

Fighting Antisemitism and Keeping Guns out of the Hands of Terrorists and Criminals Amendment Bill 2026

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Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee
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Dear Committee

I appreciate your work to address the increasing prevalence of antisemitism and terrorist symbolism, and to bolster safety around places of worship, thereby making Queensland safer.

I am making this submission to your Committee's inquiry into the 'Fighting Antisemitism and Keeping Guns Out of the Hands of Terrorists and Criminals Amendment Bill 2026' (hereafter, the Bill) in my capacity as an Australian Jew that has a personal link to Queensland.

In 1910, my great grandfather, the Reverend Abraham Levy, was inducted as the Rabbi of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation¹, having arrived a few days prior on what would have been an arduous and difficult journey by sea from South Africa. He served in the role for three years, and came to know and love the small Jewish community of Brisbane. He again served as minister of the community in 1923. In 1910, it is my understanding that the Jewish community in Australia numbered just over 15,000 people, being approximately 0.4% of the overall Australian population², and while it has increased considerably in 116 years, its proportion has not.

I never had the privilege of meeting my great grandfather, but he is a figure that looms large in my mind. He successfully fought the legal case *Levy v Von Moltke* against a fascist organisation, the Greyshirts, in the Grahamstown Supreme Court, South Africa, in 1934, which resulted in the court determining that the Protocols of the Elders of Zion (a notorious antisemitic propaganda tool) was a fabrication.³ This was a rare moment of truth (תבונה) at a time when, like today, antisemitic disinformation had widespread currency and extremism was on the rise.

When I read the historical accounts of my great grandfather's time in Queensland it helps me to imagine the kind of person he was, and what he contributed to Australia, and, in turn, what it contributed to him. Reverend Levy's first sermon in Australia was focused on educating children⁴. In that sermon he said:

¹ [01 Aug 1910 - QUEENSLAND. - Trove](#)

² [The Jewish experience in Australia | naa.gov.au](#)

³ Sarzin, L, 'Seeking truth and challenging prejudice: confronting race hatred through the South African Greyshirt case of *Levy v Von Moltke*', PhD 2017, UTS, available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10453/120342>

⁴ Sarzin, A. 'My Grandfather, Reverend Abraham Levy, and the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation', *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies XXXVII* (2024), 33 – 54, pp. 34.

“Give them [the children] force of character and you give them more than a fortune; you give them something that will enable them to withstand all the storms and trials of this life”.⁵

He recognised, as the Australian Jewish community recognises today, the pivotal contribution that education plays in shaping our society, and ensuring that children are inoculated against hatred and prejudice. He built bridges of understanding through his pastoral work, acting as a representative of the Jewish faith and playing a significant and substantial role in the secular world of Brisbane, effecting meaningful improvements, breaking down prejudice and humanising others.

Reverend Levy also proudly laid bare his spiritual, cultural, ancestral, and historical connection to the Land of Israel. He recognised, even then, that self-determination – an entitlement of a people to control of its destiny and to be treated respectfully – was something integral to the inherent dignity of a people. His sermons also reflected his desire to rebut antisemitic attacks on the Jews by continuously referencing common humanity and empathy. On 3 December 1910, Reverend Levy stated in a sermon:

“Judaism is as broad and all-inclusive as the universe...It is true that Judaism does not send out missionaries to proselytise the world, because it does not believe in propaganda of that sort. It does not believe in forcing its thought upon others”.

My great grandfather was a humanitarian who lived by his conscience and was motivated by a positive zeal and commitment to create a more tolerant and harmonious world and to contribute to the wellbeing of all in society. While modern international human rights laws had not yet been enacted, and the greatest tragedy to befall the Jewish People had yet to unfold, Reverend Levy was a proponent of human rights and the dignity of all people. He was no bigger in the cultural or religious footprint of Queensland at the time than any other religious leader, and nor did he seek to be. As Jews have done for centuries, he sought to preserve Jewish life and instil Jewish pride, in a way that fostered a warmth with other communities of all different backgrounds.

Imagine then, how I felt in October 2021, when I saw images of a Nazi flag flying from a UniLodge building in full view of the synagogue where my great grandfather was once the religious and spiritual leader. It felt like an echo of a very distant and hateful past, and a transparent threat, coming shortly before the commemoration of Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass). It was a stain on the memory of many years of history of contribution and interconnectedness of the Queensland Jewish community as part of the fabric of broader Australian society.

At the time, the State of Queensland commenced work to review its hate crime legislation because the display of the swastika in plain sight of the synagogue and in the CBD did not breach the state’s hate crimes and vilification laws. It is now 2026, and while the legislative reform that was kicked off by the swastika incident in 2021 was entirely necessary, the work is incomplete. The promotion of hatred that is achieved through the display of symbols that racially vilify protected groups is inherently harmful, not just to those groups, but to society at large. While the effect of seeing such symbols, or hearing such phrases, is traumatising to the

⁵ “This Week’s Sermon: The Zeal of Phineas”, 1910, 1, 4.

targeted group, the real legacy of this type of public stirring up of hatred, is that it normalises the dehumanisation of groups, and, in doing so, acts as a precursor to exclusion, discrimination and violence.

Addressing the disturbance of religious worship, or the use of hateful slogans and symbols that promote Jew-hatred or other forms of hatred, or promote violence, through reasonable and proportionate laws, is an intervention worthy of our collective efforts. It is my hope that in due course the law in this area will be modified to address the real cause of the problem, which is not specific phrases or specific symbols – problematic and violating as those are – but the promotion of hatred that has been able to fester unchecked in our society.

To that end, I endorse the submissions of the representative state and federal bodies of the Queensland and Australian Jewish communities respectively, the QJBD and the Executive Council of Australian Jewry; and the submission by the Office of the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism; and I refer also to previous submissions made by these organisations with respect to hate speech and racial vilification. I hope that my children will grow up in a place where they will never feel trepidation to walk past or into a synagogue, or fear that they will see a symbol in broad daylight that calls for their elimination.

Yours sincerely,

Simone Abel