oag.state.va.us/files/AG-Miyares-Antisemitism-Letter-to-Virginia-Colleges.pdf>

JMU would have included our input and heard our concerns about and suggestions for inclusivity, as Jewish individuals and groups, faculty, staff, and students.

JMU would have demonstrated an understanding that Judaism is complex and complicated and, in particular, that any treatment or discussion of the Holocaust or Shoah is particularly nuanced, especially in a climate of rising anti-Semitism on Virginia college and university campuses.

JMU would not have repeatedly and actively attempted to silence our voices and make Jewish faculty, staff, and students fear retaliation or reprobation for speaking out.

**Had JMU centered inclusivity,**

JMU would not have adopted a posture premised on exclusion, repeatedly disinviting those who sought change or offered academic expertise intended to promote a more sensitive and respectful environment aimed at shared, collaborative education.

JMU would not have ignored Jewish members of the community who called for broader consultation and greater reliance on expertise in the planning of Jewish-themed events.

JMU would not have circumvented and sidelined the Harrisonburg Jewish Community by reaching out to Charlottesville and Staunton to round out the Holocaust program in attempts to “appear” inclusive, rather than working to form and repair local relationships.

JMU would have considered religious dietary practices in meetings in which food is served.

**Had JMU better understood Jewish history and the ways in which Jews have been stereotyped and persecuted,**

JMU would have listened when Jewish faculty and staff balked at asking students, who have had the courage to embrace their Judaism in a time of rising anti-Semitism on Virginia college and university campuses, to take a leading role in public-facing Holocaust conversations.

JMU would have provided more assurances of protections and safety measures for public events.

**Had JMU been willing to recognize that inclusive strategies conceived in isolation cannot be universally applied,**

JMU would have acknowledged that the concerns being raised for years behind closed doors as attempts to help the institution better understand the widespread disillusionment and alienation among Jewish faculty, staff, and students were not simply the complaints of a combative few.

JMU would have understood the difference between being “difficult” and being informed, judicious, and willing to stand up to make JMU the best University it can be.

**Had JMU centered the voices, history, expertise, perspective, experience, and trauma of Jewish faculty, students, and community members,**

A letter to the University President, widely disseminated to the community and broader public would not have been necessary to have Jewish voices be heard.

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