

Jewish Museum displays timely reminder of nation's founding values



The sign faces Independence Mall in the heart of historic Philadelphia. Photo: Courtesy of NMAJH.

PHILADELPHIA, PA.- The National Museum of American Jewish History has installed new building signage asserting George Washington’s promise of religious liberty to the people of the United States. Quoting Washington’s iconic letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island in 1790, the large-scale banner reads, “Happily the Government of the United States ... gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.” The Museum—a safe, open space for all—displays this text as a timely reminder of the ideals of inclusiveness on which this nation was founded.

Facing Independence Mall in the heart of historic Philadelphia, the Museum’s signage refers to one of the most significant documents in American history. George Washington’s letter, currently on view at NMAJH, was composed in August 1790 in response to a letter from the Jewish community of Newport. In it, Washington affirmed rights denied to Jews for millennia and underscored the nation’s commitment to respecting religious liberty and equality for people of all faiths. Washington described his vision of a country in which “every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.”

“George Washington’s call for religious pluralism is especially powerful today, given the rise in

expressions of bigotry and exclusion in recent months,” states Ivy Barsky, NMAJH’s CEO & Gwen Goodman Director. “Just as Washington fervently promised to preserve this nation’s acceptance of all people, the National Museum of American Jewish History remains committed as ever to our mission of inspiring a greater appreciation for the diversity of the American experience and the invaluable contributions to this country by immigrants.”

The public can explore George Washington’s original 1790 letter at the Museum thanks to a generous long-term loan from the Morris Morgenstern Foundation, or online at religiousfreedom.nmajh.org.