



To

Mr. Kai Wegner, Governing Mayor of the State of Berlin, Ms. Katharina Günther-Wünsch, Senator for Education of the State of Berlin, Mr. Stefan Evers, Senator for Finance of the State of Berlin, Mr. Raed Saleh, Chairman of the SPD Parliamentary Group in the Berlin House of Representatives, Mr. Torsten Schneider, Finance and Budget Policy Spokesman of the SPD Parliamentary Group of the State of Berlin, Members of the Berlin House of Representatives

Washington D.C. / Prague / Berlin, June 2026

Full-Scale Renovation of Urania in Berlin: The Historic Lodge Building and the Responsibility of the State of Berlin

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As representatives of B'nai B'rith across three of its branches — B'nai B'rith International, B'nai B'rith Alliance for Northern, Central, and Southern Europe, and B'nai B'rith Berlin - Raoul Wallenberg Lodge, we are writing to you today with a united voice.

The building at Kleiststrasse 10–12 in Berlin-Schöneberg, today part of the Urania complex, was once the home of our organization. It housed the Berlin headquarters of the Independent Order B'nai B'rith and served as the seat of the Grand Lodge for Germany. From 1924 to 1937, Rabbi Dr. Leo Baeck served as Grand President of the German B'nai B'rith Lodges. During this period, more than 100 B'nai B'rith Lodges with a total membership of approximately 15,000 existed throughout the German territories. The organization played a leading role in the establishment of the Central Welfare Agency of German Jews (Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der deutschen Juden) in 1917. Likewise, the Central Archives of German Jews (Gesamtarchiv der Deutschen Juden) in Berlin originated from a B'nai B'rith initiative launched in 1906.

On April 19, 1937, the building was occupied and searched by National Socialist authorities. Leo Baeck, President of the Grand Lodge and of the “Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden”, was forced to sit in the front row while interrogations were conducted and passports confiscated. The building was expropriated and transferred to Prussian state ownership.

After the war, the property was returned under Allied restitution law. Benjamin Ferencz was involved in those proceedings – as an attorney for the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization (JRSO), the institution that reclaimed the assets of murdered and displaced

Jewish owners on their behalf. Ferencz, who later gained worldwide recognition as the last surviving chief prosecutor of the Nuremberg follow-on trials, thus made a personal contribution to the history of this building as well. In the years that followed, the property came to Urania e.V. through a process involving Willy Brandt, the State of Berlin, and Benjamin Ferencz.

Today, Urania – and with it the former home of our organization – faces a different kind of existential question: the building is in urgent need of renovation. The federal government has made funds available. The renowned architect Daniel Libeskind – who knows and articulates the historical significance of this place – has developed a concept that would do justice to the building and its history. The design and planning documents are well advanced, and the procurement process has been completed.

What is missing is the commitment of the State of Berlin.

Without a formal letter of commitment from the state, the design and planning documents cannot be finalized and submitted to the federal government in time. The federal funding would be forfeited. The project would be stalled – not due to any lack of will on the part of those involved, but because of political inaction.

We appeal to you: release the letter of commitment. Not merely to support an institution – but to honor a place whose history obligates Berlin.

A building forcibly stripped of its Jewish life in 1937 now houses one of the most important centers of democratic civic education in the German capital and in Germany as a whole. To allow this place to fall into disrepair would be more than a failure of urban policy. It would send the wrong signal – especially now, as democratic institutions and the memory of Jewish life across Europe are under growing pressure.

B’nai B’rith stands by this building. We urge you to do the same.

Sincerely,

Rob Spitzer, President B’nai B’rith International, Washington D.C.

Dr. Michael Naor, President B’nai B’rith Alliance, Northern, Central and Southern Europe

Dr. Richard Stern, President B’nai B’rith Berlin - Raoul Wallenberg Lodge