

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE TO COMBAT HATE

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February 25, 2026
Start: 10:23 a.m.
Recess: 8:10 p.m.

HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS -- CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Yusef Salaam, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Shekar Krishnan
Darlene Mealy
Lynn C. Schulman
Julie Won

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Julie Menin, Speaker
Alexa Avilés
Sandy Nurse
Shahana Hanif
Eric Dinowitz
Lincoln Restler
Inna Vernikov
Althea V. Stevens
Nantasha M. Williams
Linda Lee
Crystal Hudson
Kayla Santosuosso
Phil Wong
James F. Gennaro

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING: (continued)

Tiffany Cabán

Shaun Abreu

A P P E A R A N C E S

JoAnn Kamuf Ward, Deputy Commissioner of Policy and External Affairs at the New York City Commission on Civil and Human Rights

Jose Rios-Lua, Chief-of-Staff at the New York City Commission on Civil and Human Rights

Michael Gerber, Deputy Commissioner of Legal Matters for the New York Police Department

Andrew Arias, Assistant Chief at New York Police Department Detective Bureau

Jeffrey Dinowitz, New York State Assembly Member

David Weprin, New York State Assembly Member

Linda Rosenthal, New York State Assembly Member

Micah Lasher, New York State Assembly Member

Sam Berger, New York State Assembly Member

Ilya Bretman, Executive Director of Hillel at Baruch College

David Dince, Director of Litigation and New York Senior Counsel at the Brandeis Center for Human Rights

Joanna Samuels, Chief Executive Officer of the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan

Devorah Halberstam, self

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Yisroel Kahan, Orthodox Liaison at the Anti-Defamation League

Nahiyan Taufiq, Muslim Community Network

Reverend Robert Waterman, Associate Pastor at Antioch Baptist Church

Joseph Rosenberg, Director of the Catholic Community Relations Council

Rabbi David Ingber, founding Rabbi of the Romemu community in Manhattan and Brooklyn and as a Rabbi at the 92nd Street Y

Ariel Savransky, Director of Government and Community Relations at the 92nd Street Y

Robert Freedman, self

Rabbi Abe Faur, Chief Rabbi at Ohel David and Shlomo Synagogue

Bennett Katz, self

Marcia Caban, Executive Director of Central Synagogue

Yeruchim Silber, Director of New York Government Relations at Agudath Israel of America and Nationwide Advocacy Organization

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Mark Treyger, Chief Executive Officer of Jewish
Community Relations Council New York

Scott Richmond, Regional Director for Anti-
Defamation League

Hindy Poupko, UJA Federation of New York

Daniel Sherman, Rabbi of West Side Institutional
Synagogue

Justin Harrison, Senior Policy Counsel for the
ACLU of New York

Jennvine Wong, Supervising Attorney with the Cop
Accountability Project at the Legal Aid Society

Jonathan Bloom, union organizer at UAW

Nicholas Devyatkin, Director of Legal Affairs for
the Professional Staff Congress, AFT Local 2334

Shraddha Joshi, paralegal at the Doors Legal
Services Center

Jonah Skodas, self

Simone Ding, self

Avi Posnick, Northeast Director for Stand With Us

Dovid Zirkind, Rabbi of Riverdale Jewish Center
in the Bronx

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Benny Krauss, principal of SAR in Riverdale

Megan Haller, self

Barry Grodenchik, President of the Queens Jewish
Community Council

Bishop Mitchell Taylor, Senior Pastor of the
Center of Hope International

Alan Scheiner, Senior Litigation Counsel at the
National Jewish Advocacy Center

Simon Pelman, elected district leader of the 27th
Assembly District

Kiera Kippitz, self

Sharonne Salaam, Justice 4 Wrongfully
Incarcerated

Queen Mother Dr. Delois Blakely, self

Zara Nasir, organizer with the People's Plan NYC

Kulsoom Tapal, Education Policy Coordinator at
the Coalition for Asian American Children and
Families

Amy Maltz, Jewish Voice for Peace

Unidentified, self

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Leo Ferguson, scholar in residence at Jews for
Racial and Economic Justice

Serena Smolenski, self

Bernard Hoffman, self

Margot Barrett, organizer with New York City for
Abortion Rights

Isabel Pinsky, self

Ashveer Singh, self

Michael Zink, self

Dina Bakst, Anti-Defamation League of New York

Talia Day, Rodeph Sholom School

Rabbi Erica Gerson, self

Michael Cohen, Executive Vice President of the
Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation

Beth Schwartz, self

Ross Glick, self

Barbara Birch, Executive Vice President of the
Northeast Region of the Simon Wiesenthal Center

Joey Saban, Chief-of-Staff to New York State
Senator Sam Sutton

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Mohammed Jihad Al-Ahmad, self

Surjit Syed, self

Noella Williams, organizer with New York City for
Abortion Rights

Robert Briggs, self

Unidentified, self

Sorolle Idels, Co-Founder of the Queens Jewish
Alliance

Rachel Bryant, Met Council

William Steele, self

Anabel Ruggiero, ACT UP

Eman Gad, Policy Manager at Girls for Gender
Equity

Maya Sikand, self

Sam Weinberger, self

Melinda Thaler, General Counsel to the West Side
Community Organization

Khalid Rehman, self

Miriam Fisher, self

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Heba Khalil, State Director for Engage New York

Sam Finkelstein, Jews Against White Supremacy

Suzanne Gordon, self

Awali, reading a testimony for Queen

Maureen Silverman, self

Chaskel Bennett, Co-Founder of the Flatbush
Jewish Community Coalition

Janet, representing Pam Sporn

Irene Siegel, Jews for Racial and Economic
Justice

Rebecca Goyette, self

Ken Schles, Jewish Voice for Peace

Juan Escalante, self

Dora Finns, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice

Tanesha Grant, Executive Director of Parent
Supporting Parents New York

Adrienne Easterling, self

Benjamin Nager Sadov, Jewish Voice for Peace

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Calvin Harrison, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice

Natasha Bujosa, educational organizer with New Settlement and Parent Action Committee

Andrea Ortiz, Dignity in Schools Coalition

Walter Masterson, self

Lisa Katz, Chief Government Affairs Officer of the Combat Anti-Semitism Movement

Joshua Waterman, self

Ricky Baker-Koish, organizer with Shoresh

Fania Vasilevsky, self

Rabbi David Feldman, self

Alan Sherman, self

Nick Devine, UAW Local 2325

Mark Genszler, self

Sami Al-Iryani, self

Anna Pereira, self

Jamie Cohen, self

Unidentified, self

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Rabbi William Pinsky, self

Shabsie Saphirstein, self

Tazin Azad, self

Jonathan Silverman, self

Briana Silberberg, Aunties and Friends for
Liberation

Kaiser, Community Organizer for the Alliance for
Quality Education

Jennifer Hirsch, Jews for Racial and Economic
Justice

Mala Kumar, self

Jerry Kestenbaum, self

Natalie Sanandaji, self

Tasneem Mawad, community organizer for Malukah
Safety Center

Isa Abraham, Program Coordinator for Malukah

Unidentified, self

Jasper Nathaniel, self

Alex Malescio, self

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Unidentified, self

Colin Buckingham, self

Rustin Barber, self

Jean-Pierre Seguin, self

Raul Rivera, self

Arielle Gordon, self

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

Khunsa Amin, Crown Heights Tenant Union Palestine
Solidarity Working Group

Benyamin O'Brien Magdon, self

Dr. Jane Paley, self

Amy Wagner, founder and Co-Director of the YA-YA
Network

Olive Harbor, self

Karen Bale, self

Aly Afifi, self

Sheree Gibson, self

Israel Peskowitz, self

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Alaina Daniels, Executive Director of
Transformative Schools

Michael Alon Loeb, self

Chauncy Young, Director of the New Settlement
Parent Action Committee

Maung Sawyeddollah, Muslim Community Network

Smitha Varghese Milich, self

Dr. Ameena Ali, self

Ariel Weinshanker, self

Joseph Akiba van Leeuwen, self

Kat Green, Founder of Endora

Catherine Wolf, self

Shannon O'Neill Fonseca, Latino organizer with
the Healing Center Schools Working Group

Shira Felberbaum Kadem, self

Cindy Gorn, self

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Mic check, mic check.

3 This is a mic check for the Committee on Combat Hate.

4 Today's date is February 25, 2026. Recorded by Walter
5 Lewis in the Chambers.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, and
7 welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for
8 the Committee to Combat Hate.

9 At this time, we ask that you please
10 silence all electronic devices, and at no time are
11 you to approach the dais.

12 If you have any questions or you want to
13 sign up for in-person testimony, please see one of
14 the Sergeant-at-Arms.

15 Chair Salaam, we're ready to begin.

16 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: [GAVEL] Good morning,
17 everyone. My name is Dr. Yusef Salaam, and I serve as
18 the Chair to the Committee to Combat Hate. I would
19 like to start off by thanking everyone for joining us
20 here today.

21 Although this is the first hearing for
22 this new Committee, it is not the first time the
23 Council has addressed this topic. Sadly, this
24 Committee is needed now more than ever. From the
25 macrocosm of global to national to the microcosm of

2 New York City, recent years have seen a disturbing
3 rise in xenophobia, racism, and intolerance. In the
4 past 10 years, reports on hate crime have more than
5 doubled in the United States, in New York State, and
6 in our city. This includes notable rises in anti-
7 Semitism, in anti-Black hatred, anti-Asian hatred,
8 anti-Muslim hatred, anti-LGBTQIA-plus hatred, and
9 other gender-based violence. Across the country, neo-
10 Nazi and white supremacy movements are increasingly
11 visible in mainstream discourse. These groups'
12 rhetoric stigmatizes and dehumanizes minorities,
13 migrants, refugees, women, and any so-called other.
14 Public spaces, community centers, houses of worship,
15 workplaces, and even schools feel much less safe
16 these days. Just this past Saturday, multiple shots
17 were fired at a Matamoros Mosque in the Pike County
18 Islamic Center. Such an attack during one of our
19 holiest times of year, Ramadan, adds insult to
20 injury. Thankfully, there were no reported injuries.

21 These are not just one-off incidents.

22 Since the beginning of this year, we've witnessed
23 multiple hate crimes, included are the spray-painted
24 anti-religious graffiti at the Church of Jesus Christ
25 of Latter-day Saints in Harlem, the hateful anti-

2 Black racist comments made during the CEC3 meeting,
3 and a disturbing act of anti-Semitic vandalism in
4 Gravesend Park, where swastikas were painted on
5 playground equipment. These hateful incidents inflict
6 real harm on our communities who can become afraid to
7 come together to worship and support one another.

8 The right to worship is not just a
9 fundamental right, but also part of our fundamental
10 human needs. We cannot wait for the worst to occur
11 before taking action. While we already have agencies
12 and systems in place that handle these incidents and
13 crimes, the City must work with renewed focus to
14 prevent hate and bias before they begin. We must
15 increase monitoring of hate and bias incidents and
16 ensure that victims of hate crimes and bias incidents
17 have access to the support and resources that they
18 sorely need.

19 Today, we hear legislation aimed at not
20 only combating the rise in hate, but also protecting
21 those who experience it. The package of legislation
22 is as follows. Intro. 1, sponsored by Speaker Julie
23 Menin, in relation to a plan to establish security
24 perimeters at places of religious worship; Intro. 22,
25 sponsored by Majority Leader Shaun Abreu, in relation

2 to requiring Department of Education to distribute
3 materials to students about the risks of social media
4 and online hate; Intro. 165, sponsored by the Chair
5 of the Jewish Caucus and the Committee on Education,
6 Council Member Eric Dinowitz, in relation to
7 requiring the Police Department to report on the
8 status of hate crimes cases; Intro. 175, also
9 sponsored by Council Member Eric Dinowitz, in
10 relation to a plan to establish security perimeters
11 at educational facilities; Intro. 297, sponsored by
12 Council Member Virginia Maloney, in relation to
13 emergency planning for religious institutions; and
14 Intro. 327, sponsored by Council Member Mercedes
15 Narcisse, in relation to reimbursing non-public
16 schools for the cost of video surveillance cameras;
17 and lastly, Intro. 388, sponsored by Council Member
18 Lincoln Restler, in relation to establishing a
19 hotline and detailed reports on anti-Semitism and
20 other hate-based related incidents.

21 Before I pass it to my Colleagues, I do
22 have some of my more personal reflections to share. I
23 have personally experienced the devastating impact of
24 hate, sentenced for a crime that I didn't commit
25 simply because of the color of my skin. There was

2 even a call for my death. Racism is very, very real.
3 And my rights were violated, the rights of my family
4 were violated, the rights of my very community were
5 violated during this process. The hatred from my
6 unfair sentence follows me here this day and every
7 day, follows me on social media, it follows me in
8 what they call real life. This experience has shown
9 me that hate is not inherent, but is in fact taught.
10 We must confront hate in all forms, recognizing it as
11 a learned behavior. We need to work towards healing
12 by promoting love, by promoting inclusivity, and by
13 promoting understanding. The fight against racism and
14 bigotry in all forms is a responsibility we all
15 share. The fight against racism and bigotry in all
16 forms is a responsibility we all share. I look
17 forward to a thoughtful discussion surrounding these
18 issues, as well as any feedback and testimony from
19 the Administration and members of the public.

20 I now pass it to our Speaker, Speaker
21 Julie Menin.

22 SPEAKER MENIN: Thank you so much. Thank
23 you, Chair, Council Member Yusef Salaam, for your
24 incredibly powerful words, and I couldn't be prouder
25 that you are Chairing this important hearing today. I

2 know you're going to do great things to combat hate
3 all across our city.

4 So, I want to talk about and really lean
5 into what Council Member Chair Salaam said, that the
6 purpose of this Committee is to combat hate, and it
7 really is, as you point out, so aptly needed now more
8 than ever. So, today we'll be hearing seven bills.
9 These bills were born out of an act that we did the
10 first couple weeks in January. First of all, to
11 outline a plan to combat antisemitism and a plan, a
12 five-point plan to address it. But I want to be
13 incredibly clear. This package of bills is designed
14 to benefit all communities across New York City. Our
15 city's tapestry is --

16 ZOOM HOST: Recording in progress.

17 SPEAKER MENIN: Okay. Our city's tapestry
18 is woven of many religious faiths, backgrounds,
19 races, creeds, ethnicities, languages, and
20 viewpoints. Every thread is worthy of safety,
21 dignity, and expression. But where we are today as a
22 city, as a country, is undermining the humanity that
23 we all so deeply deserve.

24 I'd like to begin today's hearing by
25 grounding us in some data that is driving the need

2 for this Committee, this hearing, and this package of
3 legislation that will be outlined today. Hate crimes
4 in New York City have risen every year from 2020 to
5 2024. For the year 2024, according to the Office for
6 the Prevention of Hate Crimes, anti-Jewish bias
7 comprised the highest proportion of hate crime
8 complaints, 53 percent to be specific, making up more
9 than all other groups combined. For the year 2024,
10 anti-Muslim hate crimes experienced a terrifying 69
11 percent increase. And yet, we've heard from so many
12 community groups all across the city that as many as
13 90 percent of bias incidents and hate crimes in the
14 Muslim community go unreported. In recent years,
15 we've seen unprecedented attacks on houses of
16 worship, not only nationally, but in New York City
17 itself. Last month, congregants were harassed outside
18 their synagogues at Park East. In 2024, there were a
19 string of vandalism attacks of religious statutes in
20 Catholic churches across Staten Island. Last month,
21 74 swastikas were found at a children's playground, a
22 children's playground, in Gravesend Park, Brooklyn.
23 Last Ramadan, an imam in the Bronx was attacked and
24 nearly abducted.

2 The picture on college campuses and
3 educational facilities around the city is equally
4 grim. Judge Lipman's report on CUNY, which conducted
5 more than 200 interviews and met with over 300 people
6 over 11 months, found widespread anti-Semitism across
7 numerous CUNY campuses, as well as a reporting and
8 response system that was failing its students.
9 According to Hillel International, who tracks this
10 data, there were 1,077 anti-Semitic incidents that
11 were reported during the 2025 to 2026 academic year
12 as of February 10th, 2026. There were 2,334 anti-
13 Semitic incidents on campus tracked during the 2024-
14 2025 academic year, the most ever since tracking
15 began in 2019. And according to American Jewish
16 Committee, 35 percent of current American Jewish
17 college students and recent graduates report having
18 personally experienced anti-Semitism at least once
19 during their time on campus, with 20 percent
20 reporting that it's happened to them more than one
21 time. These numbers are sobering and they should
22 alarm all of us. And these are just a handful of the
23 examples of how some communities have been the victim
24 of hateful, threatening harassment over the last
25 several years.

2 I also want to be direct and address some
3 of the misconceptions that have been raised about
4 Intro. 1 and Intro. 175. These bills are pro-First
5 Amendment. They protect the right to exercise free
6 speech, they protect the right to freedom of
7 movement, and they protect the right to freedom of
8 religion. That means protecting churches, mosques,
9 and synagogues and all houses of worship. It means
10 protecting Catholic, Islamic, and Jewish schools.
11 Certainly, what happened at Parkview Synagogue should
12 not happen again. And those who wish to practice
13 their religions freely at mosques, at churches, at
14 synagogues, or attend classes at schools should not
15 have to navigate the obstacles of intimidation or
16 harassment in order to do so.

17 At the same time, we're not forgetting
18 that our country was built on the protections of the
19 First Amendment. Freedom of speech is truly
20 sacrosanct and it is a freedom that these bills will
21 uphold. What we will not allow people to do is abuse
22 that freedom to harass and intimidate others outside
23 of their houses of worship or their schools. In
24 conversation with the NYPD, we've made some
25 amendments to the language to give the NYPD more

2 flexibility on the size of the perimeter that they
3 deem necessary, ensuring that there is a safe
4 environment for anyone trying to enter schools and
5 houses of worship. We can all agree that safety is
6 something that should be guaranteed to all New
7 Yorkers, no matter where they pray or where they
8 study. So, when we have instances where that safety
9 is under threat, it is our responsibility to make
10 sure that the NYPD has a proper framework to respond
11 effectively and that their response is as consistent
12 and transparent as possible.

13 But the fact that those instances happen
14 in the first place is something we cannot allow to
15 occur in our city. It's why we formed this important
16 Committee to Combat Hate, because we must create an
17 inclusive environment where everyone belongs. To
18 compound our efforts in this Committee, we in the
19 City Council are investing in education, we're
20 investing in security, and we're investing in our
21 communities. Just last week, we hosted a round table
22 with Muslim leaders across the five boroughs to
23 discuss ways to combat Islamophobia. We are also at a
24 landmark moment for political representation. We have
25 the first Muslim Mayor of New York City. We have the

2 first Jewish speaker of the City Council. This is
3 truly historic. But what will write the next four
4 years into the history books is if it can serve as an
5 opportunity for all of us to come together, to unite
6 in the fight against hate and to find new ways to
7 join that fight. So, while the voices of hate are
8 loud, ours must be louder as New Yorkers, as friends,
9 as human beings. And as public officials, our
10 solutions must be robust and our actions effective.
11 That is why we're here today, because the safety of
12 our city depends on it.

13 I'm so excited to hear testimony today.
14 We thank you all so much for being here today. This
15 is how government engages with the people it serves
16 and understands how better to serve them. So let me
17 turn it back to Chair Salaam. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you, Speaker.
19 We'll now pass it to Council Member Dinowitz.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you,
21 Chair, and thank you, Speaker.

22 You know, I think the Chair said it very
23 well.

24 ZOOM HOST: Recording stopped.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Because of me?
3 What did I do?

4 SPEAKER MENIN: Don't take that
5 personally.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: You know, I
7 think a lot of us, when we ran for office, you know,
8 a lot of people were complaining about quality of
9 life, the potholes, the tree guards, the garbage, and
10 it is a little sad that we need an entire Committee
11 to Combat Hate, but this is the reality of New York
12 City right now. And if you can imagine young girls in
13 their hijabs being harassed, intimidated, or worse,
14 on the way to school. Young boys in yarmulkes, afraid
15 to wear those yarmulkes on their way to school or
16 their house of worship. Young people with a cross,
17 they want to tuck it into their shirt because people
18 are outside protesting, harassing, and intimidating
19 them and, in some cases, preventing them from
20 entering their school or house of worship. That is
21 not the New York City that I love, and that is not
22 the New York City that we know, and that is not the
23 New York City that we should have.

24 People deserve safety. People deserve
25 their rights to be protected, which includes their

2 right to religious worship. It includes their right
3 to assembly. It includes their right to free speech.
4 And with this package of legislation today, we are
5 doing that. We are moving that forward.

6 And how are we doing it? I think, to
7 reiterate what the Speaker said, there has been a lot
8 of misconception about some of this legislation,
9 about protecting houses of worship and schools. We
10 are instructing the NYPD to come up with a plan and
11 to make transparent that plan so that everyone,
12 everyone, no matter where you are on this issue, no
13 matter whether you're outside the school or inside
14 the school, can have transparency, can know what
15 they're getting from our City government. That is
16 what people deserve. People deserve a transparent
17 City government to know that their rights are
18 preserved. And that's what we are doing. By creating
19 these buffer zones and making it public, making that
20 plan public, we are preserving everyone's civil
21 liberties and enforcing and protecting people's right
22 to be and feel safe so that young girl doesn't have
23 to question whether she could go to school because
24 she's wearing a hijab, doesn't have to wonder whether
25 she'll be yelled at, harassed, intimidated. And that

2 young boy doesn't have to take the yarmulke on his
3 head just to walk into a school building. Or someone
4 doesn't have to hide their cross just because they're
5 on their way to church.

6 That is the daylight we are proposing in
7 Intros 1 and 175 for buffer zones around schools and
8 houses of worship.

9 And additionally, there's a piece of
10 legislation, Intro. 165, which is more transparency.
11 You know, when our communities are hit with a hate
12 crime, it doesn't just impact an individual person
13 that was the victim of it or an individual house of
14 worship. It impacts an entire community and the
15 reverberations are felt throughout the entire city.
16 And the NYPD right now publishes hate crime
17 statistics and they say whether or not someone was
18 arrested the type of crime that it was, the community
19 that was impacted. What they don't do is tell us what
20 happens next. Okay, someone was arrested. Where are
21 they now? Are our communities still safe? What are
22 those next steps that are being taken to keep our
23 community safe? And Intro. 165 seeks to address that
24 issue by ensuring there is more transparency. So, our
25 communities, when hit by a hate crime, which we are

2 seeing more and more of, can have that peace of mind
3 that we all deserve. So, we can not only be safe, but
4 we can feel safe.

5 I want to thank everyone for being here
6 today and, of course, thank our Speaker and our Chair
7 of the Committee to Combat Hate and turn it back over
8 to the Chair. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you, and I'll
10 now like to pass it to Council Member Restler.
11 Brilliant, thank you.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you so
13 much, Chair Salaam and Speaker Menin. And it's
14 wonderful to see so many fellow New Yorkers here with
15 us today. I'd like to thank Speaker Menin for the
16 opportunity and for inviting me to carry Intro. 388.

17 Intro. 388 will establish a hotline at
18 the New York City Commission on Human Rights for New
19 Yorkers to report incidents of hate and bias, and it
20 requires CCHR to publish reports on these incidents.
21 We have seen a profoundly troubling rise in hate
22 incidents across the city, though not all rise to the
23 level of a hate crime. I believe it is critically
24 important that we have an avenue for New Yorkers to
25 report these incidents so that we can meticulously

2 track what type of hateful incidents are occurring,
3 in which neighborhoods, and we can then better tailor
4 education and interventions for communities to
5 prevent these incidents from happening again. In
6 order for any report to be actionable, it is
7 essential that it covers the full breadth of hate
8 that New Yorkers tragically experience on a far too
9 frequent basis. We have an updated version of this
10 legislation that specifies additional categories of
11 incidents that CCHR will have to report on. The
12 report will include the following categories, anti-
13 Semitic incidents, anti-Asian incidents, anti-Muslim
14 incidents, anti-Black incidents, anti-Latino
15 incidents, and gender-motivated incidents, including
16 anti-LGBTQ incidents will be the categories, but CCHR
17 would, of course, have the discretion to report on
18 additional categories of animus as needed. We also
19 know that some individuals, especially victims of
20 hate incidents, may be reluctant to report those
21 incidents to the police or to CCHR. We will ensure
22 this hotline is able to accept reports in all
23 languages, and we'll work with CCHR to make sure the
24 communities feel safe using this valuable resource.

2 I very much appreciate the Chair and the
3 Speaker holding this hearing today on the urgent
4 topic of anti-Semitism and anti-hate more generally.
5 We must confront and reverse the alarming increase in
6 anti-Semitic incidents citywide. A couple of the
7 bills in this package have rightly received a healthy
8 amount of attention and scrutiny as the crowd here
9 underscores today. I believe it is essential that all
10 New Yorkers have safe and unimpeded access to
11 religious institutions, educational facilities,
12 abortion clinics, and other sensitive locations. I
13 look forward to the testimony today and hope we can
14 find a path forward that balances the need for safe
15 access for parishioners and students alike without
16 creating unwieldy buffer zones that could infringe on
17 our cherished right to protest. I am keen to
18 understand how this legislation, directing NYPD to
19 create plans for managing protests at houses of
20 worship and educational institutions, will be a
21 change from the status quo.

22 Thank you to the Chair, to the Speaker,
23 and for everyone who's here today. I'm very much
24 looking forward to the conversation. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. And I'd
3 just like to remind the Chamber, we need to have
4 order so the way we clap in the Chamber is this way.
5 Thank you. Appreciate it.

6 And now we will swear in the
7 Administration starting with the NYPD.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning. Thank
9 you for being here. If you could all raise your right
10 hands, please.

11 Do you swear to tell the truth and
12 nothing but the truth before this Committee today?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: I do.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: I do.

15 CHIEF-OF-STAFF RIOS-LUA: I do.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: I do.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may
18 begin.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Thank
20 you. Good morning, Speaker Menin, Chair Salaam,
21 Members of the Committee to Combat Hate, all Members
22 of City Council, Committee Staff, and members of the
23 public. It's my pleasure to join you today to testify
24 regarding the discrimination protections in the New
25 York City Human Rights Law as well as Intro. 388. I'm

2 JoAnn Kamuf Ward, Deputy Commissioner of Policy and
3 External Affairs at the New York City Commission on
4 Human Rights, and with me today for Q and A is Jose
5 Rios-Lua, the Commission's Chief-of-Staff.

6 The Commission welcomes this opportunity
7 to speak about the agency's efforts to combat
8 unlawful discrimination at work, in housing, and
9 places open to the public when that discrimination is
10 on the basis of the more than 25 protected categories
11 articulated in the City Human Rights Law. For over 50
12 years, the Commission on Human Rights has been tasked
13 with investigating and resolving complaints of
14 discrimination as well as engaging in public outreach
15 to raise awareness and prevent violations of the City
16 Human Rights Law. This is one piece of the
17 infrastructure across the city to address bias and
18 hate. The Commission is mandated to investigate,
19 prosecute, and adjudicate violations of the Human
20 Rights Law, which is a civil anti-discrimination law.
21 Under the Human Rights Law, it's illegal to
22 discriminate against individuals based on their
23 actual or perceived religion, race, gender, national
24 origin, and sexual orientation, among many other
25 protected categories. The main areas of reported

2 discrimination to the Commission are in housing, the
3 workplace, and places open to the public. Housing
4 providers, employers, and business owners are legally
5 obligated not to discriminate and are a focus of
6 CCHR's public-facing materials, training, and
7 outreach. The Law Enforcement Bureau at CCHR, also
8 known as LEB, is the part of the agency that intakes,
9 evaluates, and investigates allegations of
10 discrimination brought to the Commission by members
11 of the public. Any individual can contact LEB via our
12 live hotline, known as InfoLine, to report
13 allegations of discrimination that are within our
14 jurisdiction. Agency staff answer calls live during
15 business hours five days a week, and the vast
16 majority of claims that come to our agency are via
17 this line. Year over year, the most commonly reported
18 allegations of discrimination we receive relate to
19 disability, gender, and race, as well as voucher
20 discrimination in housing. When a member of the
21 public contacts CCHR, the agency assesses whether the
22 allegations that are reported may violate the City
23 Human Rights Law. If they do, staff can take a range
24 of actions to either intervene proactively or
25 investigate to determine whether the case should be

2 prosecuted. These actions may include sending cease
3 and desist letters, requesting information on
4 policies and practices, making document demands, and
5 interviewing witnesses. Where a caller's allegation
6 is within the jurisdiction of another City agency or
7 where an individual is seeking legal assistance, the
8 Commission can refer callers to a range of other
9 resources.

10 If an allegation is determined to be
11 within CCHR's jurisdiction and an early intervention
12 or conciliation is not appropriate or successful, the
13 Law Enforcement Bureau will investigate to determine
14 if it's more likely than not that discrimination
15 occurred. Thereafter, the Bureau may continue
16 conciliation efforts and can take the case to an
17 administrative trial. Case resolutions can include
18 requiring respondents to engage in training, as well
19 as other measures to ensure future compliance with
20 the City Human Rights Law, such as changes to policy
21 and practice, as well as award damages to individuals
22 and civil penalties to the City of New York.

23 Virtually every settlement or order from CCHR
24 requires respondents to take a training, which CCHR
25 staff provide. These are interactive and developed in

2 consultation with community groups, academic
3 institutions, and other subject matter experts.
4 Because CCHR knows there's widespread underreporting
5 of discrimination, the Commission is continually
6 assessing how to build trust and bridge the gap
7 between communities and government.

8 In addition to mandating trainings and
9 case resolutions, the agency also proactively offers
10 trainings to businesses, organizations, and
11 individuals, regardless of whether a complaint has
12 been lodged against them. These trainings include
13 cultural competency, as well as trainings that focus
14 on the rights of New Yorkers and the obligations of
15 business owners, housing providers, and employers.
16 One example of a cultural competency training that
17 CCHR has created is understanding the Jewish
18 experience and antisemitism, which promotes
19 understanding of the city's diverse Jewish
20 communities and elaborates on the Human Rights Law's
21 provisions that protect Jewish New Yorkers from
22 discrimination. Additional cultural competency
23 trainings include understanding Muslim experiences
24 and combating anti-Muslim bias, anti-Black racism,
25 race and color discrimination, protections against

2 gender identity and gender expression discrimination,
3 and national origin, citizenship, and immigration
4 status discrimination. CCHR's trainings are
5 complemented by our outreach work, which is conducted
6 with community and faith partners, some of which are
7 mentioned in my written testimony. Our annual Fiscal
8 Year '25 report highlights partnerships across
9 diverse New York neighborhoods that allow the agency
10 to engage with over 150,000 New Yorkers.

11 These initiatives and the work of the
12 Commission are just one piece of the City's broader
13 effort to prevent and respond to bias and hate. Work
14 to combat bias and hate is also core to the Office
15 for the Prevention of Hate Crimes, OPHC, which was
16 established in 2019. In Fiscal Year '25, for the
17 third year in a row, the Commission partnered with
18 OPHC to administer community project grants, where an
19 OPHC provides 10,000 dollars to grassroots efforts
20 aimed at reducing bias. Past awardees are also
21 mentioned in my written testimony.

22 Now, turning to Intro. 388, the
23 Administration supports the intent of ensuring
24 effective pathways for member of the public to report
25 actionable hate and bias and to connect with

2 resources to vindicate their rights. However, there
3 is an existing City infrastructure to address bias
4 and hate. There are pathways for the public to report
5 unlawful discrimination to CCHR, as I've described,
6 and to report hate-based violence to the NYPD, which
7 we will hear more about shortly, as well as data
8 reporting by agencies, which are all disaggregated in
9 different ways. Accordingly, the Administration looks
10 forward to learning more from stakeholders and to
11 further dialogue with the Council on how to most
12 efficiently and effectively operationalize Council's
13 objectives consistent with constitutional guardrails.

14 In closing, thank you for this
15 opportunity to discuss the ways the Commission and
16 the Mamdani Administration are working to prevent and
17 respond to bias and hate in New York City. The
18 Commission will continue working to ensure that all
19 New Yorkers receive the protections guaranteed to
20 them in the City Human Rights Law, regardless of
21 religion, gender, race, or national origin. We look
22 forward to continuing this work in collaboration with
23 sibling agencies, including the NYPD, OPHC, the
24 Mayor's Office to Combat Antisemitism, as well as

2 with the Council. We look forward to your questions.
3 Thank you.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Good morning,
5 Speaker Menin, Chair Salaam, and Members of the
6 Council's Committee to Combat Hate. My name is
7 Michael Gerber, and I'm the Deputy Commissioner of
8 Legal Matters for the NYPD. On behalf of Police
9 Commissioner Jessica Tisch, I thank you for the
10 opportunity to testify today.

11 At the outset, I want to acknowledge the
12 significance of the issues at hand. We are talking
13 about the security of New Yorkers entering sacred
14 spaces, and the protection of students walking into
15 school. We are discussing protest activity and
16 freedom of speech on the streets of our city. We are
17 addressing hate crimes and the data that informs
18 public discourse around those crimes. The stakes are
19 incredibly high, and they go to the core obligations
20 of the NYPD. Ensuring public safety, upholding
21 constitutional principles, and solving crimes are all
22 at the heart of our mission.

23 With that, I want to address several of
24 the bills before the Committee. Intro. 1 would
25 require the NYPD to issue a plan for the use of

2 buffer zones at the entrances and exits of places of
3 worship. The NYPD had significant concerns with the
4 initial language of the bill, which we raised in
5 discussions with the Council. Revised language in
6 Intro. 1-A is a product of those discussions, and we
7 greatly appreciate that dialogue and collaboration.
8 The result is a bill that is consistent with the
9 NYPD's ability to protect people entering and leaving
10 places of worship, as well as our commitment to
11 facilitating First Amendment activity. We have no
12 objections to Intro. 1-A.

13 When there is a protest outside a place
14 of worship, the NYPD has two crucial
15 responsibilities. First, we must protect individuals
16 attending that place of worship, exercising their
17 First Amendment rights through the free exercise of
18 religion and freedom of association, so that they can
19 gather safely, without danger, without obstruction,
20 and without interference. That is true when they are
21 approaching and entering the location, when they are
22 inside, and when they are leaving. Individuals who
23 impede access to a place of worship, or interfere
24 with religious services, or otherwise commit crimes

2 against individuals coming and going from a place of
3 worship are subject to arrest.

4 Second, the NYPD must protect the First
5 Amendment rights of protesters. This does not mean
6 the protesters can go wherever they want, whenever
7 they want. Under the law, there can be reasonable
8 time, place, and manner restrictions on a protest,
9 though the restrictions cannot depend on the
10 protester's message, and the restrictions cannot
11 limit substantially more speech than necessary.
12 Critically, any such restriction must allow for ample
13 alternative channels of communication for the
14 protesters to convey their message to their intended
15 audience. This means that protesters have a right to
16 sight and sound, that is, to be seen and heard by
17 those that they are protesting against.

18 These two core principles are not in
19 tension. If individuals choose to protest against
20 those entering a place of worship, the NYPD will
21 ensure that they have sight and sound to the entrance
22 of that location, consistent with the First
23 Amendment. At the same time, the protesters will not
24 be permitted to obstruct, impede, or interfere. I
25 want to acknowledge that in this framework, people

2 attending a place of worship may hear vicious speech
3 directed at the very core of their identity. They may
4 see signs or banners that are brimming with hate. It
5 goes without saying that this can be gut-wrenching,
6 infuriating, and deeply disturbing, particularly when
7 this is happening outside a community's spiritual
8 home. Nothing that I say should be taken in any way
9 to minimize that pain. But the First Amendment
10 protects the rights of protesters, even when their
11 speech is hateful. And the NYPD is obligated to
12 ensure the rights of protesters without regard to the
13 content of protected speech.

14 When there is a protest outside a place
15 of worship, the NYPD implements these two principles
16 in a number of ways. We create frozen zones, also
17 known as buffer zones, as necessary outside entrances
18 and exits to a place of worship where no one can
19 enter except those going into or out of the location.
20 The frozen zone needs to incorporate clear pathways
21 in and out so that those approaching or leaving the
22 building are not obstructed. At the same time, we set
23 up a space for protesters within sight and sound of
24 the location. In these situations, the determinations
25 that need to be made by the NYPD are extremely

2 context-specific. NYPD executives draw on their
3 experience and expertise and use their discretion,
4 consistent with the law, to determine the size and
5 contours of a frozen zone, the space designated for
6 sight and sound, and more broadly, how we can
7 effectively secure space around a place of worship
8 without abridging the exercise of protesters'
9 constitutional rights. These determinations depend on
10 numerous factors, including the physical
11 configuration of the place of worship, the physical
12 layout of the surrounding space, other sensitive
13 locations in close proximity to the place of worship,
14 the anticipated volume of individuals coming in and
15 out of the location, the time of day, the size of the
16 protest, whether protesters are stationary or
17 marching, whether there are counter-protesters, what
18 other events may be occurring nearby and how that may
19 affect pedestrian or vehicular traffic, and whether
20 there are any specific and credible threats against
21 that place of worship. The list of relevant
22 considerations goes on and on. These operational
23 decisions cannot be reduced by strict bright-line
24 rules. To do this right, the NYPD needs to be able to
25 make decisions based on the facts on the ground. This

2 practical reality aligns with the law. The legal
3 touchstone here is reasonableness, and what is
4 reasonable turns on the particular circumstances at
5 hand.

6 Intro. 1-A will require the NYPD to issue
7 a formal policy memorializing the considerations that
8 go into our operational planning. We stand ready to
9 formulate such a policy. To be clear, the policy will
10 not alter our practices, but rather will articulate
11 and describe what we are already doing. The NYPD is
12 proud of the way that our officers respond to
13 protests in this city at a variety of sensitive
14 locations, including places of worship. Are we
15 perfect? No, we are not. But day in and day out, the
16 men and women of the NYPD are doing this work, this
17 challenging work, with professionalism and care, in
18 fidelity to the law, and our obligation to keep
19 people safe. We will continue to do exactly that.

20 Intro. 175 is effectively identical to
21 Intro. 1, except that it applies to schools rather
22 than places of worship. The ability to enter and exit
23 school safely without harm or interference is non-
24 negotiable. We also must allow protesters to exercise
25 their First Amendment rights outside of schools. The

2 NYPD exercises its discretion, consistent with the
3 law, to accomplish both of these objectives. We
4 raised concerns with the Council regarding the
5 language of Intro. 175, and there is new language in
6 Intro. 175-A that addresses most of those concerns.
7 Again, we appreciate the Council's partnership in
8 crafting this legislation. One outstanding issue is
9 the scope of Intro. 175-A. As drafted, the bill would
10 apply to police activity on both public property and
11 private property, which raises concerns. These are
12 distinct issues, both legally and operationally, and
13 we look forward to addressing that distinction in
14 discussions with the Council.

15 Intro. 165 would require the NYPD to
16 report quarterly and annually regarding the
17 prosecutorial outcomes, bail determinations, and
18 ultimate court dispositions in every case in which
19 someone has been arrested or indicted for a hate
20 crime. The NYPD supports transparency regarding the
21 disposition of cases following hate crime arrests,
22 but that is not data that the NYPD maintains. While
23 we document individual case evidence, and police
24 outcomes, the aggregate data that this bill seeks is
25 maintained by prosecutor's offices and by the Office

2 of Court Administration. The Council should not
3 direct the NYPD to report data that it does not have.
4 We would also note that the NYPD already discloses a
5 wide array of information regarding hate crimes or
6 cases. The NYPD reports aggregate data regarding hate
7 crime complaints and hate crime arrests, the race,
8 sex, and age of individuals arrested for hate crimes,
9 and the types of animus that motivated those hate
10 crimes. This data is reported quarterly and annually,
11 both in total, and is aggregated by precinct. All
12 this information is available to the public on NYCD
13 Open Data and the NYPD's website.

14 Intro. 297 would require an agency or
15 office designated by the Mayor in consultation with
16 the NYPD and OEM to provide related institutions with
17 support in establishing and maintaining security
18 plans. The NYPD already makes this support available
19 and will continue to do so. We would welcome the
20 opportunity to speak with the Council about the
21 resources that the NYPD provides and how they can be
22 enhanced. At the same time, we strongly object to
23 requiring another City agency, whether OEM or
24 otherwise, to provide guidance on these issues. The
25 NYPD has the appropriate expertise and experience in

2 these matters. Other City agencies do not. Having a
3 City agency offer guidance on security plans that may
4 conflict with the guidance from the NYPD is a recipe
5 for confusion. It will not enhance security and risks
6 undermining security. The NYPD is opposed to this
7 bill as drafted.

8 Thank you for the opportunity to speak
9 with you today, and I look forward to answering any
10 questions that you may have.

11 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you as well.

12 And I'd just like to note for the record
13 that we've been joined by Council Members Krishnan,
14 Hankerson, Mealy, Schulman, Won, Stevens, Dinowitz,
15 Vernikov, Nurse, Santosuosso, I hope I pronounced it
16 correct, Hanif, Avilés, and did I miss anyone?

17 Okay. And I'll pass it to Speaker Julie
18 Menin.

19 SPEAKER MENIN: Great. Thank you so much
20 for your testimony today.

21 So, a couple questions, starting with the
22 NYPD. How many protests have occurred near houses of
23 worship since 2021 that has required the agency to
24 establish a perimeter or other police presence due to
25 concerns about any security?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: All right.

3 So, we don't track the data that way. We obviously
4 have data on demonstrations in New York City, and we
5 track that quite closely on a daily basis. We have
6 rough data, I would say, on protests or
7 demonstrations outside houses of worship. What I want
8 to emphasize, though, is that that data, it's not
9 like there's a form that's being reviewed and signed
10 off on. It's operations tracking this in sort of a
11 rough way. It's not the kind of data that I'd be
12 prepared to say, oh, this is precise and exact. We
13 certainly do not have data where we're talking about
14 frozen zones. And I think what's actually really
15 important to emphasize in answer to that question is
16 we don't think about this sort of in these sort of
17 totally binary terms. You know, this is a protest,
18 and this would be a frozen zone protest, and this is
19 a protest, and it's not a frozen zone protest. These
20 situations, they are case by case. They are, by their
21 nature, dynamic. There are decisions that need to be
22 made in real time. And so, you know, it's not the
23 kind of thing that really necessarily, that lends
24 itself to sort of tracking in that way, because these
25 are fluid, dynamic situations.

2 SPEAKER MENIN: Okay. And can you
3 describe the typical characteristics of protest
4 activities that you tend to see around houses of
5 worship and educational institutions? And are there
6 differences?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: I'm not sure
8 I would say there are like fundamental differences. I
9 guess I would say this. We have so many protests
10 every day in New York City, right? We probably have,
11 on average, maybe 10 protests a day across the city,
12 on average, 10 to 11, I'd say, and I would say about
13 protest activity generally, you've got this
14 incredibly wide range, right? We talk about protests,
15 but that means such a wide range of things. That can
16 mean, you know, five people across the street holding
17 up signs, just standing there for an hour, and that
18 can mean 500 people marching and, you know, saying
19 all sorts of things. So, it's an incredibly wide
20 range. I think you see that in every context. In
21 other words, whether it's educational facilities or
22 places of worship or government buildings or any
23 other institution, sometimes it's commercial
24 establishments, I think we see the full range of
25 activity, ranging from small, non-disruptive protest

2 activity to situations that obviously are a lot more
3 complicated in their size and scope and their effect.

4 SPEAKER MENIN: So, I know, Mike, we've
5 described a wide range of different kinds of protest
6 activities. So, then what would trigger the NYPD to
7 set up a perimeter? What is your test then to say,
8 okay, this is a protest where we're going to
9 establish a perimeter?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Right. So,
11 there's not like a test, right? It's not some formula
12 that we can just say. We are very sensitive, right,
13 to all the factors that are at play in a given
14 situation, and I went through some of them before,
15 but there are more. I mean, certainly in a situation
16 where we, let's say if it's any kind of sensitive
17 location and we want to make sure that people can go
18 in and out in a secure way, we're going to do some
19 sort of frozen zone at the entrance, right. You know,
20 we're not going to have a situation where that space
21 at the entrance to a house of worship or a school or
22 a hospital or a government building, or maybe a
23 sensitive location where, you know, protesters can
24 just block that, right? That we cannot have.

25 Consistent with public safety, consistent with public

2 order. You know, the size of that frozen zone and how
3 we set it up and how we configure it and when we put
4 it in place and when we take it down, that's going to
5 be incredibly context-specific and does not lend
6 itself to a bright-line test or rule. But I can say
7 that in any sort of sensitive location, if we're
8 going to have a protest of any size and we have
9 reason to be concerned about the ability of people to
10 get in and out, the way this is set up, as I said in
11 my testimony, frozen zone at entrances and exits to
12 make sure we're not going to have obstruction and
13 then also spaces for protesters so they have sight
14 and sound.

15 SPEAKER MENIN: And then how does NYPD
16 determine the exact size of the perimeter?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Right. So,
18 again, it's going to depend on many, many factors.
19 The core question is, how do we ensure that people
20 can go in and out without obstruction? And a lot of
21 that turns on just the physical configuration, right?
22 Like, what does a space look like? How are people
23 coming and going? And it's going to be a case-by-case
24 determination. You know, obviously when we're
25 planning in advance, NYPD executives are looking at

2 this. We're literally looking typically at a map or
3 otherwise of the location, of the space, of the
4 relevant streets. Okay, we could do the frozen zone
5 here, we could do the frozen zone there. Sometimes,
6 this is playing out in real time, we don't have the
7 ability to plan in advance, and then typically it'll
8 be the incident commander, the highest ranking
9 uniform executive on scene in consultation with other
10 executives. I will say that Legal plays an important
11 role in this. Whether it's planning in advance or on
12 scene, having lawyers involved in this process is
13 crucial to make sure we're not violating First
14 Amendment rights. But if you look at the frozen zone
15 that we configure, the configuration, it's not some
16 set thing. It's going to vary case-by-case, depending
17 on all the circumstances and more that I was
18 articulating before.

19 SPEAKER MENIN: And in terms of what
20 happened at Park East Synagogue, what did the NYPD do
21 after that incident to prevent that from happening
22 again?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Yes. So,
24 first, let me just say, we got that one wrong, we
25 did. And the Police Commissioner, as you know,

2 apologized for that, and that was human error. No
3 more, no less. That wasn't about an issue in the law,
4 it was an issue about how we approach these things.
5 We're not perfect. Individuals made mistakes. As a
6 result, we didn't have the appropriate frozen zone at
7 the entrance, and that led to a situation that should
8 not have happened. What we did after that was, on
9 several occasions, myself and other executives in the
10 Department spoke with all executives, all uniform
11 executives, to walk them through really what I was
12 talking about in my testimony, right? That sight and
13 sound is critical. The first element pieces are
14 critical. Making sure people can go in and out safely
15 is critical. And talking about how we think about
16 these frozen zones, how we approach it, the need for
17 frozen zones in these sorts of situations. We were
18 very clear, very clear, with all executives in the
19 department, that what happened at Park East was a
20 mistake. It really can't happen again. It cannot
21 happen again. And we walked everyone through how to
22 do this the right way.

23 SPEAKER MENIN: And in terms of the
24 balance between establishing the perimeter,
25 protecting the First Amendment rights to peacefully

2 protest, so I know you say that is a case-by-case
3 basis. So, what would you say then, how is that
4 balance achieved?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Yeah. As I
6 was saying before, these two things are not in
7 tension if they're done the right way, right? I know
8 you said balance, but I guess I would resist using
9 the word balance exactly because these are both two
10 things that are critical, right, and we're not
11 trading off the two things. And I think it's
12 important, right? We're not trading off First
13 Amendment rights against security or vice versa. We
14 are fully committed to those two things. We need to
15 ensure fully those two things, and we can do that.
16 And I think, as I was saying before, sight and sound
17 is a really, really, really important concept in the
18 law and how we think about things. And when we're
19 talking, giving guidance to executives, that's a
20 really crucial element. It's not the only element. I
21 don't want to reduce it to just that, but it is an
22 incredibly valuable shorthand for executives in
23 thinking about these situations, particularly
24 sometimes, right? We have protests we didn't know
25 about in advance. We're dealing with this in real

2 time. It's very, very challenging. When officers are
3 arriving on the scene, the protest is already
4 happening. We didn't have the time to prepare. We
5 don't necessarily have the resources we would
6 otherwise have on scene. It's very, very hard. And
7 thinking about how to handle that, obviously there's
8 the safety and security piece, of course. And the
9 question is, okay, well, the protesters can't be over
10 here. They're blocking an entrance. Okay, where can
11 they go? And again, the shorthand of sight and sound
12 is really valuable. Protesters need to be able to be
13 seen and heard by the people they are protesting
14 against. That's the law. It also, I think, aligns
15 with common sense about the nature of a protest. And
16 in my experience, our experience, time and again, we
17 can do both things. Provide security. No one's
18 obstructing. No one's impeding. But protesters have
19 sight and sound to the entrance.

20 SPEAKER MENIN: Okay.

21 A couple questions for CCHR, and I know a
22 lot of Colleagues have questions, so I'm just going
23 to go right to CCHR on this. You mentioned cultural
24 competency trainings, including on the Jewish
25 experience and antisemitism. Are these trainings

2 created in-house or through an outside organization?
3 And if the latter, which organization?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Yeah. So,
5 great question. They are created in-house in
6 consultation with academic partners and community
7 groups. It is training-specific. So, antisemitism and
8 understanding Jewish experiences was created with the
9 Wagner College Holocaust Center. The training that we
10 have on Muslim bias and understanding Muslim
11 experiences was created with a center at NYU Law
12 School. And we have a bystander intervention training
13 as well that was created with a community group that
14 does bystander intervention work.

15 SPEAKER MENIN: And have many people taken
16 this training based on the Jewish experience, and are
17 they mostly City employees, and has every agency
18 taken this training?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: So, great
20 questions. I can say not every City agency has taken
21 this training. City agencies have taken this
22 training. We offer the training free of charge. We
23 have done it on several college campuses. Maybe
24 that's not surprising. We've done it in private
25 institutions. We have the numbers, which I can share

2 in a moment with you. But they are widely available,
3 and we work very hard to get the word out on these
4 trainings. This training itself was actually
5 recognized in the Biden Administration's National
6 Anti-Semitism Strategy as a best practice for state
7 and local governments. And I would say maybe just two
8 more things on this space. I mentioned in my
9 testimony, the Mayor's Office to Combat Anti-
10 Semitism, who we expect to be a partner in both
11 refining and sharing this training with members of
12 the public moving forward.

13 SPEAKER MENIN: Has the City Department of
14 Health taken the training?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: I believe
16 that parts of the City Department of Health have
17 taken the training, but I would have to confirm with
18 our trainings data and circle back to you on the
19 specific question.

20 SPEAKER MENIN: Yeah. If you could get
21 back to us, if the City Department of Health has
22 taken the training, and which and how many City
23 employees have taken that training from the
24 Department of Health, definitely want to know that
25 data.

2 Are all CCHR employees required?

3 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: I will
4 say one thing, just that my colleague is reminding
5 me, that all City EEO officers have taken both the
6 Understanding Jewish Experiences and Understanding
7 Muslim Experiences training. I'm sorry to cut you
8 off.

9 SPEAKER MENIN: Are all CCHR employees
10 required to take these trainings?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: All CCHR
12 employees take these trainings internally, yes.

13 SPEAKER MENIN: Okay. Thank you. Okay. I
14 have more questions, but I know many Colleagues have
15 questions, so I'm going to turn it back over to the
16 Chair.

17 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you, Speaker.

18 I'd like to note that we've also been
19 joined by Council Member Sanchez, Council Member
20 Cabán, and Council Member Abreu on Zoom, and in the
21 Chambers by Hudson, Lee, and Ung.

22 I'd like to start by asking some
23 questions to the NYPD. So, there's several sections
24 of the Patrol Guide that do not currently appear to
25 be public. These include Procedures Number 213-11,

2 Policing Special Events, Crowd Control, 213-15,
3 Duties and Responsibilities as Special Events, and
4 213-20, Response to First Amendment Activities,
5 Procedure 213-21, Tiered Approach to Policing First
6 Amendment Activities. Can you please describe why
7 these or other sections may not be made public,
8 either temporarily or permanently?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Sure. So,
10 other than 21, I thought they were public. We'll have
11 to check on that. I was under the impression that
12 they were. And 21, actually in preparing for this
13 hearing, noticed that it was not, and we're going to
14 address that. So, with regard to Patrol Guide
15 procedures like this, we are sensitive about making
16 public sort of operational procedures. For obvious
17 reasons, certain operational matters should not be
18 disclosed publicly. That said, our general approach
19 to how we do this, we need to be transparent about
20 that. We want to be transparent about that. So,
21 Chair, we'll look at that. Again, I thought those
22 other procedures were public already so we'll look at
23 that. And then 21, 21 is actually implementing the
24 protest settlement. It tracks, in a variety of ways,
25 the protest settlement terms, which of course are

2 public so we will look at making disclosures there.
3 We do want to review it, just for any particular
4 operational issues, operational pieces that should
5 not be disclosed. But I think we can respond to that
6 going forward.

7 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Can you please
8 explain how the Payne settlement has impacted these
9 sections?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Right. So,
11 that section 21 that you referenced really is
12 tracking and implementing the protest settlement. As
13 part of that settlement, in phase one of that
14 settlement, we overhauled our trainings. We
15 overhauled our policies and created new trainings in
16 light of those policies. I should say that the
17 changes to those policies, which again, align with
18 the protest settlement, were part of a process with
19 plaintiff's counsel in that case, and so plaintiff's
20 counsel and various public advocacy organizations
21 that are part of that case reviewed the policy
22 changes. We had back and forth about the policy
23 changes. So, it was a very dynamic process with
24 plaintiff's counsel in that case until we sort of
25 came to the final new revised policies.

2 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: And have any of these
3 sections been affected by or will be affected by the
4 review order by former Mayor Eric Adams, which was
5 removed by current Mayor Mamdani in Executive Order
6 Number 2 of this year? And are any of these other
7 sections of the Patrol Guide that were affected or
8 that you anticipate being affected by this review?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So, with
10 regard to Executive Order 2, I think, I'm not sure
11 I'm answering the right question, there was an
12 executive order under Mayor Adams directing the NYPD
13 to review policies and practices and the law in
14 connection with protests outside places of worship.
15 There was then an executive order under Mayor Mamdani
16 essentially reissuing that with some changes in the
17 language, but sort of calling upon directing NYPD and
18 the Law Department to essentially conduct that
19 review, which we are doing. We are very engaged on
20 that at the NYPD, at the Law Department. Obviously,
21 the new Corporation Counsel was just confirmed, and
22 we are very much in dialogue with him on these issues
23 and looking at this. So, that process is ongoing. I
24 think it would be premature to say what the product
25

2 of that process will be, but we are very much looking
3 at that.

4 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Can you please
5 elaborate on how the NYPD works with different
6 communities in a preventative response and even
7 restorative manner as applicable? And please
8 particularly note if you work with the Office for the
9 Prevention of Hate Crimes, the Mayor's Office to
10 Combat Antisemitism, and any other interfaith network
11 or community groups. And can you tell us more about
12 how the NYPD works with the communities and community
13 organizations representing groups that are affected
14 by larger numbers, particularly severe hate crimes?
15 For example, we know that anti-trans crimes are one
16 category that are more likely to be violent and that
17 poverty damage is particularly common for antisemitic
18 acts.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So, I'm going
20 to ask Chief Arias, one of the senior executives in
21 the Detective Bureau, to address these questions. And
22 Chief Arias oversees numerous components of the
23 Detective Bureau, but one of them actually is the
24 Hate Crimes Task Force, so he's going to speak to
25 this.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning. Do you
3 swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing
4 but the truth before this Committee?

5 ASSISTANT CHIEF ARIAS: Yes, I do.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may
7 begin.

8 ASSISTANT CHIEF ARIAS: Thank you very
9 much, Council Member, for your question.

10 The NYPD's Hate Crimes Task Force
11 investigates all incidents of possible bias as they
12 occur. And, over the course of investigation, the
13 commanding officer and his command staff is tasked
14 with maintaining relations with victims and with
15 stakeholders, whether non-governmental organizations,
16 non-profits, or local community members. Over the
17 course of the active investigations, very often they
18 work with the local precinct commander or the
19 executive officer and/or the community affairs
20 liaison in each respective precinct to maintain some
21 relationship with affected groups. Although this does
22 not occur in every crime, it occurs holistically
23 across the course of the calendar year or the
24 operational period. Since the most recent commanding
25 officer of the Hate Crime Task Force has been

2 assigned, which is dating to November of 2025, that
3 commanding officer has met with religious groups,
4 NGOs and civic organizations, non-profits, and
5 government entities. The CEO of the Hate Crime Task
6 Force also maintains liaison with the Hate Crime
7 Review Panel who oversees and acts as a litmus test
8 for active investigations and closed investigations
9 on a monthly basis.

10 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. Does the
11 NYPD have any particular relationship or other
12 community outreach protocols for K-12 schools and
13 higher education institutes? And if so, please
14 describe them.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So, if you're
16 talking about public schools, obviously we have an
17 entire School Safety Division that among many things
18 does that work. In terms of private schools, private
19 institutions, that is part of the job of a commanding
20 officer in a precinct. That is part of the job of
21 community affairs officers in a precinct. The CEO,
22 the community affairs officers, they're responsible
23 for those relationships, reaching out, communicating
24 with school leadership and leaders of other
25 institutions, being reachable and available for

2 feedback, open lines of communication. That's one of
3 the core responsibilities of a CEO, and that's CEO's
4 team.

5 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

6 I'd like to note for the record that
7 we've also been joined by Council Member Maloney, and
8 I am going to pass it to Council Member Abreu to make
9 his statement on his bill.

10 Council Member Abreu, we're trying to
11 unmute you. Just give us a second.

12 All right. We've got some technical
13 difficulties on the Zoom. I'm going to ask just one
14 or two more questions and then come back.

15 Apart from protests or rallies, what
16 other security-related events might affect schools or
17 universities? And please describe the range of
18 incidents for which the NYPD provides advance or
19 preventative support. For example, police presence
20 during high-profile events, in the event of threats,
21 etc.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: If we're
23 talking about police presence outside a school, for
24 example, but I think it's what you're asking about.
25 Obviously, officers going on a private property is a

2 different issue, which, of course, happens, but
3 putting that to the side. In terms of policing
4 outside a school or an institution in connection with
5 some event, it's an incredibly wide range. It could
6 be there's going to be some, let's say a high-level
7 government official is going to be there, and there
8 are security concerns. There's some just major event,
9 and we're worried about crowd control, right? There
10 could be security concerns, there are crowd control
11 concerns. Again, that's separate from protests,
12 right? Sometimes you just have large gatherings, for
13 whatever reason. You could have some, if you have
14 some large graduation, for example, and just a
15 question about people on the sidewalks and getting
16 around and crowd control. That's the kind of thing,
17 again, that the local CO is in dialogue, or the
18 community affairs officers are in dialogue with an
19 institution. They hear, hey, there's going to be this
20 big event happening. We're having this graduation,
21 there'll be a ton of people. We're concerned about
22 congestion outside the school or movement outside the
23 building. That's the kind of thing where sometimes a
24 police presence is going to be valuable to facilitate
25 just people's movement in and out. And again, then

2 there's sometimes situations where, hey, for whatever
3 reason, we have a security concern, and then we're
4 going to address that on a case-by-case basis.

5 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Please share the
6 numbers and trends regarding hate crimes and bias
7 incidents for each reported bias motivation in the
8 year since 2021.

9 ASSISTANT CHIEF ARIAS: Council Member,
10 thank you for your question. Since 2021, we've seen a
11 steady increase of 551 to 646 to 671 to 665, so a
12 small diminishment, to 565 in 2025. Currently, year-
13 to-date, we have 94 in 2026.

14 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

15 I believe we got the technical issues
16 worked out, so Council Member Abreu.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: Hello, hello. Thank
18 you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Madam Speaker.

19 I want to briefly express my support for
20 this package of bills aimed at combating hate in all
21 of its forms. At a moment when too many New Yorkers
22 are feeling targeted or unsafe, it's critical that we
23 respond with clear action and a united front. These
24 pieces of legislation send an important message that
25 hate, bias, and intimidation will not be tolerated in

2 our city. I'm proud to stand with my colleagues,
3 proud to stand with my speaker in supporting this
4 package and advancing protections for all of our
5 communities.

6 Thank you again, Mr. Chair. I'll send it
7 back.

8 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

9 And Council Member Abreu, if you have any
10 questions, you may ask.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: Yeah. My question
12 for the Administration is just want to make sure,
13 state for the record, there are no legal objections
14 that the Department has with Introduction 1 and
15 Introduction 175, is that correct?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So, as I
17 said, with regard to the language of 1-A, we had
18 concerns before, and again, in dialogue with the
19 Council, those concerns were addressed. We do not
20 have concerns about the language in 1-A.

21 With regard to...

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: 175 is public and
23 private, right? I remember you saying in your
24 testimony.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Yeah. So, the
3 concern there, which my hope is that we can work with
4 the Council on that, is I think 175-A seems to
5 contemplate a plan that includes policing, not only
6 on the sidewalks or streets outside of schools and on
7 public property, but also seems to contemplate that
8 the plan would include policing on private property.
9 Obviously, there are situations where the NYPD is
10 taking action on private property, of course, but I
11 think that that really raises a different set of
12 issues, different set of concerns, legally and
13 operationally, and so I think we would want to work
14 with the Council to have that language about the plan
15 including policing in private space taken out of the
16 bill.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: All right. Thank
18 you so much, Mr. Chair. I have no further questions.

19 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

20 I'm now going to pass it to Lynn
21 Schulman.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Thank you,
23 Chair. So, as it turns out, two years ago today,
24 Speaker Menin, myself, Council Member Dinowitz, and
25 other Colleagues were in Israel to witness firsthand

2 the devastation of what happened on October 7th.

3 Since then, hate, especially anti-Semitism, has risen
4 exponentially, and it's very apropos that we're
5 having this particular hearing on this day. That is
6 why this package of bills before us today is so
7 important. So, I have some questions for the NYPD.

8 First, when, and I want to give a shout
9 out to Commissioner Tisch, because one of the things
10 that I really like about her is the accountability
11 that she has for all of the NYPD. So, a couple of
12 questions. One is when Speaker Menin talked about the
13 perimeters and who makes that decision, does that
14 come from 1 Police Plaza? Does that come on the local
15 level? Is there a combination of?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Right. So,
17 there certainly are situations where we know about a
18 protest in advance. We appreciate in advance that
19 it's going to raise these sorts of issues, right, at
20 a place of worship or otherwise. And then, in my
21 experience, executives at 1 Police Plaza are planning
22 how we're going to handle that and what it's going to
23 look like in terms of both frozen zones and sight and
24 sound, and more broadly, right, in terms of what are
25 the appropriate resources and who's going to be the

2 incident commander, that sort of thing. So that's one
3 situation. I can't say that happens, it does not
4 happen in connection with every protest in the city,
5 or even most protests in the city. We have 10 plus
6 protests a day. So, sometimes it's 1 Police Plaza.
7 There certainly are times, even for planned protests,
8 where, ones we know about in advance, where you have
9 the incident commander on scene making those
10 determinations. And again, I do want to emphasize
11 that sometimes where we have protests where we just
12 didn't know about them in advance and we're
13 responding in real time, again, the incident
14 commander is going to have to make decisions, again,
15 sometimes with also very limited resources on hand
16 initially, at least. But yeah, so it's sometimes 1
17 Police Plaza and sometimes it's going to be the
18 incident commander on scene in real time.

19 I do want to emphasize also, I think this
20 is important, even when we have a plan in advance and
21 senior department executives have reviewed that plan,
22 and approved the plan, that sort of thing, it is
23 critical that incident commanders have discretion.
24 It's really, really important. Because as I was
25 saying before, the facts change, right? We thought it

2 was going to be this, it turns out to be that. We
3 thought the size was going to be this, we thought
4 that. We thought they were going to be stationary,
5 the protesters. Turned out the protesters are
6 marching. And so incident commanders, constrained by
7 the law, of course, and constrained by Department
8 policy, do have discretion.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: So, what I want
10 to ask also, when hatred turns up in some of our
11 schools, is that the DOE that's supposed to
12 coordinate with the electeds or the NYPD, or how does
13 that work? Does it get reported to the NYPD? Because
14 there have been instances, particularly in my
15 District, where there's a little bit of
16 miscommunication there.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Well,
18 certainly, if we're talking about criminal conduct.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Well, swastikas
20 on a desk.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Right. That
22 should be reported to the NYPD. If swastikas are
23 being drawn, or otherwise, on City property, that is
24 criminal conduct, and that should be reported to the
25 NYPD. Obviously, what's going on in schools does

2 present particular sensitivities. If we're talking
3 about particularly young people, I want to be very
4 clear, I'm not suggesting that we're going to handle
5 that the same way we would handle it with an adult.
6 But yes, if there's a swastika on any City property,
7 including City property in schools, that needs to be
8 reported to the NYPD.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Because I know
10 commanding officers, they change around every so
11 often and all of that, so do they get training? Do
12 commanding officers get training in hate crimes when
13 they come to the precinct?

14 ASSISTANT CHIEF ARIAS: As part of their
15 promotional process from the rank of lieutenant to
16 captain, they receive that training in the leadership
17 training school from the Hate Crime Task Force.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay. And then
19 my last question is, is hate crimes covered in the
20 CompStat meetings with the commanding officers?

21 ASSISTANT CHIEF ARIAS: As any case
22 through the investigative process, like special
23 victims or central robbery, if it is applicable, it
24 will be pulled and discussed at a CompStat meeting.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: I mean, I think
3 that it should be just a category, like there are
4 categories of other crimes that you should look at it
5 on a precinct-by-precinct basis.

6 ASSISTANT CHIEF ARIAS: Correct, and it
7 is, and it's analyzed and broken down granularly,
8 both on the CompStat sheet and over the course of the
9 citywide CompStat sheet.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So, Council
11 Member Schulman, just to be clear, because I think we
12 may have misunderstood the question with regard to
13 CompStat. There are two things. There's the CompStat
14 book, the data, right? And to your point, yes, hate
15 crime, hate crime data is broken out as part of that
16 CompStat book because it is so important. Separately,
17 what the Chief was saying is, there also are times
18 when you're having a CompStat meeting and the
19 leadership of the Department is talking about
20 particular cases. Hey, what's happening with this?
21 What's happening with that? Sometimes, those are hate
22 crimes cases.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Oh, I'm sorry.

24 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: No. I was going to
25 move to the..

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Can I just ask
3 just one more question?

4 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Sure.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Thank you. So,
6 it's actually a comment.

7 So, commanding officers have differing
8 opinions, and I've spoken to a number of them, about
9 whether or not something rises to the level of they
10 report it to the Hate Crimes Unit so that's something
11 you guys should take a look at. That's all.

12 Okay, thank you. Thank you very much,
13 Chair. I appreciate the accommodation.

14 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: You're welcome.

15 And we're going to move online to the
16 Members of the Assembly, starting with Jeffrey
17 Dinowitz.

18 We'll move to Assembly Member Lasher.

19 And now, we'll move to Assembly Member
20 Weprin.

21 We're going to move to Darlene Mealy.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I want to thank the
23 Speaker for having this important meeting, because no
24 one should be able to hate.

2 And one thing I wanted to ask the
3 Commissioner, I wish she was here, because that would
4 have been a great thing, and I want to thank you for
5 even apologizing, saying that something did happen
6 wrong at that church. And I want to thank the
7 Speaker, what she said. If people feel that was okay,
8 our voices should be louder. I feel church is sacred,
9 and if you denigrate a church, what is this world
10 coming to? So, I just want to thank this Body for
11 having these legislations. I don't feel that we
12 should have to legislate this, but our spiritual
13 well-being is at stake, so that we have to get the
14 police involved.

15 I wanted to ask you, if there's a
16 situation which the NYPD deemed was a hateful protest
17 happening outside of a house of worship, what typical
18 distance from the house of worship would the NYPD
19 impose on that situation?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So, a few
21 points. First, this is very important, it's not about
22 the content of the speech itself. It can't be, it
23 can't be. We can and do, consistent with the law,
24 impose time, place, and manner restrictions for
25 safety reasons and security reasons, but it cannot

2 turn on the content of the speech. So, the fact that
3 the speech is hateful in and of itself cannot affect
4 that analysis as a legal matter.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I was speaking what
6 distance?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Right, right.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Could you explain
9 that, because I don't have that much time.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Sure. So, the
11 way we do it, we're not setting in advance some
12 particular distance, right, it's really important to
13 emphasize this. We're not taking some tape measure
14 and saying it's going to be X feet or Y feet.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Why would you not?
16 When we do New York elections, we have to stay 100
17 feet away from the polling site, so why can't you
18 have something 200 feet from houses of worship? So,
19 could you explain that to me?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Sure, sure.
21 So, there are a few pieces of that. So, first..

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Quickly, please.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Yeah. No, I
24 understand. I'll do my best, but it's an important
25 question. There are a few things baked in.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Yes.

3 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So, first of
4 all, the test is reasonableness, and in any situation
5 in which a PD were to say in advance, oh, we're going
6 to have some bright-line rule for the number of feet,
7 it's really going to run into legal issues. It is,
8 because it has to be case specific, context specific
9 to avoid legal problems. That's one thing.

10 Second, if I may, the electioneering
11 issue is a very different issue for (TIMER CHIME) a
12 number of reasons. And if I may continue. So, first
13 of all, I think it's important to emphasize, the
14 electioneering law does not create anything that
15 looks remotely like a frozen zone or a buffer zone.
16 It's not. In fact, you can be within 100 feet of a
17 polling site and engage in first amendment activity.
18 You can't engage in electioneering. You can't tout a
19 particular candidate or a particular party.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: No matter what,
21 it's 100 feet, and everyone, the NYPD, some people
22 came closer, they was in front of it. I have to go
23 inside and tell the NYPD inside the polling site,
24 come outside and make sure they're 100 feet. They

2 will come out with a measuring tape. So, I'm saying,
3 why not the house of worship? We have to do this.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: The Supreme
5 Court, in talking about these electioneering laws, in
6 a case called Burson, actually distinguished the
7 electioneering situation from other situations. If
8 you read the case, I mean, any fair reading of that
9 case says that they were carving out a special rule
10 for polling sites because of various considerations
11 in terms of the history of those electioneering
12 restrictions and particular concerns about voter
13 intimidation and fraud.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: It's the same thing
15 as houses of worship.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: But the way
17 that the Supreme Court has structured this, they
18 really have distinguished between polling sites and
19 carved out a special rule for polling sites that is
20 not generally applicable to other types of locations.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: May I have one more
22 question? Because I still feel that should be
23 implemented. If the State can do it, we should be
24 able to do it with the NYPD to make sure everyone is
25 safe. I don't know about anyone. I'm Christian, love

2 the Lord, and I want to make sure once I go into
3 worship, when I come out, I want to be at peace. I
4 don't want to have to be on guard now to change my
5 spirit.

6 And one other thing, how does the NYPD
7 ensure that journalists and the press have their full
8 First Amendment rights protected in chaotic and
9 crowded situations? And how does this apply to
10 situations where physical barriers are in use?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Right. So,
12 journalists have wide-ranging access at protests. We
13 have to give them access, both because of the law and
14 also because of the protest settlement, which
15 actually speaks to this issue. So, there are
16 certainly situations in which we are clearing an
17 area, and ultimately no one can be there, and that
18 can include journalists. However, journalists have to
19 be able to be in a position to cover these events. We
20 have lots of situations where we are allowing
21 journalists...

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Can you give us one
23 example of other forms of crowd control that NYPD
24 consider less restrictive or more flexible than
25 physical barriers?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So, when we
3 are setting up...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: A quick example.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Sure, sure.
6 So, what we use are either, we sometimes use metal
7 barriers. There are times when officers stand there,
8 essentially, and really say, hey, you can be over
9 here, but not over there. Sometimes the officers
10 simply form a line, that happens. And quite frankly,
11 there are times when we are very much in dialogue
12 with protestors. We always try to be in dialogue with
13 protestors. It's not a confrontational situation. The
14 protestors say, we're going to be over here. There's
15 no need for barriers or anything. It's totally worked
16 out, and it's a very straightforward situation so
17 there are times when we don't need barriers or any
18 substitute.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I could take
20 another question after round two. Thank you...

21 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Sure. Absolutely.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Council Member
23 Salaam. Speaker, thank you for this hearing.

24 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. We're
25 going to go now...

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you, Chair of
3 Jewish Caucus, Dinowitz, also.

4 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: We're going to go now
5 to the Members of the Assembly who are on Zoom.

6 We have Jeffrey Dinowitz, Member Lasher,
7 and Member Weprin in a room.

8 ASSEMBLY MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay. Good
9 morning, Council Members. Thank you, Speaker Menin,
10 Chair Salaam. We have several of us from the Assembly
11 who'd like to say a few words. We'll all be brief
12 because there are a whole bunch of us.

13 As we all know, October 7th, 2023, a
14 genocide was committed, led by the terrorist group
15 Hamas. 1,200 Israelis were viciously murdered. 250
16 were kidnapped. Many of the people were raped during
17 that time. But shockingly, after October 7th, it was
18 hate crimes against Jewish people that skyrocketed in
19 New York and around the world. Around the world.
20 Right now, a majority of the hate crimes in New York
21 City are committed against Jewish people, despite the
22 fact that Jews comprise maybe 10 percent of the
23 population. I just want to say thank you to the
24 Council Members who are sponsoring this package of
25 bills, Speaker Menin, Council Member Dinowitz, and

2 the other Members who have bills in this package. We
3 have to do something, and I'm pleased that the
4 Council is taking action on this. Phrases like,
5 globalize the intifada, from the river to the sea,
6 phrases that call for the extermination of Jews
7 should be denounced, but yet they are so freely
8 spoken these days, and that is really horrible. I've
9 lived in the Bronx all of my life, all of my life,
10 and never have I ever felt any discrimination because
11 I was Jewish, discrimination against me as an
12 individual. Yet, after October 7th, for the first
13 time in my life, I started to feel that. I started to
14 get hate on Twitter and other social media. This
15 never happened before. It never happened before the
16 1,200 Israelis, not all of whom were Jewish, were
17 viciously slaughtered. So, the fact that the Council
18 is taking action and trying to address the situation
19 is really a very positive step. We've seen the
20 increase in antisemitism, which traditionally has
21 been mostly from the far right to increase to the far
22 right and the far left. That is what is happening
23 today. We have to stand up. We have to speak loudly
24 and speak loudly as a community against antisemitism
25 and all hate, all hate, and that's what this package

2 of bills does, I think. People should not be afraid
3 to go into a house of worship. They should not be
4 afraid to go into an educational institution or
5 anything else that's addressed by these bills. So, I
6 applaud all of you, and now I will turn it over to my
7 Colleague, Assembly Member Weprin. Thank you. Please.

8 ASSEMBLY MEMBER WEPRIN: I'm Assemblyman
9 David Weprin, representing the 24th Assembly District
10 in Queens. I am also President of the National
11 Association of Jewish Legislators, encompassing
12 Jewish legislators from over 40 different states.

13 Antisemitism is rising in New York City,
14 and the data is undeniable. In January alone, there
15 were 31 reported anti-Jewish hate crimes,
16 representing more than 180 percent increase from the
17 previous year. Jewish New Yorkers deserve to feel
18 safe in their homes, in their streets, and in their
19 houses of worship. I commend Speaker Menin and Chair
20 Salaam for recognizing the urgency of this crisis and
21 putting forward a comprehensive citywide strategy to
22 confront the scourge of hate. Meeting this moment
23 requires decisive leadership and sustained action,
24 and that is exactly what this plan seeks to deliver.
25 I fully support the package of bills. Thank you.

2 ASSEMBLY MEMBER ROSENTHAL: I am Assembly
3 Member Linda Rosenthal. I'm Chair of the Assembly
4 Committee on Housing, and I represent the Upper West
5 Side, parts of Hell's Kitchen...

6 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: I'm sorry, Assembly
7 Member. We can't hear you. Can you repeat what you
8 said?

9 ASSEMBLY MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Can you hear
10 me now?

11 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Yes.

12 ASSEMBLY MEMBER ROSENTHAL: Okay. Thank
13 you. Sorry about that.

14 I'm Assembly Member Linda Rosenthal. I
15 represent the Upper West Side, parts of Hell's
16 Kitchen in the 67th Assembly District. I'm also Chair
17 of the Committee on Housing. And first off, I'd like
18 to thank Speaker Menin for shining a spotlight on the
19 scourge of antisemitism. I'm the proud daughter and
20 granddaughter of immigrants who had to flee Nazi
21 Germany for a safe and better future. And for the
22 past 20 years, I've proudly represented a large
23 Jewish population on the West Side of Manhattan.

24 Antisemitic attacks are surging across
25 the United States. And while antisemitism is a tale

2 as old as time, it should be no surprise that there's
3 been a sustained increase in antisemitic acts and
4 hate crimes since the beginning of 2016. In early
5 February, NYPD reported that anti-Jewish hate crimes
6 increased by 180 percent this past January over last
7 year. Now, antisemitism is not unique to New York or
8 New York City, but we here, who represent New York,
9 have a responsibility, a moral responsibility to
10 confront hatred, whether it be physical, verbal,
11 wherever and whenever it rears its ugly head. And
12 I've worked with local law enforcement to report and
13 erase anti-Jewish epithets carved into our park
14 benches, church doors, or sprayed onto buildings.
15 I've also worked with Jewish schools and synagogues
16 in my District on security measures to ensure they
17 feel safe going about daily life. And I've also
18 organized Holocaust programming in my local schools.
19 And that is why I'm in strong support of this
20 holistic slate of bills that would expand education,
21 security, and infrastructure measures in New York
22 City to address antisemitism. We know that far too
23 many young people are unaware of the atrocities of
24 the Holocaust. That's deeply disturbing. We cannot
25 say never again if new generations of New Yorkers

2 can't explain what happened. So, our young children
3 who navigate a brave new world, they see a social
4 media landscape dominated by lies, fake news,
5 misrepresentations. It's our responsibility, our duty
6 to provide them with the unvarnished truth about the
7 horrors of that time, the deadly impacts of
8 dehumanizing an entire population. Education is the
9 cornerstone of that attempt, and we must double our
10 efforts because never again must mean never again.
11 I'd also like to thank my Colleague, Assembly Member
12 Sam Berger, for getting us here today. And once
13 again, the council, Council Member Salaam and the
14 Speaker, Julie Menin. Thank you so much.

15 ASSEMBLY MEMBER LASHER: I'm Assembly
16 Member Micah Lasher representing the 69th Assembly
17 District on the Upper West Side and in Morningside
18 Heights, and I'm very pleased to be here, and with
19 gratitude to Speaker Menin and her Colleagues in the
20 Council for introducing this package of legislation
21 to address the very real, very concerning rise in
22 antisemitism in our city.

23 All one needs to do is walk into a
24 synagogue. When I go into my synagogue, I am struck
25 by the extent of the security measures that exist

2 today that did not exist when I was a kid because
3 that is what we must do in this time to make sure
4 that people entering a synagogue are safe. And people
5 entering houses of worship broadly should be safe.
6 That's why we've introduced legislation here that is
7 complimentary to the legislation that the Council is
8 hopefully enacting soon to make sure that everyone
9 can enter into a house of worship without running
10 through a gauntlet of hate. We have a lot of work to
11 do to improve mutual understanding, to reduce hate in
12 our society, but what government can and must do is
13 use the tools available to it to ensure that people
14 can move safely through the streets of our city and
15 in and out of their houses of worship, and that's
16 what this legislation will do. It is entirely
17 compatible and critically compatible with protecting
18 New Yorkers' rights to free expression, and I'm
19 confident in the leadership and the rank and file of
20 the NYPD to put this legislation into practice once
21 the Council passes it. So again, I'm grateful to our
22 Colleagues in City government, grateful to the
23 leadership of Speaker Menin, and urge the enactment
24 of the entire package as soon as possible.

2 Pass the mic over to Assembly Member
3 Berger.

4 ASSEMBLY MEMBER BERGER: Thank you. Oh,
5 we're good? Can you hear me?

6 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Yes.

7 ASSEMBLY MEMBER BERGER: My name is
8 Assembly Member Sam Berger. I represent the 27th
9 District, which covers Kew Gardens Hills, Forest
10 Hills, Electchester, College Point, and Whitestone.
11 There is a lot of pushback on this legislative
12 package on the grounds of First Amendment and free
13 speech rights. It was in my District in January, my
14 community, my home, where protesters came, and we
15 heard them loud and clear when they said that they
16 support Hamas. We heard them loud and clear when they
17 said that they support October 7th. And I brought a
18 measuring tape because I was there when that event
19 happened. They were not 25 feet away. They were not
20 100 feet away. They were 300 to 500 feet away, and we
21 were able to hear them and hear their calls for hate.
22 And no speech was taken away. No First Amendment
23 rights were removed. We heard them. I heard them. My
24 community heard them. I had a call from a mother
25 living in one of the houses nearby huddled with her

2 children, the daughter of a Holocaust survivor who
3 heard them loud and clear. We have to be doing more.
4 And this is a tremendous first step, and I urge the
5 passage of this package swiftly. I am tremendously
6 grateful to Speaker Menin for her moral clarity on
7 this, for working swiftly on this. It should not take
8 six months of a listening period to take action to
9 combat anti-Semitism. It should not take months of
10 reviewing or having a legal review to make
11 determinations on what can help combat anti-Semitism.
12 We have to take action. We have to do more. This is a
13 tremendous first step. I am tremendously grateful for
14 Speaker Menin's leadership on this, and I hope that
15 we can pass this swiftly. Thank you very much.

16 I think that's it.

17 ASSEMBLY MEMBER DINOWITZ: We had two
18 other colleagues, but they haven't.

19 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
20 testimony.

21 SPEAKER MENIN: Thank you so much for
22 joining us today from Albany. We really appreciate
23 it. Thank you so much for your compelling testimony.
24 Thanks.

2 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: We'll now pass it to
3 Council Member Sandy Nurse.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you, Chair.

5 Just a couple of questions. As it relates
6 to incidents of violence at houses of worship, can
7 you let us know how many incidences have occurred
8 where entrances or exits have been blocked that the
9 NYPD has responded to? And if you could keep it brief
10 and concise.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Yeah. I don't
12 have data on that. I don't know that we track it that
13 way.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Yeah, I
16 don't.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay. So, you don't
18 have the data.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: No.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: And just to
21 reaffirm, just a yes or no, does the NYPD Patrol
22 Guide or any other written policy already specify how
23 you respond to a protest at a house of worship?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: We have
25 several policies that speak to how we...

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Yes or no?

3 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: There are
4 several policies that speak to how we deal with
5 protest situations, and they apply broadly both to
6 houses of worship and to any other..

7 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay. I'll take
8 that as a yes. That said, from what I'm hearing
9 today, this bill essentially asks you to write down
10 what you already have written down, but doesn't
11 substantially change how you would respond at all.
12 Yes or no?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: The bill
14 would not change what we do day to day.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay. I'll take
16 that as a yes.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: It would
18 require us to articulate and put in words and on
19 paper what our approach is in these situations.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Which you have
21 multiple written documents about already.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: This would
23 require us..

24 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Which you just said
25 you did.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: This would
3 require us to put forward a plan with regard to
4 protests essentially, protests in the vicinity of
5 houses of worship, places of worship, and the various
6 considerations that go into how we address those.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Understood. So,
8 given that, yes or no, does the NYPD support
9 legislating buffer zones?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: The NYPD has
11 no objection to Intro. 1-A.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Do you support
13 legislating buffer zones?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: We had
15 concerns about the initial bill.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Could you just
17 answer that?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: I don't know
19 what that means. I'm not sure... (CROSS-TALK)

20 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Well, that's what
21 the bill is asking you to do, write a plan about a
22 buffer zone.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: That's
24 actually not what the bill says.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: It's not. The
3 bill says, as I understand it, Intro. 1-A now, not
4 the initial language, but Intro. 1-A..

5 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Well, we're talking
6 about Intro. 1-A because that's what we're going to
7 be deliberating on.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Okay. So,
9 Intro. 1-A, as I understand it, says that the NYPD is
10 to put forward a plan that articulates the
11 considerations that go into how we deal with a number
12 of issues at a protest outside a place of worship,
13 including the use of, we'll call it frozen zones or
14 buffer zones.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: But again, it
17 is articulating and putting forward in a way that's
18 transparent with the public, how we... (CROSS-TALK)

19 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Understood. You've
20 already said that. So, yes, you support this is what
21 you're saying.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: I'm saying
23 that we have absolutely no objection to this bill.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay. Same thing.

2 My concern here is we're putting forth a
3 symbolic bill that doesn't really address the real
4 concerns and fears that are being expressed today and
5 that are held by a broad spectrum of New Yorkers, and
6 I (TIMER CHIME) would really want to see this
7 Committee and this Council spend more time
8 deliberating, exploring at data-backed solutions to
9 preventing acts of hate in our communities, and I
10 don't personally think that's what this is. I think
11 this is reacting.

12 I have one other question since we've
13 kind of extended time to others.

14 So, I do have a question. If a member of
15 the public brings a gun to a protest on a campus,
16 what is the NYPD's obligation there?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: If they bring
18 a firearm to a sensitive location...

19 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: And it's open and
20 exposed.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: They would be
22 subject to arrest.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay. And what
24 happens if the NYPD fails to do that, if the officer
25 fails to do that?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: If an officer
3 was aware of all the relevant facts...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: If he saw an
5 exposed gun at a protest on a campus.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Right. If the
7 officer had the relevant facts and failed to take
8 police action, that person would be subject to
9 internal discipline.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay. And lastly
11 for CCHR, if a City employee said about another
12 Muslim person that that person is a terrorist lover
13 or that they want Jews to burn in an oven, how would
14 the CCHR respond? What was the obligation of the City
15 towards that City employee?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Thank you
17 for the question. As we've discussed in our
18 testimony, the way our Law Enforcement Bureau works,
19 if someone contacts CCHR and says, I believe I've
20 been discriminated against because of my race, my
21 religion, my national origin, that moves to an
22 investigation and we look at what was said, what was
23 the motivation for what was said. In employment,
24 there's the potential that it's a hostile work

2 environment claim that is actionable under the law,
3 but that's going to be fact-specific.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

6 We'll now hear from Council Member
7 Avilés.

8 I'm going to pass it to Council Member
9 Cabán on Zoom.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Thank you. Can
11 y'all hear me?

12 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Yes.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Okay. Great. Thank
14 you. I just want to start by saying that I think that
15 there is a broad consensus amongst the Members of
16 this Council, and certainly myself, that we
17 understand and are concerned about just rising hate
18 and the fear that people legitimately feel walking
19 into different spaces, whether it is their house of
20 worship or other safe space based on the intersection
21 of whatever identities they hold. I think our concern
22 here, or some of our concern, is that we want to make
23 sure that we're doing this effectively and not
24 impeding constitutional rights. We've heard a lot of
25 data about the rise in hate violence, but what I have

2 yet to see is data or research on the efficacy of
3 certain interventions and whether this is the right
4 intervention, as opposed to lots of other
5 interventions that are available, that there is a
6 level of data and research around.

7 I want to start by talking about Intro.
8 175 first. I want to know how it would work with an
9 educational institution like NYU, right? Like NYU has
10 no established campus to speak of, and it owns and
11 maintains buildings across the city. So, yeah, I
12 mean, talk to me, how would it work with a facility
13 like that?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So again, I
15 think I want to distinguish between the extent to
16 which the bill speaks about private property, what's
17 happening on private property, let's put that to the
18 side, talking about the entrances to NYU buildings,
19 right? I don't know that it matters so much whether
20 it's a campus or a one-off building. I mean, if
21 there's a concern about individuals potentially
22 blocking access to a school facility, whether that's
23 the entrance to a campus or the entrance to a
24 standalone building, we would want to make sure that
25 people have clear access. I'm not sure that it

2 matters really that it's a campus entrance or a
3 single building entrance.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: I mean, I think,
5 and I'm going to give an example that raises a
6 concern that folks have is that with the
7 concentration of NYU buildings around Washington
8 Square Park, for example, we can imagine an
9 omnipresent police presence in a traditional public
10 forum that would create a substantial risk of
11 violating the First Amendment, right? Like, this bill
12 is silent on that kind of scenario. So how would the
13 NYPD balance the requirements of this bill with the
14 Constitution? How would the NYPD balance the
15 requirements of this bill with the settlement
16 agreement in the cases around the summer 2020
17 protests?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Sure. So, I
19 think I understand the question. The way, certainly,
20 we're thinking about this, and we have to sort of,
21 when the bill becomes law, we're creating a plan, the
22 goal is not, 100 percent not, to have some sort of,
23 you know, just like full-time or even part-time, just
24 like frozen zones put (TIMER CHIME) up outside NYU
25 buildings or outside the NYU campus. These are

2 responses to particular events, particular
3 situations. In the normal course, day-to-day, not
4 only would there not be some omnipresent frozen
5 zones, there wouldn't be frozen zones at all. That
6 said, that said, if we learn, okay, this afternoon,
7 there's going to be this protest outside this
8 building, we're concerned about making sure people
9 can get in and out securely and safely, then we would
10 say, okay, we're going to do, kind of consistent with
11 the First Amendment, potentially a frozen zone
12 outside that entrance to make sure things can go
13 smoothly. But it would not be, the way I understand
14 the bill, is not, oh, there's some sort of, you know,
15 full-time frozen zone situation.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: But to Council
17 Member Nurse's point, your understanding of the bill
18 is that these procedures and plans are memorialized
19 in the handbook and other policies that exist, and
20 this would be a duplicative rememorialization of
21 those plans, but with specific questions around the
22 creation of frozen zones or buffer zones.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So just to be
24 clear, we do have a number of policies involving how
25 we... (CROSS-TALK)

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: No, that's already
3 on the record.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: No, no, but I
5 want to answer your question, Council Member. I want
6 to respond to your question, which is to say that
7 what the bills do is they would say, okay, it would
8 require us to have new policies... (CROSS-TALK)

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: (INAUDIBLE) that
10 answer.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: particular
12 to... I'm just trying to answer your question.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: So, no, it's asked
14 and answered, it's been answered.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: But you asked
16 me the question, I just want to answer your question,
17 Council Member.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: And I said it's
19 asked and answered. I withdraw it.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Okay. Sure.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Thank you, Mr.
22 Gerber.

23 So, I want to ask, you know, Intros 1 and
24 175, do they undermine the settlement that the City,
25 because this was talked about a little bit, but not

2 in a lot of detail, do they undermine the settlement
3 that the City, and the native protest cases that
4 stemmed from the summer 2020 protests, with the NYPD
5 response to First Amendment activities. And I
6 specifically want to get the context around this,
7 right? Like, a central component of the settlement
8 agreement is a tiered approach to protest policing.
9 And then under the protest settlement agreement, the
10 NYPD is tasked with promoting, whenever and wherever
11 possible, First Amendment activity. And so, the
12 agreement implemented a tiered NYPD response to
13 protest to prevent the chilling of free speech that
14 occurs as a matter of course, when there's an
15 outsized police presence. And then the same outsized
16 presence can also escalate tensions between
17 protesters and police. So how would the two bills
18 interact with NYPD's obligation under the tiered
19 approach in the settlement agreement?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: The protest
21 settlement binds us by court order. Any plan that
22 would be formulated under these bills would have to
23 be consistent with the protest settlement. We
24 obviously could not put anything in the plan that was
25

2 contrary to the requirements of the protest
3 settlement.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Okay. So, I mean,
5 it sounds like there is some tension there because...

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: No. I don't
7 see that at all. The creation of frozen zones or
8 buffer zones outside a place of worship or a school
9 is in no way inherently inconsistent with the protest
10 settlement.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: But because of
12 those things being... but because of what is laid out
13 in the protest settlement agreement, my question is,
14 will these bills require the NYPD to create new
15 regulations to maintain the requirements of the
16 settlement and the security perimeters for them to
17 coexist?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Council
19 Member, I'm not sure I understand the question. We
20 will not violate the protest settlement. Any plan
21 will have to conform to the protest settlement. And
22 the creation of frozen zones in appropriate
23 situations does not violate the protest settlement.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Okay. I think I've
25 gone over. I can't see the time, by the way.

2 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Your time has
3 expired.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Okay. I'm going to
5 close. I'd like to, if it's possible, sign up for a
6 second round of questions. But I just want to close
7 by saying, again, we heard from the Assembly Member,
8 I think it was Berger who said that it wasn't 25 feet
9 away, it wasn't 100 feet away, it was several hundred
10 feet away that synagogue members heard hateful
11 speech. And it goes back, I think, to a lot of our
12 points around what will be the most effective way to
13 attack hate violence and if there is data research to
14 be looked at about what interventions are more
15 effective than the ones that are being presented
16 today.

17 Thank you, Chair.

18 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. Pass it
19 back to Alexa Avilés.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you, Chair,
21 and thank you, everyone, for being here.

22 This is a very important topic. I'd like
23 to pick up where Council Member Cabán has left off.
24 I'd like to know, in your estimation, both from NYPD

2 and our other agency, if, in your estimation, this is
3 an effective intervention to combat hate.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Are you
5 referring to the 1 and 175?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: I guess I'm
7 referring to all the bills. Can you just yes or no on
8 each of the bills if this is an effective
9 intervention to combat hate?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Well, I can
11 only speak to certain bills from a NYPD perspective.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Okay.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: And again, on
14 1-A and 175-A, subject to the qualification with 175-
15 A in my testimony, we don't otherwise have objections
16 to those bills. And again, I do think they speak to
17 transparency and clarity for the public and foster
18 dialogue in terms of what we're doing, is that we're
19 memorializing what we are otherwise doing. I think
20 there is value in that. Again, I do not see those
21 bills as changing what we do day to day.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Right.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: I do not. But
24 I think there... (CROSS-TALK)

2 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Very clear that
3 the bill basically is asking you to create another
4 memo for what I suppose you have in many different
5 patrol guidelines and other internal memos around how
6 you, since you are addressing 10 to 11 protests a
7 day, this seems like you're just adding another memo
8 around what you're currently doing. So, I guess the
9 question is, with your understanding, do you think
10 this bill advances, is an effective strategy to
11 combating hate? I think it's like a yes or no.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: I think the
13 bill fosters transparency.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Okay.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: And the other
16 bill, just to answer your question, with regard to
17 the reporting bill, again, we have a concern that we
18 just don't have the data that's being asked of us so
19 that's a fundamental problem.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Okay.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: And then the
22 one about security at religious institutions, again,
23 we already provide that guidance... (CROSS-TALK)

24 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Okay. So, I hear
25 you. This is not a trap question. It is really, our

2 goal here is to advance effective interventions to
3 address what is an important thing that we are
4 experiencing both here and across the globe. And so,
5 what we are in pursuit in earnest is in interventions
6 that actually address the issue, and so what I am
7 hearing is your current ways that you are addressing
8 are reflected in all of these laws, and right now
9 these laws don't necessarily advance or add an
10 effective intervention to combat hate.

11 I guess I'd love to go to the next
12 agency.

13 ZOOM HOST: Recording stopped.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Me too?
15 No. Thank you. I think I'm going to speak really just
16 specifically (TIMER CHIME) about Intro. 388, which is
17 the bill that names CCHR. I think our concern as an
18 agency that is looking at unlawful discrimination
19 that violates the City's Human Rights Law is that the
20 way the bill is drafted, which I think invites and
21 sets up CCHR to receive a whole host of allegations
22 of unlawful activity under, I think it says any law,
23 means that our agency will be responding to many
24 phone calls which no City agency is set up to
25 address. It involves speech, it involves expression,

2 it involves a range of conduct. I think we find it to
3 be effective for our agency to receive calls about
4 things that we can act upon. We 100 percent refer
5 calls that come to our existing hotline to the
6 agencies that we understand have jurisdiction over a
7 particular issue. And the way that we track and
8 report data is not reflected in this bill. A lot of
9 the data overlaps with what I think we've heard NYPD
10 speak about collecting and reporting quarterly. So, I
11 think we have questions about the ultimate efficacy
12 in getting to the objectives as we understand them
13 from Council, but obviously are here because we care
14 a lot about these issues and about getting it right.
15 Hearing from you all and the many stakeholders that I
16 know have vested interest in addressing bias and hate
17 in the city.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you, and if
19 I may, Chair?

20 Along those lines, can you for the record
21 speak a bit more substantively around what are the
22 most effective interventions that you have engaged in
23 and what is the current level of funding and support
24 in those interventions? And are those interventions
25 found anywhere in any of these pieces of legislation?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: Sure. So,
3 I can certainly speak about kind of our foundational
4 mandate and I think the tools that we have fashioned
5 to address that mandate effectively. I'm joined by a
6 colleague who wants to talk about how we're resourced
7 to do that work. But as I mentioned in our testimony,
8 we have an existing hotline. Anyone can call CCHR.
9 We're also a right-to-file agency, so if someone
10 comes to us, they report discrimination or bias and
11 it's actionable under our law, we take that
12 complaint. We actually can't turn people away, nor do
13 we want to, but that's why the vast majority of our
14 work is really focused on taking cases and
15 investigating them to make an individual whole,
16 right? These are individual cases, but with systemic
17 potential outcomes, and that's why in our cases, we
18 require, if an employer discriminates, fails to
19 provide time for someone to pray, for example, or to
20 fast or to leave work at a flexible time, and we find
21 that the employer has discriminated, our response is
22 they're going to be trained on the City Human Rights
23 Law, the employers and supervisors. They're going to
24 change their policies and practices. They're
25 potentially going to be monitored by the Commission

2 to ensure that similar violations don't happen in the
3 future, and then there's also potentially economic
4 relief in the form of damages. But we've had cases
5 that deal with race and religion discrimination where
6 the outcome is an apology. We've had cases where the
7 outcome is restorative justice, and that's because
8 we're looking, not systemically, though that is a
9 very important role that City agencies and Council
10 can be playing, we're looking at what comes before us
11 and we're working with individuals to fashion relief.
12 So, I think that we find that work very effective. We
13 also, as we've talked about in our testimony,
14 prevention is critical. Being out in communities and
15 building trust and ensuring that community partners
16 are also equipped to understand what the City Human
17 Rights Law says so that people, when they report to
18 their trusted community partners, can say, hey, I'm
19 going to reach out to CCHR, or you might want to
20 consider CCHR, or you might want to consider CCHR or
21 NYPD, depending on what the action is and what the
22 impact on an individual is. I think we've spoken
23 before, Councilwoman Avilés, just about the
24 challenges in wanting to put yourself through an
25 investigation of discrimination. It can take a long

2 time. We're going to interview people, we're going to
3 look at policies and procedures, and that is not for
4 everyone, and we think that's fine, but we take every
5 case that comes to us as a very serious violation of
6 the human rights law, and we address it as such.

7 I don't know, Jose, if you want to answer
8 anything else.

9 CHIEF-OF-STAFF RIOS-LUA: No. I guess I'll
10 just add to this point that I know you asked the
11 resource question on this, and so I just want to be
12 abundantly clear that we have a very dedicated staff
13 of 108 people at the Commission on Human Rights
14 actively.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Did you say 109?

16 CHIEF-OF-STAFF RIOS-LUA: Eight.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: 108.

18 CHIEF-OF-STAFF RIOS-LUA: Active employees
19 at the Commission on Human Rights who are dedicated
20 doing this work, and one of the things that I've
21 heard questioned about is how much would it take to
22 do this, right? And I don't have a number for you, I
23 don't have a magic number for you, but I can tell you
24 that because of our mandate under the New York City
25 Human Rights Law, those dedicated staff members don't

2 have an option not to maintain the mandate of the New
3 York City Human Rights Law, so I just want to first
4 shout out to them their dedication and their work
5 every single day. I also want to be super clear that
6 our new Commissioner, Christine Clarke, has been very
7 public about her desire to increase resources at the
8 Commission and her commitment to go out and find
9 those resources, and so those are conversations that
10 we're having with the Administration and with OMB,
11 and we'll continue to have them.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you. I mean,
13 it is very well known that the agency has not had
14 adequate funding to truly meet its mandate. I mean,
15 on income discrimination alone, you know, it's been
16 severely underfunded. I think what I am utterly
17 interested in and hyper-focused on is investing in
18 actual effective interventions to move the needle,
19 because our resources are not growing, but the issue
20 remains persistent, and it's awful that we actually
21 earnestly address the issue with substantive
22 interventions, with adequate resources, and not play
23 on the margins. So, thank you so much for your work.

24 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. We're now
25 going to hear again from the Speaker.

2 SPEAKER MENIN: Hi. I just want to ask one
3 clarifying question, because CCHR's intake line has
4 received an increasingly high number of increase each
5 and every year. I want to better understand the
6 required resources to run that line. We had a central
7 staff member who called the line earlier this year
8 and waited for 40 minutes and never even received a
9 response. In addition, the State Comptroller's report
10 indicated that in so many different discrimination
11 cases, it's taking the agency 883 days on average to
12 close out the complaint, which is totally
13 unacceptable. So, can you talk about that, please?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: I mean,
15 we can speak about all of these things. As we said,
16 our InfoLine actually, or our hotline historically,
17 was not even a live call line, so we took tremendous
18 steps to make it, it used to be you would call and
19 leave a message. We have eight dedicated staffers who
20 answer that phone call and receive what you
21 identified, Speaker, as 15,000-plus inquiries in
22 FY25. We, again, are required to file complaints on
23 behalf of anyone who calls us with a colorable claim.
24 We have created strategies so that you don't have to
25 file a complaint in instances where there's the

2 possibility of what we call pre-complaint
3 intervention, which means it's often in cases of
4 disability or other spaces of reasonable
5 accommodation, including religion, where someone
6 calls and they say, I was denied the ability to,
7 let's say, have break time to pray. We can call the
8 employer and say, hey, you're violating the law, do
9 you want to fix that, and they might say, yes, we do.
10 Pre-complaint intervention, no complaint needed, we
11 move that forward. We've built out the team to focus
12 on pre-complaint interventions in housing with
13 vouchers, but also in areas of disability and race
14 and religion and pregnancy as well, where reasonable
15 accommodations are at play. The data you're talking
16 about, about the days that it takes to resolve cases
17 are accurate. Cases vary in complexity, and we have
18 our attorneys and investigators looking into
19 complaints, doing document review, interviewing
20 witnesses, and it does take, also, a long time to
21 settle claims, even if we have a complainant who's
22 interested in that and maybe a respondent. So they
23 are time-intensive in investigations, and that's...

24 (CROSS-TALK)

2 SPEAKER MENIN: This is exactly why we
3 need this dedicated hotline to report anti-Semitic
4 incidents, Islamophobic incidents, all different
5 types of hate. It's why we need a dedicated hotline.
6 You've got a situation where so many New Yorkers are
7 experiencing hate crimes. They don't know who to
8 call. Should you call 3-1-1? Should you call 9-1-1?
9 Do they call CCHR? It's very confusing, and which is
10 why, in so many instances, it's under-reported. So, I
11 don't even understand how anyone could testify or
12 have a view that this hotline is not needed.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: I think
14 that my testimony was really about whether it is
15 well-situated for something to be at CCHR, given our
16 particular mandate, where we stand, and what our
17 current systems are set up to track and report. I
18 think there may be, and I would want to hear from
19 stakeholders, confusion about where to report. I
20 think there's lots of people reporting to NYPD. I'm
21 sure, and the data that we've collected from
22 communities confirms that there is under-reporting in
23 almost every impacted community, so the numbers to
24 NYPD are high. I am sure they are not the whole
25 picture. I think a question is, with a City

2 infrastructure that involves multiple agencies and
3 entities, where should this kind of, if it's an
4 immediate response line, where should that be, and
5 what does it look like? And we definitely want to
6 avoid people calling a hotline and not getting
7 resources because what they're reporting can't be
8 acted on, potentially, by a City agency. But I take
9 your point, and I'm not knocking down the idea on a
10 hotline. We have a hotline. I think it's where is the
11 hotline, what is it doing, and does that solve under-
12 reporting? Probably not, not alone. So, I think other
13 interventions are also needed.

14 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: So, we're going to
15 take a bathroom break for the Administration, but we
16 can continue the questioning for CCHR in the
17 meantime.

18 SPEAKER MENIN: The NYPD asked for a one-
19 minute break to use the restroom facilities. We're
20 going to keep going. Just to be clear, we are keeping
21 the hearing going.

22 Okay. I'm now going to call on Council
23 Member Eric Dinowitz. NYPD, okay.

24 Council Member Santosuosso. Is it a
25 question for NYPD?

2 Okay. He is not here.

3 Council Member Linda Lee.

4 Council Member Vernikov.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Yeah. I have
6 both. Thank you.

7 Thank you, good afternoon. Thank you,
8 Speaker, thank you, Chair.

9 I have some questions for the CCHR. Ms.
10 Ward, I'm sure you don't run the social media page of
11 the CCHR, but I'd like to bring the public's
12 attention to that. Ms. Ward, do you agree that social
13 media is important for communicating with the public?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: I agree
15 many people use social media.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: But do you agree
17 it's important?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: It's one
19 of many strategies. It depends who we're talking
20 about.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Okay. For
22 agencies to use social media to communicate with the
23 public.

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: As one
25 way to communicate with the public.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: To show the
3 public what work they do.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: As one
5 way to communicate with the public, yes.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Okay. Have you
7 seen the social media page, for example, Instagram of
8 the CCHR?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: At
10 certain times, I have, yes.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Okay. So, I just
12 want to bring that social media page to the attention
13 of the public, because I had an opportunity to scroll
14 through the Instagram page, and since October 7th,
15 there has not been a single post about anti-Semitism,
16 which has exploded in our city since October 7th. I
17 saw a lot of posts advocating for various civil
18 rights, LGBTQ civil rights, the civil rights of
19 women, the Black community, the Muslim community, all
20 appropriate and legitimate causes, but not a single
21 post about anti-Semitism that has been exploding in
22 our city, in synagogues, various houses of worship,
23 at our schools, at the City University of New York,
24 on our streets. Could you talk a little bit about
25 that? And again, I know you're not, probably not in

2 charge of social media, but it is very concerning, I
3 think, to the Jewish community not to see a single
4 post about anti-Semitism that has been exploding in
5 the city. Thank you.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: So, I
7 appreciate your comment. I think, as I noted in my
8 testimony, CCHR is one of a suite of agencies in the
9 City set up to address bias and hate crimes. We are
10 joined by the Mayor's Office to Combat Anti-Semitism,
11 specifically set up to address some of the issues
12 being raised at this hearing. I would say that our
13 social media and Instagram feed does not demonstrate
14 the scope or breadth of our work or commitment to
15 addressing bias based on religion, bias based on
16 national origin that we know has impacted Jewish New
17 Yorkers and many other New Yorkers as well. So, we
18 have, and I think we talked about this in the
19 testimony, done a huge amount of outreach and funded
20 organizations that are specifically focused on and
21 working in Jewish communities across New York City,
22 including (TIMER CHIME) with OPHC. So, I think I
23 would just say that it warrants digging a little
24 deeper into the breadth of the work that we're doing.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: But what message
3 do you think it sends to the Jewish community when
4 there are no public posts about anti-Semitism while
5 there are posts about every single other civil rights
6 clause?

7 CHIEF-OF-STAFF RIOS-LUA: Sure.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Just what
9 message do you think it sends?

10 CHIEF-OF-STAFF RIOS-LUA: Sure. I also
11 want to bring your attention to Commissioner Clarke's
12 statement that she released earlier this week
13 condemning anti-Semitism.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Yes, that
15 statement was only released because the JCRC brought
16 it to the attention and spoke up about it on social
17 media. That was two days ago. But there's not, if
18 you, the public can look at this. I'm not making it
19 up. The Instagram page is what it is. There's not
20 been a single post about anti-Semitism since October
21 7th until the JCRC posted about it.

22 CHIEF-OF-STAFF RIOS-LUA: I think
23 Commissioner Clarke is in her fourth week of being
24 the Commissioner of the New York City Commission on
25 Human Rights. I think priorities about

2 communications, what she is going to want to be
3 saying on social media will be changing and will be
4 evolving to match those priorities. But I think it is
5 a message to all New Yorkers that messaging is being
6 pushed out forward. And so you say it was just two
7 days ago. You also are claiming that it was just
8 because of a result of one thing. I'm not going to
9 sit here and discuss what her motivations are for
10 those pieces. But I will say that it was important
11 for the Commission to put that statement out. And so
12 that is why that statement is out, not only in social
13 media, but in press. And I will... (CROSS-TALK)

14 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: But you do
15 acknowledge that it sends the wrong message to the
16 Jewish community. One, anti-Semitism, just in the
17 month of January, is at 182 percent rise. You do
18 agree with that?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: So, I
20 think I just want to point out something that we also
21 mentioned earlier in the Q and A, and we have done
22 press releases on our specific training developed
23 with community partners around Jewish communities and
24 anti-Semitism. So, I don't know that we've put out
25 posts on every single civil rights issue, but I

2 understand that people want to be reflected and they
3 want their experience reflected in the communications
4 that agencies are sending, and we will take that
5 home, back to the agency, and we will look forward to
6 talking with you further about...

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Okay. And you
8 commit to changing that and discussing that with
9 whoever is in charge of social media?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: I commit
11 to going back to the agency and having a robust
12 conversation about all of the messages that we're
13 hearing at this hearing today.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Thank you. And
15 could you just talk a little bit about new
16 initiatives that you may have worked on regarding
17 anti-Semitism?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: So, I
19 think the kind of newest piece is really CCHR will be
20 a part of, and this is the incoming Executive
21 Director of the Mayor's Office to Combat Anti-
22 Semitism has expressed interest in a citywide anti-
23 Semitism strategy. We sit on the task force that is
24 led by that office. And so undoubtedly that will be
25 something that is coming up in the coming months and

2 that the Administration looks forward to speaking
3 with Council about.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Okay. Thank you.
5 And I'm sure you're aware that the Mayor revoked
6 certain executive orders as it relates to anti-
7 Semitism. Could you just tell us how you define anti-
8 Semitism?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAMUF WARD: So, the
10 way the Commission defines unlawful discrimination is
11 treating someone differently or less well because of
12 their race or religion or national origin, and that
13 is true across all of our protected categories. It's
14 a working definition that is applied in fact-specific
15 contexts, as I talked about in response to
16 Councilwoman Nurse's question.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Thank you.

18 SPEAKER MENIN: Okay. Thank you.

19 We're now going to go to Council Member
20 Santosuosso followed by Council Member Dinowitz.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: Thank you,
22 Speaker.

23 I am here today as a representative of
24 someone who cares deeply about combating hate. I have
25 a large Jewish community in my district. I also have

2 one of the largest Muslim communities in the entire
3 city. And within recent weeks alone, there has been a
4 string of three anti-Muslim hate crimes that took
5 place in my District where three visibly Muslim
6 hijabi women were attacked and, thankfully, the
7 perpetrator was arrested and charged with hate crimes
8 so I want to thank the NYPD for responding as quickly
9 as they did in those incidents.

10 I'm also someone who cares deeply about
11 protecting our right to free speech and to protest.
12 So, Mr. Gerber, I want to talk to you primarily about
13 Intro. 1-A and 175-A. First of all, are you aware,
14 I'm aware that the amended version 1-A does not set a
15 fixed perimeter. Are you aware of any fixed perimeter
16 buffer zone that has ever been upheld in a federal
17 court?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Yes. Yes,
19 there have been. It was, for example, I believe Hill
20 versus Colorado that was the case in the 1990s that
21 involved a fixed, it was a mixed fixed and floating
22 buffer zone, I think, out in Colorado that was upheld
23 by the U.S. Supreme Court. So, it definitely can
24 happen. As I said earlier, there's certainly any
25 time, I think maybe this is your point, any time you

2 have a fixed rule across the board that is certainly
3 going to raise significant constitutional questions.
4 I wouldn't be comfortable, I would not say if there
5 is a fixed perimeter or fixed buffer zone rule that
6 is necessarily unconstitutional. I don't think that's
7 correct. But any time you're doing that, yes, you are
8 going to raise constitutional questions.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO:

10 Constitutional questions, sure.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Yes.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: And so is it
13 fair to say that in the plan that 1-A asks the NYPD
14 to create that there would not be a fixed perimeter
15 that would be set outside of religious institutions?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: And by that
17 you mean some like fixed number of feet that we use?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: Correct.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Absolutely
20 not.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: I think you
22 said earlier that you do not see that Intro. 1-A
23 would change what the NYPD currently does in practice
24 outside of religious institutions. Do you see this
25

2 bill as expanding or increasing your authority to
3 create buffer zones or fixed perimeters?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: No, it
5 doesn't.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: Okay. You
7 also said earlier in your testimony that your current
8 practice to protecting entrances and exits to houses
9 of worship turns often on particularity, naturally.
10 You know, the entrance and exit types, what have you.
11 Do you see a conflict that this bill asks you to
12 create a fixed plan, a sort of one size fits all,
13 versus a particular response to individual protests
14 or individual incidents?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So the way I
16 understand 1-A or 175-A is it's a plan, but I
17 wouldn't use the word fixed. What I mean is it calls
18 upon us to articulate the considerations that go into
19 this and to say on a number of different issues, hey,
20 here are the factors that we're looking at. Here are
21 the things that we're thinking about. But I do not
22 understand 1-A or 175-A to require us to have some
23 sort of one size fits all plan. That's exactly what
24 we're trying to avoid.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: Understood.

3 And so if, I know you would have 45 days after the
4 date this bill passed in order to create this plan,
5 but if this plan were to be created tomorrow, is it
6 fair for me to assume that it would not set a one
7 size fits all approach to every protest that takes
8 place outside of a house of worship?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: That is
10 correct.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: Okay. Now
12 with regarding to Intro. 175-A, do you see the NYPD's
13 approach, planned or response, to protests at
14 educational facilities, do you see that changing if
15 the participants in the protest are students or
16 parents or faculty from within that educational
17 institution?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: And just to
19 be clear, we're talking about protests on public
20 streets?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: Well, let's
22 start with public institutions of education and then
23 we can go to private.

24

25

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: I just mean
3 we're not going to protest outside on the sidewalk or
4 on public space is what I mean.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: Right.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: I think,
7 again, we don't think about the content, content
8 doesn't matter. Whether it's someone who's affiliated
9 with the school or not protesting, no, as a starting
10 point, I mean, as a starting point, I don't think
11 that would affect matters, no.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: Okay.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: And again,
14 these things are incredibly fact specific. Things
15 that do matter a lot, you know, is if we know in
16 advance, for example, so, you know, sometimes we have
17 protests where they're telling us in advance, they
18 tell us like, here's the plan, here's where we're
19 going to be, we're going to deal with that one way.
20 There are certainly situations in which protesters,
21 as is their right, don't tell us what their plans are
22 in advance. That creates obviously challenges, as you
23 can imagine from a policing perspective. But in terms
24 of like the institutional affiliation of the
25 protesters, no, I wouldn't change that.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: Do you find
3 in both the instance of 1-A and 175-A, so I'm asking
4 educational institutions and religious institutions,
5 do you find existing state or federal law to inhibit
6 the NYPD's ability to protect people seeking
7 religious services or educational services?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: No.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: And do you
10 see either of these bills as an encouragement from
11 the Council to create formal buffer zones or the
12 institutions of frozen zones?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: 1-A and 175-
14 A? No. As I said, I understand 1-A and 175-A to
15 require us to articulate in a transparent way the
16 considerations to go into how we handle these
17 situations.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So, it would
19 be fair to say then that neither of these bills
20 mandate the NYPD to create buffer zones or frozen
21 zones outside of religious institutions or
22 educational institutions.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: No, they
24 don't.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: Thank you.

3 Okay. That's all I have. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. We will
5 pass it to Council Member Ung.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Thank you, Chair, and
7 thank you, Speaker, for your leadership on these
8 issues. I am supportive of this package. These
9 package of legislation give the City a thoughtful
10 tool to protect houses of worship and schools at a
11 time when hate crimes and acts of intimidation are a
12 real concern.

13 As this bill moves forward, will there be
14 a supervisory review process either before or after a
15 zone has been implemented?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So, in a
17 situation in which we have a frozen zone that we've
18 set up, you're going to have, by definition, there's
19 going to be an incident commander on scene, the
20 highest level uniform member of service on scene, so
21 you have a department executive. And that department
22 executive, again, is assessing the facts on the
23 ground. If we've created a frozen zone, and then it
24 turns out there's nothing happening, there's no need,
25 then we can remove the frozen zone. These situations,

2 we want to be clear about, for everyone involved, if
3 there's a frozen zone where it is, where we set it
4 up, where people can go and not go, that's critical,
5 obviously, necessary. But in terms of how long it's
6 maintained for, for example, that's going to be very
7 much in the discretion of the incident commander,
8 again, consistent with the law and consistent with
9 consulting with department executives.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Thank you. And how
11 will the house of worship be notified and be involved
12 in the decision to create a zone?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Right. So, in
14 these situations, we are doing our very best to talk
15 to everybody involved. So, we would be talking both
16 to the leadership of the house of worship. We'd be
17 also trying to engage with the leadership of the
18 protest. And again, sometimes protest leaders will
19 talk to us and engage with us. Sometimes they won't.
20 So, in talking to the house of worship, we would
21 certainly want to hear their concerns. We want to
22 understand kind of how they're coming at this. I will
23 say that ultimately, we're talking about public
24 streets, the determination how to police on those
25 public streets, that's a decision that we're going to

2 make. We want to hear what a house of worship has to
3 say on the subject, and we're going to consider that,
4 of course. But we're talking about public streets,
5 sidewalks, those are decisions for the NYPD,
6 ultimately.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

9 All right, we'll pass it to Council
10 Member Dinowitz.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you,
12 Chair, and thank you, Speaker, and thank you for
13 being here today.

14 I want to just clarify a few things that
15 I think have been danced around with some of the
16 questions regarding legislation, Bill 1 and 175-A. Do
17 these bills provide new powers to the NYPD to
18 restrict free speech?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: 1-A and 175-
20 A, they do not.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay. Does it
22 encourage the NYPD to restrict free speech in any
23 way?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: No.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay. You would
3 characterize these as transparency legislation?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Yes.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay. Good. Now,
6 it's a little, I think, funny to me, because I've
7 been in the Council, I guess, five years. I don't
8 find it too typical that the NYPD is always in favor
9 of this transparency oversight type legislation,
10 right? What makes... well, there are examples, it's
11 fine.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: I'm not sure
13 I completely accept the premise.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: But this one, it
15 seems that you are in favor of. And what makes this
16 transparency bill different than some of the other
17 ones? I'll concede it may not be most of them. But
18 some of these other transparency bills, NYPD's not in
19 favor, why is this one different?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So, first of
21 all, I will say, I don't accept the premise.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Fine.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: We often have
24 no objection to bills that require us to report on

2 various things. There are times when we have concerns
3 that are certainly true for various reasons.

4 As I've said, with both of these bills,
5 1-A and 175-A, with the amended language, changed
6 language, the Department has no objections to the
7 bills. We do understand, of course, the sensitivity
8 of these issues and the importance of these issues.
9 And I should say, importance and sensitivity on both
10 sides of the ledger, right? It's really important in
11 terms of the safety and security of people going in
12 and out of places of worship and schools. It's also
13 incredibly important that people be able to exercise
14 their freedom of speech and their freedom of rights.
15 So, we're very proud of how we do this. I think the
16 NYPD does it incredibly well. And we have no
17 objection to being transparent about that.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Fantastic. Can I
19 ask you, you're proud of the work you do as the NYPD.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Very much.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: But there were
22 questions about, why is something like this needed,
23 right? I think with the implication that this bill
24 grants new powers, which you've said multiple times,
25 does not grant new powers to restrict free speech.

2 Doesn't do that. But I guess the question of
3 effectiveness or efficacy of a bill like this, or
4 about working with protesters to have some sort of
5 zone so people can enter. You already, do you already
6 create those zones in certain circumstances?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Frozen zones
8 or buffer zones? Yes, we do.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: But why?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Why do we
11 create frozen zones?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yeah. Why do you
13 create frozen zones?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So, a variety
15 of reasons. I mean, sometimes like I said, or it
16 comes up in various contexts, but it's about
17 security, it's about safety, it's about making sure
18 people (TIMER CHIME) can go in and out of locations
19 without obstruction or interference, and there are a
20 variety of scenarios that arise. Sometimes protest-
21 related, sometimes not, where we have concerns about
22 that, and we want to make sure that there's a clear
23 space for people to get in and out without problems.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: So the idea that
25 there are buffer zones have proven effective, and

2 it's by the nature of your practice that they've
3 proven effective. Is that fair to say?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: It is a tool
5 that we have that we use in a variety of contexts,
6 including in certain situations involving protests
7 outside certain locations.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I want to be
9 respectful of time, but I appreciate you clarifying
10 the points about this legislation, about these
11 transparency measures, to give everyone, no matter
12 where you are on this issue, the peace of mind, the
13 transparency, to understand what is happening in our
14 schools, and around our schools rather, and around
15 our houses of worship, and no matter what side you
16 might be on, we should all be on the same side of
17 transparency. And I think the very fact that we are
18 having this hearing, and having a discussion about
19 what free speech looks like, lends itself to the very
20 need for these two pieces of legislation. Because
21 with this transparency, we will be able as a Council
22 to have more robust conversations, and more robust
23 oversight over the actions or inactions of the NYPD
24 as it relates to safe access for schools, and safe
25 access for houses of worship. So, again, if this

2 hearing is any indication of what we have to look
3 forward to about this type of important dialogue, I'm
4 looking forward to passing this legislation so we can
5 continue those important conversations.

6 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

7 We'll go back to Council Member Vernikov
8 for the NYPD questions.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Thank you,
10 Chair.

11 Mr. Gerber, I know that Intro. 1 was
12 amended to remove the 100-foot barrier, and I believe
13 it was at the suggestion of the NYPD. Can you just
14 talk a little bit about why that was the suggestion?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Sure. So,
16 there were a number of issues that we had, which we
17 discussed productively with the Council regarding
18 Intro. 1. One of them was the reference to 100 feet.
19 So, there are a number of issues with that. First,
20 the way the old language was written, it said a
21 ceiling of 100 feet. It said we can do, I think it
22 referred to a security perimeter, of up to 100 feet,
23 and by implication, no more. It actually limited our
24 ability to do frozen zones around places of worship.
25 And so from a practical matter, in terms of

2 protecting houses of worship, there are situations
3 where the appropriate frozen zone is far less than
4 100 feet, there are situations where it could be 100
5 feet, and there are situations where it could be more
6 than 100 feet, and we certainly would not want to
7 have our hands tied in our ability to protect houses
8 of worship.

9 In addition, I also do want to flag, and
10 this has come up a number of times, any time you're
11 trying to put a number on these things, it's really
12 going to create problems, both raises legal concerns,
13 it also raises operational concerns. So yes, we're
14 very concerned about that.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: There's a
16 current law in place, though, regarding abortion
17 clinics, and there is a 25-foot perimeter in place,
18 so do you have concerns about that one as well, or?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: I'm sorry. So,
20 you're referring to the City law?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Yes.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Yeah, so
23 that... Right, so are you referring to, this is what,
24 Admin Code 10-1003?

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: If you give me a
3 second, I'll pull up the... I can't seem to find it,
4 but...

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Yeah, but
6 there's a few points. One, I'm not suggesting that
7 any perimeter bill is necessarily unconstitutional.
8 Again, it really depends on a lot of things, but it
9 raises concerns. But also, at least what I'm thinking
10 about is a law that does govern conduct in a
11 perimeter outside of abortion clinics, but it is not
12 a frozen zone in the same way. There's a law in terms
13 of what you can do within a certain universe, and it
14 has particular rules, laws, that govern a certain
15 space, a little bit like the electioneering law as
16 well. It is one thing to say, within a certain
17 perimeter, we're going to have special rules. (TIMER
18 CHIME) It is something else to say that we are
19 freezing everything entirely. Unless you have
20 business coming in here, you're not allowed in this
21 space at all. So analytically, it's different.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: I'll move on,
23 just because we're short on time. But there has been,
24 not from the NYPD specifically, but there hasn't been
25 any concerns regarding the 25-foot perimeter and

2 making it a misdemeanor to block entrances to
3 abortion clinics, as much as there has been pushback
4 on houses of worship, so I just wanted to point that
5 out. But I'll move on.

6 Could you talk a little bit about the
7 difference in Intro. 1 and any current law that's on
8 the books?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: I'm not sure
10 I understand the question. What do you mean?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Well, there are
12 some current laws on the books regarding blocking
13 houses of worship and educational facilities. Could
14 you talk a little bit about what the difference is
15 between what Intro. 1 is proposing and the current
16 law on the books?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: You mean
18 Intro. 1 or Intro. 1-A? You're referring to 1-A?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: 1-A.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Okay. Right.
21 So, we're talking about, there are a number of
22 criminal statutes that would potentially affect
23 individuals blocking access to a place of worship.
24 Disorderly conduct, for starters, being the most
25 obvious example. And then there are laws about

2 interfering with a religious service, disrupting a
3 religious service, also highly relevant. As it stands
4 right now, if someone is blocking the entrance to a
5 house of worship in preventing people from getting in
6 or out, they are subject to arrest. They will be
7 warned. They'll be warned, and if they refuse to
8 move, they're going to be arrested. 1-A is not
9 creating new criminal liability. What 1-A is saying
10 is saying, NYPD, we want you to formulate and put out
11 a plan that describes the considerations that you use
12 when you are thinking about a frozen zone or a buffer
13 zone outside a place of worship. So, it's really two
14 different things.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: So, yes, I'm
16 sorry to interrupt. Just my question is, I guess
17 you're not concerned about this bill not addressing
18 criminal penalties or enforcement mechanisms because
19 you're saying that the NYPD already has that tool.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: That is
21 correct.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Okay. Thank you.

23 Obviously, there have been a lot of
24 concerns about balancing the First Amendment rights,
25 specifically as it relates to the right to protest

2 and free exercise of religion. And as we all know,
3 the First Amendment allows for time, place, and
4 manner restrictions. In your legal opinion, does
5 Intro. 1-A withstand scrutiny for time, place, and
6 manner restrictions?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Yeah, Intro.
8 1-A, in my view, is constitutional, yes.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Okay. And can
10 you tell us a little bit about how NYPD prepares for
11 and responds to protests considering some of them are
12 violent, especially surrounding houses of worship?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So, if we
14 have a report of violence, right, that's different.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: No, I mean
16 before.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Oh, okay.
18 Yeah. So, how do we plan? We try to gather as much
19 information as we can about what may happen, try to
20 get a sense of how big the protest, how large it
21 might be, where it might be, stationary or is it
22 going to move, time, those sorts of things,
23 logistics. We definitely, again, try to be really in
24 dialogue, both with, let's say, the relevant house of
25 worship and with the protesters, right? Ideally,

2 we're talking to everyone involved, and sometimes
3 that's quite productive and successful, sometimes
4 it's not. And then we're thinking about resources, in
5 terms of having community affairs officers there,
6 right, and having community affairs officers there,
7 out in front for dialogue with protesters, the
8 appropriate patrol resources, consistent with the
9 protest element, consistent with the law, but the
10 appropriate patrol resources. We're thinking about
11 executive coverage, right? Who's the incident
12 commander going to be? And then we're looking
13 sometimes at maps, right? We're thinking, okay,
14 here's the location. If we do a frozen zone, how
15 should we configure the frozen zone or the buffer
16 zone, sight and sound, where are we thinking the
17 protesters would be? So that's a shorthand of the
18 process.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Okay. And
20 specifically when you expect there to be intimidation
21 and harassment around houses of worship, how do you
22 prepare for that?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So, if we
24 have concerns about criminal activity, which I think
25

2 is what you're getting at, where we are worried are
3 people are going to be committing crimes...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: I'm not talking
5 about necessarily crimes. I'm talking about
6 intimidation.

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Well, I guess
8 it depends what you mean by intimidation. If we're
9 talking about protected speech, however hateful it
10 may be, that really cannot affect how we do
11 deployment, right? Reasonable time...

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Right. That's
13 why I'm asking how you respond to it.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Reasonable
15 time, place, and manner restrictions, the law is
16 crystal clear, we can do that, it cannot be content...

17 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: And after you answer
18 this particular piece, we're going to go to the next
19 Member, just because of time.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Right. So, it
21 cannot be content-based, the law is crystal clear
22 about that for time, place, and manner restrictions.
23 So, the fact that the speech is hateful in and of
24 itself, in and of itself, does not affect the
25 analysis. Obviously, if we have reason to be

2 concerned about criminal conduct, that is going to
3 affect how we think about deployment.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: And now we'll hear
6 from Council Member Hanif.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Hi, everyone. Good
8 afternoon. Thanks for being here. Apologies, because
9 I realize I forgot my glasses, so I'm not giving you
10 dirty looks. I can't see clearly, so I'm sorry about
11 that. But thank you so much for being here and for
12 the testimony that you've given so far, and
13 apologies, I'm running back and forth in between
14 meetings. But first of all, I just want to say thank
15 you to the Speaker for updating the bill and the
16 version of the bill to what it is now.

17 And I just had some clarifying questions.
18 So, for the most recent version of the bill, do you
19 see this package about planning, transparency, and
20 prevention tools as helping the NYPD respond more
21 effectively to hate incidences while protecting
22 constitutional rights? And does anything
23 substantially change here from how NYPD responds on
24 the ground, or is it pretty much remaining the same?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: The way I
3 view this, I see it as it's remaining the same, but
4 requiring us to articulate kind of the considerations
5 that go into this, so people can understand kind of
6 what we're thinking through and how we're approaching
7 this. But in terms of how we do things day to day,
8 no, I don't see it changing that.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay. Thank you. And
10 nothing's constraining you from complying with the
11 settlement requirements and court orders, is that
12 correct?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Correct. I do
14 not understand these bills to bring us into conflict
15 with the protest settlement. Any plans that we
16 formulate will be and must be consistent with
17 applicable court orders, including the protest
18 settlement.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay. Great. And I
20 think from our side on the Council, we're always
21 looking for more transparency, and so, my
22 understanding is that, in fact, one of the changes is
23 that the NYPD will now have to report in advance on
24 how it plans to respond to protests at a house of
25

2 worship. So, I just wanted to clarify that that's
3 correct.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: I'm not sure.
5 Could you repeat the question?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Sure. One of the
7 changes is that the NYPD will now have to report in
8 advance on how it plans to respond to protests at a
9 house of worship.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Yes. But to
11 be clear, that's not on a one-off basis. In other
12 words, this is a general approach. Hey, here's how we
13 think about these things, here's how we approach
14 these things. But we would not be reporting out
15 publicly like, hey, here is our plan for a one
16 particular protest. It's a broader sort of factors
17 that go into our general approach.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay. Great. And if
19 this legislation moves, what training or roll call
20 guidance would NYPD want to ensure to make sure that
21 there's consistent constitutional enforcement
22 citywide?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Yeah. I
24 appreciate the question. I think we'd have to
25 formulate the plan before we could answer that

2 question. But obviously, we always want to try to
3 communicate effectively to members of service about
4 policies and plans, but it's premature to answer that
5 question, I think.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay. Perfect. And I
7 just want to emphasize that, at least with folks in
8 our Districts, we have a growing Muslim population.
9 We have a large Jewish population. I, myself, as a
10 Christian, as well, go to church. You know, we just
11 want to make sure that people are feeling both
12 publicly safe, that they have access, and that they
13 also feel that their freedoms are protected. So, we
14 just want to thank you for being here. Thank you.
15 Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: We'll now hear from
17 Council Member Shahana Hanif.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you, or do
19 you mean Council Member Lee?

20 All right. Hi, everyone. I'm Council
21 Member Shahana Hanif. Thank you for being here.

22 I'd like to just first share, I regularly
23 hear from my constituents after they've experienced
24 hate crimes. My office encourages reporting those
25 incidents to the PD. Our local precinct is very, very

2 friendly and works collaboratively with us. At the
3 same time, those same residents feel that while
4 they've done the reporting, reporting remains futile.
5 As in, it doesn't bring the recourse the victim is
6 perhaps seeking, that nothing meaningful happens. So,
7 I'm just trying to lay the land for how PD's
8 interaction with victims looks like, because
9 oftentimes, it's just that. And then, my own District
10 office has been vandalized many, many times, targeted
11 by people with protests. And in those moments, we've
12 had to move our full Staff, and this happens to our
13 other Colleagues, too. And in this moment, we have to
14 move all of our Staff to safety while also letting
15 our community know that our District office will
16 always be a welcoming, inclusive space. But
17 inevitably, that then creates anxiety for staffers
18 and visitors, and myself. Every day I go out, I'm
19 thinking, okay, today's the day, today's the day. So,
20 I want to understand, if you can imagine a buffer
21 zone with that incident around my office, protests
22 taking place, can you describe the scene and the
23 number of police personnel? Like, what is happening?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Right. And I
25 appreciate the question. Again, it is a little hard

2 to answer in the abstract. But if there was a protest
3 outside your office, and there was a concern, as it
4 sounds like there would be, about individuals either
5 blocking access to the office or even causing damage
6 to the office, so what we would want to do is, we
7 would want to set up a frozen zone at the front door
8 or the entrance to the office. We would want to have
9 some space for people approaching on each end, so
10 they can come into that space without obstruction or
11 interference. It sounds like we might want to
12 actually just be thinking about also making sure that
13 the frozen zone encompasses the front window or
14 whatever it is to make sure that whenever a protest
15 is happening, no one's breaking a window or causing
16 any property damage. What (TIMER CHIME) we would
17 probably do is, for protesters, we would probably set
18 up space, often it's right across the street. Again,
19 it's not a rule, but that was a pretty common thing.
20 Sometimes you can't do this for various reasons, but
21 pretty common is, hey, here's a space right across
22 the street from the office. You have sight, you have
23 sound, anyone walking around will see you, will hear
24 you, you are seen and you are heard, but they're not

2 going in that frozen zone, so they're not actually
3 getting to the door or to the window.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Of intimidation
5 from across the street, what's the response?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: It really
7 depends on what you mean by intimidation.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Because freedom of
9 speech, we have to protect. We know that. At what
10 point within this buffer zone is PD doing something?
11 What is their role if there's intimidation, if
12 there's shouting slogans that are anti-Semitic, etc?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So, I really
14 appreciate the question. Just a few pieces, because
15 there are a few different things going on here. One
16 is, just to be clear, if we have a frozen zone and
17 someone goes into that frozen zone and they're not
18 allowed to be there, I mean, again, we'll warn them,
19 but they're subject to arrest if they've been told
20 they can't go in there and they go in, they can get
21 arrested for that.

22 But I want to come back to this question
23 about speech that is hateful or anti-Semitic. That
24 speech is protected under the First Amendment. I
25 think one thing that needs to be emphasized, when

2 you're talking about pure speech, not conduct, pure
3 speech, with some extremely narrow exceptions, and I
4 mean really narrow, that's protected under the First
5 Amendment. I can give one example. I think it's
6 actually really important. Give you two examples.
7 There's one, it was a case a few decades ago where
8 neo-Nazis wanted to march in Skokie, Illinois. It's a
9 pretty famous case. Skokie is a community.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: I have a few other
11 questions, if you could.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: You know, I
13 know, but I just... Chair, if it's okay just to explain
14 this. I don't want to cut into the Council Member's
15 time, but I actually think this is important, if I
16 may.

17 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Go ahead.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: You know,
19 neo-Nazis wanted to march in Skokie, Illinois, which
20 is a community, certainly then, and to some extent
21 now still, of Holocaust survivors, and children of
22 Holocaust survivors. It is hard to think of something
23 more, if you think about the pain that that must have
24 involved, and the horror that must have involved for
25 people living in that community, and the Seventh

2 Circuit, in a pretty famous opinion, and said that
3 that's protected. The neo-Nazis marching in Skokie,
4 that's protected speech.

5 I want to give one other example. Again,
6 I think this is really important. And not to cut into
7 the Council Member's time. There's a case from just a
8 few years ago. Supreme Court case, U.S. Supreme Court
9 case. A soldier, a Marine, died serving his country
10 in Iraq, and his father arranged for a funeral for
11 his son. And the Westboro Baptist Church decided to
12 have a protest outside, in which they basically said,
13 in substance, that this soldier's death was, you
14 know, a gift from God, and punishment for the
15 country's sins. And you can only imagine the pain,
16 the anguish that caused for this soldier's father.
17 He's burying his son at a funeral, and he's seeing
18 protesters glorifying his son's death. And he filed a
19 lawsuit for intentional infliction of emotional
20 distress, and it went to the United States Supreme
21 Court. And the United States Supreme Court said,
22 eight to one, that's protected speech. So, that's
23 really important to understand.

24

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you for
3 sharing that context. I think those cases are
4 important.

5 I just have a set of questions to better
6 understand whether or not there will be community
7 engagement. As you interpret this bill, will there be
8 a community input process? And then, will the Office
9 to Prevent Hate Crimes, be involved? And then, how
10 about the education and house of worship facilities
11 themselves? Would they be part of the planning? And
12 then, once the plan has been put together, is it up
13 for public review so that everybody in the community
14 could see and know? So just wanting to understand if
15 this is only a PD project, or we're bringing in
16 community leaders, we're bringing in OPHC, we're
17 bringing in other educational facilities and house of
18 worship, and then for public viewing. Thank you.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: I actually
20 had not fully thought this through until you asked
21 the question, but here's one thought. The way the 1-A
22 and 175 are structured, it's a two-step process. The
23 way I understand the bills now is there's a sort of
24 preliminary plan that we submit to both the Mayor and
25 the Speaker. It's in like one timeframe, and then a

2 second timeframe before it becomes a final plan. I'm
3 not sure exactly what that process is between the
4 preliminary plan and the final plan, but to be blunt,
5 that's to some extent, not to some extent, I mean,
6 what both the Mayor and the Speaker choose to do
7 having received the preliminary plan, that's up to
8 them, and I can imagine that sort of proceeding
9 consists of some of the things that you're talking
10 about, but I'm just not sure.

11 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

12 We'll now hear from Council Member
13 Hudson.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you, Chair,
15 and good afternoon.

16 Black churches in this country have been
17 on the receiving end of violent, racist attacks since
18 we've been here, from the bombing of the 16th Street
19 Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, to the mass
20 shooting at Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, South
21 Carolina. Despite this history of violence at Black
22 churches, broadly speaking, Black clergy are not
23 asking for this legislation. In fact, Black churches
24 often serve as places of refuge for the very
25 communities that have exerted their First Amendment

2 rights in the face of the very racism and anti-
3 Blackness that has killed so many. As data show,
4 Black New Yorkers are disproportionately targeted
5 with stops and criminal summonses compared to their
6 White counterparts and maintain skepticism toward
7 policing. Given this history and present reality, how
8 does the NYPD intend to protect Black churches in
9 ways that do not further criminalize or alienate the
10 very congregants it claims to safeguard?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: So, the way
12 we think about the plan, the plans we're talking
13 about, under 1-A, right, obviously, it would apply to
14 any place of worship, including churches, including
15 Black churches, of course. The way I think about this
16 is if someone is trying to obstruct or impede
17 services in a church, they're trying to interfere
18 with the work of a church, there should be a plan in
19 place to prevent that from happening. And I would
20 think that if someone's trying to do that, I would
21 think that a church or any other institution would
22 want the police to help.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: I guess what I'm
24 asking from you is maybe a slightly more nuanced
25 answer that actually takes into account the lived

2 reality and experiences of Black people, which is not
3 the same always in the face of police and policing as
4 everybody else. And so my question is, how does the
5 NYPD intend to protect Black churches in ways that do
6 not further criminalize or alienate the very
7 congregants it claims to safeguard? And let me just
8 be a little bit more specific, right? You can have a
9 group of protesters that include people of all races
10 and ethnicities, and data shows that historically and
11 presently, Black and Brown men in particular might be
12 more likely to be apprehended by the police. So, when
13 you're going into a Black church or standing around a
14 Black church and protecting a Black church, how do
15 you plan to protect the congregants of a Black church
16 without further criminalizing or alienating the Black
17 people who are inside of that church?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: Two points.

19 One, to (TIMER CHIME) be very blunt about it, when we
20 are talking about inside a particular location,
21 whether an institution wants us in there, right,
22 absent exigency or some act of violence is actually
23 very much up to them. We're talking about interior
24 spaces. But I think to your broader point.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: I'm talking about...

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: No, your
3 broader point, which I understand.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: 1-A specifically.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: No, I do.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: And the
7 implementation.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: I think part
9 of the answer to your question, not the whole answer,
10 but part of the answer, is something that maybe has
11 gotten lost a little bit today, which is that when we
12 do this, as part of how we think about policing
13 protests generally, it would certainly be a part of
14 any plan we would do here, is that our community
15 affairs officers are front and center in this. We
16 haven't really talked about that today, but our
17 community affairs officers, who I think do a
18 tremendous job of building bridges to a variety of
19 communities in the city, and when we think about
20 protest activity, it is community affairs officers
21 who are really the face of the police in these
22 situations. Obviously, there are situations where we
23 need additional officers. We need patrol. That
24 happens, of course. But I think community affairs has
25 a critical role to play here, a role to play in a

2 plan. And I think they are particularly good at
3 building the sorts of bridges and addressing the
4 sorts of concerns that you are talking about.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. That doesn't
6 really... I get that that's your answer, but it doesn't
7 really get to the root of my question.

8 But I'm going to ask my next question,
9 which may feel a bit redundant, but I'm going to ask
10 it anyway. In reference to Intro. 1-A, you stated in
11 your testimony that, quote, the policy will not alter
12 our practices, but rather will articulate and
13 describe what we are already doing, end quote.
14 Further, under federal law, the Freedom of Access to
15 Clinic Entrances and Places of Religious Worship Act
16 of 1994 states, quote, it is illegal to use force,
17 threat of force, or physical obstruction to injure,
18 intimidate, or interfere with anyone trying to
19 exercise their religious freedom at a place of
20 worship, end quote. It appears the intent of this
21 bill is duplicative of existing law. Does the NYPD
22 believe it already has the legal authority under
23 federal, state, and or local law to ensure
24 individuals have safe access to their place of
25 worship? And what would this bill do that isn't

2 already permissible under law? And lastly, if the
3 goal is just for NYPD to clarify its practices, would
4 you be supportive of amending the bill to solely be a
5 reporting bill that asks the police department to
6 regularly inform the city of how it addresses
7 protests?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: There are a
9 few different pieces to that.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: And I can repeat
11 anything.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: No, no.
13 Understood, understood.

14 So, in terms of our ability to do frozen
15 zones, buffer zones, that does not come from federal
16 law. I'm familiar with the statute. It's a federal
17 criminal statute. That comes from our police power,
18 from the Charter, our ability, we have the authority,
19 and it extends more broadly to close streets, to
20 close sidewalks in a variety of situations. So, do we
21 have the power to do that now? We do, consistent with
22 the First Amendment, but we have that power already.
23 So, it's not giving us new power in that regard.

24 In terms of changing the bill to a
25 reporting bill, it's a little hard to, any bill, we

2 have to sort of have to see what the language is
3 before we have a view about it. If there was some
4 alternative bill that had a different sort of
5 reporting provision, we would have to look at it and
6 assess it and form a view about it. I really can't do
7 that in the abstract.

8 Were there other questions?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Would you be able
10 to post your guidelines for protests online today?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GERBER: You mean,
12 well, as I said earlier, I think most of our policies
13 in this regard are public. I said to Chair Salaam,
14 and I think this is right, several of those
15 provisions are available publicly right now. I think
16 there was one he referenced that is not. I'm not sure
17 why it's not. We have to check on that, and subject
18 to a review for operational concerns, we can get that
19 posted too.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. Thank you.
21 Thank you, Chair.

22 SPEAKER MENIN: And I just want to make
23 one clarification. I mean, I think, you know, in
24 talking about what happened at Park East Synagogue, I
25 mean, that was not a peaceful protest. That is one of

2 the main reasons we're here is to address what
3 happened and to fix that so that never happens again.
4 So, I just don't think we should, like, we can't
5 brush that under the rug. That is really what is at
6 stake here. That is why these bills are absolutely
7 needed. I think any suggestion that the bills aren't
8 needed is just minimizing what the impact has been to
9 the Jewish community.

10 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

11 This concludes the Administration portion
12 of the testimony.

13 We will now have a break before we open
14 up the testimony for.

15 Five-minute bathroom break.

16 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Can I have your
17 attention, please? Can I please have your attention?
18 Can you please take your seats? We are about to
19 resume the hearing.

20 Ladies and gentlemen, quiet on the floor,
21 please. Quiet on the floor, please. Please take your
22 seats. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Good afternoon. We
24 now open the hearing for public testimony.

2 I want to remind the members of the
3 public that this is a formal government proceeding
4 and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As
5 such, members of the public shall remain silent at
6 all times. As we've seen before, if there's a need to
7 celebrate, we celebrate like this.

8 And the witness table is reserved for
9 people who wish to testify. No video recording or
10 photography is allowed from the witness table.
11 Further, members of the public may not present audio
12 or video recordings as testimony, but they may submit
13 transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant-at-
14 Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

15 If you wish to speak at today's hearing,
16 please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant-
17 at-Arms if you have not yet already done so and wait
18 to be recognized. When recognized, you will have
19 exactly two minutes to speak on today's hearing
20 topic. Once the two minutes is up, you will hear me
21 say, your time is up.

22 If you have a written statement or
23 additional written testimony you wish to submit for
24 the record, please provide a copy of that testimony
25 to the Sergeant-at-Arms. You may also email written

2 testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72
3 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings
4 will not be accepted there. Again, if you have
5 testimony you wish to email, email it to the word
6 testimony, T-E-S-T-I-M-O-N-Y at council, C-O-U-N-C-I-
7 L dot N-Y-C dot G-O-V. Thank you.

8 I now call the first panel. Ilya Bretman,
9 David Dince, Joanne Samuels, Muhammad Shahidullah,
10 Yisroel Kahan, Nahiyan Taufiq. Please make your way
11 to the witness table. And also Devorah Halberstein.

12 You may begin in whichever order you
13 would like.

14 ILYA BRETMAN: Can you hear me?

15 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Yes.

16 ILYA BRETMAN: Okay. Speaker Menin, Chair
17 Salaam, Honorable Council Members and honorable
18 guests, thank you so much for holding this hearing.

19 Over the past two plus years, our
20 campuses in Manhattan have endured dozens of
21 disruptions and demonstrations, some inside campus
22 buildings, but most taking place outside on our New
23 York streets and sidewalks directly in front of
24 college entrances. I serve as Hillel Director across
25 nine Manhattan campuses. My name is Ilya Bretman, and

2 I'm an English professor at CUNY, a U.S. veteran, and
3 a refugee from the former Soviet Union. I have
4 witnessed firsthand how these repeated demonstrations
5 have created a hostile and intimidating environment
6 for students, faculty, and staff. These gatherings
7 have not simply expressed viewpoints. They have
8 obstructed access to classes and programming,
9 interfered with the daily operations of our
10 institutions, and forced students to make an
11 unacceptable choice, attend school and risk
12 harassment and disruption, or stay home and forego
13 their education. No student should have to weigh
14 their safety or dignity against their academic
15 future. As Councilwoman Mealy had aptly stated, our
16 churches and religious institutions are sacred
17 spaces. So are our educational institutions. They
18 exist to foster learning, inquiry, and growth, not
19 fear, intimidation, or chaos. Students deserve
20 unimpeded access to their campuses and their
21 opportunity to pursue their education free of
22 harassment. Establishing clearly defined
23 demonstration restrictions set at a meaningful
24 distance from campus entrances and primary access
25 points would protect both free expression and public

2 safety. These temporary buffer zones and restrictions
3 would ensure that protests can occur without blocking
4 entryways, disrupting instruction, or escalating
5 tensions. Experience has shown that when clear
6 restrictions and physical barriers are not
7 implemented, these demonstrations too often devolve
8 into scuffles, arrests, and significant disturbances.
9 Protective structure prevents reactive enforcement.
10 Thank you so much.

11 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

12 Thank you. You may go.

13 DAVID DINCE: Testing, okay, okay. Good
14 afternoon, Madam Speaker, Mr. Chairman, Members of
15 the Council. My name is David Dince. I am the
16 Director of Litigation and New York Senior Counsel at
17 the Brandeis Center for Human Rights. The Brandeis
18 Center is an independent, unaffiliated, non-profit
19 legal organization established to advance the civil
20 and human rights of the Jewish people and promote
21 justice for all. We combat the resurgence of anti-
22 Semitism on college and university campuses, in K
23 through 12 schools, in the workplace, and elsewhere.
24 Our rapidly expanding New York office focuses on
25 litigation in all of these areas wherever anti-

2 Semitism is found and can be combated by the law. We
3 are here today to comment concerning the legal
4 principles to be considered in relation to the
5 proposed bill to amend the Administrative Code to
6 plan to establish security buffer zones at places of
7 religious worship. The Brandeis Center is pleased
8 that the Council is addressing a problem that we have
9 been facing in New York and elsewhere. We are facing
10 a crisis of anti-Semitism, confronting the besieged
11 Jewish population of New York City whereby various
12 individuals, groups, and organizations have adopted a
13 tactic of protest at houses of worship, including
14 synagogues. They are impeding the ability of
15 worshipers to enter or exit the building and
16 trampling on their First Amendment right to freedom
17 of religion. This must be stopped. The Brandeis
18 Center has been contacted by numerous individuals who
19 have been blocked from entering their synagogue due
20 to the presence of protesters, some of which have led
21 to assaults and property destruction. The issue
22 before this Committee is now the question of buffer
23 zones, which are needed to ensure that the prohibited
24 conduct does not occur in the first place. In
25 fashioning any such bill, first, the bill must be

2 carefully drawn to apply to all houses of worship.
3 Second, it must recognize the First Amendment right
4 to freedom of speech and protest while balancing
5 those rights against the worshiper's equally
6 important First Amendment right to practice their
7 religion. It is well recognized under the law that
8 appropriate time, place, and manner restrictions are
9 lawful when balancing these competing rights. (TIMER
10 CHIME) One more paragraph?

11 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: No. Thank you. Your
12 time is up.

13 DAVID DINCE: One? No? Okay. My best one.

14 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: We do have your
15 testimony, so thank you. It will be submitted.

16 Thank you. You may go.

17 JOANNA SAMUELS: Good afternoon, Speaker
18 Menin, Chair Salaam, and Members of the City Council
19 and Staff. My name is Joanna Samuels. I'm the CEO of
20 the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan, a Jewish
21 community center that serves New Yorkers of all
22 backgrounds each week, 16 hours a day, seven days a
23 week, through education, culture, wellness, and
24 Jewish life. It is the largest JCC in the world, one
25 that welcomes thousands of people each day. It is the

2 busiest Jewish doorway in New York City. What enables
3 me to sleep at night is the extraordinary commitment
4 of our security staff and our close coordination with
5 the NYPD. I appreciate the opportunity to testify
6 today in support of efforts to ensure safe and
7 reliable access to schools and houses of worship
8 across our city.

9 At its core, the legislative package
10 before you affirms a fundamental democratic promise
11 that every New Yorker should be able to learn and
12 gather and practice their faith without fear of
13 intimidation, harassment, or harm. This is not only a
14 Jewish concern. People of all religions and people
15 who don't have faith deserve the right to congregate
16 without fear of being harassed, without fear that
17 their entrance will be obstructed, or without the
18 fear of violent rhetoric. Protecting access to these
19 spaces is about protecting the pluralism of this
20 beautiful city that we call home. I'm grateful to all
21 of you on the Council for your leadership on this
22 issue and for your commitment to ensuring that all
23 New Yorkers of every faith and background can enter
24 their schools and houses of worship freely and safely
25 and with dignity. I appreciate being part of this

2 very sacred democratic process of testifying, and I
3 thank all of you for all the work you do every day on
4 behalf of our city. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

6 You may go. Thank you.

7 DEVORAH HALBERSTAM: If I may, without
8 taking off the two minutes of my time, that window,
9 can that shade go up? Because there's a witness
10 behind that window right there in my testimony.
11 Speaker, there's a witness behind that window. So, I
12 really would wish if we can raise that shade. Can we?

13 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Yes.

14 DEVORAH HALBERSTEIN: Thank you. Okay.
15 There we go. Okay. There we go.

16 My name is Devorah Halberstam. March 1st,
17 1994, was an ordinary day, much like today. The
18 winter was frigid, and there was snow and ice on the
19 ground. Sharing this day with you is not a
20 coincidence, because on that morning at 1021, while
21 my 16-year-old son was riding in a van with 14 of his
22 fellow students, Chabad students, all identifiable as
23 Jewish kids, with kippahs on their heads, were
24 violently attacked with over 40 rounds of ammunition.
25 My son, Ari, was shot in the head with a Uzi machine

2 gun. His friend, also shot with a Uzi, was left with
3 a brain injury. A third friend lost part of his
4 intestines while being shot with a Glock pistol.

5 Another friend was shot with the shrapnel from the
6 blast through the glass, and the rest emotionally
7 scarred forever. They were shot for only one reason,
8 they were Jewish. And that day, my life was changed
9 forever. My beautiful blue-eyed, six-foot-tall son
10 was robbed from me in a hail of bullets and a heart
11 filled with hate. Who would believe that all these
12 years later, hate has metastasized like a cancer in
13 our society? Social media didn't exist back then.

14 Today, it spreads at lightning speed, and swastikas
15 are painted on the doors of homes and synagogues. It
16 has become a platform for every excuse in the world
17 to perpetrate and spread violate in all its forms. To
18 be that, to be able to walk down the street without
19 looking over your shoulder, to be sure you will not
20 be slashed in your face or spit on because of how you
21 look or what you represent. (TIMER CHIME) Hate
22 crimes, I'm sorry, I have to finish this. Hate crimes
23 are skyrocketing. Just listen to the numbers. One
24 more minute.

2 But today is different. Today, we have a
3 Speaker who is standing up in this Chamber to say
4 enough is enough. It stops here. The laws that the
5 Speaker has presented before you are crucial to the
6 safety and security of all people in this city. New
7 York is the capital of the world, and we must set a
8 precedent. We must demonstrate with these laws that
9 every person is sacred, that life has meaning, that
10 we respect each other, that we will put tools in
11 place to protect us all. Cameras to help our law
12 enforcement do their jobs. Barriers to protect all
13 houses of worship, regardless of who you are.
14 Monitoring and oversight on social media so lies and
15 hate cannot be allowed to fester and poison hearts
16 and minds of our youngsters. And to remember, never
17 forget, educate our children, our next generation
18 about the horrors of the Holocaust and what hate
19 does. My child was the ultimate victim of hate. He
20 lived and died as a proud Jew. Ari never had a chance
21 to live and fulfill his life's dreams. Our family and
22 our community lost the promise of many generations
23 that would have come from him. I am Ari's mother, and
24 my suffering will continue until my last day on this
25 earth. But today, as you look out that window on the

2 Brooklyn Bridge, on the Ari Halberstam Memorial Ramp,
3 you remember Ari. May his death count. Do not turn
4 away. Change must happen today, because the status
5 quo is not an option. Pass these crucial bills, and
6 you will send a message, New York City, we hear you.
7 Hope springs eternal. These bills will bring new hope
8 and a new generation of acceptance, respect,
9 understanding, and justice. Do it for my Ari!

10 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

11 DEVORAH HALBERSTEIN: Thank you, Speaker
12 Menin.

13 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. Yes, you
14 can go.

15 YISROEL KAHAN: Good afternoon, Speaker
16 Menin, Chair Salaam, distinguished Members of the
17 task force. My name is Yisroel Kahan, and I serve as
18 the Orthodox Liaison at the ADL. I'm here in support
19 of this package of legislation which aims to make our
20 city safer for Jewish New Yorkers and all New
21 Yorkers, and in particular, Intro. 1, which aims to
22 create a security buffer zone for houses of worship.
23 Government has an obligation to ensure that all
24 residents, regardless of the faith they practice, can
25 freely practice their religion without fear of

2 intimidation, harassment, or obstruction. I speak to
3 you today as a proudly visible Jew, the grandchild of
4 Holocaust survivors, and someone who regularly walks
5 to synagogue with my family. In this time of rising
6 anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish sentiments, I know that
7 visibly Jewish Americans are too frequently and
8 disproportionately a target for those who are looking
9 to express anger, hatred, and political opinions. In
10 recent months and years, Jewish New Yorkers have
11 experienced increasing incidents of intimidation and
12 interference in and around places of worship.

13 Individuals attempting to enter synagogues have been
14 confronted, blocked, shot at, followed, and many
15 congregants, especially Holocaust survivors, the
16 elderly, and families with children, this has created
17 a real and reasonable sense of fear. That reality
18 should concern this Council, regardless of politics
19 or ideology. This legislation does not restrict
20 lawful protest or protected speech. It addresses
21 conduct, not viewpoint. Establishing clear, defined
22 security parameters, it is a practical way to ensure
23 that people can enter and exit houses of worship
24 safely without harassment or intimidation, while
25 still preserving public access and emergency

2 response. At its core, this bill affirms as a basic
3 principle, religious freedom is not meaningful if
4 access to worship can be obstructed or (TIMER CHIME)
5 made unsafe. No New Yorker should choose between
6 their faith and their personal safety. Thank you.

7 NAHIYAN TAUFIQ: Good afternoon, Speaker
8 Menin, Chair Salaam, and Members of the Committee to
9 Combat Hate. My name's Nahiyah, and I'm representing
10 Muslim Community Network. As a proud Muslim American
11 and the daughter of immigrants, trust me when I say
12 that this is an important issue to me. I understand
13 the fear of walking into your place of worship and
14 wondering if something's going to happen. Just two
15 years ago in Philly, where my parents live, there was
16 a shooting at an Eid prayer. That being said, Intro.
17 1 doesn't protect my community. While on paper, we
18 need something that protects congregants to practice
19 their faith, the current language remains dangerously
20 vague. This bill defines intimidation as placing an
21 individual in reasonable fear of physical harm to
22 themselves or to another individual. What does
23 reasonable fear mean? Who dictates what's reasonable?
24 These questions are left to the discretion of law
25 enforcement officers, and history has taught the

2 Muslim community that when law enforcement is giving
3 broad discretion to define intimidation in public
4 spaces, that discretion is often applied unevenly.
5 Over the last few years, my community continues to be
6 treated with violence and aggression at the hands of
7 law enforcement officers, despite practicing their
8 First Amendment rights in a dignified, justified way.
9 And in the last year alone, two Bangladeshi boys, 18
10 years old, have been unjustifiably shot at the hands
11 of NYPD, and you want us to continue putting our
12 trust in their hands? Without clear guidelines of
13 what constitutes as intimidation, we risk the
14 suppression of free speech and continued harm against
15 the Muslim community. We urge the Council to refine
16 this bill to ensure it only targets physical
17 obstruction and harassment, rather than
18 constitutionally protected speech. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. We have
20 some questions.

21 SPEAKER MENIN: First of all, I want to
22 thank this panel.

23 I want to direct my first comments to
24 Devorah. Devorah, we are so sorry for your loss, and
25 I can't think of a better way to honor your son than

2 to pass this package of bills that really fights
3 anti-Semitism and fights all form of hate so I want
4 to thank you for always standing tall, for your
5 incredibly compelling testimony. I know how hard it
6 is to do what you do every single day, and as a
7 mother, I have such deep level respect for you and
8 everything you've done to honor his legacy so thank
9 you so much for being here.

10 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: And we're going to
11 hear questions from Council Member Vernikov. We can
12 go to Council Member Hudson.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you. I just
14 wanted to reiterate the words of the Speaker, and
15 thank you, Speaker, for acknowledging your testimony,
16 Devorah. As your Council Member, I know firsthand the
17 story of your family, and it always means a lot that
18 you come out to these spaces to make your story known
19 publicly and on the record, which I think is very
20 important for these types of conversations so thank
21 you.

22 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Council Member
23 Vernikov.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Thank you,
25 Chair.

2 Mr. Dince from the Brandeis Center, can
3 you describe some of the incidents that took place
4 outside houses of worship that the Brandeis Center
5 may have recorded or took notice of?

6 DAVID DINCE: Could you repeat the
7 question? I'm sorry.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Can you just
9 describe some of the incidents that took place
10 outside of some of these houses of worship,
11 synagogues, if the Brandeis Center has taken note of
12 those?

13 DAVID DINCE: Sure. Well, I think that
14 Committee Members are probably very aware of the Park
15 East Synagogue, where people outside were harassed,
16 were threatened, were blocked from entering and
17 exiting the synagogue, and I think one of the points
18 that's so important to make are twofold. One is that
19 there are competing constitutional rights here.
20 There's the clear constitutional rights, freedom of
21 speech and to protest, but that is being weighed here
22 against the equally important First Amendment right
23 to freedom of religion and freedom of association of
24 the worshipers, and the question being how do you
25 balance those rights and how do you provide

2 protection for those who are exercising their First
3 Amendment rights to freedom of religion?

4 The second point that I think is
5 important to make is that the actual blocking of
6 these entrances is only one part of it. The other
7 part of it is, of course, the intimidation factor,
8 and that word is used carefully and defined in
9 statute in the bill that's being proposed, and
10 rightfully so. If I were to suggest that Committee
11 Members keep one picture in your mind as you
12 contemplate this bill, it would be to think of a
13 young mother with two children holding the hands of
14 two young children as they approach a synagogue, the
15 mother going in to worship, the two children being
16 dropped off at religious school, and they're forced
17 to walk a gauntlet of angry, hateful people,
18 screaming epithets, making threats of physical
19 violence, and I think the only reasonable conclusion
20 from that is that people would be intimidated, that
21 young mother would be intimidated, and would be
22 dissuaded from entering their house of worship, which
23 I think is really important to keep that in mind when
24 we're weighing these constitutional rights. But we
25 have certainly seen and heard from people who have

2 been assaulted. We have heard of destruction of
3 property inside the synagogues once some protesters
4 get inside, and we have heard from numerous people
5 who are just so frightened that they turn away from
6 their house of worship, from their synagogue.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Thank you. And
8 some opponents of the bill claim that, the Intro. 1-A
9 I'm referring to, that synagogues are used for events
10 they view as non-religious, and therefore they claim
11 there should be no limitations on their right to
12 protest. Can you address that?

13 DAVID DINCE: Yes. Thank you for that
14 question, Councilwoman. I think there are a couple of
15 points to be made in that regard. The first is that
16 this legislation does not restrict the right to
17 protest in any fashion. It simply preserves the right
18 to enter unencumbered and not intimidated. Second, I
19 think lawmakers should be, and I would respectfully
20 submit this, should be loathe to address the issue of
21 what constitutes faith and what constitutes worship,
22 because that's what you're going to get into if
23 you're going to decide why somebody is entering a
24 synagogue and what their purpose is. And third, I
25 would point out that there are always multiple

2 activities going on in a synagogue at the same time.

3 So, while there may be something that's dealing with

4 a more secular issue, at the same time, there will be

5 people praying, there will be people attending

6 religious school, and so on. So, trying to parse

7 those things, I think is a dangerous exercise that

8 the legislation shouldn't touch.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Thank you. And

10 do you have an opinion as it regards to the buffer

11 zone that's required?

12 DAVID DINCE: We are not taking a specific

13 position on the size of the buffer zone. I think it's

14 reasonable to leave that to the NYPD using the

15 reasonableness standard that they described in their

16 earlier testimony. However, I'm going to go back to

17 my same point. It must take into account the

18 intimidation factor in providing a buffer zone which

19 protects the worshipers from being intimidated.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. We're

22 going to move to the next panel.

23 Thank you for your testimony.

24 I'm sorry.

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: One more
3 question for the witness.

4 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Yes, go ahead.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Okay. You
6 addressed intimidation, and you seem, yes, I'm sorry,
7 I didn't get your name.

8 NAHIYAN TAUFIQ: Nahiyah.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Nahiyah. You
10 addressed intimidation and reasonableness, and you
11 seem like a very reasonable person. I was wondering
12 what you think about protesters standing outside a
13 synagogue and yelling in support of Hamas. Do you see
14 that as reasonable, or can you acknowledge that as
15 intimidation?

16 NAHIYAN TAUFIQ: I think my point with the
17 intimidation was that it's very subjective to some
18 people. There are a lot of people in this world that
19 see a Black man walking down the street and will be
20 fearful for their lives because of racism. So, I
21 don't think something that's in law that's supposed
22 to protect people should be left up to the discretion
23 of people and be so subjective.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: I don't
25 disagree, but specifically regarding individuals

2 yelling in support of Hamas, especially considering
3 what happened on October 7th, do you think that is
4 reasonable to do outside a synagogue?

5 NAHIYAN TAUFIQ: I'm not the NYPD, so I
6 don't think it matters what I think. I think that
7 there are a lot of times at Palestine protests...

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: I care what you
9 think.

10 CHAMBER: (APPLAUSE)

11 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Please, order in the
12 Chamber. To appreciate what you hear, this is the
13 appreciation gesture. Thank you.

14 NAHIYAN TAUFIQ: I think that there are a
15 lot of times that people will hear someone say free
16 Palestine or from the river to the sea and claim that
17 as intimidation.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: I'm just asking
19 about Hamas. Not asking about free Palestine. Just
20 Hamas, support of Hamas.

21 NAHIYAN TAUFIQ: I don't have an opinion
22 on that.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: I wanted to put
24 that on the record. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
3 testimony.

4 We're going to move to the next panel. I
5 now call Robert Freedman (phonetic), Ariel Bakal,
6 Reverend Robert Waterman, Ariel Savransky, David
7 Ingber, Joe Rosenberg, and Bennett Katz (phonetic).

8 We're now going to turn to Reverend
9 Robert Waterman on Zoom.

10 REVEREND ROBERT WATERMAN: Hi. Good
11 afternoon, everyone. This is Reverend Dr. Robert
12 Waterman. How are you all today?

13 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Doing well.

14 REVEREND ROBERT WATERMAN: Good. That was
15 a test to make sure that you guys can hear me.

16 Speaker Menin and the Committee, this is
17 Reverend Dr. Robert Waterman. I'm just here out of
18 concern of the legislation that Speaker Menin is
19 putting forth. I believe that is something that will
20 be suitable for all houses of worship. There was a
21 day of this year at the Antioch Baptist Church where
22 I pastor. During the Martin Luther King weekend, we
23 had a visitor that came into the church. He
24 encountered many of our parishioners and he was
25 spoken to, but we're a church that invites everyone

2 in. We have relationship with our Muslim brothers,
3 our Jewish brothers and sisters across the aisle. But
4 this particular weekend, this Muslim young man walked
5 in. I'm calling him young, but he was not of that
6 youthful age, but yet he walked in and was spoken to
7 many times to have a seat and sit down. He roamed
8 around the whole church. We could not identify him.
9 He came in under the assumption as an Uber driver. My
10 question about Uber drivers, Lifts, or even Access-A-
11 Ride..

12 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: So, Reverend, I'm not
13 sure. Your screen is frozen. We can't hear you. Okay,
14 we're going to come back to you.

15 For the people in the Chamber, you can
16 begin in any order you like.

17 Two minutes.

18 JOSEPH ROSENBERG: Good afternoon. I'm
19 Joseph Rosenberg, Director of the Catholic Community
20 Relations Council representing the Archdiocese of New
21 York and the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens. We thank
22 Speaker Menin and the Committee for holding this
23 hearing on such an important and timely matter. At a
24 time when hate crimes against religions are on the
25 rise and incidents against synagogues, mosques,

2 churches and their schools are increasing, our city
3 must stand together, united against such abhorrent
4 acts. Such solidarity includes supporting legislation
5 allowing the NYPD to create a buffer zone outside of
6 houses of worship to ensure the safety of people
7 entering from being threatened, harassed, and
8 intimidated. A similar bill dealing with educational
9 facilities is also supported. Students, teachers, and
10 faculty of public and non-public schools must not be
11 placed in a situation of being afraid to enter these
12 buildings. Parents need to be assured that schools in
13 our city will be safe for their children and a place
14 for learning, not a place for fear. In New York City,
15 both the Archdiocese of New York and the Diocese of
16 Brooklyn and Queens, like many other religious
17 organizations, have seen the rise of crimes against
18 houses of worship. These include acts of vandalism,
19 destruction of religious statues, and the disruption
20 of religious services. We stand with all other faiths
21 in declaring and reiterating that an attack on one
22 religion is an attack on all religions and frankly is
23 an attack on all New Yorkers. Like other faith-based
24 organizations, we are fortunate in having the NYPD as
25 a strong partner. They have been responsive and

2 proactive in confronting these challenges. We are
3 pleased that they are given flexibility to establish
4 policies and practices consistent with the
5 legislative intent of these measures. Three bills in
6 particular are strongly supported. They are Intro. 1-
7 A and 175, which charge the NYPD to create
8 established buffer zones at entrances and exits of
9 houses of worship and educational facilities,
10 including non-public schools, and Intro. 327, which
11 allows non-public schools to be reimbursed by the
12 City of New York for the cost of installing and
13 operating video cameras to record all activities
14 within 15 feet of (TIMER CHIME) the entrance and exit
15 of each school. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. Thank you
17 as well.

18 RABBI DAVID INGBER: Hello. Good
19 afternoon. My name is Rabbi David Ingber, and I serve
20 as the founding Rabbi of Romemu community in
21 Manhattan and Brooklyn and as a Rabbi at the 92nd
22 Street Y. I'm grateful to Speaker Menin, to Chair
23 Salaam and to the Members of the City Council and to
24 all those who have worked thoughtfully on this
25 legislation for your leadership and for the

2 seriousness with which you are approaching this
3 issue. I speak today on behalf of both of my
4 communities in support of the buffer bill. I want to
5 begin with something simple, which is in a democratic
6 society, we must protect both freedom of speech and
7 freedom of worship. These are not competing values,
8 notwithstanding what others might say. They are co-
9 equal pillars of our civic life. And over the past
10 year, houses of worship and Jewish communal
11 institutions have experienced heightened tension,
12 protest activity and at times intimidation. I,
13 myself, was the subject of such intimidation most
14 recently at an event at the 92nd Street Y where
15 leaving the event, I was accosted as were my family,
16 and I felt intimidated. Let me be clear though,
17 protest is of course a sacred democratic right. But
18 there is a profound difference between protest in the
19 public square and protest that targets the entrances
20 of synagogues, churches, mosques, and community
21 centers in ways that make people feel unsafe as they
22 gather to pray, to mourn, to celebrate and to learn.
23 A buffer zone does not silence speech, it creates
24 space, literally creates space for dignity, safety
25 and access. It ensures that elderly congregants,

2 families with children and individuals simply seeking
3 spiritual refuge can enter their institutions without
4 confrontation or fear or being spit at or being
5 called genocide killers or some such thing. In the
6 Jewish tradition, we speak of makom kadosh, of sacred
7 space. Every faith community deserves the ability to
8 create such space without any intimidation, and this
9 bill affirms that New York City can uphold robust
10 public discourse while also protecting vulnerable
11 communities. This is not about privileging one group
12 over the other, it is about setting reasonable
13 constitutional boundaries that allow all of us to
14 live together in a city that is both passionately
15 expressive and fundamentally safe. I urge you to pass
16 this bill. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you as well,
18 and I'd like to note for the record that we've been
19 joined by Council Member Phil Wong.

20 You may go.

21 ARIEL SAVRANSKY: Thank you for the
22 opportunity to testify today. My name is Ariel
23 Savransky, and I am the Director of Government and
24 Community Relations also at the 92nd Street Y. For
25 more than 150 years, 92NY has served as a non-profit

2 cultural and community center in Manhattan, welcoming
3 over 700,000 New Yorkers of all backgrounds annually.
4 As a prominent Jewish institution that hosts more
5 than 250 high-profile public programs each year, 92NY
6 is both highly visible and deeply connected to the
7 Jewish community. That visibility has increasingly
8 made us a target and, since 10/7, our security costs
9 have increased by 150 percent and continue to grow.
10 Most recently at the event that Rabbi Ingber
11 referenced, patrons entering the building were met
12 with drums, flags pushed into their faces, and
13 shouted insults. Our CEO was also physically
14 confronted while documenting the scene. The hostility
15 did not stop at event attendees, and even neighboring
16 businesses were harassed for being in or near a
17 Jewish space. Protests like this occur with troubling
18 regularity. Demonstrators are often aggressive
19 towards patrons and frequently go beyond holding
20 signs to shouting inflammatory accusations including
21 calling guests child murderers or Nazis. New Yorkers
22 should not be intimidated or harassed for attending a
23 lecture, dropping off their child, or using a gym.
24 The legislation under consideration, particularly
25 related to perimeters, is essential to providing

2 additional protection to organizations at risk and
3 must be passed with language inclusive enough to
4 ensure that Jewish community and cultural centers
5 such as the 92nd Street Y are protected. Thank you
6 for your leadership and your commitment to combating
7 anti-Semitism and strengthening protection for
8 vulnerable communities. We look forward to continuing
9 to work together to ensure that Jewish New Yorkers
10 feel safe. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

12 ARIEL BAKAL: Good afternoon. It's an
13 honor to be speaking in front of you here today. My
14 name is Ariel Bakal. I am 18 years old and attend SAR
15 High School in the Bronx. On February 23rd, 2024, two
16 men dressed in cloaks walked into the Riverdale
17 Jewish Center, one with a large machete in hand. They
18 approached my friends and me and asked in a menacing
19 tone, do you want to see something cool? I was
20 scared. I knew that attacks on places of worship
21 regardless of religion were not uncommon, but I never
22 thought that it would be my reality. Immediately, my
23 survival instincts kicked in. One of my friends and I
24 bolted out the back door and called 9-1-1.
25 Thankfully, the police arrived and took care of the

2 situation before it could escalate. The men, who were
3 clearly troubled, had entered a place of worship with
4 a machete and were seeking to threaten a religious
5 leader. Our heroes at the NYPD made sure the
6 situation never turned violent, but the presence and
7 language of these men struck fear into the hearts of
8 my friends and family. These were men who did not
9 understand the fear which they invoked by threatening
10 us in our place of worship, men who did not
11 understand boundaries. At its core, this bill is
12 about boundaries, setting boundaries on what is safe
13 and productive protest and what is not. This bill
14 would give students, teachers, clergy members, and
15 countless others, regardless of religion, age, sex,
16 and race, a sense of safety which is currently
17 missing. Free speech and the right to protest are
18 fundamental rights upon which this country was
19 founded. This bill does not take away from any of
20 these rights. It only structures them. It allows for
21 people to have their voices heard without invading
22 the safety and comfort of the entire New York City
23 community. I ask you to consider, if these men had
24 intruded on your house of worship in this manner, how
25 would it make you feel? And sit with that. That

2 feeling is why it is imperative that this bill is
3 passed.

4 ROBERT FREEDMAN: Thank you, Speaker
5 Menin, Chair Salaam, and the Committee to Combat Hate
6 for your work, because I was at Park East Synagogue
7 on that night of November 19th, and I'm still
8 outraged by what I witnessed. This was not peaceful
9 protest, and it shouldn't be sanitized or gas lit. A
10 mob screamed violent slogans at Jews at a synagogue
11 as we tried to enter the space for prayer and for a
12 communal event. Families, seniors, neighbors, folks
13 gathering in faith, just feet away from hostile and
14 often mass protesters yelling, globalize the
15 intifada, death chants, and most chillingly, there's
16 only one solution, then kill yourself, someone said,
17 slit your throat, and calling folks Nazis. It's all
18 on video, and my link is in the handout that I handed
19 out to you. We all know all too well what these words
20 mean. They are in its abstract. They're hateful
21 threats and incitement, not merely protected hate
22 speech like Skokie and Westboro, and they were
23 directed at a community already facing unprecedented
24 and relentless racist anti-Semitic hostility. High-
25 powered blinding flashlights were aimed at our eyes.

2 I saw adults shield each other. I saw elders lowering
3 their heads, shaken and humiliated. A sacred space
4 was turned into a site of menacing intimidation. Our
5 Mayor promised safety for all New Yorkers. Harassment
6 should never be normalized. Jews attacked, students,
7 businesses, cemeteries, and playgrounds targeted,
8 synagogues are mobbed. It feels like open season on
9 Jewish New Yorkers, but we've been here since 1654
10 and we're not going anywhere. We're entitled to equal
11 rights and protection, full stop. We know proper
12 buffer zones don't silence protest or stop sight and
13 sound. They prevent intimidation, but there is a
14 chilling effect here. The chill of parents afraid to
15 bring their children to school or children hiding
16 their faith. The chill of seniors unsure that they
17 can walk through a hostile crowd. The chill of
18 communities wondering if prayer is worth the risk, or
19 if they even should simply be visible in their own
20 city. That's chilling. We have buffers around
21 courthouses, polling sites, abortion clinics, because
22 access to constitutional rights matters. And the
23 right to worship freely matters too. But there's no
24 constitutional right to intimidate (TIMER CHIME)

2 obstruct or threaten folks at the door of sanctuary.

3 And if you look up there...

4 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Your time is up.

5 ROBERT FREEDMAN: Our founder, Thomas
6 Jefferson said that no matter what the persuasion is,
7 we should have freedom and equality. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

9 Do we have any questions for this panel?

10 Seeing none, thank you for your
11 testimony.

12 I will now call to the testimony table,
13 Rabbi Daniel Sherman, Hindy Poupko, Mark Treyger,
14 Scott Richmond, Yerra Humselber (phonetic), Marcia
15 Caban, Rabbi Abe Faur.

16 I now call Rabbi Faur on Zoom.

17 RABBI ABE FAUR: Hi.

18 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Hi, Rabbi. You have
19 two minutes. You may begin.

20 RABBI ABE FAUR: Okay. Well, thank you
21 very much to the Committee. I was asked to give some
22 of my thoughts about what it means to be a community
23 Rabbi. I'm the Chief Rabbi of Ohel David and Shlomo,
24 which is a synagogue in Brooklyn. We had to spend
25 quite a lot of money on security over the last year.

2 Our regular budget is 50,000. This year, we actually
3 went up to 100,000. So, we take it very seriously.
4 And I believe that it's important for the Committee
5 to understand that not just as a rabbi, but as a Jew,
6 we're a bit concerned about the direction that things
7 are going in in the city. And certainly when we think
8 about potential demonstrations outside any synagogue,
9 it's something that it's not just unpleasant, but it
10 actually can become a security threat. People feel
11 very threatened, especially in light of what happened
12 on October 7th. So, we're dealing with crowds that
13 are not just anti-Jewish, but crowds that support
14 violence against Jews. And that's where we get scared
15 because we're very pluralistic. We're okay with
16 people having different opinions. We respect
17 different opinions. But for us to tolerate people who
18 support the massacre of Jews is something that just
19 makes us feel very uncomfortable with.

20 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

21 I'll now call Bennett Katz on Zoom.

22 Bennett Katz, can you allow us to unmute you?

23 BENNETT KATZ: Hi, here I am.

24 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. You have
25 two minutes.

2 BENNETT KATZ: Good afternoon, and thank
3 you to the Council for allowing me to testify about a
4 violent protest, and my personal experiences with it
5 at Park East Synagogue on November 19th, 2025. On
6 that evening at around 7:30, I was approaching the
7 synagogue on East 68th Street, that entrance between
8 Lexington and 3rd. I was wearing a kippah or a
9 yarmulke at the time, walking on the north side of
10 the street. As I approached the synagogue, I observed
11 a crowd of about what looked like 200 people
12 stretched on the whole block on the same side of the
13 street as the entrance of the synagogue, right up to
14 the entrance of the synagogue, screaming loudly,
15 death to Zionists, why don't you kill yourself, right
16 at the people going right into the synagogue for an
17 event. As I approached the rear of the protest, I was
18 immediately surrounded by 10 to 15 mass protesters
19 who put up their fists almost like a human wall to
20 stop me from proceeding down the sidewalk towards the
21 entrance of the synagogue. I was jostled, bright
22 lights shined in my eye, and suddenly from behind
23 this wall, from behind all these people, threw a
24 punch, which fortunately just glanced my shoulder,
25 and I wasn't injured, again, fortunately. One

2 protester said, where are you going, they're not
3 going to let you down there, and my thought was, how
4 is that possible on a New York City street that
5 someone's telling me I can't go down there, that that
6 street was being occupied by these people? And this
7 was very shocking to me that there were folks who are
8 being obstructed from entering the synagogue, and it
9 should be noted, I was not carrying a flag, I was not
10 carrying a sign, I was merely a person with a kippah
11 on his head walking towards the synagogue. That was
12 enough to provoke this kind of reaction, this violent
13 reaction. Council, no New Yorker should be made to
14 feel unsafe as they...

15 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. Your time
16 is up.

17 BENNETT KATZ: enter any house of worship,
18 and I urge you to support these bills that are being
19 discussed today. Thank you very much.

20 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. Now I'm
21 calling the in-person panel.

22 You can go in any order you would like.
23 You have two minutes.

24 MARCIA CABAN: Hi. My name is Marcia
25 Caban. I will soon mark my 10th anniversary as the

2 Executive Director of Central Synagogue, which is a
3 very large congregation in Midtown East. When I
4 arrived in 2016 in my role, I was surprised to learn
5 that Central had armed guards. Today, we have twice
6 as many guards, metal detectors, bomb-sniffing dogs,
7 protective barriers in front of our sanctuary, which
8 is beautiful and it is a shame, and much more. We
9 have to. Synagogues around our country have seen
10 violent attacks, arson, vandalism, and threats. The
11 rise in anti-Semitism across America and in our city
12 is deeply alarming. So too is the rise in hate crimes
13 against all minority communities, with more than half
14 of them anti-Jewish hate crimes, although Jews make
15 up a far smaller percentage of our city's population.
16 I am here in my role as a Jewish professional to
17 share what keeps me up at night. It is the safety of
18 my community. We have thousands of people, toddlers
19 and teenagers, parents and grandparents, walking
20 through our doors each week. They deserve to enter a
21 synagogue where they feel safe, where they can pray,
22 mourn, celebrate, and gather without fear or
23 interference, where every person is welcomed with
24 dignity. And yet, we have received threats. We have
25 been targeted. We conduct regular active shooter

2 drills. We place emergency instructions in our pews,
3 explaining what to do should the unthinkable occur.
4 This is not how a sacred space is meant to feel. We
5 are grateful that the City Council recognizes its
6 responsibility to ensure that Jews and all people of
7 faith can gather to worship in peace, safety, and
8 without intimidation. Our community will continue to
9 lead with openness, strength, and resilience, but we
10 cannot do it alone.

11 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
12 testimony.

13 YERUCHIM SILBER: Thank you, Chair Salaam,
14 Members of the Committee. My name is Yeruchim Silber.
15 I serve as Director of New York Government Relations
16 at Agudath Israel of America, a nationwide advocacy
17 organization. Thank you for this opportunity. We're
18 here today to express our support for the package of
19 legislation being introduced today, especially that
20 to establish the clear security perimeters around
21 houses of worship. This bill addresses an urgent and
22 growing concern, ensuring that New Yorkers can enter
23 and exit their houses of worship safely and without
24 intimidation or obstruction. Recent events illustrate
25 precisely why this legislation is needed. As we've

2 heard, sadly as we know, anti-Semitic incidents have
3 increased exponentially across the city. This
4 November, as was mentioned so eloquently before by
5 some of the speakers, protestors gathered directly
6 adjacent to a synagogue entrance during an event,
7 hindering access and creating an atmosphere of
8 intimidation for those attempting to enter. While
9 peaceful protest is a protected right, obstructing
10 access to houses of worship crosses a line and
11 undermines both public safety and religious freedom.
12 While we support efforts addressing similar concerns
13 as State efforts, the City legislation is especially
14 significant. New York City is home to the largest
15 population of Orthodox Jews outside of Israel.
16 Measures enacted here will have an outsized
17 influence, not only on public safety, but also on
18 communal confidence and stability. The bill sends a
19 powerful message. New York City will not tolerate
20 intimidation outside houses of worship. At a time
21 when Jews around the world face rising anti-Semitic
22 threats, passage of this legislation will affirm that
23 New York remains a place where Jewish life is
24 protected and respected. At the same time, we
25 recognize this legislation is not a cure-all or not

2 on its own in anti-Semitic incidents or hateful
3 rhetoric. Nevertheless, it still represents an
4 essential step forward. We commend Speaker Menin and
5 her Colleagues in the Council for advancing this
6 measure, and we strongly support the Speaker's
7 comprehensive five-point plan to combat anti-
8 Semitism. We look forward to its implementation. New
9 York is a (TIMER CHIME) Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. I'd like
11 to note for the record that we've been joined by
12 Council Member Brewer.

13 MARK TREYGER: Thank you, Chair Salaam and
14 Members of the City Council. It's great to be with
15 many friends and colleagues. My name is Mark Treyger,
16 CEO of JCRC New York, and I'm going to put aside my
17 prepared remarks and just speak from the heart. Just
18 a few weeks ago, JCRC celebrated its 50th anniversary
19 celebration at Park East Synagogue, and a 95-year-old
20 Holocaust survivor, Rabbi Arthur Schneier, addressed
21 our crowd, not as a politician, not as a lobbyist,
22 but as a Jewish New Yorker who believed that he lived
23 long enough that he would never again have to see
24 Jewish people fearful to practice their faith. But
25 unfortunately, he described exactly that at Park

2 East, and I'm very happy that the Council is setting
3 the record straight that what happened at Park East
4 was not peaceful. It was not peaceful. There is no
5 constitutional right to bang on doors and scare the
6 living hell out of people entering or leaving their
7 house of worship. When you bang on the door of a
8 house of worship and scare people and yell at them in
9 their faces, that is not persuasion, that is
10 intimidation. That's against the law. And I'm also
11 pleased to hear the NYPD acknowledge that they did
12 not meet the moment that day, which is also proof
13 positive that you cannot rely on a piece of guidance.
14 And I remind this Body, that I have so much respect
15 for, that guidance is very different than a law. Many
16 laws the City Council has passed, including in my
17 time, began as a piece of guidance in a City agency,
18 and later to be cemented into law to require that
19 agency to be held accountable, to perfect it,
20 training, education, outreach. That's why we have a
21 City Council. (TIMER CHIME) So, I thank you all for
22 creating this space and opportunity for the community
23 to be heard and to make sure that we protect the
24 rights of worshipers and the First Amendment for

2 everyone. But we have to make sure that we act in
3 this moment.

4 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

5 MARK TREYGER: Thank you, Chair Salaam.

6 SCOTT RICHMOND: Good afternoon, Chair
7 Salaam and Members of the Committee to Combat Hate.
8 My name is Scott Richmond, and I'm proud to serve as
9 the Regional Director for ADL's office covering New
10 York and New Jersey. I'm pleased to be here today to
11 testify in support of legislation sponsored by New
12 York City Council Speaker Julie Menin. New York City
13 faces an unprecedented crisis of antisemitism that
14 demands immediate action. While we do not yet have
15 finalized data for 2025, ADL carefully responds and
16 tracks antisemitic incidents across the country, and
17 of course in New York City. According to our 2024
18 audit, New York State recorded 1,437 incidents of
19 antisemitism, the highest number of incidents
20 reported in any state across the country,
21 representing 15 percent of all antisemitic incidents
22 nationwide. And most importantly, 68 percent of those
23 incidents occurred in New York City in the five
24 boroughs. And we'd be happy to provide all of the
25 data for 2025 when it comes out. This data is unique

2 to ADL because it comprises both hate crimes and hate
3 incidents, to which ADL responds and carefully
4 tracks. We at ADL know all too well that a pattern of
5 unchecked hate incidents leads to hate crimes.

6 Indeed, the data on hate crimes in New York State
7 reveals a disturbing pattern of escalating violence
8 with a record 69 antisemitic assaults taking place in
9 New York City with more than half of them perpetrated
10 against Orthodox Jews. My team and I respond to
11 antisemitic incidents every day and know this work
12 firsthand, and our data shows that religious
13 institutions, unfortunately, became targets of
14 antisemitic incidents many times. By our account in
15 2024 in New York City, this happened 157 times.

16 Congregants have been harassed and even assaulted at
17 Jewish institutions. Speaker Menin's legislation
18 carefully balances the rights to peacefully protest
19 (TIMER CHIME) and engage in free speech and the need
20 to protect religious freedom and public safety.

21 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. Your time
22 is up.

23 SCOTT RICHMOND: We urge you to support
24 Intro. 1-A.

25 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

2 HINDY POUPKO: Hi. My name is Hindy
3 Poupko. I'm honored to be testifying today on behalf
4 of UJA Federation of New York. Thank you, Chair
5 Salaam and the Members of the Committee to Combat
6 Hate, for the opportunity to provide testimony in
7 support of this bill package, specifically Intro. 1
8 and Intro. 175. Today is really about upholding three
9 sacred values which we all hold dear, freedom to
10 practice our religion, freedom of assembly, and
11 everyone's right to free speech. These bills find a
12 way to uphold all of these values without compromise.
13 What these bills aim to do is ensure that in
14 protecting free speech, we are also not causing harm
15 to communities, ensuring that families and children
16 can enter their houses of worship and schools without
17 being harassed. These bills take a practical and
18 measured approach requiring the NYPD to create and
19 implement a clear plan to establish buffer zones when
20 safety concerns arise. For so many New Yorkers of
21 faith, our temples, church, mosques, and synagogues
22 are not simply our temples and churches, they are
23 community buildings, they are our sanctuaries. We
24 pray there, we mourn there, we cry, we celebrate our
25 lives milestones, and we teach our children there. We

2 all deserve to feel safe in these spaces. New York is
3 not only the greatest city in the world but is also
4 home to the largest Jewish community outside of
5 Israel, and we want to keep it that way. Images of
6 Jews being harassed on their way to synagogue not
7 only frighten Jewish communities everywhere, they are
8 also a stain on our city's image and we want it to
9 end. We want New York to continue to be a place where
10 everyone feels welcome. I remember visiting New York
11 as a young child coming from Montreal, and my father
12 would always say, look how welcome we all here, so
13 many yarmulkes on the streets, it was also the only
14 city where you can get a kosher hot dog at Yankee
15 Stadium. We want New York to stay that way, we want
16 to feel at home here, we want everyone to feel that
17 this is a city where they can be most themselves,
18 most at home. Peaceful protest is a cherished right
19 in this city, intimidation and obstacles are not.
20 Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in
21 support of this important legislation. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

23 RABBI DANIEL SHERMAN: Hi. My name is
24 Daniel Sherman, I'm the Rabbi of West Side
25 Institutional Synagogue and West Side Sephardic in

2 the Upper West Side, and our community serves
3 approximately 300 families ranging from young
4 children to individuals in their 90s. The beauty of
5 our synagogue is that it is comprised of individuals
6 who fled their homes, whether it's Hungary and
7 Ukraine, on the one hand Morocco, Tunisia on the
8 other, and they have come to New York City to start
9 their lives because of the freedom of speech that
10 they want from the government and the individual in a
11 society that accepts them and allows them to worship.
12 The beauty of this bill is that it provides both, the
13 transparency on behalf of the government to ensure
14 that protesters and the individuals that are being
15 protested know the buffer zones that will be given to
16 them as well as on behalf of the individuals praying
17 that they can enter and access into homes that have
18 become not only their spiritual home, but their
19 communal home as well, their home away from home from
20 the continents in which they now live in this
21 wonderful City of New York. I'd like to conclude that
22 every morning or almost every morning I leave my
23 synagogue after morning prayers on 76th Street. I
24 pass a church on 73rd, I go home to 68th Street where
25 I pick up my two boys, and I bring them to their

2 Jewish school on 75th Street, and I'm blessed every
3 morning to also pass by the mosque at 72nd in
4 Riverside. The New York City that I envision is one
5 of where I left my synagogue and entered into it for
6 morning prayers safely. It's one of where those
7 entering the church on 73rd Street, that they are
8 given the sense of sensitivity and safety as they
9 enter and exit and, when I show my boys this mosque
10 on 72nd Street with the true dream of coexistence
11 that I really imagine everyone in this room wants,
12 that my boys also understand what is happening in
13 that mosque and that the individuals in that mosque
14 feel safe as well. And my blessing to New York City
15 is that those in the synagogues, those in the
16 mosques, those in the churches, each feel equally
17 access and safety both in their homes, out of their
18 homes as they exit and that's truly what New York
19 City has always been and can be and continue with
20 this bill. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
22 testimony.

23 I think we do have some questions for
24 this panel. Council Member Vernikov.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Thank you,
3 Chair. I have two questions. One for Rabbi Faur and
4 one for Mr. Treyger.

5 Rabbi Faur, some opponents of Intro. 1-A,
6 the bill we're discussing here today, claim that
7 synagogues are used to sell Israeli land and
8 therefore there should be no limitations on their
9 right to protest. Can you talk about the religious
10 and national connection of the Jewish people to the
11 land of Israel and address how Israel's an integral
12 part of Jewish identity?

13 CHAMBERS: (INAUDIBLE)

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet, please. Thank
15 you.

16 RABBI ABE FAUR: Yes. Thank you for that
17 question. And it's important to understand that when
18 Jews pray, we pray three times a day and we face the
19 land of Israel and we face the land of Israel because
20 it's not just a religious connection with the land.
21 Of course, the land is sanctified for the Jewish
22 people, but it's also a national historical
23 connection. That's where we come from. That's what we
24 always want to return. And whenever Jews think about
25 the history, which was filled with, unfortunately,

2 antisemitism, pogroms, horrible, horrible events over
3 the course of the last 1,000, even 2,000 years, Jews
4 always thought about, well, one day we'll go back to
5 Israel. So, today we can go back to Israel and that
6 gives us a sense of comfort. And I want to just
7 explain that without going over time. Today we have
8 the State of Israel. And as a Jew who lives in
9 America, and I love America and I love New York and I
10 love being here and I love the diversity of the city,
11 but I'm also aware of what's happening all over the
12 world and I'm aware of my history. There was always
13 antisemitism. In my mind, I can do something that my
14 grandparents couldn't do. I view Israel as a place to
15 go to if, God forbid, things went downhill in this
16 country. So, when we think about buying land in
17 Israel, it's not just about the religious connection
18 and it's certainly not a commercial transaction. It
19 has nothing to do with commerce. There's a lot of
20 good real estate opportunities in the U.S. and many
21 places in the world. Israel is not necessarily a real
22 estate opportunity. We think about it as a place
23 where we can finally return home and be safe.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Thank you.

2 And Mr. Treyger, since JCRC is an
3 umbrella Jewish organization working with Jewish
4 communities across New York, do you believe these
5 hateful demonstrations have impacted Jewish New
6 Yorkers to the extent that they made them fearful of
7 attending their synagogue and affected other aspects
8 of Jewish life?

9 MARK TREYGER: Thank you for the question,
10 Council Member. Absolutely, that is the case. I don't
11 think a week goes by that I'm not at an event or a
12 meeting where I hear from a parent who painfully
13 tells me that they advise their child to wear a
14 baseball hat over their yarmulke when they take the
15 subway to get to school or to attend events in their
16 Jewish institution or synagogue. That's painful. That
17 is very painful because, you know, I am also a
18 grandson of Holocaust survivors. My family left the
19 former Soviet Union because of religious persecution.
20 And to have to hear and relive stories that I've
21 heard as a child, it's unacceptable. It goes against
22 everything that New York and America stands for. And
23 I also want to say, Council Member, I heard questions
24 before about the use of data in terms of making
25 decisions. Let me give the Council a piece of data.

2 The non-profit security program that was revamped in
3 2021 to provide security aid for houses of worship
4 and institutions started at about 180 million dollars
5 back then. Do you know what it is now? Leader Hakeem
6 Jeffries attended our breakfast to say that he's
7 putting in a request for over 500 million dollars
8 nationally, of which New York City gets the most, not
9 because it's a gold star achievement, but because the
10 level of threat to synagogues and institutions of all
11 houses of worship, synagogues, churches, mosques, you
12 name it, that happens in New York. That's not a badge
13 of honor that I share. That's just the reality and
14 facts and data of what people are going through in
15 New York City on a day-to-day basis. So, I appreciate
16 the question. I hope I have provided a response.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VERNIKOV: Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
19 testimony.

20 I now call up to the witness panel,
21 Justin Harrison, Jennvine Wong, Nicholas Devyatkin,
22 Riley Henderson, Shraddha Joshi, Jonathan Bloom.

23 You may begin in whichever order you
24 like. You have two minutes each.

2 JUSTIN HARRISON: Good afternoon, Speaker
3 Menin, Chairman Salaam, and Council Members. I'm
4 Justin Harrison, Senior Policy Counsel for the ACLU
5 of New York. I manage our legislative First Amendment
6 docket, and I'm here to testify about 001-A and 175-
7 A, the buffer zone bills. These proposals are
8 unnecessary and threaten New Yorkers' constitutional
9 rights. Unnecessary because federal and New York
10 state laws already protect access to places of
11 worship and offer judicial relief when that access is
12 threatened, and an affront to the Constitution
13 because they would strip away New Yorkers' free
14 speech rights. Both proposals encourage viewpoint and
15 content-based enforcement against disfavored speakers
16 and messages in that they offer the NYPD wide
17 latitude to decide when, where, and under what
18 conditions they should set up buffer zones, an
19 exercise typically reserved for the courts, which are
20 very limited in their ability to allow any
21 infringement on the right to protest on public
22 streets and sidewalks. To enforce these proposed
23 buffer zones, NYPD officers will be asked to address
24 and contain the risk of injury, intimidation, and
25 interference, a risk they will have to assess with

2 little to rely on other than appearances. Any
3 assessment that is not content or viewpoint neutral
4 will run afoul of the Constitution. Given the
5 concerns animating the Council's proposals, we think
6 this delegation is a recipe for chilling and
7 targeting and suppressing speech. Why? Because while
8 the bills at least facially charge the NYPD with
9 honoring First Amendment obligations, the proposals
10 were introduced in response to constitutionally
11 protected protests criticizing Israel and its
12 policies, not a rising trend of criminal activity or
13 an uncontained demonstration that got out of hand. It
14 will present individuals exercising their First
15 Amendment rights with a blunt instrument designed to
16 suppress speech. (TIMER CHIME) That sort of
17 censorship cannot be allowed.

18 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. Your time
19 is up.

20 JENNVINE WONG: Good afternoon. My name is
21 Jennvine Wong, and I'm a Supervising Attorney with
22 the Cop Accountability Project at the Legal Aid
23 Society. Thank you for the opportunity to testify
24 today. I'm here to join the opposition to Intros 1-A
25 and 175-A, which would fundamentally undermine the

2 protest settlement that was reached with NYPD and the
3 City in the wake of the 2020 racial justice protests.
4 That settlement required NYPD to minimize police
5 presence at protests and demonstrations to ensure
6 compliance with the First Amendment. The proposals
7 direct NYPD to create and maintain security
8 perimeters around places of worship and educational
9 facilities, and doing so would necessarily increase
10 police presence and risk greater surveillance of
11 people of color. And for example, the repercussions
12 of NYPD's documented surveillance over mosques and
13 our Muslim neighbors are still felt in our city
14 today. We, along with our co-counsel at NYCLU,
15 represent plaintiffs in the NYPD protest settlement,
16 *Payne v. de Blasio*, one of the consolidated cases.
17 And under that settlement, NYPD is tasked with
18 promoting whenever and wherever possible First
19 Amendment activity. Both of these bills, even as
20 amended, would upset that carefully negotiated
21 balance of the settlement. Modern policing experts
22 understand that police presence at protests can
23 escalate crowd tension instead of promote safety, and
24 we've seen that over and over again with NYPD. These
25 bills do not incorporate the considerations that the

2 tiered approach in the settlement considers, and it
3 presupposes deployment of officers by requiring the
4 creation and maintenance of frozen zones, which would
5 require the deployment of officers, and this would
6 fundamentally undermine the settlement. NYPD is
7 required to use de-escalation methods before
8 increasing officer deployments to protest. This
9 proposed legislation would set up these buffer zones
10 without balancing the best practices reflected in the
11 protest settlement, and it would upend the tiered
12 system. But even more than that, the sheer number of
13 educational facilities and houses of worship in a
14 city as dense as New York City could turn the city
15 into a hotbed of (TIMER CHIME) speech-free zones and
16 would unconstitutionally burden the speech of every
17 New Yorker.

18 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Your time is up.

19 JENNVINE WONG: I just have one more thing
20 to say. I think that we find it incredibly...

21 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: I'm sorry. Your time
22 is up.

23 JENNVINE WONG: Troubling that we are
24 relying on the NYPD to combat hate crime when..

2 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: I'm sorry. Your time
3 is up.

4 JENNVINE WONG: It is an agency that is
5 still under federal monitorship for racial...

6 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Your time is up.

7 Also, I want to remind the public that
8 snapping fingers or clapping or any of that is not
9 acceptable in the Chambers. We do, however, allow for
10 any hand gestures this way or any of that other stuff
11 is good. Thank you.

12 JONATHAN BLOOM: Good afternoon. My name
13 is Jonathan Bloom. I'm a Jewish New Yorker and a
14 union organizer at UAW. I'm also a proud member of
15 UAW Staff United, an independent union representing
16 our dedicated organizing staff here at UAW. Today,
17 I'm speaking on behalf of my union, urging Council
18 Members to reject the proposed security perimeter
19 bills. These bills would be a disaster for organized
20 labor and for free speech in our city. They follow
21 the Trump playbook of muzzling protest instead of
22 actually addressing the root causes of protest. I'll
23 start with Intro. 175-A, which supposedly protects
24 students outside their schools. The issue is that
25 educational facilities are also workplaces. The

2 ability to protest visibly outside the workplace is
3 one of the most powerful tools that we have as
4 workers. This bill would defang union actions without
5 offering any additional protection against
6 obstruction, violence, or property damage than
7 existing laws already provide, and I saw the revised
8 language and it does not address that concern. Not
9 only is this bill unnecessary, but it would also
10 suppress union activity. The workers that I
11 personally help organize are largely immigrants that
12 are here on visas. Trump's attacks on immigrants have
13 already created a climate of fear in our city. The
14 mere threat that the NYPD could deem a protest
15 illegal would create further barriers for immigrant
16 workers to participate in union activity. Council
17 Members who support these bills would be working
18 hand-in-hand with Trump to suppress labor in New
19 York.

20 As for Intro. 1-A, the issue is simple.
21 At the end of the day, if houses of worship host
22 activities other than worship, then we need the
23 ability to protest directly outside. Rather than
24 criminalizing protesters, the City should be
25 targeting the illegal events hosted by houses of

2 worship, as well as illegal union-busting activity by
3 educational institutions. As a proud Jewish
4 representative of organized labor in New York, I
5 strongly urge the Council to vote no on both proposed
6 bills. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: I'd just also like to
8 remind the witnesses who are testifying, that they
9 have an opportunity as well to submit their written
10 testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov.

11 NICHOLAS DEVYATKIN: Good afternoon. My
12 name is Nicholas Devyatkin. I'm the Director of Legal
13 Affairs for the Professional Staff Congress, AFT
14 Local 2334. We are the instructional staff union for
15 CUNY. We represent approximately 30,000 members and
16 serve about 240,000 students across 26 campuses in
17 the five boroughs. I'm here to testify about Bill
18 175-A, as that specifically affects our members and
19 the students and publics that we serve. We do not
20 believe that this statute would survive a First
21 Amendment challenge, as many other speakers have
22 indicated. We should take a look at the actual text
23 of the bill, and there hasn't really been that much
24 analysis of that today, but for example, there's been
25 talk that the bill does not force the NYPD to do

2 anything. Paragraph 4E states that the Police
3 Commissioner shall implement the plan to establish
4 these buffer zones. Furthermore, there is no
5 oversight mechanism to review whether the
6 Commissioner's plan, once developed, will itself pass
7 constitutional muster. Paragraph 4B says that this
8 plan must accomplish its goals through the use of
9 buffer zones. The purpose of this bill is to
10 establish buffer zones. If it isn't the purpose of
11 that bill, then your constituents are going to be
12 really disappointed because you just heard from about
13 a dozen of them that are expecting this Council to
14 pass a buffer zone bill. Paragraph 4F says that
15 nothing in this section shall be construed or
16 interpreted to infringe upon rights granted under the
17 National Labor Relations Act or the Labor Law. It's
18 unclear what the term the labor means. Finally, the
19 NYPD already has a lot in its toolkit. I was shocked
20 to hear today that the most vociferous defender of
21 the First Amendment was the representative from the
22 NYPD. The City Council itself appeared to show almost
23 ignorance of basic First Amendment litigation, and
24 with that, I only have three seconds left, so thank
25 you for your time.

2 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

3 RILEY HENDERSON: Good afternoon. I'm here
4 representing the Crown Heights Tenant Union Palestine
5 Solidarity Working Group. I'm here today to speak out
6 against...

7 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: What's your name?

8 RILEY HENDERSON: Sorry?

9 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Your name?

10 RILEY HENDERSON: Riley Henderson. I'm
11 here today to speak out against the buffer zones
12 proposed in these bills. Protesting is supposed to be
13 a constitutional right, but to give the police the
14 discretionary authority over when and where protests
15 may take place completely defeats the purpose of
16 assembling in person and in solidarity around a given
17 issue. It is also absurd to ban protests as a form of
18 political action from institutions that themselves
19 can host political events. This creates a scenario
20 where any time a group wishes to host a potentially
21 controversial event or gathering, they simply need to
22 find a religious or educational building willing to
23 host them, and then suddenly they are free from the
24 inconveniences of criticism and shame or
25 accountability that they would otherwise face from

2 their neighbors, peers, and fellow New Yorkers. The
3 sale of stolen Palestinian land is an explicitly
4 political action with real material effects on
5 people's lives now and for generations to come. It
6 has rightfully drawn criticism and anger from people
7 all around the world, and this bill would effectively
8 ban meaningful protests against it while creating the
9 conditions to do the same for any controversial event
10 that chooses a religious or educational institution
11 as its host. I urge the City Council to reject these
12 unconstitutional bills and to help preserve New
13 Yorkers' rights to protect and fight for our
14 neighborhoods and our ideals. Thank you.

15 SHRADDHA JOSHI: Good afternoon, everyone.
16 My name is Shraddha Joshi, and I'm a paralegal at the
17 Doors Legal Services Center working with our Detained
18 Minors Project. The Doors is a comprehensive youth
19 development organization serving 9,000 young people
20 in New York City yearly. For 54 years, we have
21 provided a safe space for health access, mental
22 health care, career and ed programs, runaway and
23 homeless youth services, enrichment, and legal
24 assistance for young people. As a staff member at an
25 organization that works with vulnerable youth, I'm

2 here to raise deep concerns regarding proposed bills
3 1-A and 175-A regarding educational facilities and
4 places of worship. Despite recent amendments to these
5 bills, NYPD-established buffer zones would
6 dramatically increase police presence across the
7 city, serving as another tool for surveillance and
8 selective enforcement, especially against communities
9 of color. Black and Brown youth are
10 disproportionately profiled and targeted by the
11 police, and buffer zones would further put the young
12 people we serve at risk. Furthermore, in December
13 2025, Doors members testified right here in this room
14 regarding ICE presence in New York City, where we
15 called on the City to end the NYPD's tacit support
16 for extrajudicial ICE raids. Given that buffer zones
17 require escalated NYPD presence and activity, we are
18 worried about the increased vulnerability of
19 immigrant youth, both around our facility and in New
20 York City at large. In defense of immigrant youth,
21 Doors staff members regularly attend hands-off
22 protests against the violent presence of ICE in our
23 city. Because places of worship and educational
24 facilities are everywhere, these bills would impact
25 mobility and protest across the city, effectively

2 criminalizing and policing demonstrations that our
3 staff members take part in. We are worried that our
4 ability to advocate for youth and exercise protected
5 speech will be curtailed by these police buffer
6 zones. Finally, as an organization that provides key
7 health services to youth, we stand with the calls of
8 reproductive justice organizations and healthcare
9 workers who have broadly stood against these bills
10 and the risks they pose to health access. As we
11 witness an unprecedented crackdown that threatens our
12 work in service of young people, I urge Council
13 Members to vote against these bills. Young people in
14 New York City deserve to feel safe from the harmful
15 effects of escalated policing, and City Council must
16 stand up for our right to continue advocating for
17 social change.

18 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
19 testimony. I believe there are questions for this
20 panel.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yes. Thank you.
22 I appreciate some of the testimony. I appreciate that
23 there was attempts to read the bill. And I appreciate
24 ICE and our fight against ICE and talking about
25 sensitive locations that we want to protect from ICE,

2 from undue infringement on our rights, such as
3 schools and houses of worship. So, I appreciate you
4 are articulating that and that our houses of worship
5 and schools should be safe spaces for all who go
6 there. Okay. So, I appreciate that we agree on that.
7 May not agree who gets to be protected. I think
8 everyone should be protected in those spaces. It
9 seems that only some people should be protected in
10 those spaces. So, that's a point of disagreement. I
11 appreciate you bringing up that point.

12 So, there were a number of things that
13 were brought up about reading the bill. I kind of
14 want to read a little bit of it. But first, I just
15 want to ask, for the ACLU and Legal Aid Society, when
16 the NYPD testified under oath that this bill provides
17 no new powers to them and would not and will not
18 conflict with the court settlement they agreed to, as
19 per Council Member Cabán's questions, were they
20 wrong? Were they lying? Were they misinterpreting
21 their own duties? Can you talk a little bit about
22 that?

23 JENNVINE WONG: I would say that our
24 reading of the bill is that the bill here is
25 directing NYPD to create buffer zones. And as other

2 people have testified already, that is the way that
3 the bill reads. It is directing NYPD to create buffer
4 zones.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: But let me read
6 that. I'm going to let you get back to your question,
7 but I do want to read that part.

8 JENNVINE WONG: Sure.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Because what it
10 actually says, I'm going to read section B, which one
11 of you did a highlight from. No later than 45 days to
12 present a proposed plan. And the purpose of that is
13 to provide for feedback. Right, we want that
14 sunlight, that daylight on that. Submit to the mayor
15 a proposed plan to address and contain the risk of
16 injury, intimidation, and interference while
17 preserving protest rights. So, you left that part
18 out. The purpose, and I'm going to finish the
19 sentence, but the purpose is to address and contain
20 the risk of injury, intimidation, and interference
21 while preserving and protecting protest rights at
22 educational facilities through the use of buffer
23 zones.

24 So, the purpose of the buffer zones would
25 be to protect against that and contain that risk. And

2 then the other part that was, and this is a plan, by
3 the way. It says a plan. And the other part that was
4 left out, four, you mentioned section E, I believe.
5 But it's a subsection under line four. And it says
6 communicating with the public an individual seeking
7 to protest at or enter to, from educational
8 facilities when the Police Department has established
9 such a buffer zone. So, you have two lines in this
10 legislation that's in the text that demonstrates that
11 it is not a blanket buffer zone to protect and
12 infringe free speech. It is saying in certain
13 instances, and it affirms that later in the bill. So,
14 can you please speak to those points?

15 JENNVINE WONG: I just want to highlight
16 that the carefully negotiated settlement that was
17 reached in the protest cases in the wake of the 2020
18 racial justice protest really center around the
19 social research science and modern policing experts
20 acknowledging that an outsized police presence at the
21 beginning of a protest, of a peaceful protest, is one
22 that will escalate tensions with the crowd. And in
23 acknowledgement of that, this settlement had
24 negotiated a four-tiered response, a four-tiered
25 approach, which is undermined by these laws, by these

2 proposals. Because what the law is directing NYPD to
3 do is actually taking away the discretion to make
4 these plans with the consideration for the tiered
5 approach and actually directing them to create buffer
6 zones outside of the tiered structure. Which means
7 there is a presupposition of a deployment of officers
8 before there is a consideration of whether that
9 protest or demonstration falls into the appropriate
10 tier for officer deployment, and that is where the
11 tension lies. Now, if the question here is really
12 about what the execution will look like, I can't
13 speak to that because I don't have a crystal ball.
14 But I will say that just reading the text of the
15 proposals and comparing it against the text of the
16 settlement and the tiered approach, it is in tension.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Do you have
18 anything to add to that?

19 JUSTIN HARRISON: Nothing to add to that.

20 JENNVINE WONG: I do have one more thing
21 to add to that. And there is something else that was
22 in consideration when the tiered approach was
23 created. That the research and the data showed that
24 when it came to protest arrests and protest violence
25 between police and protesters, it was not just about

2 the escalating tensions, it was about the fact that
3 people of color, protesters of color, were the ones
4 who were being targeted for arrest and violence at a
5 much higher rate than white protesters, even when
6 controlling for factors such as the content of
7 speech, the size of the crowd, and other factors that
8 would be considered relevant to that. And so that was
9 another reason why the tiered approach was so
10 carefully negotiated. It was to protect protesters,
11 and that is something that these two bills have not
12 addressed.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I would point
14 out again that the bill calls for transparency,
15 something I thought the ACLU and Legal Aid Society
16 would want to see in our police system. It does not
17 direct them to create buffer zones except for outside
18 of these intimidations. And I would point out
19 actually, it's interesting, before this hearing,
20 there was a protest outside. Great, fine. And you
21 know what else there was? A buffer zone. There was a
22 rope and stanchion, that separated the protesters
23 from the entrance to the building. Now that buffer
24 zone was very small, right? But that existed. That
25 was something that was set up. So, the notion that

2 this would somehow create something that doesn't
3 already exist, I think isn't rooted in the text of
4 the bill. It's rooted in like feelings. But we're not
5 legislating based on how we feel. We're trying to
6 pass a law that protects New Yorkers and protects
7 people's right to protest, and we do that through
8 transparency. We do that through a plan. And as the
9 NYPD testified, we are not directing them to change
10 anything, nor can we direct them to change anything
11 that was reached in a settlement.

12 JENNVINE WONG: I would just note that
13 another witness at this table had pointed out that
14 there are so many houses of worship, and there are so
15 many schools, so many facilities that are swept in
16 under these proposals, that it would necessarily
17 increase police surveillance and police presence
18 across the city. And again, whenever there is
19 increased police presence and increased police
20 surveillance, it is the people of color, people from
21 marginalized communities, that wind up bearing the
22 brunt of NYPD police violence and brutality.

23 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: I'd just like to
24 remind everyone that we have over maybe 150 or more
25 people to testify that have not testified yet. So,

2 just be cognizant of that so that we can move things
3 along in a manner that gets us out of here before
4 midnight. Thank you.

5 Thank you for your testimony. We will now
6 move to the next panel.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: And thank you to
8 the people who responded to my questions. Appreciate
9 it.

10 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: I now call to the
11 witness table Simone Dang (phonetic), Dovid Zirkind,
12 Avi Posnick, Barry Grodenchik, Mayer Waxman, Rabbi
13 Benny Krauss, Jonah Skodas, and Megan Haller.

14 We'll bring a chair for those members who
15 wish to testify. In the meantime, you all can start.
16 Two minutes each in any order you would like.

17 JONAH SKODAS: Can you guys hear me all
18 right? Good morning, everybody. And thank you for the
19 opportunity to speak here today.

20 On November 5th, 2023, a few short weeks
21 after the October 7th massacre, the synagogue of my
22 then 97-year-old Holocaust survivor great-grandmother
23 held an evening of solidarity for the local
24 community. When my grandparents walked across the
25 street from their apartment to the event, they were

2 appalled to see a massive counter-protest right on
3 top of their synagogue. Hundreds of people lobbing
4 taunts, jeers, and threats at elderly citizens from
5 close range. Had there been a reasonable buffer zone
6 between the protesters and the synagogue, my
7 relatives would have been able to enter their house
8 of worship and pray for peace instead of having to
9 retreat back to their homes in fear. I want to be
10 perfectly clear about something. This bill is not
11 meant to silence protests or in any way restrict the
12 right of assembly guaranteed in the First Amendment
13 of our Constitution. This bill merely ensures that
14 everyone gets to exercise their First Amendment
15 rights, including both freedom of assembly and
16 freedom of religion, fully and safely. Thank you so
17 much.

18 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

19 SIMONE DANG: Good afternoon. Thank you,
20 Members of the Councils. My name is Simone Dang. I
21 was born in Sudan. I was enslaved as a child because
22 of my faith and my identity. I believe in protesting.
23 I have protested many, my whole life. Peaceful
24 protest is a right and it is part of our democracy. I
25 have traveled the world. I spoke before the

2 presidents, United Nations, and countries worldwide.
3 I have seen protests everywhere. What is happening
4 outside these days in New York, it is unlikely like
5 anything I ever seen. (INAUDIBLE) crowd gathering to
6 intimidate people, to scare them so they would not
7 attend their community events. People are being
8 harassed and at times physically blocked from access.
9 And the effort is clear. People stop coming. Events
10 get canceled. Community get silenced. The buffer
11 zones doesn't protect. It makes sure people can
12 attend without fear of being harassed or being
13 attacked. We seen videos. We have seen what is
14 happening in New York. We can protect both free
15 expressions and safety for all peoples. I'm asking
16 the Member of the Councils, all of us together, let
17 pass this bill.

18 AVI POSNICK: Thank you, Chair Salaam. My
19 name is Avi Posnick. I'm the Northeast Director for
20 Stand With Us, an education organization that
21 educates and empowers students and communities to
22 fight antisemitism and hate. We support New York City
23 Council Intro. Number 1, and we thank Speaker Menon
24 for introducing this legislation as well as the many
25 Members of the Council who support it as well, and we

2 support the package of bills that are included today.

3 This commonsense piece of legislation ensures the

4 First Amendment rights of members of any faith

5 community have free access to their house of worship.

6 It also ensures the First Amendment right for those

7 who want to protest. It does not prevent protesters

8 from declaring, for example, as they did outside the

9 Park East Synagogue, we have to make them afraid, and

10 it does not prevent them from proudly expressing

11 support for Hamas as they did in Kew Gardens Hills,

12 Queens. Though, of course, such speech is abhorrent.

13 It would not prevent anyone from chanting

14 Islamophobic, anti-Christian, anti-Hindu statements

15 outside of a mosque, church, or temple. Though, of

16 course, such statements are abhorrent as well.

17 Rather, by applying reasonable, content-neutral time,

18 place, and manner restrictions, this legislation

19 helps maintain order and rooted in law that has long

20 been constitutionally upheld and protects the rights

21 of all New Yorkers to worship freely while preserving

22 the right of everyone to protest freely as well. At

23 Stand With Us, we urge this Committee and the full

24 Council to pass these bills. Thank you very much.

25 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

2 DOVID ZIRKIND: Good afternoon to the
3 Council. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on
4 this critical subject, which weighs heavily on the
5 minds of my community for two specific reasons that
6 I'd like to outline. Our tradition teaches that it's
7 not only good deeds that are rewarded in heaven, but
8 the journey to and from is rewarded just the same.
9 It's that sacred journey that we're here to protect
10 today. My name is Dovid Zirkind. I serve as the Rabbi
11 of Riverdale Jewish Center in the Bronx, a thriving
12 community of many different religions and creeds. Our
13 community is bursting with newly married couples and
14 young children. Sadly, our community has also not
15 been immune to terrible acts of religious hate.
16 Vandalism, broken windows, bomb threats, and hate
17 speech have all made their way to our doorstep. As a
18 father and a congregational rabbi, I know how special
19 it is to walk our children to school and how
20 meaningful it is to bring our families to prayer.
21 Going to school is not a political act of resistance.
22 Heading to church should not require any courage. But
23 when fear and intimidation are real and present, our
24 parents are forced to ask themselves if these spaces
25 are safe to bring their kids. No parent should have

2 to worry what their child might see on their way to
3 school. No mom should agonize over what her daughter
4 might hear from within the stroller on the way for
5 their family to go and pray. I respect every person's
6 right to free speech, but we cannot allow houses of
7 worship, schools, and community centers to become the
8 easiest and most vulnerable targets of hate and
9 intimidation. They already have, and it's our job to
10 act. I support the safe access bills and testify to
11 that effect on behalf of every dad in synagogue who
12 worries if his children will arrive safely, and on
13 behalf of every mom trying valiantly to shield their
14 children from the hate that is already around us. I
15 believe in this Council and its ability to ensure
16 that the narrow technicalities of politics don't
17 erode the basic experiences of what it means to live
18 proudly and religiously in New York. Please join us
19 in protecting our sacred spaces and ensuring that our
20 families can walk to worship with confidence and
21 security. We pray that our comings and goings are
22 safe today and safe forever.

23 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

24 BENNY KRAUSS: Good afternoon, my name is
25 Benny Krauss. I serve as a principal of SAR in

2 Riverdale. It's a community of 1,800 students and 400
3 faculty. It is almost 4 o'clock. Our students will
4 now get a pass. The students that are testifying on
5 our behalf are going to get a pass for the entire day
6 they sat through this entire hearing and learned a
7 lot. But this is a testament to how important this is
8 to them and to all of us. I want to begin by
9 expressing genuine gratitude to Speaker Menin, to
10 Chair Salaam, to our local Councilman Eric Dinowitz
11 for championing this legislation. I also want to
12 acknowledge the very serious and careful work that
13 has gone into crafting the specific language of these
14 bills, including over the last few days. The result
15 of real collaboration between the City Council and
16 NYPD to find the most effective approach, balancing
17 the commitment to free speech with the very real
18 security challenges of this moment. That balance
19 matters and it reflects thoughtful governance and
20 frankly, it reflects thoughtful people. But the most
21 important words you hear today, I believe are from
22 our students. Not just because they're our students,
23 but our students. I ask you to listen to their
24 experiences and equally to their fears. Both deserve
25 your full attention. Children in New York City should

2 not be afraid to walk to school, they should not feel
3 unsafe on the streets of Manhattan or on the Bronx.
4 Bills 327 and 175, reimbursing non-public schools for
5 security cameras and establishing meaningful security
6 perimeters at educational facilities are concrete
7 steps towards making that a reality. The Council has
8 an opportunity today to both provide relief and to
9 send a message to our kids that they matter, that
10 their safety is important and that they should be and
11 feel seen, protected, and valued. Thank you very,
12 very much for working to pass these bills.

13 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

14 MEGAN HALLER: My name is Megan Haller, I
15 live in the Bronx and I'm a senior at SAR High
16 School, a Jewish day school in Riverdale. The
17 synagogue I attend every week is Riverdale Jewish
18 Center on Independence Avenue. The RJC has always
19 been a place where I feel part of a community and
20 this is where I celebrate holidays, pray, and lead
21 young children in services. It's not just a
22 synagogue, it's our second home. Lately, things feel
23 really different. I worry that one day when I'm least
24 expecting it, I'll turn the corner and there could be
25 an angry mob of protesters screaming at me and

1 blocking my way into the building. The story of what
2 happened at Park East Synagogue scared me. Many
3 protesters lined up right outside, shouting violent
4 words and shoving people in ways that created an
5 unsettling environment. I always have a fear that my
6 synagogue is going to be next. Some weekends, our
7 local police, the 50th Precinct, stand outside. I
8 love seeing Detective Rasha Jamsheer there. She and I
9 became really good friends and seeing her familiar
10 face provides me with a sense of relief. The police
11 being there makes me feel safe and, as a token of my
12 appreciation, every Thanksgiving, I bake cupcakes and
13 bring them to the 50th Precinct. On weekends, when I
14 notice that they aren't there, my fears escalate
15 because I feel vulnerable. This bill is not about
16 silencing anyone's right to freedom of speech, it's
17 about my safety and the safety of the Jewish
18 community and our ability to walk into our local
19 synagogue and worship freely without fear of being
20 harassed. The buffer zone would allow people to still
21 protest; however, it creates a safe space around the
22 synagogue for people to worship in peace. No New
23 Yorker should feel worried about being able to walk
24

2 into a house of worship or be who they are and
3 neither should I.

4 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

5 BARRY GRODENCHIK: Chair Salaam, I am
6 Barry Grodenchik, President of the Queens Jewish
7 Community Council. I've been joined by Rabbi Mayer
8 Waxman who gave up his time to speak today. He's our
9 Executive Director, and we also have several board
10 members who you hear from. We're here to testify in
11 strong support of Intro. 1-A to establish security
12 perimeters at places of religious worship. The QJCC
13 is a 57-year-old Queens organization committed to
14 improving the economic, cultural, and social
15 prosperity of our clients. Many of the QJCC's efforts
16 are in regard to general social services and the QJCC
17 also provides Jewish cultural experiences through our
18 concerts and other public events. Recently, we have
19 focused significant attention on programming to
20 repudiate harassment and hate speech. After the
21 pandemic, QJCC partnered with groups from the Queens'
22 large Asian American and Pacific Islander community
23 to stand up to anti-Asian hate. On 7th October,
24 thousands of Hamas members and their supporters broke
25 barriers into the sovereign State of Israel and

2 tortured and murdered over 1,200 people, kidnapping
3 more than 250 people. Since that time, there have
4 been a slew of anti-Israel rallies, often if not
5 always, featuring expressions of outright anti-
6 Semitism in the city. We have focused our advocacy
7 and programming since that time against hatred of
8 Jews. While hatred is not illegal, threatening is
9 illegal, menacing is, spitting on people is illegal,
10 and physically accosting people is illegal. All these
11 activities have been perpetuated by rioters since
12 October 7th, and we know about what happened. We've
13 heard about Park East Synagogue and at the Young
14 Israel of Kew Garden Hills last month in Queens. In
15 light of these outrages, the Queens Jewish Community
16 Council fully supports Intro. 1-A, which would
17 require the NYPD Police Commissioner to develop and
18 implement a plan of worship. I just want to say that
19 this is a sanctuary city and that predates, goes
20 back, sanctuary goes way back to even beyond
21 Christianity and early Judaism to pagan times. (TIMER
22 CHIME) And could there be a bigger irony than New
23 York City preaching security for anyone as a
24 sanctuary city..

2 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you, your time
3 is up.

4 BARRY GRODENCHIK: Okay. I'll yield the
5 rest of my time to you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Any questions for
7 this panel?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Just want to
9 thank the students for testifying, thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Oh, absolutely. And
11 thank you for your testimony.

12 I'll now call up to the witness table Dr.
13 Michael Simon-Pellman, Kiera Kippitz (phonetic), Greg
14 Weiner, Scott Richmond, Zara Nasir, Chavnoy Yeoman
15 (phonetic), Queen Mother Dr. Blakely, Sharonne
16 Salaam, Bishop Mitchell Taylor on Zoom, and Alan
17 Scheiner on Zoom.

18 Bishop Mitchell Taylor, we are calling
19 you first.

20 BISHOP MITCHELL TAYLOR: Okay. Thank you
21 so much. Thank you so much.

22 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: You have two minutes.

23 BISHOP MITCHELL TAYLOR: Thank you. All
24 right, good afternoon, Speaker Menin, Chair Salaam,
25 and Members of New York City Council. My name is

2 Bishop Mitchell Taylor. I'm the Senior Pastor of the
3 Center of Hope International. And over the last
4 years, 40 years or so, I have worked closely with
5 faith leaders across the city, including Jewish
6 leaders, Muslim leaders, Christian leaders, Hindu,
7 Sikhs, and other communities to promise
8 understanding, cooperation, and respect. And we may
9 not be monolithic in faith, but we're monolithic in
10 worship and the freedom to worship here in New York
11 City, and we share that common goal to ensure that
12 families, children, elders can worship safely with
13 dignity. Intro. 1-2026, sponsored by Speaker Menin,
14 would establish security perimeters around houses of
15 worship to help achieve that goal. Congregants,
16 especially children, seniors, should be able to enter
17 and leave their places of worship without facing
18 imminent threats. This bill does not prevent peaceful
19 protest or silence dissenting voices. It provides
20 modest, time-placed, and mannered protections that
21 allow protesters to express themselves while ensuring
22 that congregants can fully exercise their right to
23 worship. Across our city, houses of worship are more
24 than buildings. They are sacred spaces where
25 communities gather to pray, celebrate, and learn.

2 Protecting those spaces from harassment respects both
3 religious freedom and public safety. Faith leaders
4 already work in collaboration with law enforcement
5 when needed, including by participating in NYPD
6 clergy councils and such alike. This legislation
7 gives the NYPD the discretion to establish reasonable
8 perimeters based on real-time safety conditions.
9 Supporting this bill is about holding up the dignity
10 of all worshipers, affirming our commitment to
11 interfaith respect, and balancing the right to
12 protest with the right to practice faith freely. By
13 passing Intro. 1, the Council can ensure that New
14 Yorkers of every faith can worship safely with honor.
15 For these reasons, I respectfully ask the council to
16 pass this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to
17 testify.

18 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you, Bishop.

19 Alan Scheiner, if you're on Zoom, you can
20 begin. Alan Scheiner, you are unmuted, you may begin.

21 ALAN SCHEINER: Yes. Can you hear me now?

22 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Yes, we can. You have
23 two minutes.

24 ALAN SCHEINER: Terrific. Thank you. Good
25 afternoon. I'm Alan Scheiner, Senior Litigation

2 Counsel at the National Jewish Advocacy Center. NJAB
3 is a non-profit law firm advocating to protect the
4 civil rights of Jewish people and organizations.

5 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I've

6 submitted written testimony citing facts and legal

7 authorities that I hope you will review. Protective

8 buffer zones around houses of worship properly

9 balance the equally precious constitutional rights of

10 freedom of speech and the free exercise of religion.

11 Increasingly, some no longer treat houses of worship

12 as sanctuaries from conflict, as protected neutral

13 ground, but rather as preferred targets for

14 intimidation and violence. Mobs use crowding,

15 obstruction, menacing, following, confrontation,

16 excessively loud and penetrating noise, slurs,

17 taunts, harangues, and other abusive conduct to

18 burden, frighten, and discourage and punish religious

19 people entering and exiting their houses of worship.

20 Buffer zones fits squarely within First Amendment

21 jurisprudence as a time, place, and manner regulation

22 to protect worshipers from these harms, even when the

23 harms do not include physical invasion. Offensive,

24 hateful speech is protected by the First Amendment,

25 but that does not mean that speech can occur anywhere

2 at any time the speaker chooses. Civilization
3 requires that we take turns exercising our rights. We
4 cannot all do so at the same time and place. So, for
5 example, it's well settled that you do not have the
6 right to hold your own parade at the same time and
7 place as another parade. It's one parade at a time.
8 The First Amendment does not require that protesters
9 be within sight and sound of the religious worshipers
10 that they target for harassment. Time, place, and
11 manner limits must leave ample alternative channels
12 for communication. In other words, a realistic way to
13 get the message out, but that channel could be in a
14 different location or a different time where
15 unwilling listeners need not be burdened. The Second
16 Circuit held that much in *Marcavage v. City of New*
17 *York* in 2012.

18 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. Your time
19 is up.

20 ALAN SCHEINER: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Okay. I'll now call
22 the in panel. You can begin in any order you like.

23 SIMON PELMAN: Good afternoon. My name is
24 Simon "Shimi" Pelman. I am the elected district
25 leader of the 27th Assembly District, a 42-year

2 veteran of Community Board 8 in Queens. I also serve
3 as a board member of the Jewish Community Relations
4 Council, the Queen Jewish Community Council, and many
5 other civic and Jewish organization. I'm also a child
6 of Holocaust survivor. I was born in a displaced
7 persons camp in Germany in 1947. Freedom of speech is
8 absolute. Freedom of assembly is absolute. Freedom of
9 religion is absolute. However, to intimidate and
10 harass is not a constitutional right. We've witnessed
11 protesters and insiders harass and obstruct
12 individual attempting to enter houses of worship in
13 Manhattan and Queens. No one should be prevented for
14 exercising their right to attend religious services
15 or any cultural events. No one should feel
16 threatened, intimidated, or unsafe while practicing
17 their faith. For this reason, I strongly support the
18 City Council proposal to prohibit harassment,
19 incitement, and protest while the Police Department
20 set up buffer zones for any religious organization,
21 schools, or house of worship. We have seen chants
22 intended to intimidate and hurt people. We have seen
23 objects thrown. This behavior must stop and must be
24 prevented. Protecting constitutional rights includes
25 protecting people from harassment and intimidation

2 when they're exercising these rights. Thank you for
3 the City Council, for all your consideration, and for
4 all your help. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
6 testimony.

7 KIERA KIPPITZ: Dear Chair Salaam and
8 Members of the Committee to Combat Hate, my name is
9 Kira Kepitz, and I'm coming today as a concerned New
10 York City constituent, and more importantly, a CUNY
11 student. I'm here to express my strong support for
12 the entire legislative package, specifically Intro.
13 1, which would require the NYPD Police Commissioner
14 to develop and implement a plan to establish security
15 perimeters at places of worship across New York City.
16 It is critical that New Yorkers of faith like myself
17 are able to enter and exit religious institutions
18 without fear or harassment or intimidation.
19 Specifically, as a New York City Jewish college
20 student, I attend many college events at religious
21 institutions and never want myself or other students
22 feeling scared to attend or leave the events. It is
23 imperative that there be known security perimeter at
24 places of worship, so that students like me do not
25 have to worry about even deciding whether they want

2 to attend the college event or even going to class.

3 According to ADL's most recent audit of antisemitic

4 incidents, like Director Richmond had mentioned,

5 there were 1,437 antisemitic incidents in New York

6 State in 2024, the highest number of reported

7 incidents in the country, representing 15 percent of

8 all antisemitic incidents nationwide. Further, 68

9 percent of all documented incidents in New York took

10 place in the five boroughs of New York City, and as a

11 CUNY student, I have witnessed many of them.

12 Particularly in the wake of high-profile incidents

13 outside synagogues in our community, such as the Park

14 East Synagogue and Young Israel of Kew Garden Hills,

15 there's no question that American Jews are

16 increasingly living in fear of being harassed and

17 intimidated because of who they are or how they pray.

18 I strongly urge you to give Intro. 1 and the entire

19 legislative package a favorable report. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

21 SHARONNE SALAAM: Thank you. I'm Sharonne

22 Salaam, and I'm with Justice 4 Wrongfully

23 Incarcerated. And you might say to yourself, well,

24 what am I doing here, other than thanking the City

25 Council for having me? Well, I'm here because I'm

2 very concerned. I was more less concerned when I
3 came, but I'm here because I'm really interested in
4 combating hate. I have lived through hate so, so many
5 times. My great-grandparents, going back, were slaves
6 right here in this country. They lived their
7 Holocaust, and they still, in some way, have passed
8 on that pain down through the years, and we're still
9 living it. We lived through segregation. I was one of
10 those people who sat in the back of the bus. I drank
11 out of the colored water fountain. I had my
12 experience with hate. And I'm here now to tell you a
13 wall is not going to save you. You're not going to be
14 saved by police on every corner. You're not going to
15 be saved by police putting a blockade in front of
16 your church. You're not going to be saved by more
17 police being in your school. Your children are going
18 to be traumatized. As a Black mother, I want to tell
19 you, our children go to school in fear sometimes
20 because the police are there. They're not their
21 friends. They're not their enemies. I have gone to
22 department stores and other stores where people
23 followed me around the store, and I said to myself,
24 is it my color that gave me away? Because I didn't
25 have the opportunity to put something over myself so

2 I could change in front of them to be somebody new. I
3 am who I am, the daughter of those who brought me
4 here on the slave ships. (TIMER CHIME) I really would
5 like to say, in a way, I support this bill, but I
6 cannot. The shame of it and the pain that would pass
7 on to our children cannot survive. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
9 testimony.

10 QUEEN MOTHER DR. DELOIS BLAKELY: I come
11 in the spirit of my ancestors, and I guess that's why
12 I'm the latest one to speak. I represent 55 million
13 displaced Africans of the transatlantic ocean of the
14 slave trade. We come from a holocaust. The greatest
15 crime ever committed against our people. We are the
16 descendants, and we sit here today with you. We feel
17 your pain. We see your pain. I am now reaching the
18 age of 85. Yes, Reverend Jesse Jackson just made his
19 transition. He would have understood what we're
20 speaking about in terms of churches, in terms of
21 synagogues, in terms of the mosque, the mosque. But
22 we are here saying to all of us, no one will save us
23 but us. Come together as brothers and sisters. Let us
24 bring about a love that we all will understand
25 through our pains and through our struggles. Let us

2 join hands as Joan Roth would say, my sister from
3 another mother who happens to be Jewish, as (TIMER
4 CHIME) we say to each other, hold on to each other.
5 And I say to all of us in the Chamber, pull together
6 for peace and love amongst us. And I thank you for
7 allowing me to speak.

8 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
9 testimony.

10 There are no questions for this witness
11 panel.

12 I'll call the next panel.

13 I'd like to call Zara Nasir on Zoom.

14 ZARA NASIR: Hi. Thank you so much. Sorry.
15 You called me earlier, and I'm here now.

16 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. You have
17 two minutes.

18 ZARA NASIR: My name is Zara. I'm an
19 organizer with the People's Plan NYC, a grassroots
20 coalition that represents working class and poor New
21 Yorkers and New Yorkers of color. I'm here to oppose
22 the bills around the buffer zones. I and many in the
23 grassroots coalition are concerned about the
24 implications to free speech and First Amendment
25 rights. We take hate violence very seriously. And in

2 fact, many of the organizations in our coalition,
3 specifically do work on the safety of vulnerable
4 people, but many of them you'll hear today are
5 opposed to these bills, which feel like they're being
6 rushed through the Council's process and have not
7 been significant to be the input from a diverse set
8 of stakeholders that represent different identities.
9 Because places of worship and educational facilities
10 are everywhere, these bills would make most of the
11 city off limits to protests. The bills could prohibit
12 and criminalize countless demonstration, even if a
13 protest is barely passing by. We've done many
14 demonstrations around the city, around issues that
15 have to do with education, around budget cuts. We're
16 really concerned about the First Amendment
17 implications of this bill (INAUDIBLE) whose leaders
18 have control of the policy and on the autonomy have
19 also been essential to the (INAUDIBLE) activism. This
20 tradition of protest is based on principles that no
21 institution is exempt from public accountability, and
22 that free speech protections cannot be selectively
23 applied, both of which are being threatened by this
24 proposed legislation. We're also concerned about the
25 police presence that this would increase at places of

2 worship and educational facilities. The legislation
3 could become another tool of surveillance, of mass
4 arrests, of selective enforcement, especially against
5 communities of color and the movement's challenging
6 and entrenched power. There's already widespread use of
7 excessive force by...

8 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. Your time
9 is up.

10 ZARA NASIR: NYPD against protesters,
11 particularly by the Strategic Response Group. And
12 we're really concerned also with the way that the
13 Trump Administration is weaponizing protests..

14 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. Your time
15 is up.

16 ZARA NASIR: To prosecute anti-ICE and
17 pro-ceasefire protesters as well. Thank you for the
18 time. We oppose these bills.

19 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

20 I'd now like to call up to the witness
21 table, Jennifer Hirsch, Abraham Hamra (phonetic),
22 Josh Kramer, Amy Maltz, Kulsoom Tapal, Mohamed Razvi
23 (phonetic), Maung Sawidula (phonetic).

24 You may begin. You have two minutes each.

2 JOSH KRAMER: Yes. Good afternoon, Chair
3 Salaam. Thank you to you, to Speaker Menin, to the
4 Council Members, the Members of the Committee for
5 putting forth this package of bills and for convening
6 this Committee in the first place, forming it in
7 light of this terrible need for such a Committee. My
8 name is Josh Kramer. I serve as the Director of AJC
9 New York, part of American Jewish Committee, the
10 global advocacy organization for the Jewish people.
11 AJC works across six continents to ensure Jews are
12 safe and thriving. Today and here in New York, that
13 mission is urgent. We've seen Jews attacked in all
14 manner of location in person, online, including, of
15 course, outside of synagogues. AJC's 2025 State of
16 Antisemitism in America report released just a couple
17 of weeks ago reflects a deeply troubling reality. 91
18 percent of American Jews say they feel less safe as a
19 Jewish person in the United States following major
20 antisemitic attacks over the last year. More than
21 half, 55 percent, say they have changed their
22 behavior out of fear of antisemitism, and nearly one
23 in five has considered moving out of the country due
24 to rising antisemitism. National data only reinforces
25 how urgent this issue is here in New York City, home

2 to approximately one million Jews, the largest Jewish
3 population of any city in the United States. In 2025,
4 57 percent of reported hate crimes incidents in New
5 York City targeted the Jewish community. That figure
6 has been cited repeatedly today, and it bears
7 repeating. The impact is disproportionate and
8 sustained, and of course, in January, we saw an
9 average of one antisemitic attack per day in New York
10 City. These statistics reflect daily calculations,
11 whether it's safe to wear visibly Jewish symbols, to
12 attend synagogues, to send children to school, to
13 gather openly in public spaces, or to express one's
14 identity online without becoming a target. For the
15 first time in the history of our survey, more than
16 seven in 10 Americans, 73 percent, report
17 experiencing antisemitism online (TIMER CHIME) or on
18 social media. We stand in support of these bills, and
19 we stand ready to work with this Council, leaders of
20 all affiliations, to ensure that Jewish New Yorkers
21 can live openly and securely in this city. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

23 KULSOOM TAPAL: Good afternoon. My name is
24 Kulsoom Tapal. I'm the Education Policy Coordinator
25 at the Coalition for Asian American Children and

2 Families, the nation's only pan-Asian advocacy org
3 advancing equity for AAPI children and families. I'm
4 here with many colleagues to oppose Intro. 1-A and
5 Intro. 175-A and Intro. 388. With the first two,
6 which would allow police to establish buffer zones
7 around places of worship and schools for an unlimited
8 duration. For AAPI communities, this raises serious
9 alarm. Our temples, our gurdwaras, churches, masjids,
10 synagogues, they're not only spiritual places, they
11 are civic and organizing hubs. We cannot ignore the
12 documented history, particularly post 9/11, of NYPD
13 surveillance and infiltration of Muslim communities,
14 particularly through houses of worship. Expanding
15 discretionary policing authority around these spaces
16 without meaningful guardrails or time limits risks
17 deepening patterns of profiling and over-policing
18 that currently still exist. At a time of heightened
19 fear due to increased immigration enforcement,
20 expanded policing parameters will not feel like
21 protection to many AAPI families. It will feel like
22 scrutiny and more risk. We strongly support
23 addressing hate in all its forms. Our communities
24 have experienced devastating anti-Asian violence.
25 However, we are mindful of the risk that the AAPI

2 community may be propositioned as a wedge in the
3 legislative language of Intro. 388. That elevates
4 reporting for certain communities while failing to
5 acknowledge the full spectrum of hate-based violence,
6 including anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, violence
7 against LGBTQ communities, etc. Efforts to address
8 hate must be comprehensive, intersectional, and
9 rooted in solidarity. Narrowly framed approaches risk
10 dividing impacted communities rather than
11 strengthening collective safety. Rather than creating
12 a new hotline, we recommend strengthening and
13 resourcing existing reporting systems and improving
14 coordination through (TIMER CHIME) trust-based
15 community-based organizations. We're also concerned
16 about increased policing around schools. Thank you so
17 much.

18 AMY MALTZ: Thank you for the opportunity
19 to speak today. My name is Amy Maltz, and I'm a
20 Jewish New Yorker and member of the New York City
21 chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace, a grassroots
22 organization representing thousands of Jewish New
23 Yorkers. I am gravely concerned about the proposed
24 City legislation to create a buffer zone around
25 places of worship and educational facilities.

2 Legislation that restricts protest undermines the
3 open society we cherish here. This proposed
4 legislation will restrict New Yorkers' right to
5 assembly and free speech. As the federal government
6 wages war on our cities, particularly targeting
7 protesters and legal observers, we desperately need
8 City and State governments to strengthen our First
9 Amendment protections. The proposed legislation does
10 not make Jews safer. It is anti-democratic,
11 unnecessary, and dangerous. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

13 UNIDENTIFIED: How are you doing? Good
14 afternoon, Chair. Ramadan Kareem Mubarak to anybody
15 celebrating. I felt it was appropriate to say that at
16 this hearing this time. We heard a lot about people
17 talking at the impact of this bill to Brown and Black
18 folk. Well, I am a Brown individual. I am also a Jew.
19 I am also a Syrian Jewish refugee, an individual
20 displaced from Syria based on the same hatred that we
21 are seeing take to the streets of New York today,
22 what they call anti-Zionist, anti-Semitism. I
23 remember walking down the streets of Syria with my
24 father, trying to get to synagogue, worrying about,
25 are we going to encounter the chants from the river

2 to the sea, and let me say it correctly, Palestine
3 will be free, or are we going to encounter the other
4 chants, (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE) Palestine is our
5 land, and the Jews are our dogs. We came to this
6 country. We came to this country, and the promise was
7 written on that Statue of Liberty, give me your poor,
8 your tired, and your huddled masses yearning to
9 breathe free, and we were yearning to breathe free.
10 We were yearning to breathe free and celebrate to
11 practice our religion, free of any intimidation. When
12 I first came to this country, walking down the
13 streets, I found new hope, seeing people wearing
14 yarmulkes without fear, without risk to their life
15 that they're going to be attacked because they're a
16 Jew. What we have seen in the last two years was a
17 recreation of what displaced the Jewish community of
18 Syria, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Egypt, 10 other
19 countries, how many people sitting here today have
20 spoken about the Jews of Arab countries? 850,000 to
21 one million Jewish refugees have been displaced
22 because of this hate. I see many wearing not in my
23 name. Well, this is in my name, in my name, as a
24 refugee from Syria that demands to be free, that
25 demands to be protected in the United States, where

2 we are promised, where we are guaranteed the right to
3 practice our religion and our faith, free from
4 harassment, intimidation. I support this bill in my
5 name. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

7 LEO FERGUSON: Leo Ferguson, sitting in
8 for Jennifer Hirsch. So, my name is Leo Ferguson, I'm
9 the scholar in residence at Jews for Racial and
10 Economic Justice, on behalf of who's testifying. We
11 are united with the Speaker, this Committee, and with
12 the Council in our belief that all New Yorkers have a
13 right to live, work, and worship free from violence
14 and bigotry. However, we have grave concerns
15 regarding elements of the proposed legislation, in
16 particular, its broad deference to the NYPD and its
17 reliance on the NYPD for our safety. The data makes
18 it crystal clear that the NYPD is simply the wrong
19 tool for addressing hate in New York City. Over the
20 past decade, a period of time in which the NYPD Hate
21 Crimes Task Force has been the tool, basically the
22 only tool that New York City has invested in to
23 prevent hate violence, hate crimes have only
24 increased. We've heard it from many people here, hate
25 crimes are going up, hate crimes are going up. Well,

2 guess what, they've been going up on the NYPD's
3 watch. The NYPD is not keeping us safe. In fact, the
4 number of incidents dwarfs the number of arrests, the
5 number of hate crimes convictions stands at a
6 relative handful. Meanwhile, researchers have shown
7 repeatedly that hate crimes laws have no measurable
8 deterrent effect. The NYPD is just the wrong tool for
9 this job. The goal that we all share, the Speaker,
10 the Committee, and the Jewish community that I
11 represent is to prevent violence. The only proven way
12 to do that is community-based prevention that builds
13 trust and relationships across difference and gives
14 New Yorkers the tools and training they need to keep
15 each other safe. We have the research, we know what
16 actually works, but we have never had the resources
17 or the focus and support from City government to
18 bring community-based prevention to scale. During the
19 campaign, the Mayor made a powerful commitment to
20 funding community-based prevention. It turns out that
21 the amount that he proposed is in fact less than the
22 amount that the NYPD has paid out in settlements for
23 its protest policing since 2020. This is just not the
24 right way to go. So, I challenge you, I challenge
25 this Council to stop the cycle of pouring resources

2 into the same failed strategies over and over again
3 and instead vote against these bills and vote for
4 community-based prevention.

5 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
6 testimony.

7 I believe we have questions for this
8 panel.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: Hi, Leo. I
10 just wanted to ask you to elaborate more as a scholar
11 who has studied this, what do you think are the
12 proper investments and tools that will effectively
13 combat hate in our city?

14 LEO FERGUSON: Absolutely. What the data
15 shows is that investing in bringing communities
16 together and specifically helping communities find
17 shared stakes and shared resources and the things
18 that they all need to stay safe is the strategy that
19 works. There's also plenty of data showing that
20 things like upstander intervention has a positive
21 impact. In addition, we know that education and
22 awareness are incredibly powerful tools, but in
23 particular, it's this key piece of bringing
24 communities together. That's something that the City
25 should be investing in. It should be doing it at

2 scale. It's the thing that will most likely keep Jews
3 safe.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: Do you happen
5 to know right now if we invest a significant amount
6 of City dollars in upstander intervention training?

7 LEO FERGUSON: It's a relatively small
8 amount. I mean, I think the budget for OPHC is about
9 three million dollars. For a city the size and scale
10 of New York City, it's a drop in the bucket. That
11 money is spread out over many different
12 organizations. And frankly, I'll just say that as
13 someone who's been making this case for years, I am
14 just deeply disappointed in seeing the Council again
15 and again do things that are safety theater, which is
16 exactly how I would characterize these bills. These
17 are not things that are going to keep Jews safe at
18 scale across New York City in the way that Jews need.
19 We keep getting offered crumbs when we need real
20 investments.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

23 We have more questions, yes.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you so much.

25 I guess I'd like to follow up on a question around

2 data. Some of these bills have to do with data. And
3 we see the lack of data. We see data with no
4 interventions that are connected with it. So, can you
5 talk a little bit about how you see the data
6 landscape and what could we do that is actually
7 meaningful in combating this horrible issue?

8 LEO FERGUSON: Oh, I'll echo what we heard
9 from CCHR earlier, which is that the data that we
10 have now is essentially meaningless. What we have is
11 self-reported data to the NYPD, which means that
12 you're only getting a small fraction of the incidents
13 that are occurring and it's only coming from
14 communities that feel comfortable reporting to the
15 NYPD. We know that many of the communities that are
16 most targeted by hate are the ones that are least
17 likely to report so what we have is just a completely
18 distorted snapshot of what's going on. Now, what that
19 actually means is that there are more incidents,
20 right? We are undercounting and under... we are not
21 taking this seriously. And this is like the key thing
22 that I want to keep coming back to. We are not taking
23 hate violence seriously in New York City. And
24 unfortunately, this is not a plan to do so.

2 And, sorry, I didn't answer your question
3 about what would actually work. What we need, I mean,
4 we need many more reporting channels. But we also
5 need things like surveys, which can give a
6 statistically accurate picture of what's actually
7 going on and a much more granular picture of what's
8 happening in communities rather than what we have
9 now.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you. We
11 should be really laser-focused on not only evidence-
12 based intervention, but really funding interventions
13 that we already have a good amount of knowledge that
14 can be effective and need to be appropriately scaled.

15 LEO FERGUSON: Absolutely.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: So, thank you so
17 much.

18 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

19 I'll now call up to the witness table,
20 the next panel. A. Singh, Jamie Cohen, Kat Green,
21 Margot Barrett, Bernard Hoffman, Michael Zink
22 (phonetic), and Isabel Pinsky (phonetic), Serena
23 Smolenski (phonetic).

24 All right, you may begin in whichever
25 order you like. You each have two minutes.

2 SERENA SMOLENSKI: Hi. I first want to say
3 thank you, honorable Council Members, Speaker Menin,
4 and Chairman Salaam. My name is Serena. I live in
5 Lower Manhattan. I'm in Chris Marte's District. I
6 hope he's following this. I'm just a regular person.
7 I feel like we've heard from a lot of luminaries and
8 scholars and children. And I'm just, I'm in my mid-
9 50s. I'm a woman. I'm a mother. I'm Hispanic. I'm a
10 Jew. Indeed, I'm actually a Jew of color. But today,
11 I'm here as a New Yorker who attends my house of
12 worship. I strongly support the entire package. In
13 contrast to many speakers today, I'm unfazed and not
14 intimidated when I encounter anti-Jewish protestors
15 and hateful speech. And I'd like to tell you why. I
16 grew up with a Holocaust survivor. My childhood was
17 haunted by the Shoah. My dad never fully recovered
18 and, indeed, died by suicide. Childhood for me and my
19 sister overall was good. But it also involved martial
20 arts training, knife fighting training in the garage,
21 and even firearms training. So yeah, I'm pretty
22 prepared for hateful speech and intimidation outside
23 my house of worship. And it doesn't bother me. But I
24 ask you, should I be the standard? Is it reasonable
25 to expect that before anyone can feel safe going to a

2 potluck dinner or to celebrate (INAUDIBLE) at their
3 house of worship, that they have knife fighting
4 training in the garage?

5 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

6 BERNARD HOFFMAN: Bernard Hoffman. This
7 buffer zone is part of a larger attempted buffer
8 against right and just global disgust with genocidal
9 Israel. Both efforts are failing miserably. I'm not
10 here to sanctify the imperial fig leaf known as the
11 First Amendment. I'm not going to talk about
12 unintended consequences for reproductive rights. I'm
13 going to talk about the intended consequences and
14 stand with the conscience of the world and the
15 Palestinian people. Council, this lawfare will make
16 you a partner in ethnic cleansing, a crime against
17 humanity. Israel's ethnic cleansing of the West Bank
18 is currently on steroids. A defining feature is
19 sickening Zionist violence against indigenous
20 Palestinians. Anyone with a smartphone can see it in
21 graphic detail. Speaker Menin, your bill is 100
22 percent an attempt to further the sale of stolen
23 Palestinian land in the synagogues and yeshivas of
24 New York City. Conducting these secular crimes in
25 religious venues is strategic. Dissent must be

2 condemned as anti-Semitic, but no one's buying it.
3 Our eyes and our hearts know how to inventory a
4 genocide in Gaza proudly emblazoned with the Star of
5 David. And since I'm in this house, I'd like to say
6 shame on you, Mayor Mamdani, for condemning the Kew
7 Gardens protest and not the crime being protested. A
8 word about the Anti-Defamation League, one of the
9 sponsors of this bill. Let's be clear, the ADL is not
10 a civil rights organization as advertised, but rather
11 a Zionist organization, therefore a racist
12 organization. Objective number one of the ADL is to
13 shield Israel from accountability for genocide,
14 apartheid, and such ethnic cleansing as Speaker
15 Menin's bill seeks to advance. Finally, Palestine
16 advocates on this Council, your opposition to this
17 terrible bill has been faint. You need to be louder,
18 bolder, braver. Tiffany Cabán, where are you? Thank
19 you.

20 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

21 MARGOT BARRETT: My name is Margot
22 Barrett. I'm here today as an organizer with New York
23 City for Abortion Rights, a grassroots feminist
24 collective fighting for reproductive justice, both
25 here in the city and beyond. Reproductive justice is

2 about much more than just abortion. It is about the
3 right for all persons to choose whether to have
4 children, to not have children, and the ability to
5 raise children in a safe and sustainable environment.
6 Palestinian freedom is a reproductive justice issue.
7 Our organization has always been anti-Zionist. That
8 is, we oppose Zionism, the ethno-supremacist and
9 colonial doctrine that seeks to eradicate
10 Palestinians. For years, we have marched and
11 organized alongside our fellow New Yorkers because we
12 understand that there is no reproductive justice
13 until Palestine is free. This is why New York City
14 for Abortion Rights stands in firm opposition to
15 protest restrictions outside places of worship and
16 educational facilities. These bills are clearly
17 designed to stifle protest on college campuses as
18 well as outside synagogues, hosting illegal sales of
19 stolen Palestinian land. Instead of addressing the
20 immorality and illegality of these land sales, some
21 Members of City Council are choosing instead to
22 criminalize those who protest them. And these same
23 Council Members have explicit support of
24 organizations like the UJA, which according to The
25 Intercept, funds the groups who put on the illegal

2 events. As abortion activists, we have seen firsthand
3 the success of protesting outside religious
4 institutions. In 2021, we organized a campaign to get
5 St. Paul's Church in Brooklyn to stop hosting anti-
6 abortion groups. Three months later, the church
7 declined to host the anti-abortion bigots, saying
8 they were tired of the attention. Our campaign was
9 successful precisely because we were able to table
10 and protest directly in front of that place of
11 worship. As an organization, we believe it is our
12 moral duty to inconvenience people who spread hate,
13 violence, and bigotry, regardless of what they are.
14 We will continue to fight until Int. 1-A and 175-A
15 are scrapped entirely. We will continue to oppose
16 (TIMER CHIME) those who violate others' bodily
17 autonomy, be they Catholic bigots or genocidal
18 settlers.

19 ISABEL PINSKY: I'm Isabel Pinsky from the
20 Bronx's 13th District, and I'm just here as a
21 constituent. Guys, we have to reject these bills.
22 This has got to be the most transparent attempt to
23 collaborate with the Trump regime and stamp down on
24 dissent in pretty much any form. There's a lot of
25 schools, there's a lot of religious institutions, and

2 this is going to render just giant chunks of the city
3 potentially inoperable to protest, you know, pending
4 if the NYPD approves of it or not, pending their
5 discretion. It's asking us to, you know, rely on NYPD
6 to stop hate, kind of manipulating our very genuine
7 fear of potential hate crimes. I cannot imagine a
8 situation, guys, where someone's like, oh man, I was
9 worried that I was about to be discriminated against
10 for my race, religion, or national origin, but thank
11 goodness the NYPD is here. And I have to say, Eric
12 Dinowitz, I apologize to him that he's not here right
13 now. That's just the order in which we were called.
14 But he was just saying the most blatantly
15 manipulative stuff. He was saying you had to come
16 through a metal detector to get here, so aren't you a
17 huge hypocrite for opposing these bills? You don't
18 want ICE in the religious institutions and schools?
19 Well, don't you feel stupid for opposing these bills?
20 It was completely nonsensical. Council, I urge you to
21 reject this package of bills.

22 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

23 ASHVEER SINGH: My name is Ashveer Singh,
24 and I'm a CUNY undergraduate student who just founded
25 a human rights club on campus at John Jay. And I

2 firmly believe that any imposition of buffer zones
3 will violate the right to protest that we are all
4 entitled to. I've seen many people first engage in
5 activism as students. I feel that some of their first
6 experiences and exposures to activism, including
7 myself, was seeing protesters outside of our campus,
8 directly in front of our entrances. Students may see
9 their administration taking actions that they are
10 opposed to, such as CUNY's investments in apartheid
11 South Africa in the past. Seeing this, they take
12 action to push their university to divest. These
13 actions are only possible through activism,
14 especially protest. CUNY students have also protested
15 against ICE recruitment on John Jay's campus.
16 Recently, leaders of student organizations on campus
17 united to petition in favor of pausing all
18 connections to ICE. CUNY students have also demanded
19 an end to CUNY investment in apartheid Israel, and
20 engaged in many demonstrations, just as their
21 predecessors have against investments in apartheid
22 South Africa. I feel this legislation attempts to
23 legitimize the City's repression of protests in a way
24 that has been on the wrong side of history time and
25 time again. This includes the Stop the Church protest

2 in 1989 at St. Patrick's Cathedral to oppose their
3 stance on AIDS, abortion, and LGBTQ rights. It
4 includes protests against illegal and immoral land
5 sales at religious institutions. At a time where
6 protesters are advocating against support for
7 apartheid, as well as against ICE, I feel like it
8 would be negligent, and it feels almost malicious to
9 attempt to silence them. I hope in the future, our
10 City Council will prioritize issues that protesters
11 demand be addressed, such as these illegal land
12 sales, rather than work on ways to suppress the act
13 of protest in the name of combating hate.

14 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

15 MICHAEL ZINK: Hello. Thank you so much
16 for this time. My name is Michael Zink, and I am a
17 New York City non-profit leader and a proud Jewish
18 person. I am one of the many Jews who is here today
19 to oppose this legislation. I've directly experienced
20 antisemitism. I've worried in synagogue. In high
21 school, my AP English teacher called me a godless Jew
22 in front of the entire class, was the president of my
23 synagogue youth group. I had a swastika drawn on my
24 playground. This bill does nothing about any of that.
25 Now, personally, I do not want to protest a

2 synagogue, but I would, and I nearly did. About a
3 year ago, a synagogue near my home planned to host a
4 luncheon with the US non-profit that fundraises for
5 tactical combat gear for an Israeli special forces
6 unit that is operated on the front lines of Israel's
7 genocide in Gaza. And thankfully, after concerted
8 public opposition, that event was ultimately
9 canceled. But had it not been, I would have been on
10 the sidewalk to protest. I'm here as a Jew who cannot
11 find a home inside my local synagogue because of my
12 devastation and moral outrage with the genocide. And
13 for as long as my local synagogues fly the Israeli
14 flag and fundraise for war criminals and host illegal
15 land sales, my moral and spiritual home is on the
16 streets. If you pass this bill, you are telling
17 Jewish people like me that we are the wrong kind of
18 Jews, that we cannot stand on public property and
19 peacefully hold our own faith leaders accountable for
20 contributing to violations of moral and international
21 law. And you are telling Palestinians that supporting
22 the genocide against them is protected activity, and
23 that their efforts to seek justice will be
24 criminalized and suppressed. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
3 testimony.

4 I believe there's some questions for you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Chair, thank you. I
6 actually had a comment. I just wanted to, for public
7 awareness, I felt compelled to say something. My
8 Colleagues that might not be present physically here
9 right now, I can assure you that people are watching
10 this and have been watching it all day. It's been
11 broadcast in our lounge. People are listening online.
12 There are many reasons why people can't be here who
13 are in the Council. There's other hearings happening
14 today. We're not in charge of that schedule. And also
15 we make accommodations for people with visible and
16 invisible disabilities to be able to participate. So,
17 I just want to name that. If someone's presence isn't
18 here, it's not because we don't care about what's
19 happening. This is something we are paying attention
20 to very, very deeply. Thank you, Chair.

21 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

22 I will now call the next panel. Dina
23 Bakst, Michael Cohen, Beth Schwartz (phonetic), Ross
24 Glick (phonetic), Barbara Birch, Joey Saban, Talia
25 Day, Erica Gerson.

2 You may begin in any order you like. Two
3 minutes.

4 DINA BAKST: I'm happy to start. Good
5 afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.
6 My name is Dina Bakst. I am a proud board member of
7 the ADL New York, New Jersey, and the JCC of
8 Manhattan, as well as a public interest attorney and
9 Co-Founder and President Emeritus of A Better
10 Balance. And for nearly 20 years, I have worked to
11 advance and enforce civil rights and labor rights
12 protections for vulnerable New Yorkers. I am here in
13 support of Speaker Menin's schools and houses of
14 worship access and safety acts. These are measured
15 constitutional steps to ensure safe access, not to
16 silent speech, but to prevent obstruction and
17 intimidation at the door. The data is unmistakable,
18 as you've heard. Hate crimes against Jewish New
19 Yorkers have surged to high levels, higher than
20 anywhere in the country, and other vulnerable
21 minorities have faced increased attacks,
22 unprecedented attacks as well. Every New Yorker
23 deserves to enter and leave houses of worship and
24 schools without fear. As a board member for nine
25 years of my synagogue, and the mother of three

2 daughters who attended a Jewish day school in New
3 York City, I know firsthand what is at stake. This
4 legislation will provide a critical margin of safety,
5 especially for children who cannot reasonably expect
6 it to assess and respond to threats. Seniors,
7 families, and congregants deserve that protection as
8 well. As a lawyer, I also know that buffer zones are
9 not novel. They are firmly grounded in constitutional
10 precedent. For more than three decades, courts have
11 upheld narrowly tailored buffered zone, and in many
12 states, broad coalition of civil rights and
13 reproductive justice advocates have endorsed buffer
14 zone legislation in order to protect safe access. The
15 same principles apply here. Whether seeking medical
16 care or exercising faith, New Yorkers have the right
17 to enter and exit without obstruction, intimidation,
18 or fear. This legislation is vital. No one should
19 have to choose between practicing their faith or
20 feeling safe. I respectfully urge you to pass this
21 legislation without delay. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
23 testimony.

24 TALIA DAY: Good afternoon, Members of the
25 Council. My name is Talia Day, and I am the Chair of

2 the Board of Directors for the Rodeph Sholom School,
3 a nursery through eighth grade Reform Jewish day
4 school on the Upper West Side. I am also the mother
5 of a fourth grader at that school. I am here today in
6 strong support of the proposed legislation. Every
7 morning, parents walk their children to our school,
8 carrying not only backpacks and lunchboxes, but also
9 the weight of anxiety. Our students are growing up in
10 a time when they are constantly exposed to news of
11 anti-Semitic attacks, in synagogues, on school
12 campuses, and in our own city. And yet their parents
13 bravely choose to send them to a proudly Jewish
14 school. That choice should not require courage. The
15 emotional toll on our children is profound. They ask
16 questions that children should not have to ask. Our
17 families worry about what might happen outside our
18 doors. If there are ever protests near our school or
19 synagogue, we must be able to guarantee that our
20 families, teachers and staff, and children can enter
21 and exit safely. Security perimeters are not about
22 limiting free speech. They are about ensuring safe
23 passage for five-year-olds holding their parents'
24 hands, for teachers dedicating their lives to
25 education, and for communities gathering to pray.

2 Rodeph Shalom is a small school of approximately 450
3 students, yet we already spend nearly a million
4 dollars annually, about 4 percent of our total
5 budget, on security alone. We are committed to doing
6 everything in our power to make our community feel
7 safe, but we cannot do it alone. We are asking you to
8 stand with us, to send a clear message that in New
9 York City, every child deserves to walk into their
10 school without fear. Every family deserves safe
11 access, and every community deserves protection.

12 Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
14 testimony.

15 RABBI ERICA GERSON: Good afternoon. My
16 name is Rabbi Erica Gerson. I'm a native New Yorker.
17 I'm the mother of four children that are school-aged,
18 and I'm a former board member of a Jewish day school.
19 I teach my children to be proud and unafraid Jews,
20 and to fight at every turn for our civil rights. I'm
21 here asking you to do your part to help keep my
22 children safe. I'm in strong support of all of the
23 bills that are being proposed, but I want to speak
24 particularly to Bill 165, which hasn't received much
25 conversation. This requires the NYPD to report on the

2 status of hate crime cases. In 2022, unprovoked, on
3 our way out of school, our crossing guard, provided
4 by the City, outside of our Jewish day school,
5 unleashed Jewish hatred at me and my nine-year-old
6 daughter. She then did the same to another family,
7 letting the child hear as she spoke to the mother,
8 saying she should push her child in traffic and hope
9 she gets hit by a bus. We went immediately to the
10 NYPD, and the precinct commanding officer agreed she
11 needed to be removed from the intersection. They
12 removed her, but we never found out her name. They
13 declined to tell us her name or to confirm whether
14 she was reassigned to another place in New York City.
15 There was no way to ensure that justice was served.
16 My nine-year-old, now 12, never forgot, and she
17 deserves justice. So please support that bill to
18 ensure that we know what happens when we report these
19 problems.

20 The second bill I want to support is Bill
21 327. It reimburses non-public schools for the cost of
22 video surveillance. As Talia Day just said, our
23 school spends a million dollars. That's almost 2,500
24 dollars per student. Do the math, I have four
25 children. It's not fair for Jews to have a security

2 tax on us, which is what we effectively have, and
3 it's absurd to blame the victims when we need
4 protection. You need to help us so that we can afford
5 to be safe like everyone else and have an equitable
6 share in this city where everyone deserves
7 protection. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
9 testimony.

10 MICHAEL COHEN: Thank you. Chair, Members
11 of the Committee, Members of the Council, my name is
12 Michael Cohen, and I serve as the Executive Vice
13 President of the Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation,
14 a New York-based organization dedicated to combating
15 anti-Semitism, prejudice, and hate through outreach
16 and education rooted in the lessons of the Holocaust.
17 We are here to offer our unequivocal support for
18 establishing appropriate buffer zone plans around
19 houses of worship and schools. Certain spaces in this
20 city must remain beyond intimidation. Our synagogues,
21 churches, mosques, and classrooms must be among them.
22 The protests at the gates of the historic Park East
23 Synagogue brought urgency to this issue. Park East
24 Synagogue is the synagogue of our President, Jack
25 Simone. His children attend school there. What

2 happened is not theoretical. It was experienced by
3 children who hesitated before entering their place of
4 worship and learning. No child in New York City
5 should pause at the threshold of their synagogue,
6 church, mosque, or school and wonder whether it's
7 safe to walk outside. This is not solely a Jewish
8 issue. Intimidation does not stay contained. After
9 9/11, mosques were targeted. During COVID, AAPI
10 institutions were targeted. Reproductive health
11 clinics have long been the faces of harassment. When
12 clear lines are not drawn, targets simply change.
13 Free speech is foundational. Protest is protected.
14 But protest is not obstructed and dissent is not
15 intimidation. Clear, neutral plans developed in
16 advance for houses of worship and schools protect
17 both constitutional rights and the physical safety
18 and transparency. Safety and liberty are not opposing
19 values in New York, and these bills offer a way to
20 transparently come to the right balance. The AJCF
21 stands firmly in support of this entire package of
22 bills. Thank you so much to the Council for all your
23 help.

24 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
25 testimony.

2 BETH SCHWARTZ: Good afternoon. My name is
3 Beth Schwartz, a lifetime New Yorker. My husband and
4 I raised four Jewish children on the Upper West Side,
5 and I am an active member of the Jewish community in
6 New York City. Thank you for the opportunity to
7 testify today. This package of bills was introduced
8 because of the violent protests targeting Jewish
9 spaces that began on October 8th, following the
10 brutal October 7th attack carried out by Hamas.
11 Jewish institutions were targeted simply for being
12 Jewish, underscoring the urgent need for protections
13 to ensure safe access to places of worship, schools,
14 and community life. As a lifetime New Yorker, I am
15 appalled that it has come to this, that legislation
16 is needed just to ensure that people can attend
17 religious services and students can attend school
18 safely in our city. Since October 8th, 2023, Jewish
19 residents and institutions across New York have faced
20 a surge in harassment, intimidation, outside
21 synagogues, schools, and community centers, including
22 intimidating students, making it difficult for people
23 to enter safely and exit. I know this firsthand
24 because I was barricaded inside a Jewish space, the
25 Nova Festival exhibit here in New York City, to

1 protect us from a violent mob protesting an exhibit
2 honoring the 378 people who were murdered, along with
3 many others who were kidnapped and attacked,
4 including women who were brutally raped. No one in
5 this city should experience that. Some protests have
6 crossed into the line from protected speech into
7 obstruction and intimidation, chants such as
8 Globalized Intifada and the chant We Support Hamas,
9 which was shouted outside the Park East Synagogue,
10 are not heard as abstract political statements. They
11 invoke a history of violence and trauma. When crowds
12 block entrances, surround buildings, or intimidate
13 students and congregants, it creates a hostile
14 environment that prevents people from exercising
15 their fundamental right to worship and learn in
16 peace. Is it too much to ask that the police
17 determine where protesters may stand so Jews can
18 safely access their own institutions to pray, learn,
19 and gather? This bill is not about silencing
20 protests. Peaceful demonstrations must be protected,
21 but that right does not include obstructing access to
22 houses of worship or schools or intimidating those
23 who attend them. I respectfully urge the Council to
24

2 support the measures to protect religious freedom and
3 public life and safety. Thank you.

4 ROSS GLICK: Good afternoon. My name is
5 Ross Glick. I feel like we're rearranging the deck
6 chairs on the Titanic here today. Honestly, the City
7 is burning, and for the past two and a half years,
8 we've witnessed not just protests, attacks,
9 harassment campaigns against Jews who stand with
10 Israel. Now, you heard the testimony of what we would
11 call a kapo Jew just before because he's against
12 Israel. And this guy is saying that, as a Jew, that
13 he should be able to go into a synagogue and protest.
14 Well, this is unacceptable. I was at Park East
15 Synagogue. I stood on the doorsteps, and I arrived,
16 and I saw young men, thuggish men, fully face-
17 covered, wearing keffiyehs, screaming, death to
18 Zionists. We don't want Zionist Jews here in New York
19 City. They were standing at the doorstep, pushing,
20 screaming. I was pushed. I was poked. I was punched.
21 And the Jews who were there to support the synagogue
22 were penned and corralled across the street while the
23 so-called protestors were standing in the doorway,
24 screaming, yelling vile obscenities. What were they
25 protesting? A group of Jews showing up at a synagogue

2 for an event? How is that going to help the innocent
3 Arabs in Gaza? Really, after two and a half years, I
4 was at 770 Eastern Parkway last May when a violent
5 mob from within our lifetime, who's been marauding
6 the city with impunity, costing the City millions of
7 dollars in overtime and costing the NYPD, where are
8 they? Why are they not being held to account? I was
9 at 770 when they sent a mob of young kids to the
10 doorsteps, starting a fight while I watched the
11 police stand on the outskirts. I had to step in. I'm
12 an old guy. This is bullshit, sorry, but this is
13 unacceptable. We're debating a buffer zone? I'm a
14 free speech absolutist, absolutely. As much as I find
15 what they're saying reprehensible, go for it, this is
16 America. But standing in the doorway of a synagogue,
17 this isn't happening at mosques. Can you imagine if a
18 group of Jews after October 7th showed up in a
19 mosque? The worldwide condemnation. We would never do
20 it because we respect a house of worship, even as
21 much as we don't want intifada in New York City, and
22 we're not going to stand for it.

23 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
24 testimony. Thank you.

2 BARBARA BIRCH: Good afternoon, Chair
3 Salaam, Committee Members, and Council Members. My
4 name is Barbara Birch, and I serve as the Executive
5 Vice President of the Northeast Region of the Simon
6 Wiesenthal Center. We're here today in support of the
7 Speaker's five-point plan to combat antisemitism, as
8 well as the legislation being heard today, especially
9 Intro. 22, which would require the Department of
10 Education to distribute materials to students about
11 the risks of social media and online hate. As you may
12 know, the Simon Wiesenthal Center is a nearly 50-
13 year-old global human rights organization researching
14 the Holocaust, genocide, and hate in historic and
15 contemporary contexts. The center confronts
16 antisemitism, worldwide genocide, hate, bias, and
17 terrorism, promotes human rights and dignity, defends
18 the safety of Jews worldwide, and teaches the lessons
19 of the Holocaust along with other historical moments
20 for future generations. Our programs teach tolerance
21 and empathy to thousands of students and educators
22 across the city each year. In partnership with the
23 City Council, the Simon Wiesenthal Center and our
24 team of educators have reached thousands of New York
25 City Public School students through our in-classroom

2 Combating Hate in Digital Spaces educational
3 workshops. Combating Hate in Digital Spaces is a
4 learning experience designed for grades seven through
5 12, offered in classrooms that aligns with the C3
6 college, career, and civic life framework, social
7 justice standards, and the New York Department of
8 Education media literacy toolkit. Learners explore
9 the formation of online identities and examine how
10 digital systems such as AI and the algorithm
11 influence and manipulate individual actions in
12 digital spaces. At a time when manifestations of hate
13 are increasingly visible across facets of society,
14 particularly online, it is imperative that students
15 receive direct instruction on investigating the
16 harmful effects of fear-driven hate. (TIMER CHIME)
17 The Simon Wiesenthal Center's programs, workshops,
18 educate students on the risks of social media, the
19 harms of online hate, misinformation, bullying, and
20 equip students with strategies and solutions to
21 create more positive..

22 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. Your time
23 is up.

24 BARBARA BIRCH: Online presence. Thank you
25 for introducing such impactful legislation.

2 JOEY SABAN: Good afternoon, Chair Salaam
3 and distinguished Members of the Council. My name is
4 Joey Saban, and I'm a proud member of New York's
5 Sephardic Jewish community. I'm a District Leader in
6 Southern Brooklyn and serve as Chief-of-Staff to New
7 York State Senator Sam Sutton, whose district
8 includes vibrant Jewish communities, communities that
9 in recent years have faced a deeply troubling rise in
10 anti-Semitic hate crimes. I'm here today in strong
11 support of Speaker Julie Menin's proposal to
12 establish safe passage protections to and from houses
13 of worship. For many New Yorkers, a house of worship
14 is more than a building, it's a sanctuary, a place of
15 peace, identity, and community, yet too many families
16 now approach that sanctuary with anxiety, my family
17 included. I'm raising young children here in New York
18 City. During the Jewish High Holidays a few months
19 ago, I had to explain to my young son why a man was
20 shouting obscenities at us while we were trying to
21 enter our synagogue. No parent should have to
22 reassure their children about safety before they go
23 to a synagogue, ever. No child in any faith community
24 should carry fear on their way to pray. Religious
25 freedom is not only the right to believe, it's the

2 right to gather, to enter, and to leave peacefully.

3 New York City has always stood as a beacon of free

4 speech and lawful protest. Those rights are sacred,

5 but when protest becomes targeted intimidation that

6 obstructs access to religious practice, it crosses a

7 line. Protecting the right to protest and protecting

8 the right to pray are not competing values. They are

9 co-equal civil liberties, and it is in the

10 government's solemn responsibility to safeguard both.

11 On the right-hand ceiling of this Chamber is a quote

12 from George Washington. He said that government

13 should hold an equal and impartial hand. That

14 principle applies powerfully here. An equal and

15 impartial government cannot elevate free speech by

16 diminishing the right to practice and pray free from

17 intimidation or harassment. An equal and impartial

18 government safeguards both. Holding that balance is

19 not a restriction of liberty, it is the truest

20 expression of it. Today you have the opportunity to

21 reaffirm that truth. Thank you for your leadership,

22 and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

23 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

24 We have some questions for this panel.

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SANTOSUOSSO: I just want
3 to thank everybody for the time in testifying today,
4 and I also just want to comment that we are here
5 today because we take hate seriously. I hope that is
6 something that all of us hold seriously and dear to
7 our hearts. We did hear from a panelist who used, in
8 my opinion, an upsetting anti-Jewish slur, and I
9 would like to just draw attention to that and name
10 that because we in our Council and in our Body have
11 the responsibility to call out hate even when it
12 happens within our own Members and also within our
13 own hearings, so that is all I would like to say.
14 Thank you, Chair.

15 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

16 Seeing no further questions, this panel
17 is excused.

18 For the members on Zoom participants, we
19 don't use the raise hand function on Zoom, but we
20 will call by panel.

21 I'd like to call to witness panel
22 Mohammed Jihad Al-Ahmad (phonetic), Noella Williams,
23 Taj Sutton (phonetic), Robert Briggs, Lucy Hornbeck
24 (phonetic), Jake Zee (phonetic), Surjit Syed
25 (phonetic), Sorolle Idels, Rachel Bryant.

2 You may begin in any order you like. You
3 each have two minutes.

4 MOHAMMED JIHAD AL-AHMAD: Good afternoon.

5 I'm Mohammed Jihad Al-Ahmad, a Palestinian New
6 Yorker, public high school teacher and current
7 doctoral student. I'm here to testify against the
8 bill's Intro. 1-A and Intro. 175-A, which attempt to
9 codify NYPD practices that often abridge New Yorkers'
10 right to assemble on public property and further
11 empower the NYPD to continue their brutalization of
12 protesters with impunity, most often Black and Brown
13 protesters. Educational institutions are places where
14 knowledge is made and shared. Protests maintain the
15 integrity of educational institutions as counter
16 narratives to the top-down imposition of oppressive
17 knowledge and institutional policy. Restricting the
18 ability to protest at educational institutions,
19 relegates them to sites of indoctrination, not
20 learning. It's clear that Intro. 175-A is in response
21 to the student protests against Zionist genocide of
22 Palestinians and an effort to empower the NYPD to
23 continue suppressing and brutalizing students
24 exercising the right to assemble. Is this what
25 Council Member Dinowitz and his co-sponsors are

2 aiming for, the continued brutalization of students
3 because he disagrees with them? Anyway, as a
4 Palestinian whose family comes from the ethnically
5 cleansed and erased villages of Lifta and Qazazeh,
6 the continued illegal dispossession and theft of
7 Palestinian land deeply troubles me. Equally
8 troubling is the use of houses of worship here to
9 conduct business in violation of international law,
10 specifically the illegal sale of stolen Palestinian
11 land. When foreign agents use houses of worship and
12 their worshipers as human shields to protect their
13 illegal activities, those agents endanger the
14 community that they are hiding within. In the case of
15 the incidents that caused Intro. 1-A to come
16 together, those foreign agents also endangered my
17 people who are suffering an escalation to an almost
18 eight-decade-long genocide. Intro. 1-A does not get
19 to the root of the problem at hand, but brings into
20 question the premise from which it was born. Not
21 addressing the breaches of international law
22 conducted inside these houses of worship with
23 impunity makes the City government complicit in those
24 crimes. Whose interests are Speaker Menin and her co-
25 sponsors serving by pushing this bill? Not ours. It's

2 no irony that the premise of these bills as safety at
3 schools and houses of worship, when we saw
4 militarized police forces attacking college students
5 at university encampments and the...

6 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. Your time
7 is up.

8 MOHAMMED JIHAD AL-AHMAD: Ongoing illegal
9 sale of stolen land in the West Bank and Gaza being
10 held in local synagogues.

11 SURJIT SYED: Is this working? Hello?
12 Hello, can anyone hear me? Okay. My name is Surjit,
13 and I am simply a concerned citizen that is deeply
14 troubled by this bill, and I strongly oppose this. I
15 would like to bring up a couple arguments here.
16 Firstly, I believe that everyone in this room can
17 agree that rules are rules and they must be followed.
18 And secondly, I believe that religious institutions
19 are a place of worship, not to break laws. And
20 finally, the sale of stolen Palestinian land is
21 illegal under international law. I hope you know
22 where I am going with this. This is a component that
23 gets purposely overlooked when discussing this buffer
24 zone. And for some reason, these previous panelists
25 refused to talk about that. I wonder why, why they

2 don't want to talk about the crime that the religious
3 institutions are committing. Synagogues are a place
4 of worship, not places to harm Palestinians and
5 displace them from their homes. These acts are
6 disgusting and illegal. I want to bring up one final
7 argument here, and it is that people protest when
8 they feel their government isn't doing its job of
9 enforcing the law. And if our government wants to sit
10 by and allow illegal land sales to happen under their
11 watch, then these protests are going to happen. If
12 you don't want these protests to happen, do not break
13 international law. Do I have to repeat myself? Do not
14 break international law. And to my City Council, if
15 you care about stopping these protests, then
16 recognize these land sales are illegal and criminal
17 acts of terrorism towards Palestinians. Pass a bill
18 that punishes those that sell land illegally or these
19 protests will continue. And one final statement, the
20 Council Member over here was talking about combating
21 hate. Where is that energy for Council Member
22 Paladino who said that us Muslim New Yorkers do not
23 belong here? When will she be expelled? Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

2 NOELLA WILLIAMS: Good evening, everyone.

3 My name is Noella Williams and I'm an organizer with
4 New York City for Abortion Rights. I'm here to oppose
5 Speaker Menin's and Council Member Dinowitz's
6 proposed bills around places of worship and
7 educational facilities. By preventing First Amendment
8 protected speech and protests, the intent of these
9 bills is to stifle free speech on significant issues
10 in public places like the streets. In New York,
11 places of worship, healthcare facilities and
12 buildings associated with educational institutions
13 are everywhere and their close proximity would limit
14 political protests and potentially criminalize
15 countless demonstrators. This legislation mirrors the
16 Federal Access to Clinic Entrances Act known as the
17 FACE Act, which the Trump Administration is currently
18 weaponizing to prosecute anti-ICE and pro-Palestine
19 protesters as well as journalists like Don Lemon and
20 Georgia Fort. As a Black independent journalist, I
21 find it deeply jarring that this bill could strip
22 reporters of their press freedom and place us at risk
23 of policing. This bill also arrives at a time of an
24 escalating national criminalization of dissent and
25 there are countless examples of state-sanctioned

2 violence enacted upon journalists such as last summer
3 in Los Angeles. Journalism is not a crime. Building
4 solidarity with students, healthcare workers,
5 educators and activists who oppose this bill reminds
6 me of the coalition fighting similar strategic
7 repression and censorship in my home state of
8 Florida. During my time at college in the city of
9 Tallahassee, I've seen firsthand how bills like HB1,
10 Florida's anti-protest law enacted in 2021, target
11 Southern organizers and it's clear that this has the
12 potential to be replicated here. Even after a
13 blizzard, even after we were left outside to wait for
14 over an hour, we're here to share our personal
15 reasons to why as New Yorkers, as the inhabitants of
16 New York, we care, and so I urge all Council Members,
17 particularly those who claim to vote against these
18 bills, please listen to us and we need our City
19 Council to stand for New Yorkers' freedom of speech
20 and assembly. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

22 ROBERT BRIGGS: Good afternoon. My name is
23 Robert Briggs. I'm here today to oppose the buffer
24 zone bills or more appropriately named the far enough
25 away so they can't hear you zones. Council Member

2 Dinowitz, you mentioned the protest before this
3 hearing earlier, you said how it was great and how
4 there were in fact buffer zones there. Well, for the
5 record, I was there along with several other
6 community members who are opposed to this bill.
7 Speaker Menin simultaneously held a rally inside the
8 building with no buffer zone applied to the
9 supporters of the bill. And when the dozens of us
10 subject to the buffer zones tried to enter to
11 testify, we were told by security the Chambers were
12 already full and we had to leave. Only after
13 insisting that we had a right to testify about these
14 deeply problematic bills and waiting for over two and
15 a half hours were we finally allowed in. I understand
16 that you like buffer zones, but this morning was an
17 example of their disproportionate impact on people
18 based on their views and whether or not they support
19 certain bills. Protesting at schools and places of
20 worship has long been a part of positive social
21 change in New York City. In 1964, students, parents,
22 teachers, and activists marched on New York City
23 schools to protest segregation. These protests
24 brought about immense positive social change. Now
25 imagine the NYPD setting up buffer zones around these

2 schools and arresting anyone who dares to get within
3 shouting distance. In 1969, James Forman famously
4 interrupted the service at Riverside Church to
5 protest white supremacy and to demand that religious
6 institutions that benefited from slavery pay
7 reparations. This Council passed a bill in 2024 to
8 study the City's role in slavery and explore
9 reparations. Now this bill asks the NYPD to set a
10 barrier around Riverside Church and arrest James
11 Forman for having the courage to go inside. People
12 protest in certain places because of the hateful
13 injustices occurring, being planned, or propped up
14 inside of them. This is the Committee to Combat Hate.
15 Is more policing really the best we can do? As
16 Council Member Nurse, the ACLU, the Legal Aid
17 Society, and many other experts made clear in their
18 comments, these bills will not actually achieve their
19 stated goals. These buffer zone bills are symbolic
20 and reactionary. They're meant to chill dissent and
21 repress students and activists who protest against
22 their schools funding genocide in Palestine and
23 illegal land sales in the West Bank. Claiming
24 otherwise is gaslighting.

25 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

2 Next speaker please.

3 UNIDENTIFIED: I want to start my remarks
4 requesting that I'm able to finish since that grace
5 was allowed to a panelist on the first panel and in
6 the interest of equity of voice today at this
7 hearing.

8 If the legislative bodies that comprise
9 this Committee want to have a conversation about
10 combating hate, I would advise we use a historical
11 lens. That requires us to start at the beginning. And
12 this country's beginning rests upon the bones of
13 Native American ancestors and the backs of African
14 American enslaved people's labor and exploitation who
15 happen to be my ancestors. There can be no
16 conversation about mass displacement, violence,
17 brutalization, mass murder, interpersonal violence
18 and hostility and fear of walking down the street or
19 hate that does not include Black people in a city
20 that sits on the bones of unmarked graves just blocks
21 away from Wall Street and our educational
22 headquarters. Because we have not rooted ourselves in
23 that history and the shadows that chattel slavery,
24 Jim Crow, segregation and fascism continue to cast
25 over our city and society, we lack a collective

2 understanding of the fact that anti-Blackness exists.
3 More than this, anti-Blackness is so pervasive, so
4 insidious, so normalized that it does not even show
5 up in the legislation already on the books to
6 supposedly combat hate. It is implied but never
7 insisted upon, assumed but never uplifted. We also
8 have to root ourselves in the history of policing.
9 The NYPD, regardless of how diverse it becomes, is an
10 arm of an aggressively fascist state derived from the
11 tradition of slave catching. In the past seven years
12 alone, I have witnessed this firsthand as I had the
13 pleasure of serving on my local school board and
14 endured the trauma of placing myself between not only
15 NYPD officers and our students while they protested,
16 but also the New Yorkers emboldened by the behavior
17 of this police force and the elected officials who
18 blindly swarmed the city with them under the guise of
19 laws, which can be unconstitutional, and order, which
20 cannot exist in the absence of justice. Because of
21 this, I know that regardless of the supposed intent
22 of these bills, their impact will be the further
23 criminalization of Black, Brown, immigrant, Muslim,
24 Arab, South Asian, Palestinian, disabled, queer,
25 poor, low-income families, educators, and worshipers.

2 It is no coincidence that these bills coincide with
3 the five-point plan to promote safety and fight anti-
4 Semitism, and while I support that, as a former
5 member of the first iteration (TIMER CHIME) of the
6 Anti-Hate Crimes Task Force...

7 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

8 UNIDENTIFIED: Which was charged with
9 addressing anti-Black, Islamophobic, anti-LGBTQ, and
10 anti-Semitic hate crimes...

11 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you so much.

12 UNIDENTIFIED: I was on the front lines in
13 Williamsburg, but no...

14 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
15 testimony.

16 UNIDENTIFIED: Such five-point plan exists
17 for Black people, for Latinos, for queer people.

18 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: You have two minutes
19 to testify, and that's going to be very consistent.
20 And if you have additional...

21 CHAMBERS: (INAUDIBLE)

22 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you so much.
23 The two minutes, as now that I'm Chairing this
24 hearing, is going to be consistent, and if you have

2 additional testimony, you may submit it in writing.

3 Thank you.

4 Next panelist, please.

5 SOROLLE IDELS: Thank you. Members of the
6 Council, my name is Sorolle Idels. I'm the Co-Founder
7 of the Queens Jewish Alliance. On election day this
8 past November, I stood outside a polling site in my
9 neighborhood, as I have for years, greeting voters. I
10 don't campaign, I simply say hello, and thank people
11 for participating in our democracy. I stand 100 feet
12 from the entrance, because that is the law. In Burson
13 versus Freeman, the United States Supreme Court
14 upheld that boundary to prevent intimidation and to
15 protect the integrity of the vote. The court
16 recognized that democracy works best when citizens
17 can approach the ballot calmly without confrontation
18 at the door. Worship deserves that same protection.
19 In New York City, synagogues are filled with New
20 Yorkers of every age, children to seniors, and
21 seniors who remember times when gathering openly as
22 Jews was not safe. When protests take place directly
23 outside synagogue doors during active services, it
24 does not feel abstract. It feels personal, it feels
25 targeted. And at a time when anti-Semitic incidences

2 are rising in our city and across the country, even
3 the appearance of intimidation carries real weight.
4 This is not about silencing protest. The First
5 Amendment protects protest, and it should. This
6 proposal is narrow, content neutral, and applies
7 equally to all viewpoints. It simply creates a 100-
8 foot buffer so people can enter their place of
9 worship without being confronted at the threshold.
10 Federal law already recognizes, through the Freedom
11 of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, that houses of
12 worship deserve protection from obstruction and
13 intimidation. We are not inventing a new principle.
14 We are applying an existing one consistently. No one
15 should have to walk through anywhere with anyone
16 shouting at them to reach a ballot box, and no one
17 should have to walk through shouting to reach a
18 synagogue. New York prides itself on protecting
19 diversity and religious freedom. Protecting 100 feet
20 of space for worship is how we turn that principle
21 into practice.

22 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

23 And the last on the panel. Thank you.

24 RACHEL BRYANT: Good afternoon. My name is
25 Rachel Bryant, and I'm a Brooklyn native and Jewish

2 New Yorker. I'm here today on behalf of Met Council,
3 one of America's largest Jewish charities dedicated
4 to fighting poverty. We operate 19 affordable housing
5 buildings, comprehensive social services, including
6 to Holocaust survivors, and the country's largest
7 kosher emergency food network. Since 2020, our
8 emergency food service has also provided halal food
9 to Muslim New Yorkers in need. Through these
10 programs, Met Council proudly helps 300,000 New
11 Yorkers a year from all races, religions, and walks
12 of life. Met Council strongly supports the City
13 Council's proposal to prohibit harassment,
14 incitement, and protests within a buffer zone around
15 any religious organization, school, or house of
16 worship. As an organization founded on Jewish values,
17 we are unfortunately familiar with the rising
18 antisemitism in this city. Our events require
19 increasing security, and we often hire armed guards.
20 Jewish staff members have been increasingly subjected
21 to antisemitic language and incidents outside of
22 work. I've personally witnessed the antisemitism and
23 aggression of protesters towards Jewish New Yorkers.
24 On one occasion, I walked with a colleague who wears
25 a kippah after work. We walked past a group of

2 protesters, and without provocation, the protesters
3 immediately targeted my coworker and began shouting
4 at him. The hatred and anger they displayed was
5 horrific and was shocking to me as a Jewish New
6 Yorker who often passes as non-Jewish. This behavior
7 is harassment and extends beyond the bounds of what
8 should be protected free speech. It makes New Yorkers
9 afraid to go to synagogue and Jewish events. Allowing
10 protesters to harass individuals visiting houses of
11 worship infringes upon our right to freely practice
12 Judaism and our right to assembly. We ask the Council
13 to prohibit harassment, incitement, and protests
14 within a buffer zone around religious organizations,
15 schools, and houses of worship. I just want to end by
16 noting that there was some suggestion earlier that
17 community building and building bridges is a
18 substitute. That's not a substitute for the security
19 measures here.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you so
21 much.

22 I would like to thank this panel for
23 testifying.

24 I will call the next panel. Melinda
25 Thaler, Peter de Blasio (phonetic), Josh Melman

2 (phonetic), Sam Weinberger, William Steele, Maya
3 Sikand, Eman Gad, Anabel Ruggiero, and I apologize
4 for any mispronunciations that you will correct when
5 you testify.

6 If you heard your name, please come up.

7 I'm going to read the names again.

8 Melinda Thaler, Peter de Blasio, Josh, I think it's
9 Josh Melman, or it says Meckleman, that's probably a
10 typo, Sam Weinberger, William Steele, Maya Sikand,
11 Eman Gad, and Anabel Ruggiero.

12 Okay. We'll go from my left to your
13 right. We'll start. We're going to do this panel, and
14 then we'll discuss with Committee Counsel about that.
15 Thank you.

16 We'll go from your left. Make sure your
17 microphone's on. You may begin when ready, and state
18 your name for the record.

19 WILLIAM STEELE: Yes. My name is Mr.
20 William Steele, and I'm just here to represent
21 humanity, okay? To let you know, I sat patiently
22 listening to all of everyone's differences of
23 opinions based on this bill. These bills that are
24 being passed to safeguard humanities, to safeguard
25 people's First Amendment rights. I think that we need

2 to really understand that we are in a time, we are in
3 a time that this country is burning down. We don't
4 have time to be bickering and fighting amongst each
5 other with principles and all these other different
6 values. What we need to do is collectively come
7 together, to collectively come together and respect
8 each other's rights, dignities, and worships. If we
9 do not do this, this country and the civilization as
10 we know it is going to fall right before our very
11 eyes. We need to understand that passing these bills
12 to protect the Jewish synagogues, to protect any
13 persons of worship, it is a basic humanity. We need
14 to be passing a bill on just basic human dignity.
15 That's the bill that we need. Because what this Trump
16 Administration and what they are actually really
17 doing, they are rotting this country from the inside
18 out. And no matter what bill you pass, no matter what
19 you sign into legislation, it's irrelevant. There is
20 a war against humanity. But I respect this panel for
21 having this type of open setting for the public.
22 Everyone has their own different opinion. Everyone
23 has a human right to exist upon whatever purpose,
24 whatever value, whatever worship that they have. And

2 it is not neither of our positions to mock, to
3 discriminate.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you. Thank
5 you, William.

6 Next panelist, please.

7 ANABEL RUGGIERO: Hello. I'm Anabel
8 Ruggiero, an ACT UP member here to speak on Intro. 1,
9 175, and buffer zones in State-level bills. During
10 the early years of our country's founding, we did
11 horrifying and cruel acts. Central to the founding of
12 New York City was the displacement of the Lenape
13 people from the land that cradled their civilization.
14 This was explicitly an act of ethnic cleansing. Wall
15 Street ran along the walls of the city that barred
16 the Lenape from part of their millennia old homeland.
17 It would be remiss of me to not mention some of the
18 good decisions made during our country's founding.
19 For example, the First Amendment gives us civil
20 liberties that are core to a functioning democracy.
21 It allows me to say things like, our president is a
22 pedophile protector that is building concentration
23 camps for immigrants and erasing trans people from
24 the U.S. There are some narrow carve outs to the
25 First Amendment. The applicability of these depend on

2 the government's goals. The goals of these laws, not
3 only do they protect patients, worshipers, and
4 students. However, the goals of these laws are
5 inextricably bound to the protests that prompted
6 these laws. On November 19th, there was an anti-
7 Zionist protest outside of a synagogue. Inside of the
8 Park East Synagogue at the time was not worship. A
9 Zionist organization was conducting discriminatory
10 recruitment of Jewish people for immigration to the
11 state of Israel. To be blunt, our City and State
12 Legislators are trying to crack down on the First
13 Amendment to squelch dissent of Zionism, a political
14 philosophy. They do so while buying into the
15 conflation of Zionism and Judaism. Our legislators'
16 actions have a few implicit messages. First, it
17 suggests politics that supports the genocide of
18 Palestinians, which directly parallels the genocide
19 of the Lenape people, is part of Jewish faith. I
20 fully reject this implication. Second, in a time
21 where we seek shelter from our fascist overreach at
22 the federal level, our City and State are trying to
23 shatter our civil liberties to stop us to voice our
24 opposition to an ethno-state abroad. From

2 Lenapehoking to Palestine, no one is illegal on
3 stolen land.

4 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your
5 testimony.

6 EMAN GAD: Good afternoon, Members of the
7 Committee to Combat Hate. My name is Eman. I'm the
8 Policy Manager at Girls for Gender Equity, or GGE.
9 GGE is a Brooklyn-based organization which works
10 intergenerationally through a Black feminist lens to
11 center the leadership of Black girls and gender-
12 expansive young people of color. We offer this
13 testimony today in opposition of both Intro. 175 and
14 Intro. 327, which called for establishing buffer
15 zones at educational facilities and reimbursing non-
16 public schools for the cost of video surveillance
17 cameras. The creation of buffer zones around schools
18 would increase the policing and surveillance of
19 students and infringe on their rights to organize and
20 stage protests and walkouts. At GGE, we know that
21 police do not create safety for all students, and
22 that Black and Brown students are disproportionately
23 targeted by police. A study conducted by NYCLU found
24 that while Black and Latino students constitute two-
25 thirds of the student body, they continue to

2 represent approximately 90 percent of arrests and
3 summonses in school. Moreover, at a time when the
4 fear of ICE is keeping some students from attending
5 school, the last thing parents and students need is
6 more policing of their schools. Historically, young
7 people have used their school grounds and positions
8 as students to have their voices heard. Protests and
9 school walkouts were integral in the fight for civil
10 liberties and desegregation in the civil rights era.
11 One of the five cases that made up Brown versus the
12 Board of Education was sparked by 16-year-old Barbara
13 Johns, who led her school of 450 black students on a
14 walkout to strike and protest the poor conditions of
15 her segregated Virginia high school. In our time,
16 young people have staged walkouts to protest gun
17 violence in schools, the genocide in Palestine, and
18 most recently, to protest ICE. At GGE, we believe in
19 the power of student organizing and recently also
20 launched the Alliance on Gender Equity base of
21 organizers, who are currently organizing in support
22 of the School Girls Demand campaign. We want to
23 ensure our young people and their peers all feel safe
24 and empowered to use their voices in their schools to
25 call for the change they want to see. At a time when

2 there's heightened fear around law enforcement and
3 police are increasingly brutalizing students and
4 protesters, the (TIMER CHIME) City should not give
5 the NYPD increased discretion to police and surveil
6 our schools.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you, Eman.
8 Make sure your microphone's on and then
9 state your name for the record.

10 MAYA SIKAND: Good afternoon. My name is
11 Maya, and I am a resident of New York City, an
12 immigration attorney who represents low-income New
13 Yorkers from all faiths and walks of life, and the
14 granddaughter of a New York City pastor. I grew up
15 attending the New York Chodae Church in Queens, which
16 my grandfather founded to be a spiritual sanctuary
17 for the Korean American community of New York City. I
18 am here today to strongly oppose Bills 1-A and 175-A.
19 Increased police presence outside New York City
20 places of worship or educational facilities will not
21 make us safe or protect us from hate. Rather,
22 increased police presence will fill congregants with
23 fear, especially immigrant congregations and
24 congregations of color, and lead to the erosion of
25 religious spaces as a safe and important sanctuary

2 for New York City's faith communities. We are all too
3 familiar with the horrific violence that the NYPD
4 unleashes on New Yorkers every day from all walks of
5 life, and the idea of trusting them with enforcing
6 these bills is absolutely ludicrous. The hypocrisy of
7 these bills is blatant. Rather than actually
8 protecting New Yorkers from hate, they are
9 weaponizing fear to target the movement for
10 Palestinian liberation. The places of worship
11 proposal is intended to strengthen the City's
12 protection of illegal sales of stolen Palestinian
13 land. Instead of listening to widespread calls for
14 ending the illegal sale of Palestinian land, these
15 bills silence and punish New Yorkers, further expose
16 us to police brutality, and distract everyone from
17 grave violations of local and international law. I
18 urge all City Council Members to vote against these
19 bills and to listen to New Yorkers asking for an end
20 to illegal land sales, and protect our right to
21 protest these illegal events.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you so
23 much, Maya. Thank you.

24 SAM WEINBERGER: Good afternoon. Thank
25 you, Council Members Dinowitz, Avilés, and Wong for

2 allowing us the opportunity to speak here today.

3 These hearings can be very demanding, and I
4 appreciate you taking the time in your busy schedules
5 to stick around and listen to this hearing.

6 My name is Sam Weinberger, and I am
7 speaking today in a personal capacity. I am here to
8 express my support for the proposed legislative
9 package that has been discussed today. And in
10 particular, I would like to speak in support of
11 Intro. 1-A, which enables the NYPD to implement
12 buffer zones around houses of worship when necessary.
13 There must be clear protections to ensure all
14 residents of our city can practice their faith and
15 enter and exit their sacred spaces in safety and
16 peace. All people of faith, including but not limited
17 to our Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Jain, Sikh,
18 Buddhist, and Hindu siblings deserve to be safe in
19 and around their houses of worship. This bill strikes
20 a thoughtful balance. It does not criminalize
21 protest, nor does it suppress free speech. Rather, it
22 empowers the NYPD to assess each situation and
23 establish reasonable buffer zones where needed, zones
24 that protect individual safety without unnecessarily
25 restricting First Amendment rights. Critically, this

2 policy affirms that freedom of worship and freedom of
3 speech are not mutually exclusive. One person's right
4 to protest should not overwrite another's right to
5 worship without fear or obstruction. By supporting
6 this legislation, we reaffirm that New York is a city
7 where people of all faiths and all backgrounds can
8 pray, reflect, and live without intimidation. In
9 closing, I just want to applaud and thank Speaker
10 Menin and the entirety of the Council for standing up
11 against hate, and I urge the Council to advance this
12 bill and the entirety of the legislative package. I
13 thank you all for your time.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you, Sam.

15 Last on this panel.

16 MELINDA THALER: Thank you, Council
17 Members, for this opportunity to testify. My name is
18 Melinda Thaler, and I'm General Counsel to the West
19 Side Community Organization, a civic group focused on
20 community affairs. We strongly support these bills,
21 and I want to address two arguments raised by those
22 opposing the floating buffer zone bill. First, the
23 rights to free speech and protest are not absolute.
24 No one has a right to march into the Oval Office and
25 demand to exercise their freedom of speech there, and

2 no one has a right to exercise their speech while
3 impeding access to a house of worship. Restrictions
4 on these rights in the form of flexible floating
5 buffer zones have been repeatedly upheld by our
6 Supreme Court and are entirely constitutionally
7 valid. Second, opponents of this bill suggest that
8 protests outside houses of worship enjoy some special
9 status because activities inside those spaces, quote,
10 violate international law. Mayor Mamdani expressly
11 stated after the Park East Synagogue debacle that,
12 quote, sacred spaces should not be used to promote
13 activities in violation of international law, close
14 quote. Not only is it false that the legality of
15 activities in a space enlarge the right to protest
16 the activity, but not one adherent to this
17 unsupported idea, including Mayor Mamdani himself,
18 has ever identified any law, treaty, or international
19 compact governing New York City that has been
20 contravened by activities inside a New York City
21 house of worship. If activities going on in houses of
22 worship violate a law governing this city, which law
23 is it? No one in opposition to this bill, including
24 our Mayor, has come up with an answer. The stalking
25 horse of vague violations of never-identified laws do

2 not give rise to a new elevated status for the right
3 to speech and protest, nor does it give rise to
4 immunity from restriction. Please protect access to
5 all houses of worship alongside the constitutional
6 right to free speech and protest. Thank you.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

8 I would like to thank this panel for
9 their testimony today, and I will call up the next
10 panel.

11 Okay. The following people, please come
12 up. Queen Arson, Drew Finkelstein, Samuel
13 Finkelstein, Stanley Slater, Yerucham Selber, Rabbi
14 Ellie Cohen, Suzanne Gordon.

15 Okay, and we're going to start with our
16 Zoom panel as part of this panel. Khalid Rehman,
17 Miriam Fisher, and Heba Khalil. And we'll do the in-
18 person testimony, and then the Staff will call the... I
19 was kidding. We're going to do the Zoom first for
20 this panel, and the Staff will call the Zoom member...
21 I'm kidding for a second time. I'm going to call your
22 name on the Zoom, and then Staff will unmute you, and
23 then you'll begin your two minutes.

24 So, we'll start with Khalid Rehman.

25 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

2 KHALID REHMAN: Thank you very much. I
3 applaud the Council for taking the time and the
4 effort to work on the hate issues and hate crimes.
5 However, I do not support the bills as they're
6 written. To me, there seems to be a lot that needs to
7 be fleshed out. The last time I looked at, there were
8 about 7,000 registered houses of worship in New York
9 City and as many as that which are not registered and
10 there may be thousands of schools. So, when you
11 create 100 meters or 100 feet around all of them,
12 there is really no space left for the protest. So
13 that is one. The other thing that has not been
14 brought up is that the sale that was going on inside
15 the synagogue was being carried out by the group
16 called Nefesh B'Nefesh. Please make a note of it.
17 Nefesh, N-E-F-E-S-H. Nefesh B'Nefesh. And if you go
18 to their website, they will help you find... this
19 organization works on the social work, Aliyah, as
20 well as immigration to Israel, but it also helps them
21 find places to live and communities. So, if you go
22 into their webpage and look for communities, you will
23 find all these red dots, which are in the West Bank,
24 in the East Jerusalem, all in the occupied lands, and
25 that is where these sales are being offered for. So,

2 let's be very specific. This is neither international
3 law or local law, but this is somebody else's land
4 that is being sold in a house of worship in New York
5 City. Legalities aside, whether it's international
6 law or the local law or the New York Senate, but just
7 morality-wise, a house of worship, a house of worship
8 should not be carrying out activities...

9 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you for
10 your testimony today.

11 KHALID REHMAN: On the sale of stolen
12 property.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you for
14 your testimony.

15 Just, Sergeants, I'm not sure they hear
16 the buzzer on Zoom. So just a reminder, if you can
17 let them know that it's time on Zoom. Thank you so
18 much.

19 Next on Zoom, Miriam Fisher.

20 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

21 MIRIAM FISHER: This is Miriam Fisher. I
22 am a lifetime New Yorker. I am a Jew, and I'm
23 extremely offended by the rage-baiting demagogic
24 characterization of anti-Zionism as anti-Judaism. I'm
25 not a Kapo, and that's offensive, too. I'm anti-

2 Zionist, and conflating anti-Zionist illegal... what
3 we're protesting is illegal and completely criminal
4 and morally bankrupt, stealing land and selling it in
5 synagogues. My belief is any synagogue that allows
6 that to happen on their premises should get their
7 tax-free status as a religious institution absolutely
8 revoked. Also, so many speakers are referencing the
9 Shoah. I also learned about the pogroms that happened
10 before that, but you know what? There's a Shoah
11 happening now in Gaza and in a different way in the
12 West Bank, but they act like that doesn't exist, and
13 we all see it on our damn phones every day for years.
14 So, you know, the hypocrisy of these... I'm against
15 these bills. I'm for the First Amendment, and the
16 police de facto would become the assessors on the
17 ground of what to do. They're not equipped for that.
18 What they've got is anger management issues and
19 weapons, and they cannot adjudicate things, but they
20 would be put in a position of adjudicating which
21 things are what and deciding on the ground, and you
22 know, I don't really love their history. They're
23 going to be rougher on people who are defending...

24 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you for your
25 testimony. Time has expired.

2 MIRIAM FISHER: Thank you.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

4 Next on Zoom, we have Heba Khalil.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

6 HEBA KHALIL: Hello. My name is Heba
7 Khalil, and I serve as the State Director for Engage
8 New York. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.
9 We support Intro. 388 and Intro. 327. Intro. 388
10 should be strengthened in two ways. First, by
11 explicitly including anti-Muslim hate as a distinct
12 reporting category, and second, by ensuring strong
13 language access requirements so immigrant communities
14 can report incidents without barriers. We have
15 concerns about Intro. 1-A and Intro. 175-A, and we
16 thank the sponsors of the bills for the changes
17 already made before the hearing. As a Muslim New
18 Yorker, protecting houses of worship and schools is
19 essential. As CM Santosuosso mentioned earlier, in
20 January 2026 in Bay Ridge, three visibly Muslim
21 women, including a 12-year-old girl, were attacked
22 and targeted. These are not abstract fears. They
23 affect whether families feel safe attending Friday
24 prayer, and now prayers during the holy month of
25 Ramadan. Protecting houses of worship is crucial, and

2 these efforts must not erode First Amendment
3 protections regardless of the viewpoints expressed.
4 The First Amendment protects minority communities
5 like ours from government overreach. We must be
6 careful not to create a framework that can later be
7 exploited. As Muslims, we have lived through eras of
8 surveillance and profiling justified in the name of
9 security. We know how quickly an expanded authority
10 can be misused. The Supreme Court case in McCullen v.
11 Coakley makes clear that buffer zones are disfavored
12 when existing laws already address obstruction and
13 harassment. For that reason, we urge the Council to
14 reconsider whether buffer zones are advisable at all.
15 If you are to proceed, we strongly recommend a
16 required public comment period before the laws are
17 passed, annual reporting and data collection,
18 including where zones are deployed, their size,
19 duration, and enforcement actions so the policy can
20 be evaluated transparently and equitably, a sunset
21 clause requiring review and clarification...

22 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you for your
23 testimony. Time has expired.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you for
25 your testimony. Thank you for the recommendations to

2 strengthen or amend legislation. We appreciate that,
3 Heba.

4 We will now start with the in-person,
5 starting from my left, your right, and please turn
6 your mic on and state your name for the record.

7 SAM FINKELSTEIN: Hello. I'm Sam
8 Finkelstein. I'm speaking today as a fourth-
9 generation New Yorker, a student, a Jew, and a
10 representative of Jews Against White Supremacy, which
11 opposes Introductions 1 and Introduction 175, no-
12 protest security perimeter outside places of worship
13 and educational institutions for three reasons. It's
14 unconstitutional, it weaponizes the language of
15 Jewish safety to shield criminal activity, and it
16 demands that New York City endorse the ideology of
17 Jewish supremacy. Proponents frame Introduction 1 as
18 neutral protection for houses of worship. In reality,
19 this bill is a direct response to the recent
20 mobilizations of Palestinian and allied communities
21 protesting the sale of stolen Palestinian land inside
22 New York synagogues. It is a veto on the movement for
23 Palestine. The City is not concerned with the
24 sanctity of religious spaces. If it were, it would
25 not have spent two decades subjecting New York's

2 mosques to infiltration and surveillance. This bill
3 selectively weaponizes the concept of safety to
4 protect Zionist institutions. Julie Menin and the
5 bill's sponsors claim that protesting outside a
6 synagogue is an act of anti-Semitic harassment. But
7 what is happening inside that might draw protest?
8 These religious institutions are hosting sales of
9 stolen, ethnically-cleansed Palestinian land, which
10 is illegal under U.S. law. They provide material
11 support for the displacement and extermination of
12 Palestinian people. This bill seeks to veil the
13 crimes of settler colonialism in language of
14 religious worship. Its sponsors ask New Yorkers to
15 accept that the real estate arm of the occupation is
16 entitled to legal impunity. This is not protection,
17 this is supremacy. We do not seek safety purchased
18 with the silence of Palestinians. We demand no buffer
19 zones around places of worship or educational
20 facilities, and we demand that City Council
21 prioritize stopping these land sales in New York.
22 Additionally, in the interest of combating hate, I
23 have to point out I have been harassed and
24 intimidated multiple times in this Chamber today by
25 proponents of these bills. If you need any evidence

2 that they are not actually supporting this in the
3 interest of (TIMER CHIME) free speech, it's that they
4 are not supporting free speech right here..

5 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

6 SAM FINKELSTEIN: Right now, nor are you
7 equitably enforcing the time limits on testimony.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you so
9 much. That's not true, but thank you.

10 Next, please.

11 CHAMBERS: (INAUDIBLE)

12 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet in the Chambers.

13 SUZANNE GORDON: Thank you so much.

14 Originally, I'd said good morning, then I said good
15 afternoon, but now it's good evening. Thank you for
16 hearing us. I actually am not going to say what I had
17 planned to because hearing what other people feel, I,
18 listen, the two women that spoke, I'm here as a
19 mother, and I have children in New York City Public
20 School, and I have a child in a SUNY school, and I
21 really empathize with the mother. When I see a police
22 person and I'm with my son, I feel safe. I understand
23 that if you're a person of color and you see a
24 policeman and you're with your son, you might be
25 nervous. I am not... I am a huge proponent, and I also

2 wanted to invite that other guy who said that he
3 wasn't allowed in his synagogue or welcome to come to
4 my house Friday night for a Sabbath meal, Shabbat, I
5 would love to have you. We can agree to disagree, so
6 please find me if you're still here, or someone who
7 knows him, because I feel we're still family, two
8 Jews, three opinions. But what I wanted to say is I
9 wanted to go over some things that have happened that
10 have not necessarily been in the news. I don't want
11 to talk about my children because they're not at
12 Columbia University. I have two friends that are
13 professors at Columbia. Anyway, faculty workers, four
14 were trapped in Hamilton Hall, two filed lawsuits.
15 They were people of color. Someone at Barnard, who
16 they will not name, was a guard. He was also
17 hospitalized, and the labor union came out against it
18 and condemned that assault. Brad Lander also said,
19 quote, let's be crystal clear, this vile anti-
20 Semitism, said the City's former Comptroller, should
21 not have been said. You cannot (TIMER CHIME) oppose
22 land sales...

23 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

24 SUZANNE GORDON: In the West Bay without
25 supporting terrorism.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you so
3 much. And as a reminder, it looks like you got a lot
4 of notes there. Testimony@council.nyc.gov to submit
5 written testimony.

6 Our last in-person panelist for this
7 panel. Please state your name for the record.

8 AWALI (phonetic): Good afternoon. My name
9 is Awali, and I'm reading a testimony for Queen, a
10 Brooklyn resident, and I quote, I'm a parent of a New
11 York City public school student, and a New Yorker
12 who's deeply involved in both the labor movement and
13 the movement for Palestinian liberation. I'm urging
14 my City Council to vote against proposed bills that
15 would create major and targeted restrictions around
16 educational facilities and places of worship. These
17 bills clearly target Palestinian solidarity protests,
18 and by infringing on this crucial political speech,
19 these bills seek to curb our basic freedom and our
20 moral duty to protest injustice. These bills are not
21 content neutral. They have been invoked explicitly to
22 target pro-Palestine protests. The places of worship
23 proposal is intended to derail scrutiny around the
24 City's protection of illegal sales of stolen
25 Palestinian land. The educational facilities bill is

2 intended to criminalize protests on college campuses,
3 especially in light of student protests against
4 university complicit in the U.S./Israel genocide of
5 Gaza. New York is lucky to be a city full of
6 education institutions and places of worship of all
7 kinds, and a city full of densely built
8 neighborhoods. These bills would create even more
9 surveillance and policing of New York's speech. I
10 want the City to focus on providing for residents,
11 not criminalizing us. I would hope that the Committee
12 to Compact Hate would focus its attention on
13 something that actually promotes hatred and
14 disenfranchisement, the illegal land sale that so
15 many people are discussing today. The protests
16 outside of these land sales are doing far more to
17 combat hate than these short-sighted and deeply
18 concerning proposed bills. Again, I urge the City
19 Council to think (TIMER CHIME) about what these bills
20 will actually do to...

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

22 AWALI: The people of New York and
23 decisively vote against them.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: And thank you
25 for being here on behalf of your friend.

2 I just want to confirm that Drew
3 Finkelstein, Stanley Slater, Yerucham Selber, and
4 Rabbi Ellie Cohen are not here.

5 Got it. Well, then he doesn't get a
6 second bite of the apple.

7 All right. Thank you everyone for your
8 testimony.

9 I'll now call the next panel.

10 Okay. Rebecca Goyette, Ken Schles, Garth
11 Simmons (phonetic), Juan Escalante, Emily Adler
12 (phonetic), Pamela Sporn (phonetic), Irene Siegel,
13 Dora Finns. Would you please come to the table?

14 And then on Zoom, be ready, we have
15 Maureen Silverman and Chaskel Bennett.

16 We will call the Zoom panel first as we
17 did in the last panel, and we will start with Maureen
18 Silverman.

19 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

20 MAUREEN SILVERMAN: I'm going to submit
21 written testimony. I just want to say I'm clearly
22 against these bills, but I'm not going to testify
23 now. I'm going to submit this written testimony.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you,
25 Maureen.

2 And as a reminder to everyone,
3 testimony@council.nyc.gov. If you'd like to submit
4 written testimony.

5 And if you do have to have conversations,
6 that's fine. Please take it outside so we can hear
7 everyone who's here on the panel.

8 On Zoom, Chaskel Bennett.

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

10 CHASKEL BENNETT: Good afternoon, good
11 evening, Councilman Dinowitz and the Committee to
12 Combat Hate. My name is Chaskel Bennett. I'm the co-
13 founder of the Flatbush Jewish Community Coalition,
14 an executive board member of the Agudath Israel of
15 America. I'm a child of Queens and a longtime
16 Brooklyn business owner. I was the first responder to
17 the terror attacks on September 11th, and I'm a proud
18 Jewish grandchild of Holocaust survivors, all were
19 New Yorkers. I know what happens when vulnerability
20 is ignored, and my family understands the deep price
21 paid when threats to our people are not taken
22 seriously. I testify today in strong support of
23 Speaker Menin's Intro. Number 1-A, establishing a
24 safe, protected buffer zone around places of worship
25 and the full package of bills that accompany it. We

2 are grateful that this was introduced as the first
3 bill of the session, number one, that sends a clear
4 message that protecting New Yorkers from hate is not
5 secondary. It is essential. The need, as has been
6 discussed over and over and over again throughout the
7 entire day, and I've sat through every hour of
8 today's testimony, is undeniable. Our beloved city
9 has seen an alarming surge in anti-Semitic incidents.
10 Jewish New Yorkers have been assaulted, harassed, and
11 intimidated outside synagogues simply for attempting
12 to attend their houses of worship. The First
13 Amendment, as has been mentioned many times, protects
14 both speech and religion, but our Founding Fathers,
15 in their wisdom, chose to lead that amendment with
16 the language of free exercise of religion,
17 recognizing that the right to worship freely is
18 fundamental to a free society. So let me be clear. No
19 matter how loud and how irrational some might be,
20 let's talk about what is the fact. A safe, large,
21 protective buffer zone is not about restricting
22 speech.

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you for your
24 testimony. Time has expired.

2 CHASKEL BENNETT: Let me finish this one
3 sentence.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you. No,
5 that's time. Thank you so much.

6 We will now go to the in-person panel,
7 starting from my left and your right. Please state
8 your name for the record. Yes, and you can speak into
9 the microphone. Make sure the red light is on.

10 JANET: Is that good? That's good. Oh, I
11 can hear me.

12 Good afternoon. My name is Janet. Thank
13 you for burning the midnight oil on this very long
14 hearing.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I'm terribly
16 sorry. Your name's Janet?

17 JANET: Janet. I'm sitting in for Pam
18 Sporn.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay. Okay.
20 Thank you. Yeah. I just wanted to clarify because
21 we're on a list. Thank you very much.

22 JANET: Okay. As a Jewish woman and New
23 Yorker and constituent of Eric Dinowitz, I hereby
24 submit this testimony urging the upcoming buffer zone
25 legislation be rejected. In the last two years, I've

2 stood with my fellow Jews, including Holocaust
3 survivors, in opposing the civilian tragedy unfolding
4 in Gaza. Despite smears, every one of these rallies
5 have been peacefully conducted, even when assailed
6 with violence by the pro-Israeli side, ironically
7 often against fellow Jews. All too often, I've also
8 witnessed the use of religious locations to hold
9 events of a political and sometimes criminal nature.
10 For example, the sale of stolen Palestinian land in
11 synagogues and stump speeches by war criminals such
12 as Ben Gvir in his 2025 violent visit to Brooklyn.
13 Where is the City's condemnation and legislation for
14 that? Such events should face opposition. Creating a
15 buffer zone cuts the legs out from under the concept
16 of peaceful protest itself. And giving discretion to
17 the NYPD to decide what is sufficient is a recipe for
18 oppression. Protests that isn't seen and heard by
19 those being oppressed cannot work. And to criminalize
20 those who speak up for human rights is the very
21 definition of fascism. I stand against the enactment
22 of such draconian legislation as a Jewish woman, as a
23 New Yorker, as an American who is acutely aware of
24 how precious and vulnerable our right to free speech
25 is. Thank you.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Well, I was
3 going to give you 20 extra seconds for the time I
4 took from you, but would you like the 20 extra
5 seconds?

6 Okay. Thank you so much for the
7 testimony.

8 Please, next speaker.

9 IRENE SIEGEL: Council Members, thank you
10 for holding this hearing. My name is Irene Siegel,
11 and I'm here with Jews for Racial and Economic
12 Justice with whom I've co-facilitated trainings
13 against antisemitism and other work to promote
14 community safety. I'm also a JVP member and Arabic
15 studies professor at CUNY and teach in afterschool
16 Jewish education programs for kids. I'm here to voice
17 my strong opposition to the perimeter bills. As a
18 Jewish New Yorker, I care deeply about Jewish safety
19 and thus I know that it is inextricable from the
20 safety of my Muslim and BIPOC neighbors who are the
21 most likely to be targeted and racially profiled by
22 this legislation. As an organizer and a CUNY
23 educator, I have repeatedly witnessed the police
24 brutalizing or intimidating principled and courageous
25 student protesters, most of whom are BIPOC or Muslim,

2 while protesting the genocide in Gaza. Some of these
3 same demonstrators have stood side by side with
4 Jewish New Yorkers like myself to peacefully protest
5 the illegal sale of stolen Palestinian land at fully
6 secular promotional events being held at synagogues
7 like Park East. Dozens of CUNY faculty and staff
8 including myself have also been targeted with doxing
9 or even fired for expressing support for Palestinian
10 liberation. People speaking their conscience against
11 atrocities should not be subjected to intensified
12 surveillance and control which is what these bills
13 would encourage, all justified through a weaponized
14 Jewish identity. As the Trump Administration wages
15 outright war on our cities and educational
16 institutions with everything from violent masked
17 gestapo to FBI investigations and lawfare, the last
18 thing we need right now is to direct more resources
19 to increase policing that will make us less safe
20 while undermining our rights. What we need is more
21 resources for data-driven interventions that
22 meaningfully build safety infrastructure from within
23 and across communities such as upstander, anti-racism
24 and restorative justice trainings. Please oppose

2 these bills and feed initiatives that keep Jews and
3 all New Yorkers safe. Thank you.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you for
5 your testimony.

6 REBECCA GOYETTE: Hi. I'm Rebecca Goyette,
7 a public artist standing in resistance for a free
8 Palestine. On Thursday, January 8th, 2026, an angry
9 lynch mob of Zionists in front of a synagogue in Kew
10 Gardens launched serious threats at pro-Palestine
11 protesters. "'Fuck you, faggot," "I'm going to follow
12 you home and rape you," they cried. Zionists have
13 been conducting illegal land theft and pre-selling
14 Palestinians' properties in the West Bank and in Gaza
15 while people are living inside. After Palestinian
16 properties are pre-sold here in New York City,
17 settlers violently remove Palestinians from their
18 homes, murdering, imprisoning, raping and torturing
19 them. Make no mistake, these are acts of terror.
20 Illegal land sales here in New York City must be
21 stopped and we demand Mayor Mamdani take this on as
22 top priority. No ethnic cleansing of Palestinians
23 through illegal land sales in New York City, period.
24 We protest with no buffer zone until this is all
25 accomplished and Palestine is free. Israel's

2 apartheid state, occupation, and genocide of
3 Palestinians is illegal under international law. It
4 is Palestinians' right and our duty to resist and
5 protest the illegal occupation carried out by Israel
6 and the U.S. It is legal and morally essential to
7 disrupt this thievery. Protesting sales do not
8 disrupt worship. It is an ungodly manipulation of
9 public perception to hold these land theft pre-sales
10 in synagogues. Allowing these war crimes to take
11 place in synagogues is no different than when the KKK
12 organized their crimes against humanity in churches.
13 The KKK historically used churches as recruitment and
14 staging ground, making Black communities targets for
15 terror and destruction. Churches and religious
16 organizations were integral to the systematic abuse
17 and cultural destruction of indigenous peoples in the
18 United States. No matter where these war crimes take
19 place, the public has a right to protest in close
20 proximity and to resist until these war crimes stop.
21 Palestine is for the Palestinians. Free Palestine.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you for
23 your testimony.

24 KEN SCHLES: Hi. My name's Ken Schles. I'm
25 a father, a lifelong New Yorker, and a Jewish member

2 of JVP, Jewish Voice for Peace. I'm also a childhood
3 survivor of anti-Semitic violence. I strongly oppose
4 Intros 1-A and 175-A to create arbitrary deployable
5 buffer zones around places of worship and educational
6 facilities. These bills presented as part of a
7 package to combat anti-Semitism pit parts of New York
8 City's Jewish community against the right to protest.
9 They don't address hate. They threaten New York's
10 storied tradition of activism, protest, and the
11 public's ability to speak truth to power. These bills
12 give police discretion to criminalize proximal acts
13 of protest. In Minnesota, it was also discretion that
14 DHS officers murdered peaceful protesters deemed to
15 be in the wrong place. Constitutional rights should
16 never be contingent on police discretion. Intro. 1-A
17 was written in response to incidents at synagogues
18 where stolen Palestinian land was illegally
19 auctioned. Synagogues should not be a cover for
20 illegal acts. In our upside-down world, even valid
21 claims of anti-Semitism have been weaponized against
22 us. In places of higher learning, anti-Semitism is
23 used as a pretext to eliminate research funding, to
24 threaten accreditation. My daughter currently
25 studying for her master's at Columbia tells me how

2 fearful students and faculty are to speak their minds
3 now. She describes a chill that has befallen the
4 campus. These bills will do nothing to reduce hate,
5 nor will they have safeguarded me from the anti-
6 Semitic violence I experienced as a child. They
7 follow upon a pattern of federal civil rights
8 reversals that allow egregious violations of rights
9 to flourish. I implore the City Council to reject
10 intros 1-A and 175-A. Consider seriously that only in
11 a free society will New Yorkers be safe.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you for
13 your testimony.

14 JUAN ESCALANTE: Hello. My name is Juan
15 Escalante. Loved ones know me as Jess. My pronouns
16 are they, them, theirs. I am transgender. I am also a
17 Columbia alumni who graduated a few months before
18 October 7th. On October 7th, my Salvadorian mother
19 was visiting Jerusalem. My stepfather is a Persian
20 Jewish man who fled Iran during the Islamic
21 Revolution of 1979. I also want to add that there has
22 been zero mention by a lot of the people in keffiyehs
23 here today of the Iranian genocide that has killed
24 nearly 100,000 people. I really resent as a person of
25 color, the hijacking of terms like person of color

2 and Black and Brown by all of these in keffiyahs here
3 today. But I want to address something. Earlier there
4 was talk about how anti-Semitic speech and hate
5 speech is protected under the First Amendment. Under
6 that logic, Islamophobia after September 11th is also
7 protected. The demonization of Arabs and Muslims in
8 this country is also protected. We have seen what
9 happens when rhetoric turns entire religious and
10 ethnic communities into political symbols, as has
11 been the case with the Jewish people over the last
12 two years. After 9/11, Muslims in America were
13 collectively blamed, harassed, attacked, and our City
14 must protect the right to protest and protect
15 political, sorry. Our City must protect the right to
16 protest political policies, our First Amendment
17 right. But we must also be vigilant when protest
18 language shifts from criticizing policy to targeting
19 people because of who they are. The rule should be
20 consistent for everybody, Muslims, Jews, everyone. I
21 urge you to pass this bill. Thank you.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you for
23 your testimony.

24 Last on this panel.

2 DORA FINNS: Good afternoon, Council
3 Members. My name is Dora Finns, and I'm a lifelong
4 New Yorker, granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, and
5 member of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, NYC
6 for Abortion Rights, and Jewish Voice for Peace. I'm
7 here to urge City Council Members to vote against the
8 proposed buffer bills around places of worship and
9 educational facilities. I'm aware the bills have
10 already been revised because they are so
11 overwhelmingly unpopular, but that is not sufficient.
12 These bills are being presented as part of a package
13 to combat anti-Semitism, positioning supporting New
14 York's Jewish communities and defending the right to
15 protest against each other. This is divisive and
16 disingenuous. This legislation emerged in response to
17 protests outside of synagogues that were hosting
18 illegal non-religious political events, including
19 sales of stolen occupied Palestinian land for
20 exclusive Jewish audiences in violation of
21 international law, as well as federal, state, civil
22 rights and fair housing legislation. I have been
23 disgusted to see synagogues I grew up attending
24 desecrated by these events and dismayed that this is
25 the Council's solution to the issue. Additionally,

2 reproductive freedom and queer rights have been
3 defended and expanded for decades using tactics like
4 protests at places of worship whose leaders have
5 tried to control public policy and bodily autonomy.
6 This has been essential to progress from ACT UP and
7 WHAM in the '80s to reproductive justice groups
8 combating clinic invasions today. No institution is
9 exempt from public accountability. Giving the NYPD
10 discretion over these buffer zones would make them
11 another tool for surveillance, mass arrests and
12 selective reinforcement, especially against
13 communities of color, the LGBTQIA2S-plus community,
14 and movements already disproportionately targeted by
15 law enforcement. There is already documented
16 widespread use of excessive force against protesters,
17 particularly by the NYPD's violent strategic response
18 group. The federal government is currently waging war
19 on our cities, targeting protesters and legal
20 observers. We need this Council to protect us from
21 these attacks, not add to them. I urge all Council
22 Members to vote against these bills and stand for New
23 Yorkers' freedom of speech and assembly. Thank you.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you for
25 your testimony.

2 And just the last thing, Janet, just for
3 the record, would you state your last name for the
4 record?

5 JANET: (INAUDIBLE)

6 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Good. Thank you.

7 That is all for this panel. Thank you so
8 much for your testimony this evening.

9 Okay. For our next panel, as always, I
10 apologize if I say your name incorrectly, you'll
11 correct me. Calvin Harrison, Benjamin Nager Sadov
12 (phonetic), DJK, Walter Masterson, Andrea Ortiz,
13 Vladislav Spector, Natasha Bujosa, Adrienne
14 Easterling (phonetic), and on Zoom, we have Tanesha
15 Grant.

16 And, as in the previous two panels, we'll
17 be starting on Zoom.

18 TANESHA GRANT: Thank you, Chair. Okay, so
19 I am Tanesha Grant. To my esteemed Chair and
20 Committee Members, I am Tanesha Grant, the Executive
21 Director of Parent Supporting Parents New York. I
22 address you today in my professional capacity as well
23 as a Black woman, mother and grandmother. I will
24 first like to commend your efforts to combat hate.
25 However, your five-point action plan to combat anti-

1 Semitism and strengthen community safety appears to
2 be narrowly focused on a single demographic within
3 our diverse communities. As a Black woman descended
4 from enslaved African people, I must highlight that
5 these five proposed bills fail to address the
6 protection that Black people deserve and have
7 historically been denied in this nation and this
8 city. Our Black community has been subjected to anti-
9 Black hate and anti-Blackness for over 400 years.
10 This systematic issue has been consistently dismissed
11 or treated as illegitimate. Yet across this country,
12 documented video evidence exists of numerous attacks
13 targeting Black children, women, and men. Having been
14 removed from my Black family at birth, I experienced
15 early on the profound nature of anti-Black prejudice
16 simply for being born Black. It is an affront to our
17 ongoing trauma that Council Members would draft
18 legislation that could potentially further
19 marginalize our voices under the guise of combating
20 anti-Semitism. Such an approach suggests a tiered
21 system of protection where only certain groups are
22 prioritized. In this, the 100-year anniversary of
23 Black History Month in the year 2026, Black
24 individuals continue to strive for equity and equal
25

2 protection under the law. A recent example is the
3 February CEC3 meeting, which illustrated the presence
4 of anti-Blackness and the lack of immediate
5 meaningful action to address it. We were compelled to
6 advocate strenuously simply to bring attention to
7 this issue despite the involvement of Black children.

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time
9 expired.

10 TANESHA GRANT: These proposed bills...

11 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you,
12 Tanesha.

13 We will now go to the in-person panel and
14 we're going to start from left to right, unless you
15 have other plans.

16 ADRIENNE EASTERLING: Yeah. We agreed that
17 I would go first. Sorry.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Perfect.

19 ADRIENNE EASTERLING: Adrienne Easterling.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you. You
21 may begin.

22 ADRIENNE EASTERLING: In 1766, the lawn
23 outside saw the erection of the Liberty Pole
24 protesting the British government leading to the very
25 revolution that gave us our constitutional right to

2 protest. The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire triggered the
3 labor rights movement, which swept the country.
4 Stonewall gave birth to the queer rights movement and
5 the ongoing war on AIDS. And these are only three of
6 the thousands of demonstrations and movements born
7 within the five boroughs that you have no right to
8 revoke. This bill is not only unconstitutional, it is
9 the next step in a fascist USA shrouded in false
10 altruism. You claim it protects those who quote, are
11 trying to go about their lives, but it only protects
12 you. The ever-changing buffer zone now decided
13 entirely by a group that killed a man over a two-
14 dollar fare and uses weapons against unarmed
15 civilians that are illegal in warfare, closes off any
16 number of blocks, meaning that no one would be able
17 to hold a ULP strike, which is the only type of
18 strike protected by the NLRB. The Pride Parade and
19 all parades will be barred due to the fact that
20 routes pass multiple houses of worship and schools,
21 and you could forget about protests against religious
22 leaders committing sexual abuse. But what really gets
23 me is the fact that Kathy Hochul's regional office in
24 Manhattan qualifies as a house of worship due to the
25 Heritage Baptist Church being in the very same

2 building, which means that no one in the city can
3 inconvenience her with our peasant problems. This
4 bill protects you. Don't act like we're too stupid to
5 see that.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you for
7 your testimony.

8 Have you decided who's next?

9 Okay. So, now we'll go from now, we'll go
10 from left to right, my left, your right. Start with
11 you.

12 BENJAMIN NAGER SADOV: Hi. My name's Ben.
13 I'm a member of Jewish Voice for Peace, a grassroots
14 organization of thousands of Jewish New Yorkers. I
15 was proud that we were able to turn up many to the
16 hearing today, many of whom have waited hours to
17 speak. I'm here to express fierce opposition to the
18 proposed legislation to restrict protests outside
19 places of worship and educational facilities. The
20 legislation was proposed in response to specific
21 demonstrations protesting the auctioning off of
22 Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank. These
23 sales are both illegal under international law and
24 discriminatory under U.S. law. Organizations are
25 increasingly carrying out this theft inside

2 synagogues with a strategy to make the story into one
3 about protests outside synagogues rather than about
4 the heart of the matter, the illegal theft and sale
5 of Palestinian land. This proposed legislation
6 communicates a dangerous message that if you want to
7 violate international law or U.S. law, you need only
8 do it inside a house of worship and you will be
9 insulated from protest. We call on New York City's
10 legislators to work to prevent such discrimination
11 and violations of international law in the first
12 place rather than suppressing constitutionally
13 protected dissent of such violations. When houses of
14 worship host non-religious political events,
15 including real estate sales, they are making a choice
16 with the knowledge that they might be protested for
17 doing so. As a Jewish New Yorker, I encourage our
18 City Council Members to vote no against this
19 dangerous and unnecessary bill that does not keep
20 Jews safe and instead criminalizes free speech, which
21 speaks out against the genocide in Gaza and
22 settlement expansion in the West Bank.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you for
24 your testimony.

2 CALVIN HARRISON: Good evening, Council
3 Members. My name is Calvin Harrison, and I'm a member
4 of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice here to voice
5 opposition to Bill 0001 and 175. As a Jewish New
6 Yorker, I care deeply about my community's safety,
7 but I do not believe these bills will make us safer.
8 Quite on the contrary, they have the power to
9 significantly curtail our First Amendment rights to
10 protest and would further empower the NYPD, which has
11 been known time and again to violently over-police
12 protest, to make arbitrary decisions about who is
13 allowed to say what and where. I've personally
14 attended many protests that would fall under the
15 purview of this law. At one in particular, I served
16 as a safety marshal for a group demonstrating on a
17 rainy evening outside a Midtown synagogue that had
18 chosen to host a real estate event for land in West
19 Bank settlements, which are illegal under
20 international law. We were separated from those
21 entering the event by barricades and were under the
22 eyes of at least a dozen NYPD officers. As marshals,
23 our job was to help demonstrators be their best
24 selves, to help our voices be heard while ensuring
25 the safety of our demonstrators. Voices were raised

2 and there was palpable tension, but no violence
3 occurred and we ended peacefully after a short march
4 to Bryant Park. Protests, like any exercise of
5 democracy, can be difficult and can make people
6 uncomfortable, but we need to reflect and work
7 through that discomfort together to move forward and
8 build the world we wish to see. That synagogue made a
9 choice to host an event that, in my opinion and that
10 of many other Jews, is antithetical to our religion
11 and the moral code it imbues us with. That night, we
12 chose to let those who attended the event hear and
13 see our disagreement. We did not prevent anyone from
14 entering the building. Had we done so, the NYPD would
15 have been able to arrest us under existing laws. Had
16 one of our demonstrators attempted harm on someone
17 entering, again, we could have been arrested under
18 existing laws. While claiming to be combating
19 antisemitism, this law does nothing to further
20 protect Jews. On the contrary, it could actually end
21 up criminalizing certain Jews for rightful criticism.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you for
23 your testimony.

24 Make sure the red light's on when you
25 push the button.

2 NATASHA BUJOSA: Thank you. Hi, everybody.
3 Happy Black History Month. Happy Ramadan. My name is
4 Natasha Bujosa. I am an educational organizer with
5 New Settlement and Parent Action Committee in the
6 Bronx, the Great Boogie Down, and I'm also here with
7 many colleagues for educational rights. I'm here to
8 oppose the bill in its entirety. While it's a vague
9 disguise as inclusive, it's clear as demonstrated
10 today that it only uplifts one group while leaves the
11 rest of us vulnerable. I represent many schools who
12 are mostly Black and Brown kids who don't have the
13 greatest relationship with NYPD, unfortunately. So,
14 while the increase in police presence may benefit
15 some schools, it does not benefit all schools, and
16 that's just not unacceptable. Would you hold the same
17 concerns or hearing in the future when those students
18 are subject to hate crimes by other people that
19 oppose them? Did this Council even consider the
20 impact that these bills will have outside for other
21 minority groups? I guess we're going to have to find
22 out if we pass this in a couple months. Thank you,
23 and I yield my time.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you for
25 your testimony.

2 ANDREA ORTIZ: Hello. My name is Andrea.
3 I'm with the Dignity in Schools Coalition, which
4 encourages students, parents, and educators to engage
5 civically. The bills being debated today in the name
6 of safety would essentially prevent protests and
7 demonstrations from taking place and increase police
8 presence and surveillance at a time of heightened
9 fascism and political repression. Our schools and
10 public institutions are most effective when
11 communities have agency and protected rights to speak
12 and assemble to help shape the systems that serve
13 them. Therefore, we urge you to oppose all proposals
14 to create protest-free buffer zones around healthcare
15 centers, places of worship, and educational
16 facilities. Stop targeting all protected free speech
17 activities and do not waste public funding on private
18 school camera surveillance systems. Suppressing free
19 speech does not make people safe. The buffer zone
20 proposals will inevitably increase the intensity of
21 encounters between civilians and overzealous law
22 enforcement, a result that will disproportionately
23 endanger not only certain viewpoints, but also Black
24 and Brown communities that are already over-policed.
25 Policing and surveillance in and around schools is

2 harmful for all students. We cannot waste 35 million
3 dollars to get private school surveillance cameras at
4 a time when the City is proposing cutting restorative
5 justice and mental health services in public schools
6 due to budget cuts. Additional police presence is
7 also problematic because NYPD school cops are able to
8 contribute names to secret lists of people it deems
9 gang members with little or no evidence. In a time
10 when Trump and other political leaders are
11 prioritizing youth criminalization and expediting
12 deportations and detentions of gang members with no
13 justifiable evidence, we cannot let more NYPD
14 officers contribute to the ongoing surveillance and
15 criminalization of our young people. It would be a
16 grave mistake for the Council to react to peaceful
17 protests, including the youth and community groups
18 protesting for Palestinian human rights, by imposing
19 buffer zones that would restrict free speech. If our
20 elected leaders are truly concerned about our safety,
21 they would make a concerted effort to push the
22 federal government to reinstate sensitive location
23 policies and establish real sanctuary zones where ICE
24 and police cannot terrorize our communities,
25 including in schools, courthouses, hospitals, parks,

2 religious institutions, and our demonstrations. Thank
3 you very much.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you. Right
5 in that two minutes. Perfect.

6 WALTER MASTERSON: I'm Walter Masterson.
7 I'm here to express opposition to the Buffer Act.
8 Last month, myself and several protesters went to a
9 congressman's town hall. We disrupted it and we were
10 thrown out. A few days later, I opened up Twitter to
11 find that Trump's Department of Justice was opening
12 an investigation into myself and my friends. Great
13 day, amazing day. You see, because the town hall was
14 held inside of a synagogue, the Trump DOJ was able to
15 use that to weaponize protesting against myself and
16 my fellows. So, we're here today because Council
17 Member Julie Menin and Eric Dinowitz are drafting a
18 law called the Buffer Act. Under the Buffer Act, I
19 can be arrested not just for being inside, but also
20 outside of a religious institution, healthcare,
21 education facility. Now, outside, that seems very
22 vague, right? Like, what are the boundaries of that?
23 Well, according to your bill, the NYPD determines
24 these boundaries. I mean, what could go wrong,
25 really? A few months ago, the real estate group

2 decided to sell stolen West Bank land inside of a
3 synagogue. This attracted protesters. No one that
4 spoke here today in favor of this bill mentioned that
5 this was a land sale of stolen West Bank land. This
6 is not just a violation of civil rights law, fair
7 housing law, it's a violation of the Fourth Geneva
8 Convention, okay? Julie Menin and Eric Dinowitz are
9 pushing the Buffer Act so that a real estate company
10 can continue to sell Palestinian land inside a place
11 of worship. Why? All right, this is being framed as
12 keeping Jewish New Yorkers safe. All right, yes, our
13 Jewish neighbors should be safe. All right, does
14 selling stolen West Bank land inside of a synagogue
15 keep Jewish New Yorkers safe? (TIMER CHIME) Does
16 Jerry Kushner's Mara...

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

18 WALTER MASTERSON Gaza keep Jewish New
19 Yorkers safe?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you so
21 much for your testimony.

22 WALTER MASTERSON You know, the IDF just
23 said...

24

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you for
3 your testimony. I appreciate your testimony and your
4 time.

5 Everyone has testified.

6 And seeing no questions, I want to thank
7 this panel for testifying today.

8 We've also been joined by Council Member
9 Gennaro.

10 Panel 20. Okay. I'm going to read the
11 names.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Mr. Chairman, I
13 just wanted to say that I was, I was Chairing a
14 hearing across the street like all day.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you,
16 Council Member Gennaro. One of the hardest working
17 guys in City Council.

18 Fania Vasilevsky (phonetic), Samantha
19 Epstein-Rubinstein, Rachel Storch, Ricky Baker-Koish
20 (phonetic), Joshua Waterman, Awali Samara, Alan
21 Sherman, Rabbi David Feldman. And on Zoom, we have
22 Lisa Katz.

23 And we're going to start with Zoom again.

24 LISA KATZ: Can you hear me?

25 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yes, we can.

2 LISA KATZ: Wonderful. Well, good evening,
3 Council Members. My name is Lisa Katz, and I'm the
4 Chief Government Affairs Officer of the Combat Anti-
5 Semitism Movement, and I'm also a former elected
6 Councilwoman and Town Supervisor with a decade of
7 public service. Through CAM, I work with Mayors,
8 Council Members, law enforcement, and community
9 partners across North America on practical public
10 safety and policy tools to address anti-Semitism and
11 hate. We strongly support this package of bills, and
12 other cities have adopted similar legislation. Anti-
13 Semitism in New York City is a public safety issue, a
14 civil rights issue, and a test of whether government
15 will act before harm escalates. Of course, people
16 have a right to protest and express their views, even
17 views we find offensive, ignorant, or misguided. That
18 is the strength of our democracy. But no one should
19 have to weigh their safety against learning or
20 worshipping. When Jewish New Yorkers must calculate
21 risk just to pray, bring a child to school, or report
22 an incident, that is not only a Jewish problem, it's
23 a public safety failure for all New Yorkers. And that
24 is why these bills matter. They are not symbolic.
25 They address how anti-Semitism and all forms of hate

2 actually show up. They're combining prevention,
3 preparedness, transparency, and accountability,
4 exactly what serious municipal governments provides.
5 Some critics, as we heard today, will say these
6 measures infringe upon free speech. They do not. They
7 do not silence anyone or can prevent awful assembly.
8 They protect safe access. And while I'm in 100
9 percent in favor of these bills, I do request the
10 change incorporated into Intro. 1-A and 175-A, that
11 buffer zone protection should be left to NYPD
12 determinations be removed. Clear objective (TIMER
13 CHIME) rules...

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time
15 expired.

16 LISA KATZ: Handle this discretion.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

18 You may start the panel, starting from my
19 left, your right. Turn the mic on, state your name
20 for the record, and your two minutes begins.

21 JOSHUA WATERMAN: Thank you. My name is
22 Joshua Waterman. I oppose Intros 1-A and 175-A. I
23 want to begin by acknowledging the 1,057
24 Palestinians, including 230 children who have been
25 killed in the occupied West Bank since the so-called

2 Gaza War began. These lives lost 6,000 miles from
3 this room, many of them victims of settler violence.
4 Ultimately, that's why we're here today. This bill
5 came to be because of a number of protests outside
6 synagogues in the past year. Protests that opposed
7 what was happening inside those synagogues. Not Jews
8 going to study Torah or to pray together, but to make
9 plans to leave New York and make Aliyah, and in some
10 cases, to become settlers in the occupied West Bank.
11 That's included an Israeli real estate event last
12 month in Kew Gardens Hills that offered turnkey real
13 estate help to purchase homes in Maale Adumim and
14 Modi'im, both in the occupied West Bank. That also
15 included an event at Park East Synagogue last
16 December, hosted by Nefesh B'Nefesh, which provides
17 resources for American Jews to become settlers in the
18 occupied West Bank. It is widely accepted under
19 international law that the settlements in these
20 occupied territories are illegal. Settlements that
21 are being populated by New Yorkers who attend these
22 events at synagogues. And that's what was being
23 protested and led to the genesis of these bills. This
24 bill does not protect my fellow Jewish New Yorkers
25 who are exercising their First Amendment right to

2 practice their religion by going to synagogue,
3 praying, and being in community. This bill provides
4 cover for the illegal sale of Palestinian land, which
5 is taking place in our city. How can this Body, with
6 a Democratic supermajority, take a page from the
7 Trump playbook of squashing constitutionally
8 protected free speech? I'm not talking about
9 protesters being violent. That's already illegal. I'm
10 talking about the ability to peaceably assemble in
11 the face of injustice, which this bill stands to
12 prevent. In closing, as a Jew, I strongly object to
13 the use of synagogues to enable the expulsion of
14 Palestinians from their homes. That events supporting
15 the theft of Palestinian land in full violation of
16 international law are occurring at all is
17 unconscionable. That they are occurring in our sacred
18 spaces is a moral failure of epic proportions. When
19 people protest against sales of stolen Palestinian
20 land, elected officials, like Speaker Menin, rush to
21 decry the demonstrations. But this outrage obscures
22 the real questions. Why is Palestinian land being
23 stolen and sold? And why is it sold inside our
24 synagogues and temples? Thank you for your time.
25 Please let this bill die in Committee.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you for
3 your testimony.

4 RICKY BAKER-KOISH: Hello. My name is
5 Rivka, or Ricky Baker-Koish, and I'm an organizer
6 with Shoresh. Shoresh is a movement of anti-Zionist
7 Israelis in the Diaspora who work toward freedom and
8 justice for all, from the river to the sea. I'm here
9 to oppose Speaker Menin's and Council Member
10 Dinowitz's proposed bills around places of worship
11 and educational facilities. Since the 2014 war on
12 Gaza, I have protested Jewish institutions that play
13 a role in perpetuating the occupation and the
14 subjugation of Palestinian people, whether through
15 miseducation on Israel, obfuscation of anti-Semitism
16 in the U.S., or by directly donating to settlement
17 projects in the West Bank. We have picketed outside
18 Jewish federations, been arrested outside AIPAC, and
19 protested outside synagogues. Synagogues in the U.S.
20 have been targeted by the extremist settlement
21 expansionist project so that those aligned with the
22 far right have cover to sell property in Palestine,
23 including within the West Bank, despite these
24 settlements remaining illegal under international
25 law, according to Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva

2 Convention. By hosting these real estate events
3 within synagogues, right-wing bad actors are able to
4 decry our protests as anti-Semitic. But we're not
5 protesting our families making Shabbat, we're
6 protesting illegal settler colonialism. While 2.2
7 percent of the Israeli population are U.S. citizens,
8 15 percent of settlers in the West Bank are U.S.
9 citizens, with one in 10 recent American emigrants
10 moving to the West Bank. This isn't accidental, it's
11 intentional, because for too long we've given cover
12 to these settlement expansionist projects as they
13 illegally sell Palestinian land to New York
14 residents. This tradition of protest is based on the
15 principles that no institution is exempt from public
16 accountability, and that free speech protections
17 cannot be selectively applied, both of which are
18 threatened by the proposed legislation. I urge all
19 Council Members, particularly those who claim to
20 value democracy to vote against these bills.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you for
22 your testimony.

23 You may begin. Make sure your
24 microphone's on, and then state your name for the
25 record. You'll see the red light.

2 You may begin.

3 FANIA VASILEVSKY: Before I testify, I
4 want to say that no Jew, I repeat, no Jew can talk in
5 the name of all Jews. On the term stolen land, we're
6 here not to adjudicate Palestinian-Israeli conflict,
7 especially when there is use of inflammatory,
8 insulting language, and questionable statements.

9 Here, I'm start testifying. My name is
10 Fania Vasilevsky. I was born in the Soviet Union and
11 lived there for 30 years. I experienced firsthand
12 antisemitism on the state level. Lucky for me, I came
13 to the United States and made my home here. Never in
14 my almost 50 years of my life in this beautiful
15 country, I was ashamed or afraid to be a Jew. The sad
16 truth that now, the Jews are not feeling safe in our
17 city. It is the time the City government protects its
18 residents. I commend the Committee for proposing
19 these laws. Unfortunately, I could not find in the
20 final proposition the 100 feet buffer zone that was
21 written in the original documents. I urge the
22 Committee to bring back this 100 feet buffer zone for
23 the places of religious worship and the schools. I
24 also would like to propose one more item, to allocate
25 funding for professional self-defense and de-

2 escalation training programs for Jewish youth and
3 congregational member. Jews should feel safe in our
4 great city and Jewish children should not grow up
5 thinking fear is normal. To be sure, the prejudice
6 will always exist in society.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

8 FANIA VASILEVSKY: Yes, the government...
9 okay.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you so
11 much.

12 And I'll pause here and I want to
13 acknowledge, you know, two minutes doesn't feel like
14 a lot, and there's a lot more I think everyone
15 testifying can say. And I just want to first say we
16 do value every single second that you are testifying,
17 no matter how you feel about these bills. And also
18 want to acknowledge that the time limits are in place
19 to ensure as many people as possible have the
20 opportunity to share at least a couple of minutes of
21 their perspective.

22 So with that, I'd like to call the next
23 person on the panel and please state your name for
24 the record and make sure the red light's on.

2 RABBI DAVID FELDMAN: Thank you, Chairman
3 and the rest of the Council Members. My name is Rabbi
4 David Feldman. I'm representing a number of
5 organizations that hold public events here in the
6 city with 25 years of collaboration with the NYPD.
7 And I'm here to oppose these buffer zones outside of
8 synagogues. As a religious leader, I definitely
9 appreciate when politicians are working towards the
10 freedom of religion, but I want to make clear that
11 attacking a shul, attacking a synagogue because of or
12 during prayers or religious conducts, that's an
13 affront on the religion. But protesting criminal
14 activities taking place in synagogues, this is not
15 against religion. On the contrary, supporting crimes
16 in a synagogue is a desecration of the religion.
17 Selling stolen land in synagogues or supporting
18 occupation of Palestine, this is not only a crime but
19 this is a violation of Judaism. Killing and stealing,
20 oppressing an entire people, these are violations of
21 Judaism. The concept of the Zionist movement, ending
22 Jewish exile by physical means, is in total contrast
23 of Judaism. Therefore, protesting the State of Israel
24 or any of its actions is not about hate, it's not
25 against Judaism and it's not anti-Semitic. We have to

2 remember the difference between Judaism and Zionism.
3 Judaism is a religion, Zionism is a political
4 movement, should never be confused. Masses of Jewish
5 people oppose the State of Israel. When people stand
6 up for righteousness, for justice, these activities
7 should be admired, should be supported under the
8 First Amendment rights. If administrations of
9 religious institutions are concerned about these
10 demonstration, I encourage them to keep their
11 institutions to religious (TIMER CHIME) activities
12 only and not to crime supported.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you for
14 your testimony.

15 RABBI DAVID FELDMAN: I encourage to
16 oppose these bills.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.

18 And last on this panel, please state your
19 name for the record.

20 ALAN SHERMAN: Good evening. My name is
21 Alan Sherman from the great Borough of Queens, New
22 York. At least we have the Mets. Anyway, I had this
23 whole speech prepared I wanted to say, but you know
24 what? I've learned a lot today. I am totally in favor
25 of these buffer zones, but only temporarily. You do

2 not take it far enough. You need to start educational
3 programs to teach people not to hate each other. I
4 tried talking to some people who opposed my views.
5 They called me a child and they would not shake my
6 hand. That is what we have to stop in this city. We
7 are all New Yorkers, we are all here together, and I
8 want one of, see, he's laughing. I want one of you to
9 come up and say you're willing to make peace and
10 shake my hand.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Alan, please
12 direct your comments to the Chair.

13 ALAN SHERMAN: I want one of you to stand
14 up and shake my hand...

15 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I kind of asked
16 for that, didn't I?

17 ALAN SHERMAN: Say you're willing to make
18 peace. Shows you where the problems are. A buffer
19 zone is just like a DMZ line. It's only temporary.
20 You need to educate people, start in your schools
21 where children learn all people are good, basically
22 good. We may disagree with each other, but we're all
23 good. And that's what the City Council has to do.
24 Educate the children so future generations don't hate
25 each other. And CUNY needs to be revamped. There are

2 too many professors teaching hate. We have that at
3 Queens College, it's sickening. You guys on the City
4 Council have to stop this hatred of anyone. I have
5 seven seconds left. Thank you.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you for
7 your testimony. I want to thank this panel for their
8 testimony as well.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Mr. Chairman, Mr.
10 Chairman, if I could.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Yes. Sure.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: I just want to
13 comment on Alan, the last person who testified. He's
14 my constituent, and I agree with you trying to get to
15 the, people getting to the better angels of their
16 nature, but you were out there in Kew Gardens Hills
17 with me when the protests started up, and thank God
18 the PD did what they did, because with all the talk
19 we've heard about here about freedom of speech or
20 whatever, the people who showed up that night were
21 not talking about what was going on in the shul. They
22 were screaming, we are Hamas, and we are here, and so
23 given that that is what is going on, measures need to
24 be taken. And so this is a step that needs to be
25 taken because people come into my District screaming

2 that they are Hamas and that we're here and we're not
3 leaving. This is a direct threat to the community if
4 anyone knows what happened on October 7th, 2023. And
5 so you're a better man than I in appealing to the
6 better angels of people's natures, but I'm a
7 Councilman that has to represent my constituent and I
8 know you support these measures as I do. And I want
9 to thank you for all you've done for the Jewish
10 community and your long, long career of community
11 advocacy. And that's my comment, no need to reply.

12 And thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the
13 time.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you, Council
15 Member. Thank you so much.

16 I'm going to call on the next group of
17 panelists. Mark Genszler, Sami Al-Iryani, Anna
18 Pereira (phonetic), Bridget Dayan, Bill Pinsky, David
19 Wapner, Steven Sam Mirstein (phonetic), Jamie Cohen,
20 Shabsie Saphirstein, and on the Zoom, Nick Devine.

21 And I'll start with Nick Devine.

22 Nick, you have two minutes.

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Nick, you may begin.

25 NICK DEVINE: Can you hear me now?

2 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yes.

3 NICK DEVINE: All right. Thank you. Good
4 evening, Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee. My
5 name is Nick Devine, and I am speaking to you this
6 morning on behalf of, or this evening, wow, on behalf
7 of the Association of Legal Advocates and Attorneys,
8 UAW Local 2325, a union of non-profit legal workers
9 where I serve on the executive board. We strongly
10 encourage all of you to vote against these bills
11 before you, and in particular Intros 1-A and 175-A.
12 Last summer, hundreds of our workers at 10 of our
13 bargaining units went on strike. Legal service
14 offices are often embedded in the communities in
15 which they serve as a critical part of our success is
16 our access to our clients. As such, during the 2025
17 strikes, many of our pickets were next to churches
18 and schools, which are similarly embedded. In one
19 instance, a unit that was on strike for almost six
20 weeks picketed in front of their employer that is
21 directly next to a church. Another unit of that same
22 employer, the Canva IT Workers Union, remains on
23 strike as of now, and if this bill were to pass, it
24 would directly impact their ability to continue
25 picketing in front of their employer. These bills

2 would attack protected union activity more
3 effectively than any union busting activity that
4 management could deploy. Many on this City Council
5 have claimed in the past that they stand with
6 workers. Some of you have visited our picket lines
7 for photo ops, and our workers have ended up on your
8 social media. Many of you have come to us for
9 endorsements. As elected leaders of this city, we
10 appreciate your support. Visible support from you
11 adds pressure on our employers to bargain with us,
12 but no politician is as influential or as important
13 in forcing management back to the table as the
14 workers are, and we make our presence and our demands
15 known on the picket line. In limiting where we can
16 picket, you silence our voices, and in doing so, you
17 speak and act for our employers. In closing, these
18 bills fail to accomplish their stated goals while
19 preventing workers from securing our economic..

20 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
21 testifying.

22 Okay. You may start from my left.

23 Yes, please.

24 MARK GENSZLER: Good evening, and thank
25 you for having me. My name is Mark Genszler, and I'm

2 an Episcopal priest in District 39 in Cobble Hill. So
3 good evening, Council Member Hanif, as well.

4 I wish to speak clearly in opposition to
5 this bill, and to do so specifically as a religious
6 leader who is responsible for the safety of those who
7 gather in my building, and I really would urge
8 Council Members to pay attention to those sorts of
9 questions. My own particular location, we
10 deliberately welcome a variety of communities to
11 share our space, our small Episcopal church in Cobble
12 Hill. These are, and I'd want the room to know this,
13 these are Jewish groups, these are Muslim groups,
14 these are Buddhist groups, many of which do not feel
15 they have a place to gather within their own wider
16 community, so they gather at our little place called
17 Christ Church Cobble Hill. I am intensely concerned
18 with their safety, and with their access to the
19 practice of their religious observances, their prayer
20 gatherings, any number of reasons for gathering in
21 our space. I am offended, though, at those who would
22 wish to hide behind religious edifices, and so much
23 of this discussion has been utterly disingenuous, and
24 I have been disgusted to hear a lot of that over the
25 course of the day, and I don't use that word lightly,

2 because there's been so much outrage theater here
3 already, truly. The other reason I'm opposed to this
4 bill, though, speaks to, I think, our common need for
5 civil liberties. Last week, a week ago, it was Ash
6 Wednesday, which was the beginning of the season of
7 Lent, and I gathered with many of my colleagues in
8 front of the federal building, 26 Federal Plaza,
9 right up the way, and we gathered to sing, to
10 protest, to chant in defense of our immigrant
11 neighbors. It was protected speech, it was moving on
12 a sidewalk, right? It was in protest at activities
13 taking place inside that building.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
15 testifying.

16 MARK GENSZLER: Thank you.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Next speaker.

18 SAMI AL-IRYANI: Hello. Hi. I'm Sami Al-
19 Iryani. I'm a New York resident. I oppose these
20 bills, and I want to echo the previous panelists that
21 there has been an incredible amount of
22 disingenuousness happening here today. This is about
23 Palestine, and I just came back from Palestine,
24 legally called the Occupied Palestinian Territories
25 because it's an occupation that's been ongoing since,

2 well, since 1948, since, but specifically since 1967,
3 and what an occupation is is a temporary military
4 administration of a piece of land, temporary. It is a
5 war crime to settle civilians on occupation, okay?
6 And I saw what those war crimes look like. I saw the
7 burned fields, the uprooted trees, the destroyed
8 homes, the burnt mosques, the bullet wounds, the
9 broken bodies, the terrified children, and the story
10 after story after story of Palestinians murdered by
11 settlers. Over a dozen villages have been wiped off
12 the face of the earth in the West Bank in the last
13 two years. That's what this is about. Where do these
14 settlers come from? They come from here. They come
15 from land ethnically cleansed and sold here, and the
16 thing that makes me so disgusted is the idea that
17 there's any other reason we're there protesting. We
18 wouldn't be protesting if those illegal, under
19 international law, activities weren't happening.
20 Nobody cares that you're Jewish. This is not what
21 this is about. My God. This is international human
22 rights violations that are happening under your
23 watch, and you're choosing (TIMER CHIME) to
24 criminalize the people that are fighting it, that are

2 trying to uphold international law. We're doing your
3 job.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
5 testifying. Thank you.

6 ANNA PEREIRA: Hello. My name's Anna. I'm
7 speaking as an everyday constituent. I'm not
8 religious, but would find myself more aligned with
9 the protesters and how this bill would affect that. I
10 would like to draw attention to a former testimony
11 giver who used an anti-Jewish slur. This man was
12 outside harassing people, some of whom are Jewish, as
13 we patiently waited in the cold this morning. His
14 hypocrisy is a microcosm of the hypocrisy many
15 proponents of this bill exhibit. In my understanding,
16 this bill is about outlining NYPD's power. As the
17 Police Commissioner stated numerous times, buffer
18 zones are already a strategy in place. My concern is
19 this bill would encourage NYPD to establish new, more
20 aggressive tactics to control protests. I'm
21 questioning if this is the intent of the bill. A
22 Council Member questioned Police Commissioner about
23 who would be consulted in development of guidelines
24 for buffer zones per this bill. He did not speak to
25 or name any organization which would be consulted.

2 Thus, my concern is this policy would empower NYPD to
3 be more aggressive with no outside input.
4 Additionally, I want to remind everyone that
5 someone's religious affiliation does not make them
6 immune to committing crimes. If a religious person
7 commits a crime in the name of their religion, the
8 First Amendment would support people protesting their
9 crimes. If a crime is committed in a church, wouldn't
10 protesting be encouraged? At a time where I can pull
11 up a recent video of police brutalizing onlookers of
12 ICE, even police cooperating with ICE in Brooklyn
13 yesterday abducting a father, what will this bill do
14 to protect New Yorkers? Thank you.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for your
16 testifying.

17 Next speaker.

18 JAMIE COHEN: Good evening, Council
19 Members. My name is Jamie. I am a proud CUNY graduate
20 and currently a public school teacher. I'm a member
21 of the United Federation of Teachers and I am a
22 supporter of Palestinian liberation. I strongly
23 oppose this legislative bundle. I have attended
24 protests organized outside of synagogues. I did not
25 attend these protests to terrorize Jewish people. I

2 attended because officials from synagogues have
3 partnered with Zionist real estate companies based in
4 Israel to hold real estate events open only to vetted
5 Jewish attendees. At these land sales and recruiting
6 events, land that is recognized by international law
7 as Palestinian occupied territories is being offered
8 to ethnically restricted groups. This is clearly
9 illegal under U.S. law. How can anyone with a
10 conscience let this happen? I would like to bring up
11 another point in regards to the discourse around
12 violence at protests outside of houses of worship.
13 The Islamophobic, homophobic, transphobic and
14 misogynist violence of Zionists at protests has been
15 documented thoroughly, and yet the narrative that
16 continues to dominate is that the people who are
17 standing up against the genocide of Palestinians are
18 the violent ones. Further, I have no interest in
19 giving the NYPD more authority to decide when and how
20 buffer zones should be implemented. There are two
21 pending class action lawsuits against the NYPD that
22 allege that they have treated Palestinian solidarity
23 protesters with increased levels of brutality and
24 issued elevated charges. I have personally witnessed
25 this targeting countless times, including that of

2 students. I have also witnessed the generosity of
3 everyday people organizing mutual aid for arrested
4 and brutalized protesters. This is the kind of care
5 that I value.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
7 testifying.

8 UNIDENTIFIED: I'm proud to be an
9 American. I appreciate, I'm grateful every day for
10 the freedom that I have. I love free speech. But in
11 the U.S., hate speech is not protected if it
12 constitutes true threats, incitement to violence, or
13 harassment. When I'm at all these protests, I've been
14 at all of them. I don't know why we're talking about
15 Park East. That wasn't the worst one at all. Borough
16 Park is the one we should be talking about. The cops
17 got caught with their pants down. That's why we're
18 talking about Park East. But Borough Park was
19 insanity. Okay, I was assaulted. I'll get to that
20 hopefully. But when you go to these protests, you're
21 not hearing free speech. You're hearing, say it loud
22 and say it clear, we support Hamas here, not the
23 Palestinian people, Hamas, a terrorist group, a no
24 doubt, nothing but terrorist group, kill yourself,
25 death to the IDF, NYPD, KKK, from the river to the

2 sea is a genocidal slogan. It is nothing but a
3 genocidal slogan that is being normalized by these
4 people like this, white little liberal Kapo Jews. Oh
5 my. Shut the...

6 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Please, please,
7 please.

8 UNIDENTIFIED: Okay. So, this is such a
9 breadcrumb. This is such a breadcrumb.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Comments should be
11 directed at the panel.

12 UNIDENTIFIED: This is such a breadcrumb.
13 Okay. A hundred feet in front of a synagogue to walk
14 in freely, that's too much to ask. That's a
15 breadcrumb. Okay, the revised bill gives the Police
16 Commissioner the power to designate how many feet the
17 protesters would be placed from a house of worship,
18 and her boss is the Mayor who is a Jew hater. Okay,
19 thank you for your time.

20 CHAMBERS: (INAUDIBLE)

21 Thank you.

22 Next speaker.

23 RABBI WILLIAM PINSKY: Yes, hello. My name
24 is William Pinsky, Rabbi William Pinsky. Some people
25 here consider themselves rabbis who aren't really

2 rabbis, so maybe I'm a rabbi. I'd like to say that
3 I've been to the same protests. I put that in quotes.
4 And these are not protests. They're hate fests. It's
5 a mob of people, many of whom are dressed up wearing
6 Hamas headbands. Hamas kills ordinary Palestinians.
7 If you're for Palestinians, how can you possibly wear
8 a Hamas headband? It's evil. All right. I've heard a
9 lot of statements about having these barriers,
10 whatever, buffer zones, are going to affect Black and
11 Brown folks. The majority of people, the vast
12 majority at these protests are White. In fact, I was
13 at protests in Crown Heights, where they were trying
14 to stir up a horrible Crown Heights riot again. And
15 in fact, the Black people of Crown Heights kicked
16 them out. They didn't want the trouble that these
17 people were trying to stir up. All right. Finally,
18 I'd like to add that a lot of the people who dress,
19 who come to these protests are wearing full mask
20 veils, shouting hate speech. What does that remind me
21 of? That reminds me of the KKK. Why are we allowing
22 this? I mean, there should be an additional thing
23 added to this bill, whatever you want to call it, and
24 we should get rid of masks at protests. It's evil. I
25 wouldn't go to any other place wearing a mask.

2 There's no reason to do it other than to intimidate.

3 Thank you very much for your time, Chair Wong.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
5 testifying.

6 RABBI WILLIAM PINSKY: Thank you.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Again, you are
8 commenting at the Committee. You're talking to us.
9 Thank you.

10 SHABSIE SAPHIRSTEIN: Good evening,
11 Council Members. Good evening, Council Member
12 Gennaro. My name is Steven Saphirstein, and I'm a New
13 York City resident residing in Kew Gardens Hills, a
14 neighborhood in Central Queens that has been at the
15 forefront of much of today's discussion. I serve as
16 the Community Outreach Coordinator for Queens Shmira,
17 the Queens Borough Safety Patrol, a volunteer public
18 safety organization that works closely with the NYPD
19 to help protect residents and respond to community
20 safety concerns. I also serve as the assistant to the
21 publishers of the Queens Jewish Link, a community
22 newspaper serving thousands of families throughout
23 Central Queens. I'm here today in strong support of
24 the Schools and House of Worship Access and Safety
25 Act, legislation that I believe is necessary given

2 the very real public safety challenges for our
3 communities are facing. We're living through a moment
4 of heightened tension and a documented rise in anti-
5 Semitic incidents across New York City. For many
6 Jewish residents, particularly those who are visibly
7 identifiable while attending synagogue or community
8 events, the question of safety is no longer
9 theoretical. It is personal and it is immediate. My
10 perspective comes from firsthand experience.
11 Recently, I was directly involved in coordinating
12 community outreach and safety communications
13 surrounding a pro-Hamas protest that took place in
14 Central Queens, an educational event promoting real
15 estate opportunities in Israel that I helped
16 publicize through the Queens Jewish Link. Due to
17 credible safety concerns and escalating rhetoric, the
18 NYPD's 107th precinct deployed a significant police
19 presence to maintain order and prevent confrontation.
20 Working alongside law enforcement, my Shmira
21 volunteers assisted with situational awareness,
22 communication with community members, and helping
23 ensure that attendees, including families and
24 religious participants, could safely access and leave
25 the event. What we witnessed was deeply concerning.

2 Even protests remain legally permitted. The
3 atmosphere created with demonstrations occurred
4 directly outside the precinct.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
6 testifying.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Mr. Chairman, I
8 just want to address the last witness.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yes.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: You know, thank
11 you very much, Shabsi. You know, as many may know
12 that he's my constituent and I represent that area in
13 the Kew Gardens Hills. I want to give you just a
14 public shout-out of, you know, recognition of, you
15 know, grateful recognition for all you've done in
16 order to make sure our streets are always safe
17 through working with the PD, through Shmira, and your
18 events and your actions of that night of the protests
19 that we were both at, you know, led to, you know, the
20 best outcome which was possible, which is that
21 everybody was safe, everybody went home safe. So, I
22 thank you for that. But the echoes of we are Hamas
23 and we are here to stay, you know, will haunt me for
24 a long time. So, thank you for your good work,
25 Shabsi.

2 SHABSIE SAPHIRSTEIN: Thank you.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you, Council
4 Member Gennaro.

5 Thank you, panel members.

6 I'm going to call the next panel.

7 Brittany Kaiser, Jonathan Silverman, Paul Werner,
8 Briana Silberberg, Bayan Mastal, Trevor Norwitz,
9 Danae Elihu, and then two people from the Zoom, Tazin
10 Azad and Linda Sadaka.

11 And we'll start with Tazin from the Zoom.
12 Tazin.

13 TAZIN AZAD: Yes. Good night, everybody.
14 Thank you, Chair, for recognizing me. My name is
15 Tazin Azad, and I am a Brooklyn constituent and these
16 statements are mine. The bill's establishing
17 requirement for buffer zones are intimidating. I've
18 heard here today people incite violence. I've heard
19 here today a Council Member directly use a Muslim
20 speaker as her way to directly attack them because
21 just because she was Muslim. I've heard testimonies
22 here that alluded to knife wielding and guns, yet,
23 and then centering all those at the beginning of the
24 testimony and silencing everybody else and delegating
25 them to the background is an act of intimidation.

2 Yet, Chair Dinowitz mentioned that we cannot
3 legislate feelings, then what is intimidation. By
4 tactfully weaponizing already militarized NYPD to
5 restrict assembly, not just protocol, intimidates
6 those that are already fearful and brutalized by
7 NYPD. There is clear overreach, and clear overreach
8 by this Administration by that bill that allows NYPD
9 more power over educational institution already
10 surveilled by the law enforcement, increasing
11 probability of BIPOC young people's contact with
12 them. I am worried about giving an institution with
13 history of systemic racism, bias, and inequitable
14 implementation of protection, determining rights of
15 what is intimidation or a buffer zone. For example,
16 NYPD allowed a sitting Member here to have, to carry
17 a gun at a protest without ever confronting her, yet
18 intimidating schools or school-going students for
19 marching while brutalizing BLM protests, anti-ICE
20 protests and anti-war protests.

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you, your time
22 has expired.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you.

24 TAZIN AZAD: Thank you.
25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Next, I'll go to in-
3 person speakers.

4 I'll start from my left.

5 JONATHAN SILVERMAN: Good afternoon,
6 Chair, members of the Committee. My name is Jonathan
7 Silverman. I'm a lifelong New Yorker, a proud member
8 of the city's Jewish community. The American Republic
9 has Jewish roots. From the Liberty Bell's Torah verse
10 to the very word federal, it's a translation of the
11 Hebrew Brit word for covenant. An attack on Jewish
12 communal life is not an attack on a minority. It's an
13 attack on the very traditions that founded the
14 American democracy. Yet today, that tradition is
15 under coordinated assault, chants of we support Hamas
16 or shouts of we don't want no Zionists here. This is
17 not spontaneous outrage. Scholars of modern conflict
18 describe it as a networked, multi-front, and
19 strategic thing that's targeting not military
20 objectives but civilian morale and institutional
21 legitimacy. That's what it is. Hostility towards Jews
22 has always repackaged itself. So, in 1870s, they
23 said, I don't hate Jews, I'm just anti-Semitic. In
24 2026, they say, oh, I don't hate Jews, I'm just anti-
25 Zionist. So, the vocabulary changes but the target

2 never does. And the strategy is working because
3 parents hesitate before bringing their kids to
4 services, congregants quietly quit. Intimidation
5 causes smaller synagogues to drop programming if they
6 can't secure funding for the security. So, the
7 opposition counts on tricking you. They are counting
8 on this Committee to accept a mislabeled product.
9 Intimidation marketed as free speech, a campaign of
10 fear sold as political protest. So, buffer zones are
11 not radical. They've protected abortion clinics for
12 decades. And George Washington promised the Jews of
13 Newport no bigotry, no sanction, to persecution, no
14 assistance. And George Washington is right here, by
15 the way. He closed with the prophet Micah that said
16 that every person shall sit under their own vine and
17 fig tree and none shall make them afraid. So, Council
18 Members, please vote for the buffer zones around
19 synagogues and schools. Thank you.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay. Thank you for
21 testifying.

22 Next speaker.

23 BRIANA SILBERBERG: Hello. My name is
24 Briana Silberberg. I'm from Forest Hills, and I'm
25 here today as a proud supporter and advocate

2 representing Aunties and Friends for Liberation. I've
3 come to voice my opposition to Speaker Menin's
4 proposed bill, Intro. 1-A, regarding houses of
5 worship and protests in their vicinity. I want to be
6 clear that this is not an issue I take lightly. I'm a
7 Jewish woman born and raised in this city, a former
8 youth group president who has passed many a treasured
9 hour within the walls of my synagogue. I deeply
10 cherish the sanctity and safety of houses of worship.
11 But just as sacred and special to me is the right to
12 free speech. We must ensure that people have these
13 rights to speech and, yes, to protest. And we must be
14 vigilant in opposing any act that attempts to curb
15 these sacred rights. I worry about the potential
16 consequences of this bill. When a house of worship
17 decides to host a non-religious political event, the
18 public has a right to protest it if they so choose.
19 To target that right is to fundamentally threaten the
20 viability of free speech in New York. We must not let
21 that happen. Please vote against this bill so the
22 vibrancy that makes the city so great can continue
23 unabated. Thank you.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
25 testifying.

2 Next speaker.

3 KAISER: Hi. My name is Kaiser. I'm the
4 Community Organizer for the Alliance for Quality
5 Education. I'm a parent and former NYC DOE teacher
6 here to oppose Intros 1-A and 175. Many Black, Brown,
7 and Muslim students and families feel criminalized
8 and in fear when interacting with the NYPD. Council
9 Member Dinowitz, in absentia, you took the reins of
10 the Education Committee overseeing the school system
11 consisting of majority low income Black and Brown New
12 Yorkers. Their visceral, mental, and emotional
13 reactions when interacting with the NYPD will always
14 be different than yours or mine. Immigrant families
15 are already rightfully hesitant to send their
16 children to school because of the threat of violence
17 and abduction by federal agencies. Buffer zones will
18 needlessly add another barrier they are forced to
19 contend with before their child can access the
20 education to which they're entitled under the
21 Constitution. As a teacher, I've witnessed
22 foundational educational experiences that would be
23 criminalized by this bill. My middle school students
24 organized a walkout to protest school shootings.
25 Staff supported the action, and we incorporated it

2 into our curriculum. Students leaned into their
3 inherent sense of justice, raised their voices in
4 protest and, in the process, learned the kinds of
5 lessons you can't get from a textbook. Under this
6 bill, according to Mr. Gerber, those kids could be
7 subject to arrest. I am Jewish and the goal of these
8 bills is to prevent anti-Semitism and keep Jewish
9 people safe, but existing laws address violence and
10 hate speech. This legislation will only chill lawful
11 speech, just like the buffer zone outside today
12 dissuaded some people from coming inside to testify.
13 And there's a co-sponsor of these bills who is
14 repeatedly and publicly Islamophobic. There were
15 supporters of the bill using hate speech,
16 intimidating trans people trying to use the bathroom
17 all day today, so I'm really not buying that this is
18 about preventing bias and intimidation. If it was,
19 you would have broader support. We can take steps to
20 make schools safer for everyone by mandating anti-
21 bias and anti-racist training for educators,
22 increasing mental health support in schools, and
23 teaching the truth about (TIMER CHIME) oppression and
24 protest so students...

25 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you.

2 KAISER: Know how to stand up to hate and
3 injustice. The knee-jerk reaction to limit expression
4 and increase police involvement will...

5 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you. Thank
6 you.

7 I'll call the next panel of speakers.
8 Eitan Steinbaum, Natalie Sanandaji, Jerry Kestenbaum,
9 Eugene Major, Rabbi Yishak Deutsch, Tasneem Mawad,
10 Isabella Abraham. And then the two people from Zoom,
11 Jennifer Hirsch, Mala Kumar.

12 I'll start with Jennifer.

13 Jennifer.

14 JENNIFER HIRSCH: Can you hear me and see
15 me?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yes, yes.

17 JENNIFER HIRSCH: Good evening, Speaker
18 Menin, Chairperson Salaam, and Council Members. My
19 name is Jennifer Hirsch. I'm a Jewish New Yorker and
20 a member of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice,
21 here to voice my strong opposition to the Perimeter
22 Bills, which will not make any of us safer. I speak
23 as a Columbia professor and one of 12 arrested at the
24 February 6th action calling on Columbia to reinstate
25 its commitment to being a sanctuary campus, an action

2 that would have taken place in the so-called frozen
3 zone. It was probably not ideal for me to get
4 arrested with a broken arm. My mom certainly wasn't
5 happy about that. But we need to meet this moment. We
6 need to face a rising tide of authoritarianism. And
7 if we fail to speak up now, we may lose entirely the
8 right to do so. We're coming up on March 9th, one
9 year since the federal government piloted their
10 kidnap first, ask questions later strategy by
11 detaining Mahmoud Khalil because they found his
12 constitutionally protected free speech distasteful.
13 Our campus remains on lockdown, and so faculty and
14 staff have gathered every Monday since April for a
15 silent vigil outside the gates to protest ICE
16 overreach and our own campuses silence about our
17 detained students. Those vigils would be in the so-
18 called frozen zone. Both on and off campus, actions
19 taken in the name of Jewish safety have created
20 conditions of danger. I have colleagues who regularly
21 receive death threats. Threats which are largely
22 regarded because they do not fit the narrative that
23 all Jews are ardent Zionists. We need policies that
24 will protect all of us in the city, regardless of
25 religion or policies, not politics that pits some

2 Jews against others. As the federal government seeks
3 to silence protests in all corners, we need more free
4 speech, not less. As a Jewish New Yorker, I need this
5 City Council to protect me and my fellow New Yorkers
6 from the federal government's criminalization of free
7 speech, not to add to it. Please do not support this
8 legislation. Thank you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay. Thank you for
10 testifying.

11 Mala Kumar, you may begin.

12 MALA KUMAR: Good evening, Council
13 Members. My name is Mala Kumar, and I am a concerned
14 constituent in strong opposition to Intro. 1-A and
15 175-A. These security perimeters will infringe on
16 free speech, and they will not make our community
17 safer, and they will leave most of the city off-
18 limits to lawful protests of all forms, including
19 student-resistant forms like sit-ins, marches,
20 occupations, and vigils. It will make Black and Brown
21 students and families more vulnerable to
22 criminalization, and they will not make our community
23 safer. Let's be honest about this bill really is. It
24 is a means of further silencing those speaking out
25 about the inhumane treatment of Palestinians,

2 suppressing advocacy for immigrant communities,
3 journalists reporting on resistance movements, and
4 enabling corporate interests to crush mass union
5 labor organizing and sell stolen Palestinian land.
6 This bill package is designed to protect a small
7 group of people and disenfranchise the rest. We are
8 seeing this double standard right here where people
9 are spewing hateful Zionist rhetoric and allowed to
10 speak and take up space, while those speaking calmly
11 against this bill have been subjected to name-
12 calling, mockery, and intimidation. Giving the NYPD
13 with broad, flexible authority to establish security
14 perimeters around houses of worship and schools with
15 no fixed standards, no clear thresholds and
16 enforcement, left entirely to police discretion, is
17 not a targeted anti-hate measure. It is a blank check
18 for the NYPD to violently suppress speech at their
19 discretion. I'm also troubled by the speed at which
20 this package is moving. The Mayor's own Law
21 Department has not completed its constitutional
22 review, and rushing a vote before that review is
23 finished is not decisive action. It is reckless and
24 unconstitutional. I urge the Council to reject these
25 bills. If the Speaker is committed to protecting New

2 Yorkers from hate, there are ways to do that which do
3 not empower the police to decide when and where
4 political speech is allowed in the city. Thank you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay. Thank you for
6 testifying.

7 I will now go to the speakers in person,
8 starting with my left.

9 JERRY KESTENBAUM: Okay. Hi. My name is
10 Jerry Kestenbaum. I'm a businessman in New York. I'm
11 a clinical psychologist, and I sat here all day. I'm
12 72 years old. This is a fascinating, this is like,
13 this is why there's no peace in the Middle East. On
14 this stupid little bill, this is like we are building
15 skyscrapers of drama. Eric Dinowitz commented earlier
16 this morning that people were completely
17 misunderstanding the bill. The bill has been gutted.
18 It does not require 100-foot buffer zones. Michael
19 Gerber from the Police Department under oath swore
20 that this bill would not change their enforcement
21 policy at all, that they already use buffer zones at
22 their discretion. The bill that has been revised that
23 you're all talking about simply requires the New York
24 City police to put together a plan of how, in
25 situations where there will be injury or

2 intimidation, they could deploy buffer zones to
3 prevent it. Propose a plan as to what they could do
4 to prevent injury or intimidation. And under oath,
5 Michael Gerber swore this wasn't going to affect
6 anything that they do in person. So, we've built this
7 entire tower of drama over a very simple proposal
8 like this. I think that it's unfortunate Julie
9 Menin's bills got gutted. I think that we could have
10 been arguing about, well, what should a buffer zone
11 be? 100 yards is too much. Let's make it 20. Let's
12 make it 18. This Council itself maintains a very
13 strict 18-foot distance between us and them. Anytime
14 anybody approaches, the guards panic. Why? Because
15 you want safety. Does that stop any of us from being
16 seen or heard? No. So, the City's requirement to be
17 seen or heard can be met with (TIMER CHIME) so why
18 don't we at least have an 18-foot buffer like you
19 have?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay.

21 Next speaker.

22 NATALIE SANANDAJI: My name is Natalie
23 Sanandaji. I'm a Persian-American Jew born to Iranian
24 and Israeli parents. On October 7th, I was at the
25 Nova Music Festival in Israel. A lot of people will

2 stand up and talk about what happened on that day,
3 but I didn't just study it. I didn't just watch it on
4 a screen. I lived it. I ran for my life for hours. I
5 watched Hamas terrorists shoot people right in front
6 of me. I survived. I was one of the lucky ones, but
7 over 1,200 others were not as lucky. They were
8 slaughtered on that day. I'm one of the few American
9 survivors of October 7th. When I came back to New
10 York City, the place I've always called home, I
11 thought I would finally feel safe. I thought I'd be
12 able to breathe again, but instead of relief, I felt
13 tension, like my body was still in survival mode. I
14 came home to angry crowds chanting in our streets, to
15 slogans glorifying the very terrorists who carried
16 out the massacre that I survived. Let me be clear
17 about something. My issue has never been with the
18 people caring about the innocent lives in Gaza. Of
19 course, people should care about innocent life. My
20 issue is with people chanting for another October
21 7th. My issue is with people celebrating martyrs who
22 butchered, raped, burned, and kidnapped civilians.
23 You can care about Palestinians without praising
24 Hamas. You can want peace without glorifying the
25 deadliest massacre of the Jews since the Holocaust.

2 That distinction matters, and that is why leadership
3 in this city matters. At a time when Jewish New
4 Yorkers are feeling increasingly unsafe, we need
5 concrete solutions to fight this hate. Because
6 antisemitism in New York is not theoretical. It's
7 happening in our schools, on our subways, on our
8 campuses, in our neighborhoods. For me, watching
9 protests that glorify October 7th forces me to relive
10 that day over and over again. The city was supposed
11 to be my safe haven, but increasingly it feels like a
12 place where Jewish trauma is minimized and Jewish
13 fear is dismissed. We can't normalize calls for
14 violence. We can't allow intimidation to become
15 background noise, and we cannot treat antisemitism as
16 just another political disagreement. Combating
17 antisemitism requires leadership. It requires
18 accountability, and it requires a clear plan. I'm not
19 here as a partisan (TIMER CHIME) voice. I'm here as a
20 survivor...

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
22 testifying.

23 NATALIE SANANDAJI: A viewer, and a Jewish
24 woman who feels safe in our city. Thank you.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Phil, if I could,
3 I just want to make a comment to the witness.

4 I just want to thank you for being here
5 today and bearing witness to what you observed and
6 were able to survive. Your words are the most
7 powerful. I haven't been here all day. I was Chairing
8 my own hearing, but I really appreciate you bearing
9 witness to the evils of Hamas and those that parade
10 around the city claiming that they are Hamas. And a
11 lot of people have said at various times, this is
12 what this hearing is about, or that is what this
13 hearing is about. What you said is what this hearing
14 is about. So, thank you very much for being here and
15 bearing witness.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you, Council
17 Member Gennaro.

18 Next speaker.

19 TASNEEM MAWAD: Good evening, Council
20 Members. My name is Tasneem Mawad, and I'm a
21 community organizer for Malukah Safety Center, a
22 Queens-based anti-violence non-profit. I'm testifying
23 today regarding Intro. 388, which would finally
24 provide a proper hotline for reporting incidents of
25 bias and hate. In our grassroots work with the North

2 African community in Astoria, we've seen a sharp rise
3 in Islamophobia. Mothers in our immigrant women's
4 programs share countless stories of racial slurs,
5 employment discrimination, and physical attacks
6 simply for having an accent or wearing a hijab. While
7 families are concerned with rising violence,
8 incidents go unreported because community members
9 don't trust the system or can't access it, which
10 isn't random and impacts the well-being of our
11 streets, businesses, schools, and mosques. Growing up
12 in a mainly White neighborhood, I was harassed,
13 called a terrorist, a dirty sandbitch, got told I
14 caused 9/11, and to go back to my country as someone
15 born and raised in New York. And not only was I
16 subjected to hate crimes myself, the mosque my own
17 father founded was too. In 2022, the Islamic
18 Crescent, a symbol of our faith that once stood tall
19 and proud in front of the mosque was lit on fire by a
20 White supremacist. And now as Muslims, we are forced
21 to live with the fear of not only our places of
22 worship getting set on fire, but now our own selves,
23 families, and community members too. No hotline
24 existed back then, but one that can truly be
25 accessible can now. To ensure this bill truly

2 protects communities, I urge the Council to adopt the
3 following amendment, the addition of anti-Muslim hate
4 as a distinct reporting category. I also urge the
5 Council to explicitly require compliance with NYC's
6 Language Access Law so the hotline is accessible in
7 Bengali, Arabic, Urdu, and French for non-native
8 Muslim New Yorkers to ensure equitable reporting and
9 implementation. From a data perspective, this would
10 allow us to understand the rising (TIMER CHIME) scale
11 of the challenge..

12 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you.

13 TASNEEM MAWAD: Facing our community and
14 advocate for effective solutions. Thank you for your
15 time.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay.

17 Next speaker.

18 ISA ABRAHAM: Good afternoon. My name is
19 Isa Abraham. I'm the Program Coordinator at Malikah,
20 an anti-violence non-profit in Queens. We worked with
21 the communities most vulnerable to hate-based and
22 gender-based violence across the city for over 10
23 years to empower them with safety resources, self-
24 defense, bystander intervention trainings to protect
25 and advocate for themselves and their loved ones. I

2 urge the Council to amend Intro. 388, meaningfully
3 include Islamophobia as a distinct category, and I
4 urge against Intro. 175-A that put resources towards
5 video cameras and police buffer zones. Let's instead
6 invest in programs that meet people's material needs,
7 promote social well-being, and build cross-cultural
8 understanding and interfaith dialogue, such as our
9 Islamophobia and antisemitism joint trainings, which
10 we conduct with Jewish social justice organizations,
11 addressing hate at the root. You've been asking for
12 solutions. We have them. Are you listening? In
13 facilitating self-defense and safety trainings in
14 houses of worship, schools, shelters, low-income
15 housing, and immigrant neighborhoods, we've seen an
16 increase in reports of physical and verbal hate-based
17 attacks. Women of color, specifically women wearing
18 hijab, are consistently targeted on the street, in
19 their workplaces, and on public transportation, but
20 these incidents go unreported because, frankly, many
21 don't feel the city takes anti-Muslim bias and other
22 forms of bias, such as anti-Blackness, seriously. How
23 can we expect to ask our communities to trust a
24 system with a deep legacy of state and police
25 violence against them? Or did we forget Win Rozario?

2 Or did we forget targeting of mosques after 9/11?
3 Start by adding anti-Muslim hate as a distinct
4 reporting category, but we've also seen increased
5 retaliation for speaking against hate-based bias.
6 Specifically in my work with public school youth,
7 I've seen students suspended for expressing their
8 rights to a safe school environment. Muslim and other
9 minority students have been violated, stripped of
10 their rights, subject to intimidation, while the same
11 school system fails to protect them from racist
12 harassment, Islamophobic (TIMER CHIME) admin, and
13 physical attacks.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
15 speaking.

16 Next speaker.

17 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you for taking the
18 time and staying here, Members of the Council. And I
19 reiterate what the panelists down there said. I think
20 somebody, even a survivor of Nova, the Jewish
21 community, we want peace among the Palestinians and
22 Israelis. We want to get along with Muslims. We
23 really do want to build bridges. So, we would welcome
24 that. I'm a lifelong New Yorker. I'm a son of
25 Holocaust survivors and victims of communist Hungary.

2 I have here, tough to see, it's a picture of a little
3 child, a kindergarten child, together with policemen,
4 with submachine guns and riot gear in front of the
5 Ramaz School on 85th Street in Manhattan, in front of
6 Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun Jeshur, a synagogue.
7 And the question is, my wife shows this to people,
8 and they say, oh, he's giving cookies to the
9 policemen. And people say, oh, how cute. My wife
10 goes, what's wrong with this? And that's the thing.
11 Why does a kindergarten kid have to be guarded by
12 people, by policemen with submachine guns? Something
13 is very, very wrong. And we feel some of the hatred
14 in the room as well, some of the palpable hatred. On
15 February 1st, Brett Stevens spoke at 92nd Street Y, a
16 Jewish Y uptown, and there was a protest outside. And
17 I'll just play a couple of seconds for you of that.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Hold on. Please, you
19 cannot do that.

20 UNIDENTIFIED: Okay. This woman was
21 saying, you genociders, screw you, that kind of
22 thing. It was hateful, intimidating, horribly and
23 threatening. So, we need this legislation approved,
24 and we support it, and thank you, Members of the
25 Council.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
3 testifying. You may submit your testimony to the
4 Council. It includes the video. Thank you.

5 I would like to call the next panel of
6 speakers. Jack Meckman, Colin Buckingham (phonetic),
7 Maury Brown (phonetic), Ken Capel (phonetic), Rustin
8 Barber (phonetic), Eleanor Grosz (phonetic), Raul
9 Rivers, Jeannie Berkman (phonetic), Jasper Nathaniel
10 in the Zoom, and Alex Malescio, also in Zoom. And

11 I'll start with Jasper in the Zoom.

12 Jasper.

13 JASPER NATHANIEL: Hi. Can you hear me?

14 Okay. Great. Thank you. I'm a Jewish New
15 Yorker. Many of my ancestors were exterminated in the
16 Holocaust, and I'm also a journalist who reports from
17 the occupied West Bank. I want to just contextualize
18 what the protests outside of Serbian synagogues are
19 actually about. So, in October, in a village called
20 Turmus Ayya, I was attacked by a mob of dozens of
21 masked armed Jewish settlers. It's not an
22 exaggeration to say I was running for my life,
23 narrowly escaped with my life. I then filmed a Jewish
24 settler clubbing a Palestinian grandmother
25 unconscious, then standing over her and striking her

2 twice more in the head as she lay motionless. Some of
3 you may have seen the video, it went pretty viral.
4 But here's the key thing. Those settlers had
5 descended from a nearby settlement and are part of a
6 coordinated campaign to terrorize local Palestinians
7 in order to chase them off the land and expand their
8 settlement. And the thing is, it's working. It's
9 working really well, because since October 7th, more
10 than 80 Palestinian communities have been forced to
11 abandon their land amid these relentless settler
12 pogroms. Just last week, a Palestinian American
13 teenager from Philadelphia was killed by a settler
14 during one of these attacks. How many people here
15 even knew about that? The pattern is remarkably
16 consistent. Settler violence drives Palestinians from
17 their land, settlers move in, and then the Israeli
18 government retroactively authorizes their gains and
19 integrates them into the formal settlement system.
20 This is thoroughly documented in the Israeli press.
21 And they are creating new settlements in the West
22 Bank at a record-breaking pace, quite literally. And
23 they have their eyes set on settling Gaza next. So
24 just to spell it out, these settlement homes are
25 built through violence and terror. They're

2 unambiguously illegal under international law. And
3 then they are marketed and sold at events hosted
4 inside synagogues here in New York. So that is, in
5 the most literal sense, direct material support for
6 terrorism. And I believe that if there's anything New
7 Yorkers should have the right to protest, it's that.
8 Thank you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
10 testifying.

11 And Alex? Alex, on Zoom?

12 ALEX MALESCIO: Good evening, Council
13 Members. Sorry, it's hard for me to see exactly who's
14 there on my screen. But my name is Alex Malescio. I'm
15 a Jewish New Yorker here in strong support of Intros
16 1 and 175 of 2026, introduced by Council Speaker
17 Menin and Council Member Dinowitz to establish
18 security perimeters around houses of worship and
19 educational establishments. I want to frame my
20 support clearly. This bill is not a departure from
21 liberal values. It is a defense of them. Liberalism,
22 at its core, rests on two foundational commitments,
23 robust freedom of expression and equal protection
24 under the law. It protects the right to dissent,
25 protest, and criticize, but it also protects the

2 rights of individuals to live, learn, and worship
3 free from excessive coercion and imminent threats of
4 violence. These principles are not in conflict. They
5 reinforce one another. New York City has long been a
6 beacon of free speech. Peaceful protest is a
7 constitutional right and an essential part of civic
8 life. However, the First Amendment has never been
9 absolute. The law has always recognized limits when
10 speech creates imminent harm or intimidation. Liberal
11 democracy depends on boundaries that protect
12 pluralism and ensure that one group's expression does
13 not extinguish another group's ability to safely
14 participate in public life. In recent years, we have
15 seen tensions turn into direct confrontations at the
16 entrances of houses of worship. Families attending
17 services have faced aggressive demonstrations at
18 extremely close range. Regardless of real or
19 perceived viewpoints held by congregants or
20 protesters, it is reasonable to demand that
21 belligerent parties should not convene within
22 striking distance of their targets. Anyone who has
23 witnessed protests and counter-protests firsthand can
24 affirm that for decades, law enforcement officers
25 have routinely separated parties to protect all

2 involved. This bill does not ban protest, this does
3 not silence dissent, and it does not discriminate
4 based on viewpoint. Instead, it applies a classic
5 time, place, and manner approach that allows protests
6 to continue while establishing a modest and
7 contextual perimeter to reduce the risk of danger or
8 intimidation at vulnerable points of egress. The
9 legislation appropriately gives (TIMER CHIME) New
10 York City Police..

11 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you. Thank you
12 for testifying.

13 ALEX MALESCIO: Thank you.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: I'm going to call
15 for more speakers to the panel. Lena Moman
16 (phonetic), Peter Felt (phonetic), Arielle Gordon
17 (phonetic), Jean-Pierre Seguin.

18 Okay, I'll start from my left to the
19 right, yeah. Yeah, please begin.

20 UNIDENTIFIED: Good evening. I want to
21 start by saying very clearly, Israel's committing a
22 genocide. It has been committing a genocide for eight
23 decades. Zionism is an ethnic and racial supremacist
24 ideology that calls for and requires the
25 extermination of my people, the Palestinian people,

2 and it is the ideology that Israel's founded on and
3 has been pursuing long before October 7th. People
4 here have talked about how the stolen land sales are
5 violations of international law, specifically Article
6 49 of the Geneva Convention, which prohibits the
7 transfer of a population to occupied territory. I
8 want to talk about how they're also in violation of
9 local New York State fair housing laws and federal
10 fair housing laws. In order for people to access
11 these sales, they have to submit an application that
12 explains their connection. They have to swear that
13 they're Jewish, they have to give the name of their
14 shul and their rabbi, and then that person is called
15 to make sure that not only are they Jewish, but
16 they're the quote-unquote right kind of Jews. We
17 heard many people who are in support of these bills
18 today testify, engage in actual anti-Semitism, and
19 use anti-Semitic slurs against other Jewish people
20 who are anti-Zionist. So, not only are the sales
21 accessible in a discriminatory manner, but they are
22 also selling land in occupied territory that by law
23 is only available to Jewish people. Instead of this
24 City Council, instead of the Mayor prosecuting and
25 preventing these sales under existing laws, we're

2 trying to create new laws to prevent the protests of
3 these sales. And there's a logical gap in the
4 justification. Speaker Menin listed a statistic of an
5 increase in anti-Semitism from Hillel. Hillel is a
6 student group that's largely funded, in large part by
7 the Israeli government, and who they are by
8 definition, people who consider any speech in favor
9 of Palestine to be anti-Semitic.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you. Thank you
11 for testifying.

12 Next speaker.

13 COLIN BUCKINGHAM: My name is Colin
14 Buckingham. I work in disability in the context of
15 war and genocide. If the Park East Synagogue and
16 other houses of worship were not holding land sales
17 and settlement recruitment fairs in direct violation
18 of international law and human rights, we would not
19 be out here protesting. The semantics of the bill and
20 its amendments fail to address the core of the
21 problem, that houses of worship are being used to at
22 best tacitly endorse and in reality enable crimes
23 against humanity. The UN International Court of
24 Justice has ruled that Israel's occupation of
25 Palestine, including Gaza and the West Bank, are

2 illegal under international law in a ruling handed
3 down in July 2024. This includes settlements and the
4 apartheid actions of blocking aid, food, and
5 medicine. Therefore, it stands to reason that both
6 the land sales and the settlement recruitment fairs
7 would also be illegal under international law. I
8 don't need a law to tell me that forcibly displacing
9 people from their land is wrong, that Israel's ethnic
10 cleansing, as agreed upon by the UN, Doctors Without
11 Borders, and more, is wrong, that events enabling
12 these atrocities should not happen at all, let alone
13 in our neighborhoods. The bill in question limiting
14 protests blatantly ignores the reason why these
15 protests are happening in the first place. And with
16 the U.S.'s long history of using houses of worship to
17 enact harm to Indigenous and Black communities, this
18 latest iteration, though unsurprising, is beyond
19 immoral and should be treated as such. Protesting
20 these atrocities is not only our moral imperative, it
21 is upholding international law, laws that our Mayor
22 has claimed to want to uphold per his declaration of
23 arresting Benjamin Netanyahu should he enter New York
24 City. It is our constitutional right and duty to
25 protest crimes against humanity, whether foreign or

2 domestic, and limiting our right to protest at all,
3 let alone protest events which, again, are in direct
4 violation of international law as a slap in the face
5 and an infringement on our rights that are supposedly
6 inalienable. Thank you for your time.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
8 testifying.

9 Next speaker.

10 RUSTIN BARBER: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
11 LANGUAGE)

12 To everyone here, my name is Rustin
13 Barber. I'm a visitor from Cincinnati, Ohio. My host
14 family are Shephardic Jewish Lower East Siders.
15 Protests need to be peaceful and kind in plan, words
16 and tone. Human beings have the right to peacefully
17 protest on public streets and not to in front of
18 hospitals, public schools, synagogues, churches,
19 mosques, and government buildings. Criticizing the
20 nation of Israel is not anti-Semitic. The quote-
21 unquote Israeli Defense IDF is not defending anyone.
22 It is the IOF, Israeli Offensive Force, and is a
23 terrorist entity and needs to be dismantled
24 immediately. Namely, the governments of the United
25 States, Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, France, and

2 India, the lying, thieving, rapist Europe, England,
3 Britain, United Kingdom, New South Wales, Australia,
4 United Colonies of America, United States of America,
5 are the biggest global terrorist entity and guilty
6 parties deserve no mercy from true defense forces
7 against global colonial, industrial, military, land
8 grab, intimidation agendas, and ICE. The Native
9 Americans are the Palestinians of the United States,
10 and the African Americans are the Native Americans.
11 To my understanding, under law of the Haudenosaunee
12 Confederacy, all residents deserve the rights to stay
13 where we are. No residents deserve power or running
14 water. The national and corporate authorities and
15 national and corporate allies are people complicit in
16 centuries of genocide, and it keeps escalating. My
17 first Quran teacher explained the violence Israeli
18 settler-genociders did to his Muslim and Orthodox
19 Christian childhood neighbors and family, and his
20 story was not an isolated incident. For Palestinians,
21 this has never been a religious conflict and never
22 will be a religious war. It has been over 70 years of
23 struggle against colonialism. Sadly, most Jews,
24 Christians, and Muslims have been misinterpreting
25 their scriptures to justify colonial violence and

2 have a perverted understanding of Solomonic violences
3 and laws.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you. Thank you
5 for testifying.

6 Next speaker.

7 JEAN-PIERRE SEGUIN: Good evening. My name
8 is Jean-Pierre Seguin. I'm an Episcopal Priest
9 serving in Queens. I'm here to oppose Speaker Menin's
10 and Council Member Dinowitz's proposed bills around
11 places of worship and educational facilities. As
12 others have mentioned, these land sales are not only
13 illegal locally, nationally, and internationally,
14 they are also ethically horrendous, uprooting a
15 people from their home systematically is a grave
16 violence. There are young Palestinian Christian
17 theologians I have spoken to who think of their
18 people as the olive trees that the occupation in the
19 West Bank also rips up and burns. I have seen
20 firsthand the violence inflicted by the State of
21 Israel in the occupied West Bank by the violence of
22 settlers, and I continue to follow the situation
23 there as it deteriorates. This is a situation of
24 genocide. I speak as a faith leader who cares for and
25 nurtures a faith community, and also as a faith

2 leader who finds her home in organizing. And I say I
3 find God's presence similarly in the sanctuary and in
4 the streets. The streets and the sanctuary are both
5 sacrosanct. The right to protest, secularly defended,
6 I also defend theologically. This is a right defended
7 by folks like Lucy Parsons, Emma Goldman, John Brown,
8 Nat Turner, and it is about justice.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you. Thank you
10 for testifying.

11 Next speaker.

12 RAUL RIVERA: Good evening. My name is
13 Raul Rivera. I'm a native New Yorker, and for the
14 record, I have no phobias. Chairperson and Members of
15 the Committee, I am here to express my concerns about
16 Intro. 0001-2026. This bill is a band-aid on a fatal
17 wound, and it won't protect anyone. If we do not
18 identify the true enemy, I urge our elected
19 officials, including Speaker Menin, to be bold and
20 call out Mayor Mamdani's actions for what they are,
21 anti-Semitic. When our Mayor says we came here to
22 remake this state in the image of our people, that is
23 not a call for unity, but a call for a takeover. We
24 won't be silent. We will fight for our city and
25 identify the true enemies. If you cannot do that,

2 then you are the enemies of the Jewish people, New
3 York City, and America. The people hold the power. I
4 believe in freedom of religion. The Constitution
5 grants that. However, Islam is not a religion. Zohran
6 Mamdani is a raging anti-Semite, hater of America and
7 Israel. And for the record, and for the record, and
8 for the record, God bless America, Donald Trump, ICE,
9 and the NYPD. Dr. King stood with Israel, free Iran,
10 and fuck Palestine.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you.

12 Next speaker.

13 ARIELLE GORDON: Good evening. Thank you
14 for the opportunity to speak. Excuse me, it's my
15 turn. We've listened to you all day.

16 CHAMBERS: (INAUDIBLE)

17 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet in the Chambers.

18 ARIELLE GORDON: Thank you.

19 My name is Arielle Gordon. I'm a New York
20 City resident, a mother, and a member of the Jewish
21 community. I live three blocks from Park East
22 Synagogue, and while walking home from dinner one
23 evening, my husband and I unexpectedly encountered
24 the protest blocking 68th Street from Lexington to
25 3rd Avenue. I want to share what that experience felt

2 like from the perspective of someone on the ground,
3 as a neighbor, as an activist, who simply walked into
4 it.

5 CHAMBERS: (INAUDIBLE)

6 ARIELLE GORDON: And I also want to
7 mention that it is very intimidating being one of the
8 sole non-kaffiyeh wearing members here today. Hearing
9 this in the background is something that I'm very
10 attuned to, and it's very, very intimidating. What I
11 witnessed on the day of the Park East protest was not
12 just political protest. The atmosphere was loud,
13 emotionally charged, confrontational in an incredibly
14 hostile way. And although barricades and police were
15 present, the impact did not remain contained to one
16 block. Protesters were spilling into surrounding
17 residential streets, continuing chants and
18 confrontations that carried into what is normally a
19 very quiet neighborhood. That night, I became newly
20 aware of the large Jewish star on my ski hat. It was
21 a cold night. I found myself wondering whether that
22 made me even more visible as I walked home.
23 Regardless of anyone's political views, houses of
24 worship should not become environments where
25 congregants feel hesitant to enter. The proposed

2 buffer zone recognizes this balance. It protects the
3 right to protest while also protecting the right of
4 New Yorkers to practice their faith safely and
5 freely. I ask the council to consider what this feels
6 like on the ground, and to support protections that
7 allow all communities to gather without fear. Thank
8 you for your time.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
10 testifying.

11 ARIELLE GORDON: Thank you.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: I would like to call
13 the next panel of speakers. Jane Paley (phonetic),
14 Khunsa Amin, Amy Wagner, and from Zoom, Christopher
15 Leon Johnson.

16 Christopher, can you hear me?

17 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Hello. Can you
18 you hear me?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yes. You may begin,
20 you may begin.

21 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Well, yeah,
22 hello. Yeah, sorry about that. I'm at a gala, sorry
23 about that. Hello. My name is Christopher Leon
24 Johnson, and I am here to show opposition to this
25 bill. And the reason I'm showing opposition to this

2 bill because this bill is nothing but a blank check
3 to the NYPD to do what they want when it comes to
4 police and protest. People in the City Council need
5 to be transparent and say that the people that was
6 out there standing next to Julie Menin this morning
7 at the press conference all get discretionary
8 funding. So, of course, they're going to be before
9 the bill because they don't want to lose FY27
10 discretionary funding. And Eric Dinowitz be on the
11 record that he's the son of Jeffrey Dinowitz and Mrs.
12 Sarah Salaam is the mom of (INAUDIBLE) Salaam so, of
13 course, there's going to be a big interest in
14 supporting this bill because it's family involved.
15 But I want to make it clear that I support Israel. I
16 love my Jewish people, but this bill, this last
17 minute amendment of the bill does not help Jewish
18 people with anybody. It doesn't help anybody at all.
19 And I'm calling on Zohran Mamdani, our Mayor, to veto
20 this bill when it gets to the desk. And when it gets
21 vetoed, it dies, and I'll make that clear. Like I
22 said, I support freedom of speech and I understand we
23 need to be protected, Jews and Muslims and everybody
24 be protected, but this bill is a waste. It's one of
25 the biggest watered down bills of 2026. And I support

2 Julie Menin, I want her to succeed, but she messed
3 up. She messed up in the end. But that's all I gotta
4 say. And God bless you. And yeah, I'm against these
5 bills and I hope these bills die in the City Council.
6 I'm not for this bill. If I had a number on this
7 bill, if I had a number, I would support the bill 100
8 percent. But there's no number, it's like getting a
9 blank check at NYPD to do what they want to do and it
10 does not help anybody at all. This is nothing but pay
11 to play what's going to happen in the future when
12 this bill gets passed. If the bill doesn't get passed
13 by the City Council, it's going to be pay to play.
14 But I call on Zohran Mamdani, our Mayor, to veto this
15 bill and let it die. I'm for free speech, but this is
16 a disastrous bill. So, thank you so much. And I'm
17 sorry about that.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you.

19 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time
20 expired.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for the
22 testimony.

23 I would like to start from my left. You
24 may begin.

2 KHUNSA AMIN: Hello, Council Members. My
3 name is Khunsa Amin, and I'm here as a member of the
4 Crown Heights Tenant Union, as well as the Union of
5 Pinnacle Tenants, both autonomous tenant unions by
6 and for tenants and our struggles. Speaking on behalf
7 of the CHTU's Palestine Solidarity Working Group
8 today and with the backing of our larger union, we
9 wholeheartedly reject any version of the
10 establishment of so-called buffer zones or any limits
11 on our right to protest near places of worship and
12 educational institutions. Even as these bills stand,
13 which is to say that they exist at all, would
14 implement immense restrictions on our constitutional
15 rights to free speech and assembly, given the high
16 density of educational and religious spaces in our
17 communities and effectively criminalize protest in
18 much of the city. As tenants, we know the power of
19 protest intimately. We have organized rallies to
20 insist on our neighbors' rights to electricity and
21 heat, to protect our neighbors from the violence of
22 eviction, and to demand safe housing. Protest is a
23 crucial tactic in a necessary form, enabling our
24 neighbors' voices to be heard. The two proposed bills
25 seek to undermine our collective power and

2 consequently allow for the perpetuation of violence
3 and theft from our communities. We reject this. Under
4 the guise of combating hate and anti-Semitism, when
5 violent behavior near places of worship is already
6 prohibited by law, these bills further endanger our
7 neighborhoods. Laws like these have time and time
8 again led to the over-policing and brutalization of
9 our neighbors, particularly our long-term Black and
10 Brown neighbors. Emboldened by these new
11 restrictions, the NYPD would be able to further
12 target those with dissenting opinions and stifle
13 needed voices of opposition. Moreover, the
14 establishment of any kind of buffer zone or any kind
15 of amorphous protest control at educational
16 institutions and places of worship would constitute
17 direct attack on the growing movement for
18 international solidarity with Palestine. These have
19 been key sites of protest and organizing against the
20 ongoing genocide. In addition, sales of stolen
21 Palestinian land are often conducted at synagogues.
22 The stakes are high. Bills like these would empower
23 further sweeps and lead to attacks (TIMER CHIME) on
24 neighbors fighting for...

25 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you.

2 KHUNSA AMIN: Justice. As somebody with a
3 landlord who is investing in Israel, I reject these
4 bills wholeheartedly.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Next speaker:

6 BEN YEMAN: Good evening. My name is Ben
7 Yeman (phonetic). I'm from Brooklyn, New York, and
8 I'm here to testify in 100 percent support of the two
9 bills. We're not talking about what's going on in the
10 Middle East. We're not talking about what's going on
11 in Gaza. We're not talking about what's going on in
12 Israel. We are in a New York local law. Local law
13 means that Jewish people, and any group of people,
14 have a right to peacefully gather in a church, a
15 synagogue, or a mosque without having their lives
16 threatened. Now, there's been discussions about
17 Jewish people possibly selling so-called fake
18 Palestinian land. I am a Zionist Jew. I am a proud
19 New York Zionist Jew. I do not believe that the
20 Palestinians have legitimate claim to any part of
21 Eretz Israel because long before the Palestinians
22 existed and long before the Christians existed, King
23 David lived in the Jewish sacred land in 1000 BCE,
24 thousands of years before Muhammad was created and
25 thousands of years before Jesus lived on this planet.

2 So, the Jewish people have a better claim to this
3 holy land than any Palestinian, Muslim, or Christian.
4 Therefore, Jews have a right to sell any land in any
5 country at any time in their houses of worship
6 because they're not violating any federal law. No
7 state law or no federal law is being violated by any
8 Jew selling any land in Israel, England, Great
9 Britain, or New York, nor is any New York State law.
10 So, I challenge any of the critics here to cite in
11 the Code of Federal Regulations that prohibits Jewish
12 people, Christians, or Muslims from selling Jewish
13 land in a mosque, a synagogue, or a church. So, I
14 would hope that this Council remember that we're
15 speaking about local laws protecting religious people
16 in houses of worship. That's it. We're not concerned
17 about going on overseas because that's not the
18 jurisdiction of the City Council.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay. Thank you for
20 testifying.

21 I missed your name. Can you repeat your
22 name again?

23 BENYAMIN O'BRIEN MAGDON: Benjamin O'Brien
24 Magdon (phonetic) from Brooklyn.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: O'Brien Magdon.

3 Thank you.

4 Next speaker.

5 DR. JANE PALEY: Good evening, Council. My
6 name is Dr. Jane Paley. I urge you to reject Council
7 Speaker Menin's unconstitutional bill that would task
8 the New York City Police Commissioner to create and
9 enforce buffer zones around all places of religious
10 worship, and Council Member Dinowitz's similar bill
11 for all educational institutions that includes
12 healthcare training hospitals. I am a native Jewish
13 New Yorker, a psychologist, and a parent from a
14 family that includes Holocaust refugees and survivors
15 of pogroms, people that did not survive those
16 incidents. I grew up in the late '60s and '70s in a
17 New York City that was infused with the liberation
18 and anti-war movements of that time. My formative
19 understanding of what it meant to be a Jewish adult
20 that I learned in Hebrew school included the right
21 and the responsibility to protest injustice and speak
22 up for human rights. I was taught that questioning
23 and dissent are essential Jewish values, critical for
24 a healthy, ethical society. I learned that all
25 institutions, even the most seemingly altruistic, are

2 vulnerable to corruption, racism, and greed, and that
3 we as citizens are required to remain vigilant and
4 hold them accountable. Protest is an immediate form
5 of communication that transmits information and airs
6 truths that otherwise remain hidden. The highly
7 restrictive buffer zones that would effectively block
8 much of our city from protests at the discretion of
9 the NYPD are proposed at a moment when an
10 authoritarian government is wielding anti-Semitism as
11 a bludgeon to silence free speech, creating
12 exceptional protection for some Jews, and exceptional
13 criminalization of Palestinians and those who
14 advocate for Palestinian rights.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
16 testifying.

17 Next speaker.

18 AMY WAGNER: Good evening. My name is Amy
19 Wagner. I am the founder and Co-Director of the YA-YA
20 Network, Youth Activists, Youth Allies. I'm here to
21 speak in opposition to this package of bills,
22 especially Intro. 1-A and 175-A. Activism in and
23 around schools and houses of worship have been
24 powerful catalysts for social change. Think of the
25 ACT UP actions at St. Patrick's Cathedral at the

2 height of the AIDS crisis, the anti-war and anti-
3 apartheid actions on campuses across the country
4 throughout the years. If this bill is passed, it
5 would stifle these activities. The YA-YA Network is
6 an organizing hub for youth ages 15 to 19. Over the
7 years, our young people have been repeatedly
8 confronted outside of schools by school
9 administrators, school safety agents, and NYPD, and
10 told that there was no right to free speech on our
11 public sidewalks near schools. When told to move, one
12 of our young people was arrested for not moving fast
13 enough. As a result of our lawsuit, YA-YA Network v.
14 NYPD, the right to protest on public sidewalks in
15 front of schools was reaffirmed and codified, and
16 since then, we have made these court documents
17 available to other organizations and the public who
18 wish to exercise their First Amendment rights in
19 public spaces near schools. I'm going to skip a bunch
20 of this. Students are already trying to learn in
21 schools where there are more police than in the
22 entire Seattle and San Francisco police departments
23 combined. Their communities are heavily over-policed
24 as well. Police perimeters around schools will not
25 create safety. It will only further criminalize our

2 young people. Even if these bills pass, they will
3 most certainly be vetoed by our Mayor and could never
4 stand up to a court challenge. I therefore urge you
5 to set them aside (TIMER CHIME) and focus...

6 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you. Thank you
7 for your testimony.

8 AMY WAGNER: Instead on ways to truly
9 combat racism, anti-Semitism, and hate.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you.

11 At this point, I want to do a room check.
12 If there's anyone in the room who signed up to speak
13 and who believe that we missed you, please fill out a
14 slip, and then I'll call you.

15 Thank you.

16 Okay. Next, I would like to turn to Olive
17 Harbor on Zoom. Olive.

18 OLIVE HARBOR: Hi. Yes. Thank you. My name
19 is Olive. I live on the Upper East Side within
20 Councilwoman Menin's District. I'm speaking in
21 opposition of this bill package. I live in the
22 neighborhood that facilitates the illegal sale of
23 stolen Palestinian land to prospective settlers,
24 using synagogues as a shield so when the community
25 protests these events, accusations of anti-Semitism

2 can be weaponized against them. I'm well aware of the
3 context these proposals emerged from, and it is by no
4 means because some people had a problem with Jews
5 going to worship in a synagogue. It is a context of
6 Zionist pressure that is only interested in
7 preserving the State of Israel with no genuine regard
8 for the safety of Jewish New Yorkers. If the sponsors
9 of these bills are concerned about Jewish New
10 Yorkers, these bills will only harm them further.
11 Jewish New Yorkers and all New Yorkers will be harmed
12 by the suppression of their freedom of speech. Places
13 of worship and educational facilities are everywhere
14 in the city, and this bill will effectively
15 criminalize the dissent in protesting. These bills,
16 if passed, will only encourage the NYPD to further
17 target Black, Brown, queer, and trans New Yorkers who
18 are disproportionately victims of police brutality.
19 It will endanger Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and
20 Jewish New Yorkers who stand in solidarity with
21 Palestine, further criminalizing such a stance, and
22 legitimizing this violent state repression these
23 groups face. Also, these bills will lead to the
24 further criminalization of abortion justice activism
25 as well, who have Black and Brown women, queer and

2 trans New Yorkers at their forefront. Again,
3 populations who have been disproportionate targets of
4 the NYPD's brutality, particularly the unchecked
5 violence of its strategic response group.
6 Councilwoman Menin, who has claimed to unequivocally
7 support the right to reproductive care and abortion,
8 is opening the door for abortion activists to be
9 brutalized with these bills. Finally, at a time when
10 the federal government is severely curtailing civil
11 liberties, abducting people from their homes,
12 schools, and places of worship, the City Council
13 should be doing everything in its power to protect
14 New Yorkers and their First Amendment rights. If ICE
15 happens to arrest someone within the buffer zone
16 under this new legislation, could priests,
17 parishioners, or anyone who tries to stop the arrest
18 be arrested themselves under this law? I urge the
19 Council to support New Yorkers..

20 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you. Thank you
21 for testifying.

22 Israel Peskowski on Zoom.

23 Israel.

24 KAREN BALE: The co-host unmuted me.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yes, you may begin.

2 KAREN BALE: I'm not Israel, but I'm happy
3 to make my statement. Can I give you my name?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yeah, sure, please
5 do.

6 KAREN BALE: So, my name is Karen Bale
7 (phonetic).

8 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay. Please begin.

9 KAREN BALE: Okay. Thank you. Thank you
10 all. I am here today because something has gone
11 deeply wrong in our culture. It's showing up at the
12 doors of our houses of worship. This is not just
13 about Jews. It's about hatred towards anyone becoming
14 acceptable. And we have to be honest about how it's
15 showing itself right now. Jewish New Yorkers are
16 being harassed. They're being harassed at synagogues
17 in the United States because of events happening in
18 Israel, and that should alarm every one of us. Why
19 are American Jews being blamed, confronted, and
20 intimidated for geopolitical decisions that they do
21 not make and do not control? We keep hearing the same
22 argument that opposition to this bill is about
23 international law and land policy. But if that were
24 truly the concern, then protests would be directed at
25 governments, courts, or institutions, not at

2 synagogues, not at families that are walking in with
3 their children, and certainly not at Jews who have
4 never lived in Israel, never voted there, and have no
5 authority on what land is sold or bought. Most of the
6 people making these accusations have probably never
7 even been there, yet they feel entitled to scream
8 allegations of the worst crimes at Jewish houses of
9 worship thousands of miles away. And this is not
10 justice. This is scapegoating. It's also not a First
11 Amendment issue. That protects speech. It doesn't
12 require us to tolerate intimidation and harassment at
13 the doors of sacred spaces. Proximity matters, and
14 that is why the City already recognizes zones. But we
15 need to start protecting dignity, and we need more
16 safety. So, I strongly support this bill, and I look
17 forward to celebrating it when it's passed, not as a
18 political victory, but as a moral one. And let me be
19 clear that this bill is not a fix. If we're seriously
20 thinking about combating hate, we have to do more in
21 our schools, our campuses, public discourse. We have
22 to teach empathy over ideology and kindness over
23 outrage, humanity over blame. Social justice without
24 compassion is just cruelty, and we need to stop
25 hating everyone. We need to start choosing

2 compassion, and we shouldn't have to scream all day
3 for safety. Jews should not have to, and neither
4 should anyone else.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay. Thank you,
6 Karen. Thank you for testifying. Thank you.

7 KAREN BALE: Thank you.

8 Does Israel Peskowitz (phonetic) plan to
9 testify? Karen. I guess not.

10 We'll go to the next Zoom speaker, Aly
11 Afifi. Aly.

12 You may begin.

13 ALY AFIFI: Okay. Thank you so much.
14 Really appreciate your time. As a proud New Yorker
15 and yet another descendant of both Holocaust
16 survivors and victims, I first want to say for the
17 record that from the river to the sea has been a
18 phrase used by the ruling Israeli Likud party for 50
19 years, and that Intifada simply means shaking off.
20 The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising during the Holocaust was
21 an Intifada. It does not in and of itself mean
22 anything about violence toward Jewish people. Lastly,
23 as a Jew, Jewish houses of worship would face no
24 opposition if they weren't used to lobby American
25 funding for Israeli war crimes and facilitate land

2 sales in Israel. To act like they have nothing to do
3 with one another is as disingenuous as it gets.
4 Scattered chants are not an excuse to provide cover
5 for international law violations and to strip away
6 our rights, and people accusing you of genocide
7 shouldn't upset you more than the genocide itself. If
8 you're appalled by chants and intimidated by
9 kaffiyehs, imagine how angry you'd feel after decades
10 of people burning your farms and attacking your kids
11 and elders with sledgehammers. With that said, I
12 reject these bills for failing to target the root
13 cause of the question protests, which is using
14 synagogues as shields to sell stolen Palestinian
15 land, abusing antisemitism to silence and criminalize
16 anyone who rejects Zionist violence, and screaming
17 bloody murder over protests and words, but doing
18 nothing about the material violence that's being
19 protested. The insidious, ahistorical, and deadly
20 conflation of protest against reprehensible Zionist
21 actions with a hatred for all Jewish people will only
22 guarantee the ongoing slaughter and subjugation of
23 Palestinians while increasing hatred for Jews, and
24 this has been the playbook of the Zionist lobby for
25 half a century or more. These dynamics reflect New

2 York City's excruciating complicity in Israeli
3 apartheid.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you. Thank you
5 for testifying. Thank you.

6 Sheree Gibson, you may begin.

7 Sheree, you are unmuted. You may begin.

8 SHEREE GIBSON: Thank you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Please begin.

10 SHEREE GIBSON: Good evening, all Council
11 Members of the Committee to Combat Hate. My name is
12 Sheree Gibson. I'm a proud New York City public
13 school parent and a public education advocate. Thank
14 you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to
15 the bill the five-point legislative and funding
16 package focused on education, protecting schools and
17 houses of worship, and resources to confront hate. I
18 want to start by saying I appreciate the Council's
19 intention to take on hate in our city. That work
20 matters, but I am deeply concerned that anti-Black
21 and anti-immigrant hate are not named anywhere in
22 this package. I'm choosing to believe that was an
23 oversight, not intentional, but in this moment, those
24 omissions send a harmful message. We cannot fall into
25 what I call the oppression Olympics or the hierarchy

2 of pain that's being pushed nationally. Instead, I
3 ask that the Council build on and strengthen existing
4 laws and community work rather than creating new ones
5 that could cause harm. Most importantly, let's
6 protect people, not just buildings. My written
7 testimony has responses to some of the other bills in
8 the package. My comments now are in response
9 specifically to Intro. 001 and Intro. 0175. I have to
10 ask, when has a buffer zone ever stopped hate? I save
11 you time, never. Through history, it has never been
12 police actions that changed hearts or minds. It's
13 always been truth, education, and love. These bills
14 would take power away from school and faith
15 communities, the very people who know what safety
16 means for them. They prioritize property and distance
17 over people. Real safety happens when communities are
18 engaged, informed, and connected. As a Black
19 Christian woman, mother, I know harassment
20 intimately, unfortunately, from these many
21 identities. So, I do not take what others have shared
22 about their real fears lightly. However, the majority
23 of the harassment that I face comes from police and
24 men. So, tell me...

2 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you. Thank you
3 for testifying.

4 SHEREE GIBSON: How does the buffer zone
5 protect me at church and students from the agents who
6 will define the protection?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you.

8 Yes. Israel Peskowitz, you're back
9 online.

10 Are you there?

11 ISRAEL PESKOWITZ: Hear me?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Israel.

13 ISRAEL PESKOWITZ: Hello?

14 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yes. You may begin.

15 ISRAEL PESKOWITZ: First, before I begin,
16 I'd just like to comment on the irony of how quite a
17 few people testifying earlier today called themselves
18 free speech activists...

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Israel, please
20 direct your comments at the Committee, not at the
21 audience, please.

22 ISRAEL PESKOWITZ: To silence others. All
23 right. I am here live from Kew Garden Hills. I am
24 standing right in front of the synagogue that was
25 protested at. There is a synagogue. This was the

2 corner where the the pro-Palestinian protestors
3 stood. This is the corner where the pro-Israel
4 protestors stood. Other than that both sides were
5 being illegally kettled, the cops did an excellent
6 job of managing the event. My point is, this is where
7 our protest is. It looks nothing like 92nd Street.
8 Every synagogue, every church, every house of worship
9 is different. You cannot have one rule that fits them
10 all. On top of that, you might like the Police
11 Commissioner right now, but there'll be a new Police
12 Commissioner eventually, and you might not like the
13 decisions they make. The Council should put
14 guardrails on this bill to ensure that A, there is a
15 buffer zone wide enough that people can get into a
16 synagogue or other house of worship unmolested, but
17 also that B, protestors are allowed to be close
18 enough to the house of worship that the people
19 they're protesting can hear them. Thank you very
20 much, Council Members, for your time.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you. Thank you
22 for testifying.

23 At this point, I want to switch back to
24 in-person. I would like to call on the next set of

2 panel members, Michael Loeb, Alaina Daniels, Chauncy
3 Young.

4 And I'll start from the left to the
5 right.

6 ALAINA DANIELS: Good evening. I'm Alaina
7 Daniels, Executive Director of Transformative
8 Schools. TFS creates spaces where our children are
9 safe enough to learn. Moving towards opening a full-
10 day middle school, we've operated a pilot afterschool
11 program where students ages nine to 15 from every
12 borough have learned for three years. My trans
13 students wear hijabs and kippah, T-shirts and
14 dresses, and lots of friendship bracelets. They're
15 joyful and silly, and they're really hungry for a
16 snack. My trans students are also afraid, afraid of
17 the bullies in their classrooms and in the White
18 House, afraid of losing their healthcare, and afraid
19 of a shooting at our afterschool because Moms for
20 Liberty posted about us on Twitter. They're also
21 afraid of our school board members, Community
22 Education Council, too. Backed by billionaires, Place
23 NYC has spent years building power in the district,
24 across the city, in this room, by pushing policies
25 that deepen school segregation, attacking Black

2 parent leaders, putting Jewish kids in danger by
3 weaponizing false accusations of anti-Semitism, and
4 demonizing students who write op-eds against spending
5 billions of our tax dollars on weapons to kill
6 Palestinians. Two years ago, they also tried to ban
7 books and passed a resolution attacking trans kids.
8 We've been organizing since then, and after, I'm
9 going to skip a bunch, and after 18 months of dancing
10 hot to go in the Macarena, 18 months of being called
11 slurs, we won. We also brought over 10,000 people to
12 rallies in Union Square. Leading these actions has
13 reinforced time and time again that state actors
14 disproportionately punish Black and Brown, trans and
15 queer, disabled and immigrant New Yorkers. At CEC2
16 meeting after meeting, Council labeled us
17 intimidating, and threatened us with arrest, because
18 we danced, blew bubbles, and ate cupcakes. One time,
19 they even threatened to arrest me for killing a
20 cockroach. While I think that everyone in this room
21 can agree that we want all New Yorkers to feel safe,
22 those of us who oppose these bills (TIMER CHIME) know
23 that spending our tax dollars...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you. Thank
25 you.

2 ALAINA DANIELS: To empower rank-and-file
3 armed guards...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for your
5 testimony.

6 ALAINA DANIELS: To decide who is
7 intimidating will not make New York...

8 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Next speaker.

9 MICHAEL ALON LOEB: Makes sense that I'm
10 one of the last speakers, because if there were no
11 ethno-religious, nationalist, supremacist events,
12 there would be no protest outside of religious houses
13 of worship. So there really is no need for this
14 legislation. And also, appropriately, ethno-religious
15 supremacist is not a protected group among the 25
16 that were listed. My name is Michael Alon Loeb
17 (phonetic). I'm here as an educator, a Jew, an anti-
18 supremacist, a Brooklynite, and a frequent
19 participant in public protests to offer testimony
20 against the proposed legislation. It's unnecessary,
21 given existing protections, and will be used to
22 shield nationalist bigots and target unpopular
23 speech, particularly in solidarity with Palestinians.
24 I choose to use my time this morning establishing my
25 standing. I'm the son of a Jewish refugee from Nazi

2 Germany whose life was destroyed by anti-Semitism and
3 eventually committed suicide based on that. I grew up
4 going to Zionist summer camps, visited Israel four
5 times before the end of high school. Upon graduation
6 in 1991, I lived in Palestine as a Zionist volunteer
7 for 10 months. I've not returned since 1992, and I
8 will not until Palestine is free. I'm a lifelong
9 educator, having served in New York City Public
10 Schools for 15 years, most recently was a professor
11 at Brooklyn College. Over the past 15 years, I've
12 participated in many protests, including at an
13 illegitimate land sale at the synagogue in Brooklyn,
14 at the Park East Synagogue in Manhattan, weekly
15 vigils across from a public elementary school in my
16 neighborhood. And I have had many encounters with
17 undisciplined, overpaid, over-equipped, and often
18 politicized NYPD protest suppression agents who take
19 it personal. And I have had many verbal and two
20 physical confrontations with some of the supremacist
21 bigots (TIMER CHIME) in this room..

22 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you.

23 MICHAEL ALON LOEB: Who've called me a
24 kapo, sonderkommando, had my yarmulke ripped off by
25 them. Those are anti-Semitic..

2 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Next speaker.

3 CHAUNCY YOUNG: Good evening, Council
4 Members. My name is Chauncy Young. I'm a Highbridge
5 Bronx parent and resident, and I'm the Director of
6 the New Settlement Parent Action Committee. In a few
7 minutes, I'm going to bike back to the Bronx when
8 this is all done. For nearly 30 years, PAC has
9 organized for educational justice and immigrant
10 rights. We stand here today alongside many
11 organizations to urge Council to reject 1-A, 22, and
12 327. There's been a long history of protest in
13 schools and religious institutions in New York City
14 and across the nation to address injustice. The
15 largest civil rights demonstration in the United
16 States remains the 1964 school boycott, Freedom Day,
17 organized to end segregation in New York City Public
18 Schools with nearly a half million students
19 boycotting school. On this subject, we still have a
20 lot of work to do. As of today, New York City remains
21 the most segregated public school system in the
22 United States, 72 years after Board versus Brown of
23 Education ruling of 1954. We agree that every student
24 and congregant deserves to feel safe. However, safety
25 is not found in buffer zones or expanded NYPD

2 presence. For many of our families, including our
3 Brown, Black, and immigrant families, more policing
4 does not equal more safety. It equals more fear.
5 These bills risk chilling free speech and creating a
6 climate of repression that mirrors the very
7 oppressive federal policies that we are being
8 championed by the current Trump Administration. We
9 clearly saw pro-Palestine college students,
10 activists, targeted for deportation. By prioritizing
11 enforcement over engagement, these bills move us
12 closer to a surveillance state in places where our
13 children should need to feel the most free. Anti-
14 Semitism, Islamophobia, it is undeniably true that
15 Jewish, Muslim, and immigrant families have faced a
16 rise in hate-motivated attacks. New York City is
17 hurting and divided, but we cannot police our way out
18 of prejudice. Instead of investing in barriers and
19 policing, we call on Council to invest in community
20 building. We need culturally responsive and implicit
21 bias training for all school staff and City
22 employments.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you. Thank you
24 for this defining.

2 CHAUNCY YOUNG: Thank you. I'll share the
3 rest. I appreciate you.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yes.

5 At this point, I want to thank everyone
6 in the room for signing up to speak. We had over 239
7 speakers today, and there's more than eight hours of
8 testimony. Thank you for waiting.

9 At this point, we have several speakers
10 on Zoom. I would like to call on Maung Sawyeddollah,
11 Smitha Varghese Milich, Ameena Ali, Yehuda Miller,
12 Ariel Weinshanker, Joseph Akiba Van Leeuwen, and Kat
13 Green.

14 We'll call the last batch of Zoom
15 speakers after this.

16 Maung, are you there?

17 MAUNG SAWYEDDOLLAH: Yes.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yes. You may begin.

19 MAUNG SAWYEDDOLLAH: My name is Maung
20 Sawyeddollah, and I am here representing the Muslim
21 Community Network. First, we are thankful to the
22 Council for updating the Intro. 388 to explicitly
23 include the Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hates, and
24 for strengthening language access probation. That
25 inclusion matter. Naming harm is how we make

1 communities visible in policy and in data. This is an
2 important step toward equity. As this bill moves
3 forward, our focus now is implementation. A hard line
4 is only as strong as its accessibility and community
5 trust. No New Yorker should need to speak English to
6 report a hate incident. We encourage the Commission
7 to ensure that language access is not symbolic, but
8 fully operational with trained staff, culturally
9 competent outreach, and real-time availability in at
10 least the city's top languages. We also urge ongoing
11 engagement with impacted communities to ensure
12 reporting is safe, confidential, and trusted. Many
13 immigrants and visibly Muslim New Yorkers are
14 hesitant to report due to fear of misunderstanding of
15 the government system. Outreach must be proactive,
16 not reactive. Data transparency will be key. Clear
17 quarterly reporting on anti-Muslim incidents
18 alongside other categories will allow the Council and
19 communities to respond quickly to the trend. We
20 appreciate the leadership shown here today. With a
21 strong implementation, Intro. 388 can become a model
22 for equitable hate reporting. Thank you.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you.

2 SMITHA VARGHESE MILICH: Smitha Varghese
3 Milich. Hi.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: You may begin.

5 SMITHA VARGHESE MILICH: Yeah. My name is
6 Smitha. I'm a Queens resident. So, it's been really
7 unsettling watching so many majority White people
8 today testify and leave out the actual reason why New
9 Yorkers were aggressively protesting outside both
10 synagogues. We found out it was illegal settlements,
11 and it's also unsettling seeing grown-ass White men
12 talking about fairytale kings as justification to
13 illegally sell land. How embarrassing. The Speaker's
14 bill in particular covers all religious places to
15 combat all forms of hate. Yet today, the only death
16 toll that was cited by Council Members was the over
17 1,200 Israelis who were killed on October 7th three
18 years ago. The White woman named Karen, just before
19 me, talked about dignity. Dignity for whom, Karen?
20 Nothing has been said today about the more than
21 70,000 Palestinians who have been killed since
22 October 7th. Today, the new Council leadership is
23 overwhelmingly proving what we've seen across this
24 country, this alignment with MAGA that has someone
25 like Vicky Paladino sponsoring your bills. We're

2 seeing how Zionist feelings and comfort levels are
3 more important than Palestinian lives. I'll also add
4 that you have Inna Vernikov on the bills, who's the
5 same grown-ass woman who cowardly brought a gun to a
6 college campus to intimidate students protesting the
7 genocide. How pathetic. Of course, we do not support
8 anti-Semitism. No one should hit you or touch you on
9 your way to worship, but if your place of worship is
10 hosting racist, violent, illegal activity, you lose
11 the moral ground. Your mental peace is not our
12 priority. Your discomfort pales in comparison to the
13 actual modern-day Holocaust that the rest of the
14 world is seeing in Gaza. Israel is embedded with far-
15 right genocidal psychopaths. Netanyahu's a literal
16 war criminal. You want to make Jews feel safer? Stand
17 with New Yorkers, New York Jews, and otherwise, and
18 so much of the rest of the world when we demand
19 Israel to stop committing an illegal occupation and
20 genocide in the name of Judaism. Thank you.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
22 testifying.

23 Aameena Ali. Aameena.

24 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: You may begin.

2 DR. AMEENA ALI: Good evening, Council
3 persons and constituents of this body. My name is Dr.
4 Ameena Ali, and I'm proudly born and raised in the
5 people's republic of Brooklyn. I am a mother, a
6 grandmother, a proud Gulf War veteran, and the
7 founder of the Federation of International Gender and
8 Human Rights. I am here today to speak in strong
9 support of the proposed Islamophobia-specific
10 amendments, including 22-2026, and to urge this
11 Commission to recognize that combating hate requires
12 not only solidarity in language, but competency in
13 who is important and what is seen as a priority. I
14 want to begin with a moment that illustrates the
15 policy gap we are here to close. On the very day that
16 a local mosque was subjected to hate attacks, a
17 member of the Interfaith Center of New York, an
18 institution that represents the moral architect of
19 interreligious cooperation, accepted an award from
20 MCC during the Muslim American Heritage Month, yet
21 did not speak a single word in defense of the Muslim
22 community under assault. That silence is not a
23 personal failure. It's a structural failure. It
24 reveals what happens when institutions are committed
25 to interfaith proximity, but yet have not developed

2 the literacy, training, and accountability to
3 confront Islamophobia in real time. Interfaith
4 presence without Islamophobia competency produces
5 symbolic inclusion, but operational absence. Because
6 the data is clear, anti-Muslim hate is not episodic,
7 it's systemic, racial, and increasing. It restricts
8 civic participation, limits access to employment and
9 education, and reshapes how Muslim New Yorkers move
10 through public space. When institutions are designed
11 to stand in moral solidarity, yet are not equipped to
12 name and interrupt said harm, the burden falls back
13 onto the very communities that are already targeted.
14 The City Council has already established a five-point
15 framework to combat anti-Semitism. The Islamophobic
16 proposals does not compete with that model. It
17 actually completes the very promise of equity..

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time's expired. Thank
19 you.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
21 testify.

22 Yehuda Miller.

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

24 YEHUDA MILLER: Yeah. Hi. I know it's
25 late, so I'll be very brief. I'll try to be under the

2 two minutes. First, I would like to say that I would
3 like to testify in support of the package to combat
4 hate, in particular, the proposal to create a buffer
5 zone around houses of worship. I want to thank the
6 Council for considering this proposal and for your
7 support in these very challenging times for the
8 Jewish community at large, and in particular, the
9 Orthodox Jewish community who are visibly Jewish, and
10 therefore, obviously, more vulnerable. I'd also like
11 to point out, specifically with regard to places of
12 worship and their safety, that throughout history,
13 houses of worship have often been among the first
14 places attacked when hate and bias rises, whether as
15 a precursor to heinous acts of hate or through more
16 subtle forms of targeting, such as discriminatory
17 laws, religious institutions have repeatedly been
18 singled out when hostility arises. That history is
19 precisely why the federal government, back in 2000,
20 with historic, anonymous, bipartisan support, and
21 with no objection and on consent, both the House and
22 Senate passed the Religious Land Use
23 Institutionalized Personals Act, known as RLUIPA, to
24 address the targeting of religious institutions
25 through land use regulations. The need for that law

2 reflected recognition that places of worship are
3 uniquely vulnerable to discrimination and
4 interference, and unfortunately, we continue to see
5 that when hate rises in the communities, targeting of
6 places of worship remain a common practice. When hate
7 rises, history teaches us that places of worship are
8 targeted. I support any measure taken to protect
9 them. Thank you for standing up for the safety and
10 dignity of all New Yorkers, including the religious
11 community. Thank you.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you.

13 Ariel Weinshanker.

14 Ariel.

15 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

16 ARIEL WEINSHANKER: He won't let me speak.

17 They won't let me speak. I'm here. Can you hear me?

18 Can you hear me?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yes, yes. Please

20 begin.

21 ARIEL WEINSHANKER: What today's

22 discussion has divulged into over the past four hours

23 of people in masks repeating historical stereotypes

24 is an example of the very real need for the City

25 Council to step in to combat hate. Voluminous,

2 innovative, urgent action needs to be taken
3 immediately. I have been inside of an actively
4 protested synagogue that does not engage, nor does it
5 support land sales or whatever other accusations are
6 being used to validate hateful behavior often being
7 called protesting. While I only moved to New York
8 City about a decade ago, my grandfather was born at a
9 public hospital in Lower Manhattan in the early 1900s
10 and grew up in Manhattan with his immigrant parents
11 like his wife. It was this community that gave him
12 the foundation to achieve the American dream, enable
13 him to go to college, have a quality career and raise
14 children and children of their own to have freedom to
15 choose their own futures. I wouldn't find out until
16 years later that he and his wife would lay the
17 foundation of customs forever tying me to the Lower
18 East Side's vibrant Jewish life of the last century.
19 It was the combination of this local Jewish community
20 and access to New York City programs that provided
21 that led to his accomplishments. Regardless about how
22 you feel about the people or beliefs of the people in
23 the building, we all have the right for the freedom
24 of religion. I am glad that my grandfather isn't
25 alive to witness this conversation, although I doubt

2 he would be surprised to see the impact of social
3 media rotting the brains of so many people into
4 believing warped ideas about people who appear to be
5 different from them. The visible and palpable growth
6 of hate over the past 10 years supporting terrorists
7 has been disgusting to experience and I've even seen
8 it going to the grocery store in Lower Manhattan.
9 This isn't about freedom of speech. It is about hate
10 and it's about religious freedom. New York City is
11 typically a role model for the country in terms of
12 how to properly treat people. Please take advantage
13 of this and lead. I demand that this madness ceases
14 and New York City leads the nation in codifying
15 strong legislation ensuring that hate speech stops
16 being protected...

17 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time's expired.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
19 testifying.

20 Joseph Akiba van Leeuwen.

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

22 JOSEPH AKIBA VAN LEEUWEN: Hello. My name
23 is Joseph. I'm a fourth generation Holocaust
24 survivor. My late grandfather was born into a
25 beautiful house in Scheveningen, Netherlands. And

2 after that home was seized by the Nazi occupiers, it
3 became the office of a Dutch real estate company
4 after the war. See, during and after the Holocaust,
5 the homes of dead and displaced Jews became the
6 property of White Gentiles, and today the synagogues
7 where Dutch Jews like my great grandparents used to
8 pray are now museums. And seeing the remnants of
9 Jewish culture in Europe felt like walking around in
10 my own graveyard. That's why I'm frankly sickened to
11 see my neighbors following in the footsteps of this
12 history through the sale of stolen homes belonging to
13 Palestinians. Homes whose living owners are survivors
14 of the barbaric and un-Jewish system of Israeli
15 apartheid. It directly violates the meaning of never
16 again. This is not a religious activity. It is ethnic
17 cleansing. And whether it's planned in a government
18 chamber, a business backroom, or a synagogue, it is a
19 crime against humanity. What's shameful is that
20 rather than responding to this blatant violation of
21 the law and human rights, the Committee has
22 completely ignored it. What 1-A proposes is to make
23 people like myself into human shields for an
24 apartheid regime and mission whose connections to the
25 United States and New York City governments are by

2 the admissions of testifiers, purely secular,
3 political, and financial. Just like how orgs such as
4 the ADL do in refusing to condemn Nazi salutes but
5 persecuting college students whose families are
6 victims of the Gaza genocide. This legislation
7 privileges Zionist organizations with preferential
8 use of potentially lethal force while leaving working
9 class Jews in collective responsibility for the
10 actions of the multi-ethnic and interfaith cartel
11 looting Palestinian land. And it's absolutely
12 appalling that our tax dollars are being wasted on
13 what the NYPD itself is basically calling a lawsuit
14 factory. If the Council is serious about combating
15 hate, start by addressing the criminal financing of
16 ethnic cleansing taking place in New York City...

17 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
18 testifying. Thank you.

19 Kat Green.

20 Kat, you may begin.

21 KAT GREEN: Good evening. My name's Kat
22 Green, and I'm the Founder of Endora, a non-profit
23 that provides security consultation to human rights
24 organizations. My work began with protecting abortion
25 facilities and expanded cross movement to support any

2 organization that's targeted by hate groups due to
3 the significant overlap in players that target
4 vulnerable communities. I'm here to express my
5 opposition to the proposed buffer zone bills around
6 places of worship and educational facilities. These
7 bills target free speech and the right to protest,
8 but perhaps more importantly, they do not provide any
9 novel protection to the organizations they claim to
10 support and may put them at greater risk. Places of
11 worship are already protected by both the FACE Act
12 and hate crime laws. And historically, inhibiting
13 free speech around dissenting opinions contributes to
14 conspiratorial thinking and promotes violent rhetoric
15 and actions against marginalized communities. And as
16 we've seen in the case of the Freedom of Access to
17 Clinic Entrances Act being disproportionately applied
18 to inhibit free speech and freedom of the press in
19 Minneapolis, any legislation passed to protect an
20 institution needs to be looked at critically and how
21 it can be misused to provide cover for authoritarian
22 motives. In fact, existing frozen zones in New York
23 have actually facilitated the harassment of people
24 trying to access reproductive healthcare. These
25 proposals accelerate the escalating national

2 criminalization of dissent and would compound the
3 abuse of existing legislation, which on a national
4 scale is now being weaponized to prosecute protesters
5 and journalists. In 2021, ACLED released a study that
6 showed despite equal levels of peaceful protest
7 activity, demonstrations in states pursuing new
8 legislation restricting protest already face higher
9 levels of police intervention and force relative to
10 other states. The study also flagged concerns that
11 legislation might be aimed at suppressing racial
12 justice activism. There's already documented in
13 widespread use of excessive force and uneven
14 application of the law by law enforcement against
15 protesters, and it's a fair assumption that any new
16 legislation would not be applied evenly. I urge all
17 City Council Members to vote against these bills.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
19 testifying.

20 The next panel of speakers in Zoom,
21 Catherine Wolf, Shannon O'Neill Fonseca (phonetic),
22 Shira Kadem, Cindy Gorn, RNXXXX, and then Jean O.

23 Catherine, you may begin.

24 CATHERINE WOLF: Thank you. Catherine
25 Wolf. The KKK do not gather at the door of the First

2 Corinthian Baptist Church to scream kill blacks. If
3 they did, black New Yorkers would get a buffer zone.
4 No gangs yell Arabs out of Mecca at the door of the
5 Islamic Cultural Center. If they did, Muslim New
6 Yorkers would get a buffer zone. But as Jewish New
7 Yorkers try to reach the doors of our synagogues, we
8 must run the gauntlet of mobs screaming for our death
9 and destruction. Give us a buffer zone. This bill
10 makes officials more accountable if they don't. Jews
11 are not just a minority in this world, we are a micro
12 minority. That our safety and our dignity are up for
13 debate in New York City is disgusting. Only
14 hypocrites and bigots will vote no. But pro-
15 Palestinian rallies have another problem. They are
16 anti-Black. Mr. Simon Dang gave testimony today. Mr.
17 Dang is a living victim of the Arab slave trade.
18 There's been zero reckoning with the horrific
19 Palestinian Arab racist enslavement of Black
20 Africans. Justice now for Jews and also for Blacks
21 like Mr. Dang. Vote yes and go to abeed.org, [A-B-E-](http://A-B-E-D.org)
22 D.org. Thank you.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
24 testifying.

25 Shannon O'Neill Fonseca.

2 Shannon, you may begin.

3 Shannon.

4 SHANNON O'NEILL FONSECA: Good evening and
5 thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is
6 Shannon O'Neill Fonseca. I'm a Latino organizer with
7 the Healing Center Schools Working Group and the
8 Parent Action Committee. Council Member Menin, I live
9 in the Upper East Side in District 5, and I'm
10 speaking today as your constituent in opposition to
11 this legislation. As an education organizer, I work
12 alongside families navigating racial and
13 institutional harm every day. I stand firmly against
14 anti-Blackness, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia,
15 xenophobia, and all forms of bigotry. Student safety
16 is non-negotiable. However, safety cannot just mean
17 more enforcement. Real safety protects rights and
18 ensures that in responding to harm, we're not
19 actually causing more harm. We already have laws that
20 address harassment, violence, and intimidation.
21 Harmful conduct is already prosecutable. The question
22 is not whether hate should be taken seriously. It
23 absolutely should. The question is whether expanding
24 enforcement authority is the right response. I also
25 continue to hear that these bills are not intended to

2 cause harm, but intent does not determine impact.
3 Policies are experienced through enforcement. And
4 enforcement in this city has historically fallen
5 disproportionately on Black, Brown, and immigrant
6 communities. This is not my opinion. It's well-
7 documented in NYPD enforcement records. And this is a
8 reality that can't just be ignored. When discretion
9 expands, disparities expand. If safety is truly the
10 priority here, then we invest in our communities and
11 in our schools. We invest in healing-centered and
12 restorative practices. We invest in mental health
13 supports. And we invest in real community
14 accountability, not broader police authority. For
15 these reasons, I urge you to oppose this legislation.
16 Thank you for your time.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
18 testifying.

19 The next speaker, Shira Kadem. Shira.

20 SHIRA FELBERBAUM KADEM: Hello.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yes. You may begin.

22 SHIRA FELBERBAUM KADEM: Thank you. Thank
23 you. It's been a long evening. To all concerned
24 parties, my name is Shira Felberbaum Kadem, and I
25 want to thank you for inviting me with this brief

2 opportunity to address you all. I am first and
3 foremost a lifelong New Yorker. I was born and raised
4 on the Upper East Side. My parents, grandparents, and
5 great-grandparents were all born and raised in New
6 York City. I'm also a proud Jewish American and an
7 active member in a wide range of congregations and
8 other forms of New York City-based Jewish life. I'm
9 speaking here now to share my wholehearted support
10 for the proposed buffer bill, which seeks to ensure
11 the safety of people taking part in houses of worship
12 and schooling, irrespective of one's beliefs and
13 background. I'm speaking here now exclusively as an
14 individual and not in the capacity of any of the
15 specific organizations I'm affiliated with. However,
16 it's noteworthy that I previously worked for a number
17 of years as a synagogue consultant for six distinct
18 congregations in the three boroughs across multiple
19 denominations. I currently work as a licensed social
20 worker supporting those living with dementia and
21 their care partners, and in this capacity, I
22 routinely engage in Jewish outreach, which brings me
23 into multiple Jewish organizations to speak and
24 facilitate meaningful conversations. My connection to
25 the proposed legislation is deeply personal. Park

2 East Synagogue, the shul or congregation already
3 discussed multiple times this evening, is a synagogue
4 my husband, daughter, and I walk to, pray in, learn
5 by, and socialize at just about every Shabbat
6 throughout the year. Additionally, my daughter is a
7 student at a local Jewish day school. Presumably
8 those participating in this convening understand that
9 the U.S. government is predicated on the essential
10 nature of various checks and balances. The proposed
11 buffer legislation package seeks to address the
12 absence of a practical scaffolding that ensures the
13 safety and well-being of all religiously-minded New
14 Yorkers. The genesis of these bills seems to be
15 predicated largely on the threatening circumstances
16 that unfolded on the evening in question, okay? A
17 yet-to-be-highlighted aspect of that night at Park
18 East Synagogue is that the building happens to have
19 multiple entrances, one of which is literally
20 adjacent to a police precinct, yet the response from
21 the police..

22 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has expired.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
24 speaking.

25 SHIRA FELBERBAUM KADEM: Thank you.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Shira Kadem. Shira.

3 Oh, that was Shira, okay.

4 Cindy Gorn.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: You may begin.

7 CINDY GORN: Thank you, City Council, and
8 thank you to the participants. I'll be brief because
9 I'm trying to put the children to bed. It's surely
10 been a long day. I'm speaking here today as a parent
11 and as a healthcare provider, but I mostly wanted to
12 draw attention to a school in Gaza. Without Borders
13 School is a school that was established a year and a
14 half ago to serve primarily orphans of the genocide
15 in Gaza. The children there receive meals, they
16 receive speech therapy, they receive all types of
17 education, and they are receiving this education in
18 tents. They've been forced to close several times,
19 and this is all because of the genocidal violence
20 that's been occurring at the hands of the State of
21 Israel and the United States. I'm not here to debate
22 hate because hate is an emotion and a feeling. I'm
23 not interested in talking about hate with a Body that
24 was established in a country that is the epitome of
25 genocidal White supremacy itself. We are sitting here

2 on this land because of the actions of colonizers, so
3 it's no surprise that our City Council Members are
4 supporting genocide elsewhere. However, I do think
5 it's our duty to act as best that we can both in this
6 system and outside of it to protect our children, and
7 especially to protect people who are targeted by the
8 actual literal violence and death and murder that is
9 existent by the NYPD, the prison system, and by
10 overseas genocides occurring in several countries in
11 the world at the hands of the United States. When I
12 talk to my children, I don't talk to them about
13 hating other people. I talk to them about struggling
14 for those who deserve to live. I do not tell my
15 children, don't hate other people. I tell them, don't
16 harm other people. Lift people up who are in struggle
17 and always root for people who need protection.

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you for
20 testifying.

21 CINDY GORN: Thank you.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Jean O. Is Jean O.
23 online?

24 You are unmuted, Jean.

25

2 All right, I'll ask Jean to submit your
3 testimony online.

4 Right now, I would like to do a final
5 check of the room. Please raise your hand if you sign
6 up to speak and we missed you.

7 Anybody? No.

8 Okay, I'm going to ask one more time in
9 Zoom. Please raise your hand in Zoom if you sign up
10 to speak and we missed you.

11 All right. Being there are no other
12 speakers, this hearing is adjourned. [GAVEL] Thank
13 you all for coming. Get home safe. Thank you.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date March 6, 2026