

**BJC Executive Director Howard Libit Remarks (prepared)**  
**October 7<sup>th</sup> Commemoration Ceremony**  
**October 5, 2025**

Like many of you, I've spent a lot of time over these Holidays thinking about two years ago, and how much our lives as Jews in America have changed since October 7<sup>th</sup>.

Two years ago, in the immediate aftermath of the attack on Israel, I don't think that any of us could have imagined we would be standing here today amid the current circumstances.

- Hostages still being held in Gaza.
- Two years of grinding war.
- So many lives lost, Israeli and Palestinian.
- And a surge in antisemitism here in America and around the world.

Regardless of how one feels about the current leadership of Israel, all of us are unified in our love of Israel and its people. Collectively, we know that Israel has been a secure refuge for our Jewish people since 1948. We believe deeply in Israel's right to defend herself, and we are committed to the historic, bipartisan strength of the U.S.-Israel relationship.

We have lived those values in so many ways since the October 7<sup>th</sup> attacks. As I think back over the past two years here in our community, I could not be more proud of how we as a Baltimore community have responded.

Millions of dollars raised to help support the needs of Israel. We have helped our brothers and sisters in Ashkelon and around the country – basic goods for those who have lost their homes, supplies for security shelters, counseling for the trauma experienced by so many, and much more.

And our community has engaged in numerous missions and trips to deliver our support. Israelis tell us that they are so grateful for

everyone who comes, and we've had numerous volunteer trips to provide assistance in many ways. In fact, when all of you came in today, you probably saw flyers at the front table for a volunteer trip being planned by The Associated and Birthright Israel for the end of December into early January. Please consider joining.

As our community has experienced a surge in hate, we have worked together to combat antisemitism –

- to provide safe and nurturing environments for our children in our schools and our college campuses,
- to speak out against hate, to step up security at our synagogues, schools, and institutions,
- to hold our elected officials and institutions accountable to stand with us.

Through all of these efforts, we have been incredibly fortunate to have the leadership of many -- The Associated, our synagogues, our rabbis, our community organizations, our schools, and more. We are grateful to our partners in elected office and law enforcement who have joined us in this leadership. I would ask our elected officials who are with us here today to stand up, or wave. (applause). Thank you for your efforts.

Today, all of us stand here in strong partnership. On behalf of the Baltimore Israel Coalition, The Associated, and the Baltimore Jewish Council, let me take a moment to thank everyone who has participated in this morning's program, and all of you for taking the time to join us.

To all of the partners of the Baltimore Israel Coalition and the other synagogues and groups that have co-sponsored today, **thank you**. We may not always see eye-to-eye on all aspects of Israeli policy, but we are able to work together because we share a fundamental belief in Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people.

I want to specifically recognize the team here at Har Sinai-Oheb Shalom congregation, including Rabbi Sabath and David Harrison, as well as Jay Bernstein and the entire dedicated team focused on marching for the hostages, week after week, rain or shine. Jay, as the

marchers say every week, let's pray that this week is the final week that we need to march for the hostages.

Putting together today's program, thank you to The Associated's marketing team. Most of all, thank you to Kate McDonald, the BJC's incredible director of Israel and Jewish advocacy. Kate led the planning and execution of last year's phenomenal commemoration, and she led today's planning, too. Thank you, Kate, for your leadership and dedication.

Let me conclude by noting that this morning, maybe, just maybe, thanks to the developments over the past several days, there are reasons to be optimistic. After two frustrating years, I know that all of us have a bit of skepticism of whether this latest agreement actually goes into full effect.

But I want to be optimistic. I want to believe that our hostages will be freed within a matter of days, and that we can find a way to bring peace to the region. This is the time for an end the fighting, to bring home the hostages, and to find a way for peaceful coexistence.

*Am Yisrael Chai!*