

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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JULY 9, 2026

Wesley Bell sees surge of outside spending ahead of rematch with Cori Bush

As of this week, UDP has reserved \$865,000 in ad time for the race and New Democrat Majority has reserved \$500,000, ahead of the Aug. 4 primary

By Marc Rod

A month ahead of Missouri's primary elections, Rep. Wesley Bell's (D-MO) campaign is being buoyed by an influx of outside spending from the AIPAC-linked United Democracy Project super PAC and another super PAC affiliated with the moderate New Democrat Coalition.

As of this week, UDP has reserved \$865,000 in ad time for the race, while New Democrat Majority has reserved \$500,000 ahead of the Aug. 4 primary. In at least one advertisement, UDP is taking a similar approach as it did in its attacks against Rep. Cori Bush (D-MO) in 2024 when the group helped Bell unseat her, hitting her as an absentee and ineffective lawmaker and for voting against the bipartisan infrastructure package in 2021.

UDP's ad features clips accusing Bush of having betrayed and disappointed organized labor and workers who supported her in her initial campaign.

A source familiar with Bell's campaign said that it is confident going into the final weeks, but predicted a tight race, adding that the campaign expects a ramp-up in advertising in the final month of the race.

UDP's attacks complement what the source said will be the main pitch of Bell's campaign: the congressman's work delivering for constituents through projects such as delivering funding for a local airport and tornado recovery, and standing up to the Trump administration on issues including immigration enforcement and releasing the Jeffrey Epstein files.

The source said Bell's campaign also aims to hit Bush as an ineffective lawmaker who failed to deliver for the district and was more focused on own public profile, as well as highlight past campaign finance scandals, which have continued to trail Bush, and Bush's failure to embrace Vice President Kamala Harris during her 2024 presidential campaign.

The source also emphasized that Bell has sought to remain deeply and frequently engaged in the district, focusing on constituent services and frequent appearances at local events — gaps that hurt Bush's 2024 campaign.

At the same time, with her campaign focusing on attacking Israel and AIPAC's support for Bell, Bush is likely to attempt to weaponize the UDP spending against Bell.

Bell has faced some protests and backlash in the district over Israel, though the source said that voters are much more focused on affordability and quality of life issues at home and concerns about the Trump administration than Israel policy or AIPAC.

The source acknowledged that those issues have come up in the community, but argued that Bush is overplaying the extent to which voters in St. Louis are focused on them.

Bell's campaign in 2024 ran a robust engagement and turnout operation in the Jewish community, bringing together leaders from across the community from various political and religious backgrounds. Stacey Newman, a former state representative, led that effort for Bell's campaign in 2024 and returned to do so again, after having launched and led a local Jewish advocacy group in the intervening years.

Braxton Payne, a Democratic political strategist in St. Louis, said that the pro-Bell camp was significantly outpacing Bush and her supporters in media buys around the district, while Bush seemed more focused

on the grassroots campaign tactics she has used in previous races.

Payne said he still sees Bell as the frontrunner because he hasn't taken any votes that were considered to be particularly problematic in his relatively short time in office, has stood up against the Trump administration and has strong financial backing and outside support.

"I think that he's going to be able to out-communicate Cori like he did two years ago, even without outside funding or outside groups," Payne said. "Now, if Cori is able to get some grassroots money, and if the Justice Democrats [super PAC] or other groups that similarly align to them do decide to weigh in to that, I think that could make a difference."

With Missouri's two-week early voting window, early communication is key, Payne added.

One vote that Bush has repeatedly sought to hit Bell for is on a resolution

condemning the antisemitic firebombing attack on a hostage awareness march in Boulder, Colo. that killed a Holocaust survivor and injured others. The Republican-led resolution included language expressing gratitude to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which Democrats who supported the resolution have condemned as a cynical GOP political gambit.

Payne said that the current progressive wave across the country would not necessarily have significant impacts on the St. Louis electorate — "St. Louis has always been a bastion of progressive and left-leaning politics, nothing has really changed there ... I would say it's very similar to people that would have voted two years ago."

Unlike recent races in New York City and Colorado, Bell is young and still relatively new to Congress, not an old or long-entrenched incumbent. "Those differences

of the generational change are just not here in this race," Payne said.

He said that Bell has generally remained popular among the voters and community leaders who supported him in 2024, as compared to Bush who faced significant defections in that race among voters who had previously supported her.

On the other hand, he said, some progressive voters may be undecided at this point in the race, and, given Democratic outrage at the Trump administration, could be attracted to the more aggressive and confrontational style of politics that Bush has practiced.

And Bush has been working, Payne said, to re-engage with local grassroots groups that she had neglected during her time in office. "A lot of her supporters four years ago that were maybe not as [much] there for her two years ago, or even a year ago — I think they've all started to coalesce around her," he said. ♦

JULY 8, 2026

Rahm Emanuel, in Tel Aviv, says he is 'not impressed' by far-left wing of the Democratic Party

The former U.S. ambassador to Japan is in Israel this week, where he delivered a speech on the future of U.S.-Israel relations

By Melissa Weiss

Former U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel, speaking in Tel Aviv on Wednesday, criticized the "moral bankruptcy" of "those that paraded, celebrated and cheered" in the aftermath of Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attacks on Israel.

Emanuel, who served as White House chief of staff from 2009 to 2010 in the Obama administration, made the comments as part of a broader address on his vision for the future of U.S.-Israel relations as he mulls a potential presidential bid.

Speaking to *Jewish Insider* prior to his speech at Tel Aviv University, Emanuel responded to a question about Democrats, including Darializa Avila Chevalier, the presumptive winner in New York's 13th

Congressional District, who attended a Times Square rally the day after Hamas launched its attacks on southern Israel. "I have no place for the moral bankruptcy of those that found Oct. 8 as the day to cheer 1,200 people not only killed but sexually abused, and for taking hostage 250 people. They're morally bankrupt."

Emanuel further criticized some of the banner stances of the far left, calling open-border policies and efforts to defund the police "wrong on every level."

"I believe in capitalism, a better capitalism than we have today," Emanuel said. "I don't believe in the socialism that you advocate."

"I have spent my life," he added, "whether it was helping Nancy Pelosi

become speaker by winning the House or helping President [Barack] Obama and President [Bill] Clinton not only get elected but reelected, and the policies they put in place. My whole life is geared toward politically moving red to blue, not blue to midnight blue. I'm not impressed, and for the record, the colors of the DSA are red. I'm into blue: red, white and blue."

Speaking later Wednesday to a standing-room-only audience at ANU Museum of the Jewish People on Tel Aviv University's campus, Emanuel laid out what he saw as the generational challenges facing the State of Israel and potential avenues to address them.

In the speech, Emanuel reiterated his concerns about potential Israeli annexation

of parts of the West Bank and settler violence. He accused Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — with whom he has long clashed, including on issues related to the West Bank — and the Israeli government of having “led Israel into a dead end for too long.”

Emanuel called for a reassessment of the relationship between the U.S. and Israel. “American policy towards Israel operated under the assumption that the best thing Washington could do for Jerusalem is to blindly, to silently stand behind your government without conditions, without demands, without consequences, even when we disagree,” Emanuel said. “That has been our mistake, and it’s been not a

favor to you.

Israel, he said, had “turned from being known for your technological prowess to being considered primarily a territorial pariah.”

Emanuel expanded on his “23-state solution” proposal, under which Israel would normalize relations across the Middle East, including with a newly formed Palestinian state. Emanuel had previewed the proposal in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed published earlier this week.

Under such a plan, he said, “The Arab League would establish full diplomatic recognition of Israel, and Israel with all 21 members of the Arab League, just as they had once proposed. The political benefits

from all parties would be far greater than a two-state solution could ever offer the two parties.” The implementation of his plan, Emanuel told the audience, “would be your greatest day, and Iran’s worst nightmare.”

Emanuel has in recent months become more vocal on foreign policy issues as he mulls a 2028 presidential bid. Appearing on “Real Time with Bill Maher” in April, Emanuel called for an end to U.S. military aid to Israel. Under such a scenario, Emanuel told *JI* in May, “Israel will be like every other ally. They can buy what they want, and they have to live within the restrictions.” ♦

JULY 9, 2026

New Ted Cruz-aligned organization takes aim at right-wing antisemitism

Allies of the Texas senator are launching The Front Line, a 501(c)(4) nonprofit aimed at making antisemitism 'disqualifying' for GOP candidates

By Emily Jacobs

Allies of Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) are launching a new political organization aimed at countering antisemitism within the Republican Party, *Jewish Insider* has learned, led by Arielle F. Klepach, a former assistant U.S. attorney and senior counsel for the National Jewish Advocacy Center.

The Front Line (TFL) will operate as a 501(c)(4) nonprofit, meaning the group will not have to disclose its donors and can spend unlimited sums toward political activity, provided campaign finance is not its primary purpose and it does not contribute directly to campaigns.

A source familiar with the matter told *JI* that those behind the organization, which Cruz is not directly involved with, raised several million dollars to fund the operation. Klepach will run the operation as executive director.

In a statement on her hiring, Klepach said she was enthusiastic to join an effort focused on preventing Republicans from

mimicking what she described as Democrats’ embrace of anti-Israel sentiment.

“There has been a surge of antisemitism across America, which first engulfed the left and is now threatening the moral integrity and political unity of the conservative movement and the Republican Party,” Klepach said. “I am excited to lead The Front Line’s efforts to defeat right-wing antisemitism before it takes conservatives down the same path of anti-Americanism, anti-capitalism, and pro-Sharia advocacy that has taken the left.”

TFL’s mission statement describes the group as “an issue advocacy organization aligned with the positions of Ted Cruz dedicated to countering right-wing antisemitism, by making antisemitism disqualifying in the Republican Party and conservative movement, through activities across political, policy, and digital spaces.”

On the political front, the group “seeks to defeat antisemitic candidates at all levels of

the Republican Party, first by mapping federal, state, and local primaries, and then by running effective messaging campaigns to ensure that they lose, highlighting and ensuring that antisemitism is an electoral liability for Republican candidates.”

TFL will also “engage in issue advocacy related to a cluster of policies which have emerged in the battle over right-wing antisemitism.”

“Ted Cruz and other lawmakers seek to counter Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamism, and the global persecution of Christians by Islamist extremists, while boosting the U.S.-Israel relationship and efforts to address antisemitism,” the statement reads. “Right-wing antisemites take and advocate for the opposite position on each of these issues, and related ones.”

Regarding their digital efforts, the group says in its mission statement that it also plans to “create and utilize infrastructure for real-time monitoring and response to right-wing antisemitism, including and

especially to the extent that it is being driven by foreign adversaries. It will deploy defensive measures, including the identification and deactivation of inauthentic accounts, as well as measures meant to elevate clarity about antisemitism in the conservative movement and Republican Party.”

The effort has been in the works since late last summer, as Cruz was growing more vocal with his concerns about rising antisemitism within the conservative movement and the need to insulate the GOP from fringe figures who espouse

antisemitic views, according to a source familiar with the Texas senator’s concerns.

It’s the latest development in the divide in the GOP over how to approach the outgrowth of antisemitism on the party’s far right, especially if those close to Cruz, who is considering a 2028 presidential bid, use the group to put their thumb on the scale in heated primary contests.

The Texas senator, one of the GOP’s pro-Israel champions, has led the charge in urging the Republican Party to disavow antisemitic figures within the conservative movement as commentators Tucker

Carlson, Nick Fuentes, Candace Owens and others grow their influence, particularly with young conservatives.

Cruz has criticized Republicans who refuse to disavow prominent antisemites in the party or avoid weighing in on the issue as “cowards,” and has argued that young Christians were turning away from supporting Israel because leading voices in the America First movement were maligning Jewish conservatives and pro-Israel Christians. ♦

JULY 9, 2026

Jewish communal veteran Evan Bernstein tapped to take helm of B'nai B'rith International

Bernstein says he will bring a startup mentality to the world’s oldest Jewish service organization

By Jay Deitcher

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

In a generational change at the top of B’nai B’rith International, the organization has tapped Evan Bernstein as its next CEO, the group exclusively told *eJewishPhilanthropy* on Thursday, as the longtime communal professional looks to breathe new life — and a spirit of innovation — into a 182-year-old legacy organization.

Bernstein, 51, will take the reins of B’nai B’rith on Aug. 24, succeeding longtime CEO Dan Mariaschin, 77, who has led the organization since 1999. Bernstein brings with him 25 years of Jewish nonprofit experience at a host of communal organizations, including serving as the inaugural CEO of Community Security Service and in leadership roles at the Jewish Federations of North America, the Anti-Defamation League and AIPAC. In his first interview since accepting the position, Bernstein discussed how he will use his connections at past agencies to cultivate new partnerships for B’nai B’rith and how he will bring a startup mentality to the

world’s oldest Jewish service organization.

B’nai B’rith “has a legacy unlike any other Jewish organization,” Bernstein told *eJP*. “It has just such a rich and deep history, but it’s not just domestic, it’s international, and the partners that the organization has developed across Europe, South America, really around the globe, [are] really enticing and interesting and really unique.”

Founded on the Lower East Side of Manhattan by a dozen German Jewish immigrants in 1843, members of B’nai B’rith (“sons of the covenant”) originally organized at a network of lodges where members created initiatives that combated antisemitism, supported the sick, widowed and orphaned, and provided disaster relief. Today, the organization continues to fight antisemitism, advocate for Israel, support seniors and offer disaster relief around the globe.

Bernstein is especially excited to visit Europe, where members continue to meet in lodges, a trend that began to wane in the U.S. in the mid-20th century and eventually ended. These lodges, he said, create leaders who are strong advocates, especially in communities where few Jews remain.

Bernstein brings with him decades of relationships throughout the Jewish world that he hopes to tap into in his new role. “I’m one of the few community professionals now that’s worked for JFNA and ADL and AIPAC, so I’ve worked with a lot of legacy organizations. Those are all opportunities for partnership.”

Post-Oct. 7, legacy organizations “are looking at things from a different lens,” he said. “I read a lot recently, especially about legacy organizations, how ineffective they are and how changes need to be made.”

Legacy organizations have “a very important role in the Jewish communal world,” he said, “whether it’s in the Diaspora or in Israel, and it’s the job of the legacy organizations to get more nimble, to get thinking a little bit more startup, but they have these immense connections and immense histories and large volunteer networks that are critical to making change.”

While Bernstein has worked for several legacy organizations, he also spent years working as national director of development for The David Project, an Israel campus advocacy group, and grew

CCS from an organization with \$350,000 in revenue to over \$5 million and a national footprint.

“Every major Jewish organization right now has to look at how are they doing their business, how are their programs being effective, how are they really implementing metrics of success?” he said.

No longer can things be “business as usual,” Bernstein added. “With limited resources and limited volunteer hours and limited things across the board, you want to make sure the things you’re doing are going to be as close to best in class, if not best in class, as possible to really hold value for the supporters, the organization and the investors.”

Bernstein has seen new leaders thrust changes onto organizations before understanding the landscape, he said, and “that ultimately hurts an organization.”

He plans to do a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis of the organization. “I want to talk to internal staff, internal players, external stakeholders, people [who] are involved and not involved with the organization, [who] are in the Jewish communal space, to get a sense of what’s needed. What are people thinking about B’nai B’rith? What are some areas of opportunity? What’s working? What’s not working? Once we have that information, then we can make smart

decisions about the organization and looking at things from either a rebrand or programmatic reevaluation.”

The board “sought a leader who understands B’nai B’rith’s legacy of leadership in meeting our community’s needs and the vision to help B’nai B’rith lead the response to the needs of today and the future,” Robert Spitzer, the organization’s president, told eJP. “Evan has a deep understanding of the Jewish world and a record of achievement, as well as the imagination and drive to help B’nai B’rith work to strengthen our sense of community, bringing Jews closer together in the U.S., Israel and around the world.”

The organization, he said, is one of the few legacy organizations that is not seen as leaning too far to the left or the right politically, and he hopes to maintain that view.

“We have an office in Israel,” he said. “Everything that’s done in the Jewish communal space is intertwined with Israel. It’s a critical component. My family’s in Israel. I have family in Bnei Brak, in Har Nof, part of my family is in Tel Aviv. Israel and Jews — it’s intertwined.”

Bernstein is not intimidated by having to fill Mariaschin’s shoes. His predecessor stepped down in June after serving B’nai B’rith for 37 years, as CEO for 27 of them.

Both Mariaschin and Bernstein have

plenty in common. Both grew up in New England, and both worked for ADL and AIPAC and in Jewish communal security. Their similarities have allowed them to build a strong connection, and Mariaschin plans to remain with the organization in a consultant and mentor role, helping Bernstein learn the ropes and tap into relationships.

One way Bernstein has watched the Jewish community shift during his time working for Jewish nonprofits is the way organizations are funded. No longer are there “thousands and thousands of donors,” he said. “Major gifts right now are really coming from private family offices and private family foundations... You have to build relationships with those people, understand what they’re looking for, try to find commonality there, and try to find funding streams that will allow you to enhance your mission, but doing it in a programmatic way that’s going to feel like it’s a good investment for these foundations.”

Donors are not “giving money willy-nilly” just because an organization is a legacy organization, Bernstein said. “They want to give money to things that are going to feel innovative, that have metrics of success and that are going to be able to move the needle.” ♦

JULY 8, 2026

AI models more lax with antisemitism when engaging in Persian, new ADL study finds

The antisemitism watchdog tested ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and Grok and found Persian responses hedged or missed antisemitic framing that English responses rejected outright

By Haley Cohen

Major AI chatbots consistently fail to reject antisemitic inquiries in Persian as effectively as they do in English, according to a report released on Wednesday by the Anti-Defamation League. The group argues the safety flaw has broad implications as millions rely on these platforms to

understand conflicts such as the U.S.-Israel war against Iran.

The report, “Lost in Translation: How AI Chatbots Fail Persian Speakers on Antisemitism,” looked at responses by the most widely-used chatbots — OpenAI’s ChatGPT, Anthropic’s Claude, Google’s Gemini and xAI’s Grok — over several

weeks in March, amid the Iran war.

After assessing eight prompts and 800 total responses, researchers identified a “systemic” bias in how AI models process sensitive topics, heavily dependent on the language used. Across the tested chatbots, English responses proved superior to ones in Persian — a major language with over 110

million speakers primarily in Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan — in identifying and rejecting antisemitic conspiracy theories.

Persian-language responses frequently hedged or avoided direct answers where English responses were unequivocal, the ADL found. For instance, Gemini's English answers consistently acknowledged Iran's role in spreading antisemitism, while its Persian responses softened or deflected the same claims. Several models also failed to recognize antisemitic framing when questions were posed in Persian. Asked whether U.S. behavior toward Iran had been "Jewlike" — a normalized derogatory term in Persian — models largely engaged with the question as a neutral political inquiry rather than flagging its antisemitic premise.

The report also identified gaps in depth and sourcing between languages. English

responses were generally longer, more thoroughly cited and more up-to-date. Gemini's English answers referenced the 2026 Iran war and U.S. casualties by name, for example, while its Persian responses only described hypothetical future conflicts. Citations were similarly not consistent. ChatGPT supplied close to 300 links in English responses but none in Persian, and even where other models did cite sources, reliability was inconsistent. Grok cited X accounts including a "Star Trek" fan page and one apparently impersonating Ali Khamenei, the late Iranian supreme leader.

"The gaps we found are not minor inconsistencies, they are systemic failures," said Daniel Kelley, senior director of the ADL Center for Technology and Society. "When a platform tells a Persian speaker that antisemitism is a matter of 'blurred

boundaries' while telling an English speaker it is state policy, those are not the same product."

Kelley called on AI companies "to invest the research and resources necessary to ensure their guardrails work for every person, in every language, and that means starting now."

While English responses were found to be more conscientious than those in Persian, the ADL raised concerns last year with leading AI developers like Meta and Google regarding antisemitic and anti-Israel biases in English as well. At the time, Meta claimed ADL was using an older model for its study, and not the most current version.

An ADL spokesperson told *Jewish Insider* that the study on Persian chatbots used the most recent models at the time of the research. ♦

JULY 7, 2026

New psychology training program aims to combat antisemitism in mental health care

Academics Miri Bar-Halpern and Dean McKay are piloting the curriculum across three Northeast states with the support of AEN, with plans to build a national model for doctoral programs

By Haley Cohen

Two leading psychologists are launching an initiative to help future clinicians better care for Jewish patients, *Jewish Insider* has learned, amid a surge of antisemitism in the mental health field that has left Jewish therapists and clients facing isolation and discrimination.

Created by Miri Bar-Halpern, a lecturer in psychology at Harvard Medical School, and Dean McKay, a professor of psychology at Fordham University, the pilot program, announced on Tuesday, will roll out in doctoral psychology programs at universities across New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts through faculty workshops and curriculum development. The Academic Engagement Network, a network of faculty and staff countering

antisemitism on campus, is supporting the effort.

According to the creators, the ultimate goal of the pilot is to establish a national model for psychology education that addresses antisemitism and includes Jewish identity in training.

The program comes as 75% of Jewish-identifying medical students and professionals in American healthcare reported exposure to antisemitism in the aftermath of the Oct. 7, 2023, terrorist attacks in Israel and ensuing Gaza war, according to a 2025 peer-reviewed study published in the *Journal of Religion and Health*. Last week, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services opened a federal civil rights investigation into the American Psychological Association over

allegations of discrimination against Jewish and Israeli psychologists.

The launch also comes at a time of historic demand for mental health support. More than 1 in 4 Americans (28%) have talked with a mental health professional in the past year, according to an April poll by the American Psychiatric Association.

McKay and Bar-Halpern warned that the integration of certain ideological frameworks into psychology and counseling education threatens to marginalize Jewish clients.

Among the emerging frameworks drawing growing scrutiny is "decolonization therapy," an approach that labels Zionism as a source of mental illness.

"When antisemitism begins shaping how future clinicians are trained, the

consequences extend far beyond the classroom,” said Miriam Elman, executive director of AEN.

“Future psychologists will care for patients from every background. Ensuring that they understand antisemitism and

Jewish identity is essential to providing ethical, culturally responsive care and maintaining trust in the mental health professions,” said Elman.

McKay expressed hope that the initiative “will help ensure that future clinicians are

equipped to recognize antisemitism, understand its impact, and provide care that is both culturally responsive and evidence-based.” ♦

JULY 6, 2026

Aviv Foundation grants \$1 million to expand operations of Orthodox LGBTQ inclusion group Eshel

Donation, which will allow group to work in new areas and hold more events, comes amid both a surge in interest and pushback

By Jay Deitcher

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Once a strictly taboo topic, the inclusion of LGBTQ Jews in the Orthodox world has become a far more commonplace concept in the 16 years since Miryam Kabakov co-founded Eshel. But there is still more work to be done, Kabakov, the group’s executive director, told *eJewishPhilanthropy*.

A new \$1 million grant from the Aviv Foundation, shared exclusively with eJP on Monday, will allow Eshel to expand its work supporting traditionally observant Jewish communities in cultivating welcoming spaces for LGBTQ Jews and their families.

“I feel it,” she told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. “There’s been a real turning point within Orthodox spaces that now this conversation is happening more and more. It’s no longer a taboo conversation, per se. We’ve seeded a lot of opportunities for people to actually talk about this without any stigma.”

Yet alongside this growing acceptance, there remain some in the Orthodox community who are pushing back on this trend, Kabakov said. She added that these tensions come at a time when many queer Jews feel rejected by non-Jewish LGBTQ spaces — many of which have adopted staunch anti-Israel positions in response to Israel’s war against Hamas in Gaza.

Eshel serves LGBTQ individuals, family members and allies in the United States and Canada and is the only English-

speaking support system in Israel for parents of LGBTQ people within Orthodoxy. From the organization’s inception, Kabakov knew “we couldn’t just confront the issue head-on,” she said. “We would knock on doors of Orthodox synagogues, and they wouldn’t open. Now, this past Pride month, we’ve sponsored at least 10 Pride Shabbats in Orthodox spaces. That’s an amazing thing that we’ve been able to catalyze and help Orthodox communities celebrate their LGBTQ members.”

As more institutions and individuals turn to Eshel for help, communities grow more welcoming, therefore creating increased interest in the organization. “The growth has just been leading to more and more growth,” Kabakov said.

The grant from the Aviv Foundation will help the organization implement its three-year strategic plan, launched last year. The plan is titled “Branching Out,” a play on the organization’s logo, a tree image that recalls the tamarisk tree that the biblical Abraham planted in Beersheva as a sign to travelers that food, water and shelter were available there.

According to the plan, now in year two, Eshel is expanding its geographic reach and programming and will soon hire three new positions, including an operations manager and national program director.

The grant will also support the organization in updating its website with a larger resource library and launching in-

person programming in more Orthodox hubs. The organization will increase ally training in Orthodox institutions and on college campuses, expand mental health programming and add a third annual retreat. It will also grow the organization’s Welcoming Communities initiative, in which Eshel interviews rabbis across North America so it can better connect LGBTQ families and members to caring communities and synagogues.

Eshel is a “flagship investment” for the Aviv Foundation, Adam Simon, the foundation’s CEO, told eJP. “It’s an anchor investment for us that aligns with our goals around ensuring queer Jews are full participants in Orthodox institutions in Orthodox life.”

The Aviv Foundation was founded in 2015 by American Israeli philanthopists Steven and Chani Laufer. The foundation has funded liberal Orthodox initiatives, in the U.S. and Israel, since its inception. Supporting the Orthodox LGBTQ community became a priority investment in 2018, and the foundation first invested in Eshel in 2019.

“There is a strength in the infrastructure nationwide that Eshel has created — the program history, the tools it has to support synagogues and other institutions — to be more inclusive,” Simon said. But at the same time, he added, “It’s an interesting moment in which you have both an increase of acceptance and curiosity amongst Orthodox institutions and

Orthodox leaders about how to be more inclusive and more humane to LGBTQ members and family members, and also a stronger rise of the right wing of Orthodox institutions that are rejecting that same inclusion. So you have both forces on the ends of Orthodoxy pushing against each other.”

While organizations are working to be more accepting of LGBTQ Orthodox youth, mental illness in the community is “through the roof,” he said. “That conflict is really confusing and all the more reason why we need to be funding great institutions that are trying to support individuals and support organizations and be public about their work to create safe spaces.”

The grant comes at a time when LGBTQ

Jews feel increasingly alienated from queer spaces post-Oct. 7. A 2025 study by Eshel and the now-defunct A Wider Bridge showed that 82% LGBTQ Jews reported being “kicked out,” “blocked,” having “experienced verbal harassment” or being “made to feel uncomfortable” in online queer spaces, and 42% reported those situations occurring in-person. At the same time, a 2024 Eshel study of parents showed that 44% of Orthodox parents said their LGBTQ child had experienced “some,” “significant” or “very significant” discrimination from their synagogues.

Simon hears from Orthodox organizations that “they want to do better,” and Aviv hopes to help those institutions “do it better,” he said. “We also hear from individuals who are struggling oftentimes,

and we want to be supportive of those individuals.”

The Aviv grant follows a trend of investments in Eshel, including from Micah Philanthropies, the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies and SRE Network. Last year, UJA-Federation of New York granted the organization \$100,000, which gave Eshel a “vote of confidence,” Kabakov said, and allowed the organization to hire a program manager in New York to expand programming throughout the tristate area.

The Aviv grant “gives us confidence going forward that we can grow with our strategic plan,” Kabakov said. “Without it, I’m not sure that we would be able to fulfill the road map that we’ve set out for ourselves.” ♦