As a member of the Jewish community, I would like to share my concerns to the Toronto Police Services Board, regarding protests, demonstrations and occupations.

Antisemitic protests and hate crimes in Toronto have escalated exponentially since October 7, 2023. In March 2024, it was reported that 56% of all hate crimes were classified as antisemitic, yet Jews represent only 4% of the total population in Toronto.

In the past 10 months, Jewish places of worship and businesses have been vandalized, bomb threats were emailed to Jewish institutions and shots were fired at a Jewish Elementary School. The University of Toronto encampment which lasted over 2 months blocked the movement of Jewish students, prevented access to buildings and hijacked the use of outdoor spaces. Jewish students and faculty were left feeling intimidated and censored in this toxic environment. In Jewish neighbourhoods, and on highway overpasses, masked protesters have felt emboldened to frighten residents without fear of any repercussions.

The cumulative effects of these incidents have left Jewish residents feeling apprehensive, targeted and unsafe. I am mystified that terrorist flags and symbols can be paraded in our streets. Shockingly, protesters chanting, “Globalize the Intifada,” which is a call to commit acts of terror against Jews worldwide, or “Resistance by Any Means Necessary,” has become normalized in our city.

Over the past year, the sense of safety in Toronto and the GTA, that I once took for granted has been altered. I am apprehensive about wearing a religious symbol of my faith, such as a Star of David in public and have questioned whether to remove my mezuzah from my doorpost. I am hyper vigilant when I enter a synagogue or Jewish institution. When travelling on the TTC, I plan my routes to avoid the threat of encountering protesters.

It is disheartening that the rights of protesters are superseding the rights and safety of ordinary citizens. I believe that these protests are normalising hatred in our community and I would like to make a number of recommendations. First, I am advocating for enhanced resources and training for officers to recognize antisemitic signs, symbols and genocidal rhetoric which may be in English or Arabic. Second, I would like to see that criminal law and by-law offences be enforced as they pertain to unlawful assembly and the use of disguises by protesters. Third, I would to see the implementation of a bylaw that would ban protesters from being in close proximity to Jewish schools, places of worship, community institutions, and prevent the obstruction of bridges or roadways. Fourth, I would like to see enhanced police surveillance on digital platforms to identify organizations and individuals responsible for the incitement of hate.

I am grateful for the security initiatives of Toronto Police Services to date, including the implementation of safety patrols and command centres in Jewish neighbourhoods. But I urge TPS to take necessary additional steps to address the very real threats to the Jewish community, before the situation escalates and we become the victims of even more ominous hate crimes.

Sincerely,

Shari Braham