



SCHWEIKERT BILL AIMS TO HELP PROTECT SYNAGOGUES - THE CENTER SQUARE

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Arizona Congressman David Schweikert is introducing legislation on Friday that would loosen regulations on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Nonprofit Security Grant Program to allow for places of worship to get more protection.

The House bill dubbed the "Warranting of Religious Spaces to Handle Increased Protection (WORSHIP) Act" would allow an increase from 50% to 75% to use the grant funds for personnel-related expenses and allow the hiring of "public safety personnel" to be permitted under the grant as part of "covered expenses."

FEMA defines the program as a way to provide security measures for nonprofits that are at a "high risk" of becoming terror victims, according to its [website](#).

Our communities depend on places of worship to come together and embrace shared beliefs throughout life. No one should feel threatened when exercising their religious liberty, which is fundamentally protected by the First Amendment," Schweikert said in a statement, according to a news release first provided to The Center Square.

"I've always said my faith motivates me, and I'm proud to introduce this commonsense legislation that will provide our faith-based communities the resources they need to harden security and improve safety. I look forward to working with

my colleagues to advance this bill," he added.

In addition, the bill would temporarily scrap having to request permission if the aforementioned staffing costs go beyond the allotted 75%, according to the news release.

Although Schweikert himself is Catholic, his district covers parts of northeast Maricopa County and has a significant Jewish population. There are rising concerns of hate crimes against the Jewish community nationwide following the Hamas terrorist attack in Israel on Oct. 7.

The **Anti-Defamation League** determined in April 2022 that Arizona ranked fourth for a rise in "antisemitic incidents" in the United States, saying there was a 155% from 2020 to 2021. Following the Hamas attack, the **ADL** estimates a 360% increase in those incidents, according to data obtained from October till Jan. 7.

FBI hate crime statistics **released** in late October show that 1,124 of the nation's total 2,044 religion-based incidents in 2022 were rooted in antisemitism.

Nonprofits have to apply to receive grant funding, which has had an increased budget in recent years. In terms of "total funding available," FEMA data show fiscal year 2023 has \$305 million, 2022 had \$250.15 million and 2021 had \$180 million.

The proposed policy change is a temporary measure until Sept. 30, 2025, the **bill text** states. It is not exclusive to synagogues but to any nonprofit that has the grant.