

Dear Federation Leadership,

This has been a challenging week in Israel-Diaspora relations. Israel's "Nation-State Bill" was voted into law early this morning, following fierce protest and vigorous debate. We are all strengthened having Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people and are proud over her miraculous accomplishments in face of constant adversity. Nonetheless, our communities have a number of concerns about this new law – especially its clauses about Diaspora, Arabic language, and the preference for the establishment of Jewish communities over others. This law came a long way since it was first proposed and we were part of that process. Working with many other groups and people, we succeeded in ensuring removal of some of the most problematic aspects of the bill from the final version. Still, we were disappointed with the law that ultimately passed. We take some comfort in the fact that so many in the Knesset were open to listening to, and considering our concerns, along with officials in the Prime Minister's office. We may not have achieved all of our goals, but we were an important part of the conversation.

Our Israel office has prepared the attached background document to help you understand the important points of the new Nation-State law.

We want to also call your attention to another piece of upsetting news. Rabbi Dov Haiyun, a Conservative rabbi from Haifa, was taken into police custody and questioned for officiating weddings. Haiyun has been marrying couples for years, including some who are unable to marry through the rabbinate because of its religious policies. The Haifa rabbinical court lodged a criminal complaint against him, calling his actions – the joining of two Jews in marriage – "criminal and illegal." While attitudes of this kind within the rabbinate are not new, this is the first time Israeli police have interrogated anyone for this "offense" and it is a step of significant concern. There may yet be a silver lining to this story. The public outcry in Israel has helped raise the profile of marriage freedom, on which we work through [iRep](#) on the national agenda. We are monitoring the developments very closely.

We are well aware of the impact of these types of stories and policies on Israel's reputation and the reputation of Jewry worldwide. Together with our partners at the Jewish Agency, we have vociferously raised these concerns with Israeli political leaders. We have high expectations and hopes for Israel as the national homeland of the Jewish people. It is meant to be a home for all Jews and a reflection of Jewish values, a vibrant democracy in which all citizens are entitled to full participation in society. We may be challenged at particular moments and by specific events, but we do not lose heart. Making change requires speaking up as concerned members of the same great family. Jewish Federations will continue to reach out, together with a great percentage of Israel's citizens, in support and concern for Israel to ensure the legacy of our Jewish homeland, as both a Jewish and a democratic state.

Richard Sandler and Jerry Silverman