

Reflections on the Jewish Council for
Public Affairs (JCPA) 2020 Annual Conference
February 2020

By Deborah Goldman, co-chair Buffalo Jewish Community Relations Council

Last month, Mara Koven-Gelman, director of the JCRC and I, as co-chair of the JCRC attended the JCPA Annual Conference in Washington D.C. Here is a background and reflections on the engaging, informative, experience.

What is the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA)?

The JCPA is the national umbrella body of the Jewish Community relations field, bringing together 125 Jewish Community Relations Councils (JCRCs) and 17 national agencies, including the four denominations of American Judaism.

What happens at the JCPA Annual conference?

Each year, volunteers and professionals come together to participate in trainings on policy and professional development, engage in thoughtful discussion, discuss action steps, and vote on resolutions that are available for use by local JCRCs, and learn from experts.

What topics were on the schedule?

The schedule was a combination of plenary sessions for all attendees, choices of panel discussions in smaller sessions, and affinity meetings for individuals with specific functions such as staff and/or delegates. The plenary sessions were focused broad topics such as antisemitism and Israel. Examples of smaller session included gun violence prevention; climate change; policing, bail and sentencing; Campus climate; Black-Jewish relations in a time of growing Antisemitism; and Speaking about Israel in progressive circles.

How can we use what we learned at the conference?

For example, the conversation about Jewish-Black relations touched on our history of shared interest and the opportunities to rebuild and rethink relationships - half of Israeli Jews are “Jews of Color” and appreciate the existence of Jews of Color in this country. Another example is my increased ability to respond effectively to a remark advocating for BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) in a recent conversation. Like the quote from Mark Twain, “I can love my country all the time and love my government when they deserve it.” Meaning many, Israelis have issues with current leaders. There is room for both – loving country and being critical.

We have an opportunity to continue educating our community on issues such as census, voting, restorative and rehabilitative justice, gun violence prevention, and the working definition of Antisemitism. The full list of adopted resolutions is at <https://www.jewishpublicaffairs.org/resolutions/>

As the new JCRC co-chair, joining with Nina Lukin as co-chair and Mara Koven-Gelman JCRC Director, I was pleased to learn that the Buffalo JCRC is clearly following the right path. Our JCRC Executive Committee has welcomed new members and we have a full calendar for JCRC members, and the community, for the upcoming months. We are making positive connections, partnering within and

outside our local Jewish Community. While there is certainly room for us to grow, we are “punching above our weight” compared to JCRCs in cities about our size.

Evolutionary psychiatry has shown us that “our capacity for empathy is a function of proximity.” JCRCs are a unique way to combat antisemitism from both the right and the left through building bridges, and we appreciate the continued support from our community.

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