



**OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
SEVENTH CIRCUIT COURT DISTRICT
POST OFFICE BOX 22747
JACKSON, MS 39225-2747**

January 13th, 2026

MEDIA ADVISORY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
CONTACT 601.968.6568

Hinds County Grand Jury Indicts Suspect on First-Degree Arson with Hate Crime Enhancement in Jackson Synagogue Fire

Jackson, MS — The Hinds County District Attorney's Office today announced that a 19-year-old individual has been indicted in connection with the January 10, 2026 arson of Beth Israel Congregation, Mississippi's largest synagogue. The fire caused significant damage to the place of worship and is alleged to have been motivated by religious hatred, elevating the case to one of the most serious arson prosecutions available under Mississippi law.

Beth Israel Congregation has endured violence in its history, including a 1967 Ku Klux Klan bombing during the civil-rights era, and this case arises amid a documented increase in attacks on houses of worship across the United States, including arson, vandalism, and other acts of targeted violence. Such crimes are intended to intimidate entire religious communities. Violence directed at any place of worship, regardless of faith, will not be tolerated in Jackson, MS.

The defendant has been charged with First-Degree Arson of a Place of Worship in violation of Mississippi Code Annotated § 97-17-3(1). The indictment further includes a hate-crime sentencing enhancement pursuant to Mississippi Code Annotated §§ 99-19-301 and 99-19-307, alleging the offense was committed because of the actual or perceived religion of the victim. A copy of the indictment is attached.

The fire occurred in the early morning hours of January 10, 2026, resulting in extensive damage to the synagogue. The defendant sustained injuries during the incident and remains hospitalized. No members of the congregation were physically injured.

Under Mississippi law, first-degree arson of a place of worship is punishable by a sentence of five (5) to thirty (30) years in the custody of the Mississippi Department of Corrections, in addition to court-ordered restitution for the damage caused. Because the indictment alleges the offense was

JODY E. OWENS, II
HINDS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY



**OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
SEVENTH CIRCUIT COURT DISTRICT
POST OFFICE BOX 22747
JACKSON, MS 39225-2747**

motivated by hate, Mississippi law authorizes enhanced punishment, including a term of imprisonment of up to twice the sentence (60 years) otherwise permitted by statute, if proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

Although this case has drawn national attention, the Hinds County District Attorney's Office emphasizes that this prosecution is fundamentally about protecting Mississippi communities and enforcing the rule of law in Jackson. Federal hate-crime data consistently show that religion-based hate crimes remain among the most frequently reported bias-motivated offenses nationwide, and that anti-Jewish bias accounts for a disproportionate share of those incidents, despite Jewish Americans comprising a small percentage of the U.S. population. These documented trends emphasize the seriousness of crimes that target religious communities and the need for decisive legal action.

The Hinds County District Attorney's Office is working in close coordination with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, and looks forward to continued collaboration as this case proceeds through the judicial process. This unified approach reflects a commitment to addressing bias-motivated violence using all available legal avenues.

"Crimes motivated by hate and directed at places of worship strike at the core of who we are as a community and at the fundamental right to worship freely and safely. Mississippi law treats these offenses with the seriousness they demand, including enhanced penalties when bias is involved," said District Attorney Jody E. Owens, II. "This indictment reflects our commitment to enforcing those laws fully and ensuring that acts intended to intimidate or terrorize religious communities are met with decisive accountability."

JODY E. OWENS, II
HINDS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY