

THE WEXNER FOUNDATION

October 16, 2023

Dear Harvard Board of Overseers,

More than three decades ago, The Wexner Foundation identified Harvard Kennedy School as the ideal university setting for developing and educating Israel's Public Service leaders. Central to our choice was Harvard's rigorous academic standards and the Kennedy School's steadfast commitment to honoring diversity. We aspired to place emerging leaders among global peers sincerely interested in each other's perspectives. We were confident our Fellows would be educated by world class faculty uniquely prepared to foster meaningful exchange in the pursuit of deep understanding across cultures and societies. We believed that at its core, HKS was a school with moral purpose, matching the core values we embrace in our own work.

We have observed that this cherished tolerance for diverse perspectives has slowly but perceptibly narrowed over the years. A disappointing consequence of this trend is that our Wexner Israel Fellows are increasingly marginalized, their voices and views even shouted down. Disappointingly, HKS has been slow to craft a strategy to enable Israeli students to engage in productive - even if difficult - dialogue within the school. We believe this is an unfortunate trend for the entire MPA student community.

We are stunned and sickened at the dismal failure of Harvard's leadership to take a clear and unequivocal stand against the barbaric murders of innocent Israeli civilians by terrorists last Saturday, the Sabbath and a festival day. Since then, many of our Israel Fellows no longer feel marginalized at HKS. They feel abandoned. That feeling is shared by our HKS Israeli Alumni, Foundation staff, and our chairmen. Other university presidents have said precisely what we should have heard immediately from President Gay: "What Hamas did is evil and there is no defense for terrorism. This shouldn't be hard." [Ben Sasse, President, University of Florida]. Harvard's leaders were indeed tiptoeing, equivocating, and we, like former Harvard President Larry Summers cannot "fathom the administration's failure to disassociate the university and condemn the statement" swiftly issued by 34 student groups holding Israel entirely responsible for the violent terror attack on its own citizens. That should not have been hard. In the absence of this clear moral stand, we have determined that the Harvard Kennedy School and The Wexner Foundation are no longer compatible partners. Our core values and those of Harvard no longer align. HKS is no longer a place where Israeli leaders can go to develop the necessary skills to address the very real political and societal challenges they face.

While we intend to develop new strategies and initiatives to develop Israel's civil service leaders, The Wexner Foundation is formally ending its financial and programmatic relationships with Harvard and the Harvard Kennedy School. The current class of Wexner Israel Fellows, Class 34, will be the last to complete the MPA Program and we will no longer send Wexner Senior Leaders for the Executive Program.

We make this decision with an unwavering commitment to our Israel Alumni, to Israel's civil service and to the State of Israel.

With appreciation for many years of friendship and meaningful engagement with Harvard, and especially our colleagues at HKS and CPL,

Rabbi B. Elka Abrahamson, President
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