



**Commission On  
Human Rights**

New York City Commission on Human Rights

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**Testimony of CCHR  
Before the Committee to Combat Hate  
February 25, 2026**

Good morning Speaker Menin, Chair Salaam, and Members of the Committee to Combat Hate.

It is my pleasure to join you today to testify regarding the discrimination protections in the City Human Rights Law, as well as Intro 388. I am JoAnn Kamuf Ward, Deputy Commissioner of Policy and External Affairs of the New York City Commission on Human Rights (“Commission” or “CCHR”). With me today for Q & A is Jose Rios Lua, the Commission’s Chief of Staff.

The Commission welcomes this opportunity to speak about the agency’s efforts to combat unlawful discrimination at work, in housing, and in places open to the public, when that discrimination is on the basis of the more than 25 protected categories in the City Human Rights Law.

For over 50 years, the Commission on Human Rights has been tasked with investigating and resolving complaints of discrimination, as well as engaging in public outreach to raise awareness and prevent violations of the City Human Rights Law.

**City Human Rights Law Protections Against Discrimination**

The Commission is mandated to investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate violations of the New York City Human Rights Law, which is a civil anti-discrimination law. Under the New York City Human Rights Law, it is illegal to discriminate against individuals based on their actual or perceived religion, race, gender, national origin, and sexual orientation, among many other protected categories.

The main areas of reported discrimination to the Commission are in housing, the workplace, and places open to the public (referred to as public accommodations in the Law). Accordingly, housing providers, employers, and business owners are legally obligated not to discriminate under the City Human Rights Law, and are a focus of CCHR’s public facing materials, training, and outreach.

**Reporting Discrimination to the Commission**

The agency’s Law Enforcement Bureau (LEB) is the part of the agency that intakes, evaluates, and investigates allegations of discrimination brought to the Commission by members of the public. Any individual can contact LEB via our live hotline (known as the Infoline), to report allegations of discrimination that are within our jurisdiction as determined by Law. Agency staff answer calls live during business hours, five days a week. The vast majority of claims come to us via calls to this line.

Year over year, the most commonly reported allegations of discrimination we receive relate to disability, gender, and race, as well as voucher discrimination in housing.

When a member of the public contacts CCHR, the LEB team assesses whether the allegations that are reported to the Commission may violate the Human Rights Law. If they do, then LEB staff can take a range of actions to either intervene proactively or to investigate to determine whether the case should be prosecuted. These actions may include sending cease and desist letters, requesting information on policies and practices, making document demands, and interviewing witnesses. Where a caller's allegation is within the jurisdiction of another city agency, or where individuals are seeking legal assistance, CCHR can refer callers to a range of resources.

If an allegation is determined to be within CCHR's jurisdiction and pre-complaint interventions or conciliation efforts were either not appropriate or not successful, LEB will investigate to determine if it is more likely than not that discrimination occurred, known as finding "probable cause." Thereafter, the Bureau may continue conciliation efforts and can take the case to an administrative trial. Case resolutions can include requiring Respondents to engage in training and other measures to ensure compliance with the City Human Rights Law in the future, including changes to policies and practices, as well as damages for individuals, and civil penalties. Virtually every settlement or order requires Respondents to take a training, which CCHR staff provide. These are interactive trainings, developed by CCHR, in close consultation with community groups, academic institutions, and other subject matter experts.

Because CCHR knows there is widespread underreporting of discrimination, the Commission is continually assessing how to build trust and bridge the gap between communities and government.

### **Commission Education and Outreach**

In addition to mandating trainings in Commission case resolutions, the agency also pro-actively offers trainings to businesses, organizations, and individuals, regardless of whether a complaint has been lodged against them. These include cultural competency trainings, as well as trainings that focus on the rights of New Yorkers and the obligations of business owners, housing providers, and employers.

One example of a cultural competency training is Understanding the Jewish Experience and Antisemitism, which promotes understanding of the City's diverse Jewish communities and elaborates on the City Human Rights Law's provisions that protect Jewish New Yorkers from discrimination. Additional cultural competency trainings, aimed at preventing discrimination and building trust among communities, include:

- Understanding Muslim Experiences and Combating Anti-Muslim Bias;
- Anti-Black Racism, Race, and Color Discrimination; and
- Protections Against Gender Identity and Gender Expression Discrimination.

In 2024, the Commission also launched a training on Protections Against National Origin, Citizenship and Immigration Status Discrimination.

CCHR's trainings are complemented by our outreach work, which is conducted with community and faith partners. The Commission's FY 25 annual report highlights partnerships across diverse New York neighborhoods that allowed us to engage with over 150,000 New Yorkers. I will mention just a few. The Commission has partnerships with Latino organizations, Caribbean community partners and Asian

American and Pacific Islander groups in Queens, as well as collaborations with African Diaspora organizations in the Bronx and Staten Island. CCHR also works directly with faith leaders to participate in engagements ranging from a Racial Reconciliation Roundtable to work with a Jewish-Evangelical Interfaith Group, as well as outreach to individuals at synagogues, mosques, and temples.

### **Citywide Efforts**

These initiatives and the work of the Commission are just one piece of the City's broader efforts to prevent and respond to bias and hate in New York City. Work to combat bias and hate is also core to the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes (OPHC), which was established in 2019. In FY 25, for the third consecutive year, the Commission partnered with OPHC to administer the Community Project Grants, wherein OPHC provides \$10,000 to grassroots efforts aimed at reducing bias. Past awardees include Hindus for Human Rights, T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, Wagner College Holocaust Center, Glow Community Center, and the African International Collaborative Center. The Commission is also part of the interagency taskforce to be led by the Mayor's Office to Combat Antisemitism, which includes OPHC and NYPD.

Turning to Intro 388, the Administration supports the intent of ensuring effective pathways for members of the public to report actionable hate and bias and to connect with resources to vindicate their rights. However, there is an existing city infrastructure to address bias and hate, and there are pathways for the public to report unlawful discrimination to CCHR and to report hate-based violence to the NYPD, as well as data reporting by agencies – which are all disaggregated in different ways. Accordingly, the Administration looks forward to learning more from stakeholders and to further dialogue with Council on how to most efficiently and effectively operationalize Council's objectives, consistent with Constitutional guardrails.

In closing, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the ways the Commission, and the Mamdani Administration, are working to prevent and respond to bias and hate in New York City.

The Commission will continue working to ensure that all New Yorkers receive the protections guaranteed to them under the City Human Rights Law regardless of religion, gender, race or national origin. We look forward to continuing this work in collaboration with sibling agencies, including the NYPD, the Mayor's Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes, the Mayor's Office to Combat Antisemitism, and with the Council.

We look forward to your questions.



Wednesday, February 25, 2026

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL GERBER  
NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT**

**BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL  
COMMITTEE TO COMBAT HATE**

**COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
FEBRUARY 25, 2026**

Good morning Speaker Menin, Chair Salaam, and members of the Council’s Committee to Combat Hate. My name is Michael Gerber and I am the Deputy Commissioner of Legal Matters for the NYPD. On behalf of Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

At the outset, I want to acknowledge the significance of the issues at hand. We are talking about the security of New Yorkers entering sacred spaces, and the protection of students walking into school. We are discussing protest activity and freedom of speech on the streets of our city. We are addressing hate crimes and the data that informs public discourse around those crimes. The stakes are incredibly high, and they go to the core obligations of the NYPD. Ensuring public safety, upholding constitutional principles, and solving crimes are all at the heart of our mission. With that, I want to address several of the bills before the Committee:

**Intro. 1** would require the NYPD to issue a plan for the use of buffer zones at the entrances and exits of places of worship. The NYPD had significant concerns with the initial language of the bill, which we raised in discussions with the Council. Revised language in Intro. 1-A is a product of those discussions, and we greatly appreciate that dialogue and collaboration. The result is a bill that is consistent with the NYPD’s ability to protect people entering and leaving places of worship as well as our commitment to facilitating First Amendment activity. We have no objections to Intro. 1-A.

When there is a protest outside a place of worship, the NYPD has two crucial responsibilities. First, we must protect individuals attending that place of worship—exercising their First Amendment rights to the free exercise of religion and freedom of association—so that they can gather safely, without danger, without obstruction, and without interference. That is true when they are approaching and entering the location, when they are inside, and when they are leaving. Individuals who impede access to a place of worship, or interfere with religious services, or otherwise commit crimes against individuals coming and going from a place of worship are subject to arrest.

Second, the NYPD must protect the First Amendment rights of protesters. This does not mean that protesters can go wherever they want, whenever they want. Under the law, there can be reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions on a protest, though the restrictions cannot depend on the protesters’ message, and the restrictions cannot limit substantially more speech than necessary. Critically, any such restrictions must allow for ample alternative channels of communication for the protesters to convey their message to their intended audience. This means that protesters have a right to “sight and sound”—that is, to be seen and heard by those that they are protesting against.

These two core principles are not in tension. If individuals choose to protest against those entering a place of worship, the NYPD will ensure that they have sight and sound to the entrance of that location, consistent with the First Amendment. At the same time, the protesters will not be permitted to obstruct, impede, or interfere. I want to acknowledge that in this framework, people attending a place of worship may hear vicious speech, directed at the very core of their identity. They may see signs or banners that are brimming with hate. It goes without saying that this can be gut-wrenching, infuriating, and deeply disturbing, particularly when this is happening outside a community's spiritual home. Nothing that I say should be taken to in any way minimize that pain. But the First Amendment protects the rights of protesters even when their speech is hateful, and the NYPD is obligated to ensure the rights of protesters without regard to the content of protected speech.

When there is a protest outside a place of worship, the NYPD implements these two principles in a number of ways. We create frozen zones, also known as buffer zones, as necessary outside entrances and exits to a place of worship where no one can enter except those going into or out of the location. The frozen zone needs to incorporate clear pathways in and out, so that those approaching or leaving the building are not obstructed. At the same time, we set up a space for protesters within sight and sound of the location.

In these situations, the determinations that need to be made by the NYPD are extremely context specific. NYPD executives draw on their experience and expertise and use their discretion, consistent with the law, to determine the size and contours of a frozen zone, the space designated for sight and sound, and more broadly how we can effectively secure space around a place of worship without abridging the exercise of protesters' constitutional rights. These determinations depend on numerous factors, including the physical configuration of the place of worship; the physical layout of the surrounding space; other sensitive locations in close proximity to the place of worship; the anticipated volume of individuals coming in and out of the location; the time of day; the size of the protest; whether protesters are stationary or marching; whether there are counter-protesters; what other events may be occurring nearby, and how that may affect pedestrian or vehicular traffic; and whether there are any specific and credible threats against that place of worship. The list of relevant considerations goes on and on. These operational decisions cannot be reduced to strict, bright-line rules. To do this right, the NYPD needs to be able to make decisions based on the facts on the ground. This practical reality aligns with the law: the legal touchstone here is reasonableness, and what is reasonable turns on the particular circumstances at hand.

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

**Intro. 175** is effectively identical to Intro. 1, except that it applies to schools, rather than places of worship. The ability to enter and exit schools safely, without harm or interference, is non-negotiable.

We also must allow protesters to exercise their First Amendment rights outside of schools. The NYPD exercises its discretion, consistent with the law, to accomplish both of these objectives. We raised concerns with the Council regarding the language of Intro. 175, and there is new language in Intro. 175-A that addresses most of those concerns. Again, we appreciate the Council's partnership in crafting this legislation. One outstanding issue is the scope of Intro. 175-A. As drafted, the bill would apply to police activity on both public property and private property, which raises concerns. These are distinct issues, both legally and operationally, and we look forward to addressing that distinction in discussions with the Council.

**Intro. 165** would require the NYPD to report quarterly and annually regarding the prosecutorial outcomes, bail determinations, and ultimate court dispositions in every case in which someone has been arrested or indicted for a hate crime. The NYPD supports transparency regarding the disposition of cases following hate crime arrests, but this is not data that the NYPD maintains. While we document individual case outcomes, the aggregate data that this bill seeks is maintained by prosecutors' offices and by the Office of Court Administration. The Council should not direct the NYPD to report data that it does not have. We would also note that the NYPD already discloses a wide array of information regarding hate crimes cases. The NYPD reports aggregate data regarding hate-crime complaints and hate-crime arrests; the race, sex, and age of individuals arrested for hate crimes; and the types of animus that motivated those hate crimes. This data is reported quarterly and annually, both in total and disaggregated by precinct. All this information is available to the public on NYC Open Data and the NYPD's website.

**Intro. 297** would require an agency or office designated by the mayor, in consultation with the NYPD and OEM, to provide religious institutions with support in establishing and maintaining security plans. The NYPD already makes this support available and will continue to do so. We would welcome the opportunity to speak with the Council about the resources that the NYPD provides and how they can be enhanced. At the same time, we strongly object to requiring another city agency, whether OEM or otherwise, to provide guidance on these issues. The NYPD has the appropriate expertise and experience in these matters; other city agencies do not. Having a city agency offer guidance on security plans that may conflict with the guidance from the NYPD is a recipe for confusion. It will not enhance security, and risks undermining security. The NYPD is opposed to the bill as drafted.

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

# CATHOLIC COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL

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191 Joralemon Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201

**Testimony of Joseph Rosenberg, Executive Director  
Catholic Community Relations Council  
New York City Council Committee on Combat Hate  
Security Perimeters at Houses of Worship  
February 25, 2026**

Good morning, Chair Salaam, and members of the Committee on Combat Hate. I am Joseph Rosenberg, Director of the Catholic Community Relations Council representing the Archdiocese of New York and the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens.

We thank the Committee for holding this hearing on such an important and timely matter. At a time when hate crimes against religions are on the rise, and incidents against synagogues, mosques, churches, and their schools are increasing, our City must stand together, united against such abhorrent acts.

Such solidarity includes supporting legislation allowing the NYPD to create a buffer zone outside of houses of worship to ensure the safety of people entering from being threatened, harassed, and intimidated. A similar bill establishing a buffer zone for educational facilities is also supported. Students, teachers, and faculty of public and nonpublic schools must not be placed in a situation of being afraid to enter these buildings. Parents need to be assured that schools in our City will be safe for their children, and a place for learning, not a place for fear.

Houses of worship and both public and nonpublic schools are often considered “soft targets” vulnerable to violent demonstrations, threats and tragically, often attacks. Violent incidents against them continue to grow across our entire country.

In New York City, both the Archdiocese of NY and the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens, like many other religious organizations, have seen the rise of crimes against houses of worship. These include acts of vandalism, destruction of religious statues, and the disruption of religious services. We stand with all other faiths in declaring and reiterating that an attack on one religion is an attack on all religions, and frankly, is an attack on all New Yorkers.

The bills on today’s Committee agenda create pathways to protect our institutions to hopefully ensure that people should not fear entering houses of worship or enrolling their children in our City’s public and nonpublic schools.

Like all other faith-based organizations, we are fortunate in having the NYPD as a strong partner. They have been responsive and proactive in confronting these challenges. We are pleased they are given the flexibility to establish policies and practices consistent with the legislative intent of these measures.

Three bills, in particular that are strongly supported are:

1. Int.1 and Int.175, which charge the NYPD to create a plan establishing buffer zones at entrances and exits of houses of worship and educational facilities, including nonpublic schools, and,

2. Int. 327, which allows nonpublic schools to be reimbursed by New York City for the cost of installing and operating video cameras to record all activities within 15 feet of the entrance and exit of each school. It is modeled after the successful and widely used City Council initiative that allows nonpublic schools with 150 or more students to be reimbursed by New York City for the cost of hiring security guards from security companies vetted by the City. Int. 327 would provide protection for the students, teachers and faculties of these institutions while assisting the NYPD in determining who may be attempting to illegally enter the school to disrupt classes or even worse, harm those within.

We thank Speaker Menin and the City Council for recognizing the threat against religious institutions and all schools throughout our City, and for introducing, and hopefully, soon passing these important bills.

Thank you.

February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Central Synagogue  
123 E 55<sup>th</sup> St  
New York, NY 10022

To New York City Councilmembers,

I will soon mark my 10th anniversary as Executive Director of Central Synagogue. When I arrived in 2016, I was surprised to learn that Central had armed guards. Today, we have twice as many guards, metal detectors, bomb-sniffing dogs, protective barriers in front of our beautiful, landmarked Sanctuary, and much more. We have to; synagogues around our country have seen violent attacks, arson, vandalism, and threats.

The rise in antisemitism across America and in our City is deeply alarming. So too is the rise in hate crimes against all minority communities with more than half of them anti-Jewish hate crimes, although Jews make up a far smaller percentage of our City’s population.

I am here in my role as a Jewish professional to share what keeps me up at night: it is the safety of my community.

Central Synagogue is a large and diverse congregation. Thousands of people — toddlers and teenagers, parents and grandparents — walk through our doors each week. They deserve to enter a synagogue where they feel safe. Where they can pray, mourn, celebrate, and gather without fear or interference. Where every person is welcomed with dignity.

And yet, we have received threats. We have been targeted. We conduct regular active-shooter drills. We place emergency instructions in our pews explaining what to do should the unthinkable occur. This is not how sacred space is meant to feel.

We are grateful that the City Council recognizes its responsibility to ensure that Jews and all people of faith can gather to worship in peace, safely and without intimidation.

Our community will continue to lead with openness, strength, and resilience. But we cannot do it alone.

Marcia Caban  
Executive Director

**From:** [Lisa Katz](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Comments on Bill Package in Committee to Combat Hate 2/25/26  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 6:28:43 PM

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## **Comments in Support of Int. 0001, 0022, 0165, 0175, 0297, 0327, and 0388**

Good evening, Speaker Menin, Chair Salaam, and City Councilmembers,

My name is Lisa Katz. I am the Chief Government Affairs Officer of the Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM), and I'm also a former elected councilwoman and town supervisor with a decade of public service. I appreciate the opportunity to submit these remarks in support of the Council's work.

Through CAM, I work with mayors, councilmembers, law enforcement, and community partners across North America on practical public-safety and policy tools to address antisemitism and hate. From that work, I can say clearly: cities that confront hate most effectively do not rely on rhetoric alone. They build coordinated systems that prevent harm, support safe access to civic life, improve preparedness, and deliver transparency and accountability when incidents occur. That is why CAM strongly supports this package of bills, and why we are encouraged to see New York City advancing measures that other cities have pursued in similar form to strengthen prevention and response.

Antisemitism in New York City is a public safety issue, a civil rights issue, and a test of whether government will act before harm escalates. Of course, people have a right to protest and express their views, even views we find offensive, ignorant, or misguided. That is the strength of our democracy. But no one should have to weigh their physical safety against learning or worshipping. No parent should have to hesitate at a school door. No elder should have to brace themselves before walking into a house of worship. And when Jewish New Yorkers must calculate risk just to pray, bring a child to school, or report an incident, that is not only a Jewish problem. It is a public safety failure for all New Yorkers.

No community should have to normalize fear, rising security costs, and constant vigilance around places that should be safe and sacred. And when government does not respond with clarity and seriousness, the harm extends beyond one community: trust erodes, extremists are emboldened, and the shared sense of belonging that cities depend on is weakened.

This is not abstract. In January 2026, the NYPD reported that anti-Jewish hate crimes increased 182% year over year and accounted for the majority of all hate crime incidents that month. This is precisely the kind of moment that calls for serious governance with measures that strengthen prevention and readiness, improve reporting and transparency, and ensure that communities can access help and accountability when hate occurs.

That is why these bills matter. They are not symbolic. They address how antisemitism, and all forms of hate, actually show up: at houses of worship, in schools, online, and in the gaps that still exist in reporting, emergency planning, coordination, and follow-through. Taken together, this package combines prevention, preparedness, transparency, and accountability, which are exactly what serious municipal governance requires.

Importantly, while these measures are urgently needed in response to rising antisemitism, they will also strengthen the City's response to hate in all its forms. Stronger systems to prevent and respond to antisemitism also protect New Yorkers targeted because of race, religion, ethnicity, identity, or any other protected characteristic. A city that builds stronger infrastructure to protect one community builds stronger infrastructure to protect all communities.

I also want to address a concern raised by some critics: that these measures infringe free speech. They do not. They do not silence anyone or prevent lawful assembly. They protect safe access, reduce the risk of intimidation, and strengthen preparedness. The Constitution permits content-neutral time, place, and manner restrictions that serve significant public-safety interests, are narrowly tailored, and leave open alternative channels for expression. Properly drafted and enforced, these measures regulate where intimidation can occur, and not what people may believe or say.

With that in mind, I respectfully request a specific improvement to the revised perimeter legislation in Intro 1A and 175A. While I strongly support the package overall, I disagree with the changes made allowing buffer-zone protections to be left to NYPD determination on an ad hoc basis. In First Amendment contexts, clear, objective rules are legally stronger and fairer than standardless discretion. This Council should set a neutral, consistent baseline that protects safe access while preserving lawful expression. Leaving protections to ad hoc determinations risks inconsistency and undermines the clarity communities need to feel protected.

I urge the Council to restore the specific requirement for a minimum 100-foot buffer zone in the relevant perimeter provisions. A 100-foot buffer does not ban speech or target any viewpoint. It sets a reasonable boundary to help ensure that people can enter and leave houses of worship and schools safely, practice their faith and learn without intimidation, and gather in peace. Put simply: no New Yorker should have to run a gauntlet to pray.

And we should be clear: people entering houses of worship have First Amendment rights to the free exercise of religion. Too often, public debate focuses only on speech and skips over the right to worship. The First Amendment protects both. A buffer zone around houses of worship protects all faiths helping ensure that every New Yorker can practice their faith free from harassment, intimidation, and bullying.

This public-safety principle is reflected in *Burson v. Freeman*, where the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a 100-foot buffer around polling places to prevent intimidation and protect safe access. Polling places are a different legal context, but the core principle is directly relevant here: government may adopt narrowly tailored, location-based protections to prevent intimidation and ensure safe access to sensitive civic spaces. New York City should not wait for a confrontation or tragedy to prove the value of a clear perimeter.

For all of these reasons, I respectfully urge you to advance and adopt this entire package of bills, and to restore the 100-foot buffer zone protection in the perimeter legislation.

Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to submit these remarks.

Lisa Katz



**Lisa Katz**

Chief Government Affairs Officer  
Combat Antisemitism Movement

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**From:** [Kaliris Salas-Ramirez](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Written testimony on the hearing for the Committee to Combat Hate  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 7:19:12 PM  
**Attachments:** [img-df1c254f-61c5-4d63-83d1-68648d02c833](#)

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2/25/2026

Dear Members of the New York City Council Committee to Combat Hate,

I am a public school parent in East Harlem and serve as President of Community Education Council District 4, I am writing in my personal capacity. I am also a medical educator at Rutgers School of Medicine, former professor at CUNY and Yeshiva University and longtime advocate for students and families across our city. I also consider myself an equity practitioner spending years addressing all forms of hate that our most vulnerable communities are exposed to, facilitating conversations and writing policy to address racial and socialjustice.

I am writing to submit testimony in strong opposition to the proposed package of “anti-antisemitism” bills being heard on February 25, specifically **Intro 0001**, sponsored by Julie Menin, and **Intro 0175**, sponsored by Eric Dinowitz.

Speaker Menin and Chair Dinowitz, I am sure, are trying to address deep concerns expressed to them by their constituents and those in their community. Let me be clear: **antisemitism is real**, harmful, and must be confronted unequivocally. Jewish students and families deserve safety, dignity, and belonging in our schools and communities. We should be united in combating hate in all its forms. I have been privileged to serve Jewish students as a professor and in my capacity as a parent leader, building their knowledge but also their protections and rights.

However, I am in strong opposition to these bills as they do not advance safety in a way that strengthens democracy. Instead, they risk undermining constitutional protections, chilling lawful protest, and further criminalizing Black and brown youth and families.

Intro 0001 would create “buffer zones” around religious institutions, and Intro 0175 would extend similar zones around educational facilities which likely include daycares, K–12 schools, and university buildings. These zones would restrict expressive activity in large swaths of our city. Decisions about the placement, size, and enforcement of these zones would rely heavily on NYPD discretion.

This is deeply concerning, and scary, as a Puerto Rican woman with Black children that have often exercised their right to protest. Also, as a faculty member, whose students have often been faced with injustices and have used their voices to fight for their communities. I am taken back to the struggles of the Young Lords, Black Panthers, the student protestors in 1969 (the 5 demands) and other activists in our communities whose protests and actions have led to the development of the Patients’ Bill of Rights, support for the SEEK program at CUNY and the Aspira Consent Decree supporting bilingual education in our schools. These protests were done in hospitals and at schools. Today, we benefit from all of these.

In that same vein, New York City is a place where students learn civic engagement by participating in it. Our young people organize around issues that affect them: racial justice, climate change, immigrant rights, gender equity, and international human rights. Schools and houses of worship have long been sites of peaceful protest and moral witness. Creating broad buffer zones risks criminalizing speech simply because it is uncomfortable or politically contested is violating the rights of our communities.

We know from lived experience that discretionary enforcement disproportionately impacts marginalized and historically excluded communities. Increased police involvement around schools and community spaces too often results in over-policing of our youth rather than genuine harm prevention. Policies framed as safety measures frequently translate into summonses, arrests, and records that follow young people for years. Some of these have even resulted in the hospitalization or death of our young people.

We must ask: Who will be stopped? Who will be questioned? Whose protest will be labeled disruptive or threatening? As a mother and educator, I certainly asked myself these questions when thinking about these bills.

In order to combat antisemitism and all forms of hate, we should invest in:

- Restorative and transformative justice practices in schools
- Anti-bias education that includes Jewish history and the histories of other marginalized communities
- Mental health supports and community-based safety models centered on healing and care with dignity
- Clear, transparent reporting and accountability processes for hate incidents

Expanding criminal enforcement is not the same as building safety, for anyone.

As a parent and education leader, I want Jewish children to feel safe at all times, especially in our schools. I also want Palestinian, Black, Muslim, Latine, and immigrant students to feel the same. I want them all to know that their voices matter and that peaceful protest is not a crime. These values are not in conflict; they are all true. They are also the foundation of a democratic society.

I urge the Council to reject Intro 0001 and Intro 0175 in their current form.

We must not respond to hate with policies that erode civil liberties, deepen inequities nor put people at risk of further harm.

Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "K. Salas-Ramirez".

Dr. Kaliris Salas-Ramirez

Kaliris Y. Salas-Ramirez, PhD  
Associate Professor  
Rutgers University – Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

President, Community Education Council D4  
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[www.cecd4.org](http://www.cecd4.org)

Steering Committee  
New Yorkers for Racially Just Public Schools  
[www.rjps.org](http://www.rjps.org)



**The New York City Council**  
**Committee to Combat Hate**  
**Honorable Yusef Salaam, Chair**  
**Testimony of the Dignity in Schools Campaign - NY**

Good afternoon, and thank you, Chair Salaam and members of the New York City Council Committee to Combat Hate. I am the Director of the Dignity in Schools Campaign of NY (DSC-NY), a coalition of over 25 New York City organizations that work to create safe and supportive learning environments in NYC Public Schools. We encourage students, parents, educators, and organizers to engage civically, advocate, and protest for school-based restorative justice, mental health access, and immigrant protections, while working to eliminate police, surveillance, and punitive discipline in schools.

The slate of bills being debated today in the name of safety would essentially **prevent protests and demonstrations from taking place and increase police presence and surveillance**. Our schools and other public systems are most effective when communities have agency and the training, resources, and protected rights to speak and assemble to help shape the systems that serve them. Therefore, we urge you to oppose all proposals to create protest-free buffer zones around healthcare centers, places of worship, and educational facilities, stop targeting all protected free-speech activities, and do not waste public funding on private school camera surveillance systems.

At a moment when we are seeing alarming instances of law enforcement overreach, growing facism, and hostility towards protesters, it is deeply troubling that New York lawmakers would move to expand police presence in our public spaces and hamper free speech and assembly rights. Such actions risk intensifying an already troubling atmosphere of suppression and further curtail students' and workers' civil liberties.

Suppressing free speech does not make people safe. The buffer zone proposals are unconstitutional, and criminalize speech, ultimately increasing the number and intensity of encounters between civilians and overzealous law enforcement, a result that will disproportionately endanger not only certain viewpoints but also communities that are already over-policed.

Because places of worship and educational facilities are everywhere, these bills would make most of the city off-limits to all protests. The bills could prohibit and criminalize countless demonstrations, even if a protest is merely passing by. The legislation would become another tool for surveillance, mass arrests, and selective enforcement, especially against communities of color and the movements challenging entrenched power. There is already widespread use of excessive force by the NYPD against protesters, particularly by its violent Strategic Response Group.



Policing and surveillance in and around schools is harmful for all students. We cannot waste \$35M to give to private schools for the cost of video surveillance cameras, especially when the city is proposing cutting restorative justice and mental health services in public schools due to budget gaps. Additionally, security perimeters around schools would increase police presence and policing of Black and Brown students, creating a hostile environment on campus.

NYPD school cops are able to contribute names to a secret list of people it deems gang members called the Criminal Group Database (the “Gang Database”), with little or no evidence. This database is racially discriminatory, with over 99% of people in the database being Black and/or Latinx. Youth as young as 13 years old have been added by school cops for things like doodling. A person does not need to have committed a crime to be included in the database. **In a time when Trump and other political leaders are prioritizing youth criminalization, deportation and detention of “gang members” with no justifiable evidence and expediting deportations, we cannot let more NYPD officers contribute to the ongoing surveillance and criminalization of our young people.**

It would be a grave mistake for the council to react to peaceful protests, including the youth and community groups protesting for Palestinian human rights, by imposing buffer zones that would restrict free speech directly and indirectly. As a network that works for dignity, liberation, and freedom from state violence for all of our communities, DSC-NY stood with students who walked out and denounced the escalating genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, because youth know that there can be no dignity in schools under the specter of deadly state violence and genocide. We were heartened by the growing calls for Palestinian freedom around the world, many of which are led by youth. **We cannot silence young people’s calls to end genocide, to protect their communities, or to ensure the safety and freedom of all youth across the globe.**

Our community wants safety, but not at the expense of our rights and freedoms. If our elected leaders are truly concerned about our safety, they would make a concerted effort to push the federal government to reinstate a “sensitive locations” policy and establish real sanctuary zones where ICE and police cannot terrorize our communities, including in schools, courthouses, hospitals, parks, religious institutions, ceremonies AND demonstrations.

Real safety comes from communities that are civically engaged and have the agency to publicly demand freedom and justice. That type of agency stems from the rights institutionalized in our constitution to speak and assemble.

We need safety and our rights. Anti-protest buffer zones are antithetical to those ends. Therefore, we demand:

- No anti-protest buffer zones around healthcare facilities, places of worship, or educational facilities
- Stop targeting all protected free-speech activities
- No public funding should be wasted on private school camera surveillance systems



Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Andrea Ortiz, Director of Dignity in Schools Campaign - NY.

Submitted by:  
Andrea Ortiz  
Director  
Dignity in Schools Campaign - NY





# JEWES FOR RACIAL & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

**Subject of Testimony:**Intro 0001/ 0175 - Against

Speaker Menin, Chairperson Salaam and Council Members,

My name is Irene Siegel and I'm here with Jews For Racial & Economic Justice. I am also a JVP member, an Arabic Studies professor at CUNY, and teach in after school Jewish education programs for kids. I'm here to voice my strong opposition to the perimeter bills. As a Jewish New Yorker, I care deeply about Jewish safety. With JFREJ, I have co-facilitated trainings against antisemitism as well as Upstander trainings and community safety canvasses to help New Yorkers develop the skills and understanding of what it takes to keep each other safe. I'm also on the [Community Safety Campaign](#) team, with whom I co-developed and wrote our recently released [Bringing Safety Through Solidarity to Life: An Abolitionist Guide to Jewish Community Safety](#); and co-facilitate training to build strong safety infrastructure for Jews and our neighbors. This is because we know that our safety as Jews is inextricable from the safety of the larger Muslim, BIPOC, trans and immigrant communities we're a part of – including the BIPOC, trans and immigrant Jews in our own community– all of whom are the most likely to be racially-profiled and targeted with deadly violence by police. We work toward these solutions because the data clearly shows that giving more latitude and control to police– as your bill would do– does *not* make us safer. (For instance, [unarmed black people are currently more than 3 times more likely to be killed by police than unarmed white people](#).) It is disingenuous to frame these perimeter bills as “police accountability” protocols when their goal is clearly to expand police control of protests and protesters – and most particularly those for Palestinian rights. By its further entrenchment of [the Palestine Exception to free speech](#), and generalized expansion of police authority to target protesters, this legislation will make Jews and all New Yorkers less safe.

As an organizer and a CUNY educator, I have repeatedly witnessed the police brutalizing or intimidating principled and courageous student protestors – most of whom are BIPOC or Muslim – as they protest the genocide in Gaza. Many of these same demonstrators have stood side by side with Jewish New Yorkers just like me to peacefully protest the illegal sale of stolen Palestinian land at fully secular promotional events being held at synagogues. As you've stated yourself, it is protests such as these – against accelerated Palestinian displacement and ethnic cleansing – that are the target of your legislation. Moreover, [dozens of CUNY faculty and staff – including myself -- have been targeted with doxxing](#) or even [fired for expressing support for Palestinians](#). People speaking their conscience against atrocities should not be subjected to the intensified police surveillance and control these bills would authorize. What's worse, these bills further weaponize Jewish identity to justify the expanded policing of political expression.

As the Trump administration wages outright war on our cities and educational institutions with everything from violent masked gestapo to FBI investigations and lawfare, the last thing we need right now is to direct more resources and authority to the police, amplifying the same failed strategies that will continue to make us less safe while undermining our rights. What we need is more resources for

initiatives that meaningfully build safety infrastructure from within and across communities – such as Upstander, antiracism and restorative justice trainings. Most importantly, the data clearly shows that community safety comes not from policing but from strengthening communities through jobs, housing and healthcare. Please oppose these bills and instead feed initiatives and policies that keep Jews and all New Yorkers safe. Thank you.



Good afternoon.

Council Member Salaam, Speaker Menin, Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify.

My name is Jilian Cahan Gersten, and I am the Chief Development Officer at the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust.

The Museum wholeheartedly endorses City Council's efforts to address heightened hate crime and violence; combat antisemitism, racism and xenophobia; and strengthen our communities' safety. Thus, we want to express our support to the Council Speaker Julie Menin's five-point action plan as it speaks deeply to our shared values and goals.

Since 1997, the Museum of Jewish Heritage, the third largest Holocaust Museum in the world, has served as a vital educational and civic resource, welcoming visitors from across the five boroughs and beyond. Our mission is to educate diverse audiences about Jewish life before, during, and after the Holocaust, while confronting the enduring dangers of unchecked antisemitism and other forms of hate. At a time when xenophobia is on the rise, our work is not only historically important but deeply relevant to the current moment in our city.

According to the NYPD, antisemitic incidents accounted for 57% of reported hate crimes in 2025, although only approximately 10% of New York City residents are Jewish. Jewish New Yorkers were the targets of hate crimes more than all other groups combined. As a Jewish cultural space, we want everyone to feel safe and welcomed when pursuing the goal of educating themselves about Holocaust history and its vital lessons in our museum.

The City's new investment in Holocaust education and legislation to address discriminatory misinformation is a timely, relevant, and proven-to-work method. Young people encounter growing amounts of antisemitic content and Holocaust denial online, contributing to a widening knowledge gap. Holocaust education is mandatory for every eighth and tenth grader in New York public schools, yet teachers often receive no guidance on what topics to cover or counter misinformation. Therefore, we serve an essential role in the city's educational ecosystem by providing free tours, programs, and professional development opportunities. In our work for many decades, we encountered that age-appropriate Holocaust education builds empathy and critical thinking that lead to allyship.

We thank the members of this committee and the entire New York City Council for your leadership and continued support of Holocaust education. Your commitment to the fight against hatred and intolerance ensures that New York City remains a place where history is remembered; lessons are learned, and all New Yorkers feel safe.

# **NDS**

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# **HARLEM**

**TESTIMONY OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD DEFENDER SERVICE OF HARLEM**

**before the**

**Committee to Combat Hate**

**IN RELATION TO**

**Ints. 1-A-2026 and 175-A-2026**

Dear Speaker Menin and Chair Salaam:

The Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem (NDS) submits this written testimony in opposition to Ints. 1-A-2026 and 175-A-2026. NDS is a holistic, community-based public defender office that provides high-quality legal services to residents of Northern Manhattan. Each year, our attorneys represent nearly 8,000 clients in New York County's criminal, housing, and family court systems, and in federal immigration courts. Our social workers and advocates support clients by providing referrals to services, connections to benefits, and support throughout their legal cases. More recently, we have represented thousands of protestors, the majority of whom are students arrested on college campuses and issued summonses or charged in criminal court. Our work in these cases reflects the full scope of our holistic model. We do not limit our representation to the criminal proceeding; we also defend and support students facing related immigration consequences, housing instability, and school disciplinary action. Through this work, we have seen firsthand how increased police presence escalates—not resolves—conflict. The expanded policing this bill would undoubtedly create would chill constitutionally protected protest activity and expose our clients to devastating collateral consequences, including ICE detention and deportation. It would also destabilize the very communities it purports to protect.

In most instances, the minor offenses students are charged with are dismissed as legally insufficient at their first court appearance. But the damage begins the moment they are arrested. Even when cases are immediately dismissed, students endure devastating collateral consequences simply for participating in a protest.

That harm starts in custody. Our clients are held in NYPD precincts and Criminal Court holding areas for up to 24 hours. They miss class and work. They are denied access to medication and often cannot communicate with loved ones or counsel. They are confined in

degrading conditions: using communal toilets without privacy, unable to bathe, and dependent on law enforcement for food and water.

The consequences do not end upon release. Students almost uniformly face disciplinary proceedings at their schools, often without effective access to counsel. Reports that universities are providing disciplinary records to the federal government raise serious concerns that arrests and campus discipline will be used to fuel aggressive immigration enforcement targeting students. For many, years of investment in higher education are jeopardized based on charges that ultimately prove baseless. Some students are suspended. Some lose campus housing. A few we have represented have been rendered homeless. And for those whose cases are not dismissed immediately, proceedings can drag on for months or years, compounding the harm.

Most alarming are the immigration consequences. A number of our clients have faced severe immigration enforcement directly tied to their arrest for protected protest activity. ICE has relied on the mere issuance of a non-criminal summons - not a conviction, not even an open criminal case - to detain and initiate removal proceedings against at least one NDS client. Those proceedings continued even after the summons was dismissed. Increased policing of protected speech does not simply risk criminal penalties; it exposes noncitizens to detention and deportation.

These bills will increase the likelihood that New Yorkers who are not citizens are not only criminalized but removed from the country because of their protest activity, directly contradicting this City's stated commitment to protecting immigrant communities.

Finally, the pattern of arrests demonstrates that enforcement is not content neutral. Students protesting the loss of Palestinian lives have been disproportionately targeted. These

protests are lawful and protected by the First Amendment. Yet across thousands of arrests, we have seen lawful protest repeatedly criminalized. Mandating NYPD-controlled buffer zones on campuses through Int. 175-2026 will deepen that pattern, chilling speech today and threatening viewpoints that may become unpopular tomorrow.

These bills would predictably increase arrests by authorizing police-controlled “buffer zones” around protest activity. While they do not create new criminal offenses on their face, they expand the circumstances under which individuals may be stopped, cited, or arrested. By directing the NYPD to design and implement these zones, the Council would be placing unwarranted confidence in the agency’s ability to lawfully and safely manage protests, despite its recent record. The NYPD's handling of protest activity is already subject to the 2023 settlement in *Payne v. de Blasio et al*, which was designed to reduce police presence at protests.<sup>1</sup> The *Payne* settlement requires the NYPD to abide by specific protocols to reduce violence and safeguard New Yorkers’ First Amendment rights. The proposed “buffer zones” interfere with the NYPD’s obligations under that settlement, and undermine the essential reforms that the City pledged to enact.

Even though motivated by safety concerns, these bills risk violating New Yorkers’ First Amendment rights and causing devastating real-world harm. We strongly urge the Council to reject them.

# Parents Supporting Parent NY



PARENTS  
SUPPORTING  
PARENTS  
NEW YORK

212-928-7612  
tansha@pspnyinc.org

February 25, 2026

## Testimony for Committee to Combat Hate

### We object these bills

#### Legislation

- "Require police to submit a plan to establish security perimeters at places of religious worship." (Menin – Int 0001-2026)
- "Require police to submit a plan to establish security perimeters at educational facilities." (Dinowitz and Ariola – Int 0175-2026)
- "Build upon an existing security guard reimbursement program for nonpublic schools." (Narcisse – Int 0327-2026)
- "Establish a hotline for receiving reports from the public regarding incidents motivated by antisemitic, anti-Asian, and gender-based hate or bias." (Restler – Int 0388-2026)
- "Require the Department of Education (DOE) to distribute age-appropriate materials to middle and high school students regarding the risks and dangers associated with social media for youth." (Abreu and Lee – Int 0022-2026)

Dear Committee to Combat Hate,

To the esteemed Chair and Committee members,

I am Tanesha Grant, the Executive Director of Parents Supporting Parents NY. I address you today in my professional capacity, as well as a Black woman, mother, and grandmother. I would first like to commend your efforts to combat hate. However, your "[Five-Point Action Plan to Combat Antisemitism and Strengthen Community Safety](#)" appears to be narrowly focused on a single demographic within our diverse communities. As a Black woman descended from enslaved African people, I must highlight that these five proposed bills fail to address the protection that Black people deserve and have historically been denied in this nation and this city.

Our Black community has been subjected to anti-Black hate and anti-Blackness for over 400 years. This systemic issue has been consistently dismissed or treated as illegitimate. Yet, across this country, documented video evidence exists of numerous attacks targeting Black children, women, and men. Having been removed from my Black family at birth, I experienced early on the profound nature of anti-Black prejudice simply for being born Black. It is an affront to our ongoing trauma that council members would draft legislation that could potentially further marginalize our voices under the guise of combating antisemitism. Such an approach suggests a tiered system of protection where only certain groups are prioritized.

In this, the 100th anniversary of Black History Month in the year 2026, Black individuals continue to strive for equity and equal protection under the law. A recent example is the February CEC 3 meeting, which illustrated the presence of anti-Blackness and the lack of immediate, meaningful action to address it. We were compelled to advocate strenuously simply to bring attention to this incident, despite its involvement of Black children.

These proposed bills also risk limiting our right to peacefully protest near schools, even in the face of clear instances of anti-Blackness within public school environments. Council Member Ressler's bill, in particular, lacks sensitivity as it omits any mention of protections against anti-Blackness. We can no longer compromise the safety of our children while advocating for others. It is unconscionable that anti-Blackness is not explicitly named and addressed in every community. I have personally experienced being subjected to racial slurs by members of various communities, and when we speak out, our concerns are often dismissed through gaslighting.

Council members are advancing legislation without seeking input from Black communities, proposing increased police presence in schools despite the evidence that such measures have historically not ensured our safety. We know that Black individuals are already disproportionately surveilled and subjected to stops at a higher rate than any other community, yet the prevailing narrative remains unchanged. This narrative, in fact, has lethal consequences for Black people. Every time a Black person is found hanging, Black mothers, like myself, immediately contact their children to confirm their safety. For generations, we have been forced to teach our children that their beautiful Black skin will be used as a weapon against them.

How can we support the deployment of police buffers around our schools when the police themselves often fail to record our complaints of anti-Black racism when we report them? Increasing police presence around peaceful protestors renders us less safe, as Black individuals are likely to be the first subjected to brutality while attempting to exercise our First Amendment right to free speech and our right to peacefully protest against policies that disadvantage our children and parents in NYC Public Schools. Furthermore, a deep-seated lack of trust exists between our community and the police.

We do not endorse these bills and will continue to advocate for holistic and equitable legislation that ensures protection for all. Bills that do not address the needs of all people cannot be considered beneficial for all people.

Best regards,

**Tanesha Grant**

Executive Director, Parents Supporting Parents NY



2/25/2026

## **Testimony to New York City Council's Committee to Combat Hate**

Honorable Speaker and City Council Members, we are Barry Grodenchik, former New York City Council Member, former New York State Assembly member, and current President of the Queens Jewish Community Council, and Rabbi Mayer Waxman, executive director of the Queens Jewish Community Council – QJCC.

We are here to testify in strong support of Int 0001-2026, the Committee to Combat Hate's Plan to establish security perimeters at places of religious worship.

QJCC is a 57 year old Queens 501c3 organization, committed to improving the economic, cultural and social prosperity of its clientele. It is the lead agency representing 146 Jewish synagogues, schools and organizations in the borough of Queens.

Many of QJCC's efforts are in regard to general social services, such as addressing food insecurity and assisting clients in accessing affordable health care. QJCC also provides Jewish cultural experiences through concerts and other public events.

However, QJCC has, over the last several years, focused significant attention on programming to repudiate harassment and hate speech. For two years after the pandemic closures were eased, QJCC partnered with groups from Queens' large AAPI community, to stand up to the anti-Asian hate that was being dangerously – and sometimes physically – expressed by far too many shameless miscreants at the time. Right after October 7, 2023, when thousands of Hamas members and their supporters broke barriers, careened violently into the streets of sovereign Israel, and filmed themselves as they tortured and murdered over 12 hundred people and kidnapped more than 250 children, women and men, QJCC immediately coordinated a rally in support of the victims and for the return of the hostages.

Since that time there have been a slew of anti-Israel rallies often – if not always – featuring expressions of outright anti-Semitism. QJCC has thus focused on advocacy and programing against hatred of Jews.

Hatred is not illegal. In America, in New York, hatred, or offensive comments, against most groups, however, often incur social repercussions. Jobs, political roles – society – will often banish bigots. This seems to be the case for people who express offensive hatred or vile representations of people from any ethnicity or group – except when such vile depictions or accusations are spewed against Jews. Against Jews, it has become tolerated to say offensive things.

While hatred is not illegal, threatening is illegal, menacing, is illegal, spitting on people is illegal. Physically accosting people is illegal.

All of these activities have been perpetrated by rioters since October 7, 2023. Some of these actions were reported by people attending events in Park East Synagogue in November, and the Young Israel of Kew Gardens Hills synagogue last month in Queens.

In this light the Queens Jewish Community Council fully supports Int. 0001-2026, which would require the NYPD Police Commissioner to develop and implement a plan to establish security perimeters at places of worship across New York City.

Houses of worship have provided safety through their hallowed halls – their sanctuaries – for well over 1,000 years. “The concept of sanctuary predates Christianity, going back at least as far as Greek and Roman temples that offered protection to fugitives. Early Christian churches competed with these pagan temples by offering their own protections (<https://www.history.com/articles/church-sanctuary-asylum-middle-ages>).”

This history is the basis for the 1980s’ Sanctuary Movement – a movement that brought about Sanctuary Cities, of which New York City is a prime and proud exemplar.

Can there be any bigger irony than New York City preaching security for anyone as a Sanctuary City – and then allowing the city’s own sanctuaries to be places where people aren’t safe? If the Sanctuaries of New York City aren’t safe then can any New Yorker or anyone in New York be safe?

QJCC strongly supports Int. 0001-2026, and thanks the commonsense writers and sponsors of the legislation.

**February 25, 2026.**

**Testimony in support of Intro 1 (or 1A) for the protection of freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of assembly.**

I am Rabbi Eli Cohen of Crown Heights Jewish Community Council, and coordinator of “One Crown Heights”, that brings together over 40 civic groups promoting harmony in Central Brooklyn.

With thanks to Speaker Menin and acknowledging the NY City Council members, Hudson, Mealy and Joseph, who represent Crown Heights and were present in the council chamber today, I would like to address an issue that I have experienced going back over 30 years and long before 2023, on multiple occasions while participating in religious rituals and services in Crown Heights, where protesters were present protesting against Jews or against ritual practice.

Protesters would come so close to the religious participants that they would be able to shout harassing and intimidating barbs, in the ears even of young children, causing considerable distress.

Multiple entreaties to Commanding Officers on scene always bore the same answer: “Our hands are tied by Legal.”

The “within sight and sound” standard for permitted protests, articulated by NYPD at today’s hearing as the required accommodation of free speech does not require the level of closeness that we saw in the incidents I described above. The common sense idea of separating worshipers from protesters with planned entrances and exits that do not allow protesters to get “in the face” of worshipers is really essential to protect the wellbeing of all.

I would like to urge that the wording of the new intro expressly direct NYPD, wherever possible while allowing the protesters to still be heard and seen by those entering religious ceremonies and rituals, that they shall separate protesters from participants towards whom they are directing their protest so as to prevent:

- 1) Harassment or intimidation of participants both during the service and on the way in and out;
- 2) Any possibility of protestors touching or otherwise impeding access to the event or
- 3) violent confrontation between the two parties
- 4) violent disruption of the service or ritual
- 5) disruption by means of amplified sound that would not permit the service or program to be heard by participants.



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## Testimony in Support of the Buffer Bill

Good afternoon. My name is Rabbi David Ingber. I serve as the founding rabbi of Romemu and as the rabbi of the 92nd Street Y. I speak today on behalf of both communities in support of the Buffer Bill.

I want to begin with something simple: in a democratic society, we must protect both freedom of speech and freedom of worship. These are not competing values — they are coequal pillars of our civic life.

Over the past year, houses of worship and Jewish communal institutions have experienced heightened tension, protest activity, and at times intimidation. Let me be clear: protest is a sacred democratic right. But there is a profound difference between protest in the public square and protest that targets the entrances of synagogues, churches, mosques, and community centers in ways that make people feel unsafe as they gather to pray, to mourn, to celebrate, or to learn.

A buffer zone does not silence speech. It creates space — literal space — for dignity, safety, and access. It ensures that elderly congregants, families with children, and individuals simply seeking spiritual refuge can enter their institutions without confrontation or fear.

In Jewish tradition, we speak of *makom kadosh* — sacred space. Every faith community deserves the ability to create such space without intimidation. This bill affirms that New York City can uphold robust public discourse while also protecting vulnerable communities.

This is not about privileging one group over another. It is about setting reasonable, constitutional boundaries that allow all of us to live together in a city that is both passionately expressive and fundamentally safe.

I urge you to pass this bill.

Thank you.



# **Testimony Before the Combat Hate Committee Hearing**

**February 25, 2026**

**Barbara Birch  
Executive Vice President, Northeast  
Simon Wiesenthal Center**

Good morning, Speaker Menin, Chair Salaam and fellow committee members. My name is Barbara Birch, and I serve as the Executive Vice President of the Northeast region of the Simon Wiesenthal Center. My colleagues and I are here today in support of the Speaker's five-point plan to combat Antisemitism as well as the legislation being heard, especially Intro. 22 which would Require the department of education to distribute materials to students about the risks of social media and online hate.

As you may know, the Simon Wiesenthal Center is a nearly 50-year-old global human rights organization researching the Holocaust, genocide, and hate in a historic and contemporary context. The Center confronts antisemitism, world-wide genocide, hate, bias, and terrorism, promotes human rights and dignity, defends the safety of Jews worldwide, and teaches the lessons of the Holocaust along with other historical moments for future generations. Our programs teach tolerance and empathy to thousands of students, educators, and communities across the city each year.

In partnership with the City Council, SWC and our team of educators and facilitators have reached thousands of New York City public school students through our in-classroom *Combatting Hate in Digital Spaces* educational workshops.

*Combatting Hate in Digital Spaces* is a learning experience designed for grades 7–12 and offered in classrooms. Typically delivered as a 50-minute experience, the workshop aligns with the C3 College, Career, and Civic Life Framework, Social Justice Standards, and the New York Department of Education Media Literacy Toolkit. Learners explore the formation of online identities and examine how digital systems such as AI and the algorithm influence and manipulate individual actions in digital spaces. With a focus on digital identity and civic responsibility, this workshop provides students with an identity Venn diagram handout that supports reflection on how their digital selves are shaped, as well as the responsibilities and real-world consequences that accompany their online presence.

At a time when manifestations of hate are increasingly visible across various facets of society, particularly online, it is imperative that students receive direct instruction on investigating the harmful effects of fear-driven hate. Teachers are eager to address online hate, bullying, and bias but often lack the time, resources, and curriculum to navigate these complex topics. Our workshops strengthen collaboration between students and the community. It creates a space for critical conversations about online safety and combating hate while also empowering youth to take an active role in creating solutions.

Intro 22 would require the Department of Education (DOE) to distribute materials to middle and high school students regarding the risks and dangers associated with social media for youth, including in relation to online bullying, harassment, discrimination, misinformation, and disinformation, as well as how to prevent or mitigate associated harms. The materials would be age appropriate and distributed annually, as well as being posted to the department's website.

SWC's *Combatting Hate in Digital Spaces* workshops educate students on the risks of social media, digital echo-chambers, the harms of online hate, misinformation, bullying, and equip students with strategies and solutions to create a more positive online presence and community.

SWC stands ready to be a partner and resource to the Council as they work with the DOE to develop these materials and remains steadfast in our partnership with the Council to continue bringing our critical workshops to students across the five boroughs.

We are here today in support of Intro 22, and all bills being heard as SWC continues our work combatting antisemitism, hate and bias in all forms, and as we strive to create a more inclusive, tolerant city. Thank you for introducing such impactful legislation.

Int 0001-2026

Plan to Establish Security Perimeters at Places of Religious Worship

Louis D Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law  
1675 Broadway  
New York, NY 10019

By: David M. Dince  
Director of Litigation  
New York Senior Counsel

February 25, 2026

The Brandeis Center is an independent, unaffiliated, nonprofit legal organization established to advance the civil and human rights of the Jewish people and promote justice for all. We engage in legal advocacy to combat the resurgence of anti-Semitism on college and university campuses, in K-12 schools, in the workplace, and elsewhere. Our rapidly expanding New York law office focuses on litigation in all of these areas; wherever anti-Semitism is found and can be combated by the law.

We are here today to comment concerning the legal principles to be considered in relation to the proposed bill to amend the administrative code to plan to establish security perimeters (buffer zones) at places of religious worship.

The Brandeis Center is pleased that the Council is addressing a problem that we have been facing in New York and elsewhere. We are facing a crisis of anti-Semitism confronting the besieged Jewish population of New York City, whereby various individuals, groups and organizations have adopted a tactic of protest at houses of worship including synagogues. They are impeding the ability of worshipers to enter or exit the building and trampling on their First Amendment right to freedom of religion. This must be stopped.

The Brandeis Center has been contacted by numerous individuals who have been blocked from entering their Synagogue due to the presence of protestors, some of which have led to assaults and property destruction.

Recent examples of protests at Synagogues include the following:

On January 8th and 9th of this year approximately 200 protestors gathered outside Young Israel of Kew Gardens Hills, blocking the entrance and exit.

On November 19, 2025, demonstrators at the Park East Synagogue in Manhattan blocked the entrance and exit.

Similar tactics were employed at protests in Los Angeles in 2025 and West Orange, New Jersey in 2024. The clear intent of each of these protests has been to intimidate and prevent Jews from exercising their 1st amendment rights to gather and worship.

The applicable federal statute is the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances, commonly known as the FACE Act. That statute makes it unlawful to use or threaten force to injure, intimidate or interfere with someone attempting to enter a place of worship by physically blocking entrances and exits, or intimidating individuals to prevent them from practicing their religion. The statute has been upheld by the lower courts although not ruled on by the US Supreme Court.

Over 20 states have laws which address this issue in one fashion or another. NY Penal Law 240.70 makes it an A misdemeanor to engage in such conduct. The issue before this committee is therefore the question of buffer zones, which are needed to ensure that the prohibited conduct does not occur in the first place. There are other such bills being considered requiring these buffer zones across the country, such as Arizona, the state of Washington, and NY State. We are aware of no other municipalities who have passed such a law, although it is beyond dispute that no other city is dealing with the same level of anti-Semitism as is New York City.

In summary, in fashioning any such bill: First, the bill must be carefully drawn to apply to all houses of worship. Second, it must recognize the 1st amendment right to freedom of speech and peaceful protest, while balancing those rights against the worshipers equally important 1st amendment right to practice their religion. It is well recognized under the law that appropriate time, place and manner restrictions are lawful when balancing these competing rights.

These incidents have included assaults, destruction of property and the prevention of entry by force and by intimidation. When considering this bill, we ask you to keep in mind the picture of a young mother, holding the hands of her two children, as they intend to enter their Synagogue to worship and attend religious school. They are confronted by a large group of angry protestors, screaming epithets, threatening them and making it difficult, if not impossible, to enter. That is what has happened at each of these protests. Anyone in that mother's place would at the very least be too intimidated to enter. It should never be permitted to happen to anyone.

**From:** [Conor Foley](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] RE: Committee to Combat Hate  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 3:40:25 PM

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[REDACTED]

My name is Conor Foley and I'm the Director of Community Engagement at the Community Church of New York. I am here representing an historic Unitarian Universalist congregation that has pursued pluralism and inter-religious practice for over 200 years. In a collective voice, we want to clearly state our opposition to the perimeter bills, 0001 and 0175.

We are responding to the call our multi-faith partners have made to protect our collective right to free speech and religious practice. These bills threaten our ability to express our moral and spiritual traditions through protest by giving more discretion to the NYPD to determine what is and is not legitimate protest and where it should take place. We don't entrust the care of our neighbors to a police department that has proven themselves to be bad-faith actors over and over. Their abuses of Black and Muslim New Yorkers are well-documented. Their violent antagonism of pro-Palestine protestors has been visible to all, which has included many of the Jewish New Yorkers in our community. And this legislation is clearly meant to target them.

Antisemitism is a serious issue. Anti-Black and anti-Palestinian racism is a serious issue. Colonialism, genocide, and illegal land sales are serious issues. This legislation is not a serious solution to these entanglements.

Our commitment is to the flourishing of religious practice and democratic discourse. These bills are threats to both. They protect no one; rather they open up marginalized communities to policing and muzzle legitimate moral expression. We oppose these bills, and ask that our representatives oppose them as well.

--

Conor Foley, M.Div (they/them)  
Director of Community Engagement  
The Community Church of New York  
24 E 35th St., New York, NY 10016





## The NYC Abolition and Education Justice Collective

We are the NYC Abolition and Education Justice Collective, a grassroots collective of community organizers of color working alongside Black, Latine, and working-class families across New York City. We are writing today in strong opposition to Bill #01, sponsored by Speaker Julie Menin, and Bill #175, sponsored by Education Committee Chair Eric Dinowitz, which would create NYPD-enforced “buffer zones” around religious institutions and educational facilities across our city.

These buffer zones would infringe on New Yorkers’ fundamental rights to free speech and assembly while doing little to meaningfully address the root causes of harm or bias in our communities. Creating NYPD “buffer zones” around schools will further criminalize Black and Latine students. In 2022 alone, **87 percent of all NYPD school policing interventions involved Black or Hispanic students**, even though these students make up roughly two-thirds of the NYC public school population (New York Civil Liberties Union [NYCLU], *Safety with Dignity: Alternatives to the NYPD in Schools*, 2023). These interventions can include handcuffing students, removing them from school, detaining them, or arresting them (NYCLU, 2023; NYC Department of Education & NYPD School Safety Data Reports). New York City Council’s own data shows that **Black students represent 66.7 percent of arrests in schools**, including among children ten years old and under (New York City Council Committee on Education Oversight Data Brief, 2022). Research consistently finds that both Black and Hispanic students are significantly more likely than their peers to face juvenile or criminal arrest following an initial school-based incident, contributing to what scholars describe as the “school-to-prison pipeline” (Advancement Project, 2010; Hirschfield, 2018; American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). By increasing the presence of NYPD around school campuses and religious institutions, Black and Latine students and families would be placed directly in the path of expanded criminalization and the documented harms of policing.

A broader body of national research has also found that the presence of police in schools increases the use of suspensions, expulsions, police referrals, and arrests, particularly for Black students and students with disabilities, without improving overall school safety (Skiba et al., 2014). On average, Black and Latinx youth represented 90.9% of arrests, 89.7% of juvenile reports, and 92.3% of court summonses issued, despite being only 66.2% of the student population. Black students were disproportionately impacted by school policing across the board. On average, Black students were only 25.7% of the youth population yet were subject to 54.5% of all policing incidents (Urban Youth Collaborative, 2021). Because educational facilities and places of worship exist in nearly every neighborhood, these bills would effectively make much of the city subject to increased NYPD presence,

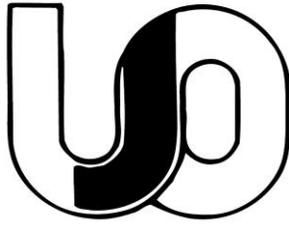
surveillance, and enforcement. Student protests, petitions, or even peaceful community gatherings could fall within these zones and be treated as violations, despite they are forms of First Amendment protected speech.

To truly address hate and bias in all forms (anti-Blackness, anti-Semitism, racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, etc.), we need schools to be welcoming spaces that invest in restorative justice practices, Black Studies K-12 curriculum, and culturally responsive education. Expanded policing on wider school campuses and religious institutions does not address hate or bias, but instead instigates further racial profiling, surveillance, and policing of Black and Brown communities. Safety does not come from surveillance and enforcement. It comes from trust, resources, culturally responsive education and meaningful opportunities for young people to engage in dialogue and resolve conflict constructively. An investment and focus on incorporating restorative justice practices in NYC schools addresses harm while ensuring community accountability and safety through open communication and relationship building. Additionally, we demand the creation and implementation of k-12 Black studies and culturally responsive curriculum in schools to combat anti-Black, anti-semitic, homophobic, sexist, and racist hate. Combatting bias and hate must begin with education.

We urge all Council Members, particularly those who claim to value democracy, to vote against Bill #1 and #175. Our City Council must stand for New Yorkers' freedom of speech and assembly while protecting the safety and dignity of our students and families.

Sincerely,

Sohini Das, The NYC Abolition and Education Justice Collective  
Imani Wilson, The NYC Abolition and Education Justice Collective  
Bri Ruiz, The NYC Abolition and Education Justice Collective



**UNITED JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS**  
OF WILLIAMSBURGH AND NORTH BROOKLYN  
פאראייניגטע אידישע ארגאניזאציעס פון וויליאמסבורג

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**March 12, 2026**

**Testimony of the United Jewish Organizations of Williamsburg and North Brooklyn (UJO)**

**In Support of Proposed Int. No. 1-A**

**A Local Law Regarding Buffer Zones Adjacent to Places of Religious Worship  
New York City Council**

Speaker, Chairs, and Members of the Council:

The United Jewish Organizations of Williamsburg and North Brooklyn (UJO) submits this testimony in strong support of Proposed Int. No. 1-A which is appropriately the Speaker's first numbered bill. We thank the Speaker for sponsoring this important bill and the Council for advancing this legislation as part of a broader package responding to the alarming rise in Anti-Semitism across New York City.

**The Broader Rise in Antisemitism**

New York City is experiencing a deeply troubling surge in anti-Semitic incidents. Jewish New Yorkers—who represent a small percentage of the city's population—are disproportionately targeted in hate crimes, harassment, and assaults. This trend is not abstract; it is visible on our streets, in our neighborhoods, and at our institutions. The need for proactive, balanced measures to protect worshippers of all faiths has never been more urgent.

**Impact on Williamsburg and the Orthodox Community**

Anti-Semitism affects Jewish communities citywide and its impact is felt intensely in Williamsburg, home to one of the largest visibly Orthodox Jewish populations in the country. The data underscores what our community experiences daily:

- According to the Brooklyn District Attorney, the **90th and 79th Precincts—which encompass the Orthodox Jewish community of Williamsburg and Bed/Stuy—recorded 88 anti-Semitic incidents in the past three years** that were handled by the DA's office.
- These two precincts are **consistently among the highest in hate-crime activity citywide**. According to NYPD hate-crime statistics for 2025, the **90th Precinct had the highest number of hate crimes in New York City (43)**, including **21 anti-Semitic crimes**, the

highest of any precinct. The **79th Precinct had the fourth-highest number of anti-Semitic incidents** in the city. Combined, the **90th and 79th Precincts experienced 38 anti-Semitic incidents in 2025 alone.**

- The ADL reports that in general, **identifiable Orthodox Jews account for 52% of all anti-Semitic assaults in New York City**, despite being a small fraction of the population.

Many additional incidents go unreported or never reach the news. The lived reality is clear: Jews are disproportionately targeted for harassment, intimidation, and violence.

### **Why Buffer Zones Are Necessary**

We fully respect and support the constitutional right to free speech and peaceful protest. However, when individuals gather directly at the entrances of synagogues and religious institutions to shout at, follow, or confront worshippers, this crosses the line from protest into **intimidation, interference, and harassment.**

For many worshippers—children, families, seniors and especially holocaust survivors, that we are still blessed to have thousands of them in our City—walking into a synagogue while being screamed at or surrounded creates real fear. That fear can deter individuals from attending prayer services, effectively depriving them of their **religious liberty.**

Additionally, New York has witnessed multiple violent attacks against Jewish institutions in recent years. When protests occur at the very doors of synagogues, there is a legitimate concern that **malicious individuals may blend into a protest crowd** and exploit the chaos to carry out an attack. A clearly defined buffer zone is a reasonable and necessary measure to reduce this risk.

### **A Balanced and Thoughtful Approach**

This legislation does not restrict protest rights or silence speech. Instead, it establishes a framework for the NYPD to:

- Protect worshippers from intimidation and interference
- Maintain safe access and egress for congregants and emergency personnel
- Ensure that protests remain peaceful and orderly
- Prevent bad actors from exploiting proximity to religious institutions

The bill is balanced, narrowly tailored, and respectful of constitutional protections. It recognizes both the right to protest and the right to pray in safety and dignity.

### **Additional Support and Comment on the Legislation Package**

Additionally, we support the other bills that are a part of the Speaker's response to antisemitism, including:

[\*\*Introduction 22\*\*](#), sponsored by **Majority Leader Shaun Abreu**, requiring the DOE to distribute materials to students about the risks of social media and online hate.

[Introduction 165](#), requiring the NYPD to report on the status of hate crime cases to improve transparency and accountability; and [Introduction 175-A](#), requiring the NYPD to develop and publish a response plan for when there are credible concerns of injury, intimidation, or restriction of movement that prevent access to schools - both sponsored by the Chair of the Jewish caucus **Council Member Eric Dinowitz**.

[Introduction 297](#), sponsored by **Council Member Virginia Maloney**, requiring emergency planning for religious institutions.

[Introduction 327](#), sponsored by **Council Member Mercedes Narcisse**, reimbursing nonpublic schools for the cost of video surveillance cameras.

- **We respectfully ask, if possible, to amend this legislation, so that not-for-profit post-secondary schools should also be eligible for those security cameras.** There are tens of thousands of NYC students who attend such colleges, and there is sadly a history of violence against such institutions of higher learning. Not-for profit colleges cannot effort the necessary security measures and we feel that it's only fair to include them in this program.

And [Introduction 388](#), sponsored by our Williamsburg **Council Member Lincoln Restler**, establishing a hotline and detailed reporting system for antisemitism and other hate- and bias-related incidents.

### **A Needed Response to Rising Antisemitism**

The rise in antisemitism is not theoretical—it is lived, visible, and too often ignored. It is felt by all Jewish communities, and in Williamsburg and Bed/Stuy the Orthodox community experiences this more than any other neighborhood in New York City.

The UJO strongly urges the City Council to pass Proposed Int. No. 1-A and the entire package of bills spearheaded under the Speaker's bold 5-point plan to combat Antisemitism. It will help protect vulnerable worshippers, prevent harassment, and ensure that protests remain peaceful and lawful. We thank the Speaker and the Council for their leadership and for recognizing the urgent need to safeguard New York's religious communities.

Respectfully submitted,

Rabbi David Niederman  
President

**United Jewish Organizations of Williamsburg and North Brooklyn (UJO)**

**From:** [Abdalla Hassan](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] I reject the proposed protest "buffer zone" bills  
**Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2026 11:11:36 AM

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Dear New York City Officials,

I write to urge you in the strongest terms to reject the proposed protest "buffer zone" bills. These measures are unconstitutional, overbroad, and unnecessary. They threaten core First Amendment protections while duplicating laws that already prohibit violence, threats, harassment, physical obstruction, trespass, and property damage near healthcare facilities and houses of worship.

Public safety and access are already protected under existing federal, state, and city law. The proposed bills go far beyond these protections by criminalizing protest in public spaces. In effect, they create sweeping no-protest zones around broad categories of institutions, dramatically restricting lawful assembly and expression.

The proposal would establish buffer zones around the entrances and premises of any hospital, clinic, or facility providing pregnancy-related care. The city proposal would extend similar restrictions to teaching hospitals by defining them as educational facilities. Taken together, these measures would cover the vast majority of hospitals and healthcare facilities in New York State. The result would be to make it exceedingly difficult for healthcare workers to hold rallies, picket, or engage in collective action in proximity to their workplaces.

Similarly, buffer zones around educational facilities would severely limit graduate student unions and other campus workers from organizing, picketing, or demonstrating. Such activities are fundamental to worker organizing and have long been recognized as protected expressive conduct.

These proposals also raise serious concerns about selective and discriminatory enforcement. In practice, they risk functioning as a "Palestine exception" to free speech by disproportionately targeting pro-Palestinian protest and criminalizing efforts to challenge the sale of Palestinian land in New York. Allegations that such sales are shielded from scrutiny because they are hosted at houses of worship underscore the danger of granting law enforcement broader discretion to police speech in these spaces. The Constitution does not permit viewpoint-based restrictions on protest.

History teaches that social progress—including the expansion of reproductive freedom and LGBTQ+ rights—has depended on protest, direct action, and sustained public pressure, including demonstrations at institutions whose leaders sought to shape public policy. The right to assemble and speak in public forums cannot be curtailed because speech is controversial or politically charged.

Finally, expanding buffer zones will inevitably expand police presence around houses of worship, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions. This will increase the risk of surveillance, mass arrests, and biased enforcement—particularly against communities of color and movements that challenge entrenched power, which already experience disproportionate policing.

For all these reasons, I urge you to reject these unconstitutional buffer zone proposals and to uphold the fundamental rights to free speech and peaceful assembly guaranteed by the First Amendment.

Sincerely,  
Abdalla Hassan  
Brooklyn, New York

**My name is Alan Sherman. I serve as a board member on the Queens Jewish Community Council, and other civic and Jewish organizations.**

**Freedom of speech, assembly, and religion is guaranteed in the United States. That is what makes us great. There is no freedom to harass, intimidate, or break laws. There have been many unruly protests around the country, against religious institutions as well as on public streets. From the streets of our beloved five boroughs, to the streets of cities all around the country, these protests breed nothing more than hatred. Our society needs to teach our children to work with people who think differently. When they grow up, they need to be mature respectful adults. We are lacking that now. There is no room for hatred of anyone in a civilized world.**

**No religious or cultural event should have a cloud of threatening protesters interfering with their inalienable rights.**

**For this reason, I strongly support the City Council's proposal to prohibit harassment, incitement and protests within 100 feet of any religious organization, school, or house of worship. We have seen chants intended to intimidate and hurt people. We have seen objects thrown. This behavior must stop and must be prevented.**

**Protecting our constitutional rights includes protecting people from harassment and intimidation when they are exercising those rights.**

**We must also teach our children to respect all people, no matter which religion they follow, gender, political beliefs, and race.**

**Thank you for your consideration.**

**Alan Sherman**

**From:** [Alex Malescio](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Cc:** [Szott, Jonathan; Hossain, Mufazzal](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Testimony in Support of Int. 0001-2026  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 12:56:09 PM  
**Attachments:** [Alex Malescio Testimony in Support of Int. 0001 2026.pdf](#)

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Hello,

I hope all is well. My name is Alex Malescio. Attached and pasted below is my written testimony in favor of Int. 0001-2026. I also plan to deliver this testimony via Zoom during today's (2/25/2026) Committee to Combat Hate.

Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Best,

Alex

Good afternoon Speaker Menin and members of the New York City Council.

My name is Alex Malescio, and I am here today in strong support of Intro 0001-2026, introduced by Council Speaker Julie Menin to establish security perimeters around houses of worship.

I want to frame my support clearly. This bill is not a departure from liberal values. It is a defense of them.

Liberalism at its core rests on two foundational commitments: robust freedom of expression and equal protection under the law. It protects the right to dissent, to protest, and to criticize. But it also protects the right of individuals to live, learn, and worship free from excessive coercion and imminent threats of violence. These principles are not in conflict. They reinforce one another.

New York City has long been a beacon of free speech. Peaceful protest is a constitutional right and an essential part of civic life. However, the First Amendment has never been absolute. The law has always recognized limits when speech creates imminent harm or intimidation. Liberal democracy depends on boundaries that protect pluralism and ensure that one group's expression does not extinguish another group's ability to safely participate in public life.

In recent years, we have seen tensions turn into direct confrontations at the entrances of houses of worship. Families attending services have faced aggressive demonstrations at extremely close range. Regardless of real or perceived viewpoints held by congregants or protesters, it is reasonable to demand that belligerent parties should not convene within striking distance of their targets. Anyone who has witnessed protests and counter-protests firsthand can affirm that for decades, law enforcement officers have routinely separated parties to protect all involved.

This bill does not ban protest, it does not silence dissent, and it does not discriminate based on viewpoint. Instead, it applies a classic time, place, and manner approach that allows protest to continue while establishing a modest and contextual perimeter to reduce the risk of danger or intimidation at vulnerable points of egress.

The legislation appropriately gives the New York City Police Department the ability to determine reasonable security perimeters based on real-time safety conditions. This approach reflects constitutional prudence and respect for civil liberties.

We already recognize that certain civic spaces warrant proximity protections. Polling sites, courthouses, and reproductive health facilities operate under similar principles. Extending comparable, narrowly tailored safeguards to houses of worship is sadly now necessary as well.

By adopting Int. 1, the Council can do more than respond to a clear and present danger. It can stand in defense of the liberalism, pluralism, and protections that for decades have made New York a beacon of hope for people fleeing persecution, violence, and those simply looking to build a better life.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Council to pass this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

**From:** [Anita S](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] New Yorker Against Buffer Zones  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 9:08:45 AM

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My name is Anita Shepherd and I am a Culinary Arts educator in NYC Public Schools.

I am here to oppose Speaker Menin and Councilmember Dinowitz' proposed bills around places of worship and educational facilities.

The proposed educational facilities bill would prevent campus protests and school walkouts and interfere with organizing and protected speech on and around school grounds. Student activism is a vital facet of New York history, and has long allowed students to shape our institutions' policies to advance racial and social justice.

In 1969, Columbia students occupied campus buildings to protest the Vietnam War and the university's construction of a segregated gymnasium in Harlem. That same year, students at CCNY occupied campus buildings and successfully won a new open-enrollment policy.

More recently, students and faculty across New York and the country have occupied campus grounds to protest their institutions' investment in businesses complicit in the US-Israel genocide of Palestinians.

University administrations have consistently relied on the NYPD and its militarized SRG unit to brutalize and arrest protesters. If passed, Councilmember Dinowitz' bill would further put our students at risk.

K-12 public school students in NYC already face elevated police presence in their schools and communities. Increasingly, they are also dealing with fear and distress due to ICE operations. As an educator, I reject any bill that increases the level of policing and surveillance of our schools.

Further, these bills increase risks for faculty and staff unions and labor organizers, who would be unable to hold pickets or rallies that have been crucial to improving their treatment and safeguarding their rights.

In a moment where we are witnessing an unprecedented crackdown on dissent, I urge all council members to vote against these bills. Educators need City Council to stand up for the freedom of expression and for the right to continue advocating for social change—for ourselves and for our students.

Anita Shepherd (they/them)

**From:** [cohn.ann@icloud.com](mailto:cohn.ann@icloud.com)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Schools and houses of worship access and safety act  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 8:56:58 PM

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[REDACTED]

Hello,

I am writing to petition the importance of safe distances from schools and houses of worship. 100-200ft minimum. There is no way for buildings and people to stay safe upon entering and exiting.

As well, if people are close enough to throw something in the building or at someone entering or exiting, they are way too close and there is no way for the inhabitants to be protected.

The protests are also disturbing to classes and services and programs.

In NYC there is very little private property in terms of front lawns and buffer zones and this can be a serious safety concern if people are allowed too close.

I hope you will take this seriously.

Thank you very much,

Ann Cohn  
10023

**From:** [Speaker Menin](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** FW: [EXTERNAL] Protect free speech and withdraw Int.0001-2026  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 12:12:18 PM

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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**From:** Anna McPherran [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 12:02 PM  
**To:** District5 <District5@council.nyc.gov>; District14 <District14@council.nyc.gov>; District9 <District9@council.nyc.gov>; District25@councilnyc.gov  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Protect free speech and withdraw Int.0001-2026

[REDACTED]

Dear Speaker Menin and members of the Committee to Combat Hate,

Hi, my name is Anna McPherran and I live in Rego Park, Queens. I am reaching out to oppose Int.0001 and Int.0175, Plan to establish security perimeters at places of religious worship and A plan to establish security perimeters at educational facilities.

These bills are being framed as protecting Jewish New Yorkers, however its effect is the opposite. Jewish New Yorkers too will be harmed by the suppression of their freedom of speech. Places of worship and educational facilities are everywhere and this bill would effectively criminalize dissent and protesting. At a time when the federal government is actively undermining our civil liberties and abducting people from their homes, the City Council should be doing everything in its power to protect New Yorkers, not aiding the Federal Republicans by criminalizing our First Amendment Freedom of Speech rights.

Please support New Yorkers' civil liberties by rescinding this bill. Thank you for your time.

**From:** [Anna](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Endorsement for Bill 0001-2026: Safeguarding Worship Access  
**Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2026 8:46:18 PM

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As a New York City resident, NYS Resident and voter, I submit this comment in support of Bill [0001-2026](#). The legislation reflects a careful constitutional balance between protecting public safety and ensuring unimpeded access to houses of worship while preserving lawful protest. I respectfully address below two arguments raised in opposition concerning floating buffer zones. FIRST The rights to speech and protest are not absolute. No one has a right to march themselves into the Oval Office and demand to exercise their freedom of speech there. And no one has a right to exercise their right to speech while impeding access to a house of worship. Restrictions on these rights in the form of flexible floating buffer zones have been repeatedly upheld by our Supreme Court and are entirely constitutionally valid. SECOND Opponents of this bill suggest that protests outside houses of worship enjoy some special status because activities inside those spaces "violate international law." Mayor Mamdani expressly stated after the Park East Synagogue debacle that "sacred spaces should not be used to promote activities in violation of international law." Not only is it false that the legality of activities in a space enlarge the right to protest the activity, but not one adherent to this unsupported idea -- including Mayor Mamdani -- has ever identified any law, treaty or international compact governing NYC that has been contravened by activities inside a NYC house of worship. If activities going on in houses of worship violate a law governing this City, which law is it? No one in opposition to this bill, including our Mayor, has come up with an answer. The stalking horse of vague violations of never-identified laws do not give rise to a new elevated status for the right to speech and protest -- nor does it give rise to immunity from restriction. Please protect access to worship spaces alongside the right to free speech and protest. Submitted, © Copyright 2026 End Jew Hatred, All Rights Reserved

**From:** [Avi Glickstein](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Wed. Feb 25th - Committee to Combat Hate Hearing  
**Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2026 7:33:56 PM

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Dear Chair Salaam and Committee,

I'm writing as a concerned NYC parent, Community Education Council member, citizen, and Jewish American. While I am horrified by the undeniable rise of antisemitism and general hate we're seeing in our city and country, I urge you to reject this package of bills. They are uncreative, knee-jerk solutions to a problem that demands real thought, engagement, and investment from the city. And some of them are downright dangerous for our Black and Brown communities, especially youth.

The two "buffer zone" bills (Int 0001-2026 and Int 0175-2026) are the most concerning. Their impetus was clearly the incident at Park East Synagogue, something for which the NYPD has apologized for and labeled a mistake. As the attorney for the NYPD said repeatedly at the hearing, nothing in these bills would change their tactics when it comes to protests outside of houses of worship and schools. They would just force the NYPD to write it down, which many called "transparency." First, if members were interested in transparency, more of them (including committee members Darlene Mealy and Lynn C. Schulman as well as CM Inna Vernikov) would have voted for the legislation giving more oversight power to the CCRB. But, more importantly, the bill would do more than that. It would give the NYPD more legal discretion to suppress protest. And it is highly duplicative. We already have laws barring protesters from blocking entrances to houses of worship and schools (or any public areas) as well as hate crime laws. When protesters choose to violate those laws, it is an intentional tactic that they know means possible arrest. These bills do not differentiate between protesters engaging in civil disobedience in that way and protesters simply showing up to voice their opinions legally. If they wish to ensure the targets of their protests hear and see them, as they are constitutionally entitled to, they risk arrest just as they would if they were block a street or entrance.

A brief word about two other bills (Int-0388-2026 and Int-0327-2026). First, the hotline bill. Based on what the representatives of CCHR were saying, they are already inundated and overwhelmed by the calls they get. This hotline, without additional funding and resources, would further and unnecessarily burden their and other agencies. And when it comes to the bill reimbursing nonpublic schools for surveillance equipment, why, once again, are we sending more and more money to nonpublic and charter schools when so many of our public schools are without resources? If they feel they require those resources, they should provide them themselves.

At their core, these bills are uncreative. They rely on the same old response to incidents of hate: use of police force and increase surveillance. These are not preventative

measures and further endanger communities that already are statistically more likely to be hurt or killed in interactions with law enforcement. There are no creative solutions here or investment in research or pilot programs aimed at undercutting hate between communities; there is just more forced separation. I urge you to reject these bills and to do some real investment and investigation into how to combat hate in this city.

Thank you,

Avi Glickstein  
Flatbush, Brooklyn (District 45)

**From:** [Awali Samara](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Committee to Combat Hate, 2/25  
**Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2026 9:53:30 AM

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int. 1A and 175A

My name is Awali Samara, and I am an organizer with Pal-Awda.

I am here to oppose Speaker Menin and Councilmember Dinowitz's proposed bills on places of worship and educational facilities.

These bills are aimed at pro-Palestine protests. The places-of-worship measure aims to derail scrutiny of the city's protection of illegal sales of Palestinian land, and the educational-facilities bill would criminalize campus protest amid student actions against universities complicit in the Gaza Genocide.

For years, New Yorkers have highlighted illegal land sales and settler recruitment events. These events, marketed to select audiences, violate the federal Fair Housing Act and New York laws including the Human Rights Law, Real Estate License Law, and Real Property Law, and they violate international law by marketing occupied land, dispossessing and displacing Palestinian communities.

Fearing accountability, some Israeli real estate companies and settler groups conceal events in houses of worship and educational facilities. Protesters do not choose locations; we respond to illegal activities in our neighborhoods.

Rather than address calls to end illegal land sales, these bills silence New Yorkers, expose us to police brutality, and distract from the grave violations of law taking place in our city .

What begins as an attack on pro-Palestine speech can spiral into an attack on political expression.

I urge all council members to vote against these bills.

**From:** [REDACTED] on behalf of [Ben Ettlinger](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Support Int. 0001-2026 to Let Communities of Faith Pray in Peace  
**Date:** Monday, February 23, 2026 3:36:44 PM

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[REDACTED]

Dear Council Members,

As a concerned New York City constituent, and higher education educator I am submitting this written testimony in strong support for Int. 0001-2026, which would require the Police Commissioner to develop and implement a plan to establish security perimeters at places of worship across New York City. It is critical that worshippers are able to enter and exit religious institutions without fear of harassment or intimidation.

Touro University Graduate School of Technology is located with other Touro graduate schools at 3 Times Square, right in the heart of one of the most favorite places for protesters to gather. I, my colleagues at the Graduate School of Technology, Graduate School of Education, Graduate School of Health Sciences, Law School, and NYSCAS, and the synagogue located in the building should be able to continue our task of higher education without fear of harassment or worse.

Touro is and open target at center stage and should be afforded protection from vicious protests.

In addition the synagogue I attend in Washington Heights is replete with elderly members some of whom lived through the holocaust. They should not have to relive what they saw in Germany in their early childhood.

(Professor) Ben Ettlinger  
Touro University Graduate School of Technology  
NYPA (Ret.)

Sincerely,  
Professor Ben Ettlinger  
[REDACTED] New York, NY 10033-2203

**From:** [Beth Schwartz](#)  
**To:** [Testimony; Brewer, Gale](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Schools and Houses of Worship Access and Safety Act  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 11:09:21 AM

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[REDACTED]

Below is my testimony in support of the Schools and Houses of Worship Access Act. I tried to testify in person but after waiting online for almost an hour we were told by the NYC policeman at the gate that there was no capacity in the hearing room and that there were also over 50 people in the rotunda waiting to be seated.

Beth Schwartz

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Speaker Adams and Members of the Council. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would also like to thank Council Members Julie Menin and Eric Dinowitz for introducing this important legislation.

As a lifetime New Yorker, I am appalled that it has come to this — that legislation is needed simply to ensure that people can attend religious services safely in our city.

Jews have been part of New York City since the 18th century. For generations, our community has helped build this city while practicing our faith openly and freely. While Jewish New Yorkers have faced prejudice in the past, we have not experienced a widespread challenge to the basic ability to worship safely as we are witnessing today.

Since October 8, 2023, Jewish residents and Jewish institutions across the city have faced a surge in harassment, intimidation, and threats. Demonstrations outside synagogues, schools, and community centers have at times created fear rather than dialogue, making it difficult for people to safely access their houses of worship.

This legislation has become necessary because some protests have crossed the line from protected speech into conduct that intimidates and obstructs. Chants such as “Globalize the Intifada” are not perceived by Jewish families as abstract political statements; they evoke a

history of violence and persecution. When large crowds gather outside Jewish spaces shouting hostile rhetoric, blocking entrances, or surrounding buildings, it creates a hostile environment that prevents people from exercising their fundamental right to worship in peace.

Is it too much to ask that the police determine where protesters may stand outside a Jewish institution so that Jews can safely access their own spaces to pray, learn, and gather? This bill seeks to establish exactly that kind of reasonable protection.

No New Yorker should have to fear entering a house of worship.

This bill is not about silencing lawful protest. The right to demonstrate is a cornerstone of our democracy and must be preserved. But that right does not include obstructing access to religious services, targeting congregants, or creating conditions that intimidate people as they seek to pray.

If any other faith community were subjected to the same treatment — if worshippers at a mosque, church, or temple were blocked or harassed — there would be broad agreement that action is necessary. Jewish New Yorkers deserve the same protection and the same standard of safety.

At its core, this legislation affirms a simple principle: every resident of this city should be able to attend religious services without fear, harassment, or obstruction.

I respectfully urge the Council to support this measure to protect religious freedom, public safety, and the well-being of all New Yorkers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

**Committee to Combat Hate Testimony, via Zoom.**

Good afternoon, Speaker Menin and members of the New York City Council.

My name is Bishop Mitchell Taylor, and I am the senior pastor at the Center of Hope International. Over the years, I have worked closely with faith leaders across New York City, including Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, and other communities, to promote understanding, cooperation, and respect.

Despite our religious differences, all faith communities in New York City share a common goal: to ensure that their families, children, and elders can worship safely and with dignity. Intro 1-2026, sponsored by Speaker Menin, would establish security perimeters around houses of worship to help achieve that goal. Congregants, especially children and seniors, should be able to enter and leave their places of worship without facing imminent threats.

This bill does not prevent peaceful protest or silence dissenting voices. It provides modest, time, place, and manner protections that allow protesters to express themselves while ensuring that congregants can fully exercise their right to worship. Across our city, houses of worship are more than buildings. They are sacred spaces where communities gather to pray, celebrate, and learn. Protecting those spaces from harassment respects both religious freedom and public safety.

Faith leaders already work in collaboration with law enforcement when needed, including by participating in NYPD Clergy Councils. This legislation gives the NYPD the discretion to establish reasonable perimeters based on real-time safety conditions.

Supporting this bill is about upholding the dignity of all worshippers, affirming our commitment to interfaith respect, and balancing the right to protest with the right to practice faith freely. By passing Intro 1, the Council can help ensure that New Yorkers of every faith can worship safely and with honor.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask the Council to pass this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

**From:** [Brandon P](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Committee to Combat Hate 2/25  
**Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2026 2:02:07 AM

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[REDACTED]

Hello, my name is Brandon Perlaza from Queens and I am opposing the buffer zone bills Int 1-A and 175-A. For as long as the escalated genocide in Gaza raged on, the pro-Palestine protestors have been relentlessly targeted by pro-Israel groups. They have hurled slurs at the protestors, harassed them, doxxed them, and call the police on them to get them brutalized. They have weaponized Judaism to silence the anti-genocide protestors, and no bigger example of this is when they sell stolen Palestinian land in synagogues. Organizations like Nefesh B'Nefesh has explicitly called for "Anglo" families to move into occupied West Bank and occupied East Jerusalem. Under Article 49 of the 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention, this is illegal and no one should be able to move in to terrorize and displace another population. This is what was being protested, but you wouldn't know based on many elected officials protection of the events, focusing solely on the protestors. The people that are going to these events are the same ones hurling rape threats and homophobic slurs at pro-Palestine protestors, everytime they come to protest the illegal land sales. But elected officials have never condemn the Zionists violent rhetoric, which therefore lies the problem of the bill. Making buffer zones of houses of worship without fixing the root of the problem will not be effective. For as long as illegal land sales are being held wherever they are, they will be protested whether from 10 feet or 1 feet. You are opening the lane for NYPD to futher harass vulnerable protestors than they already are, including Palestinian, Arab and Muslim protestors. I urge the Council to reject these two bills and introduce bills that actually stop the illegal land sales from being held. If the Council uses their power to stop these land sales, then there wouldnt be any protests at all. Thank you.

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [NYC Council Hearings](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Please keep a very wide border around synagogues  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 7:41:02 PM

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[REDACTED]

Protesters can easily be seen and heard from 100 feet away. It does not infringe on their constitutional right to protest.

Worshippers should not be fearful walking into their synagogues. Or churches. Or mosques.

If it was protest border for a church or a mosque, the same respect for worshippers would be due.

Thanks  
Celia Weintrob  
Bronx NY

**From:** [CB](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Chaskel Bennett testimony offered today at the city council hearing on Speaker Menins Bill # 1A  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 7:30:40 PM

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[REDACTED]

My name is Chaskel Bennett. I am the Co-Founder of the Flatbush Jewish Community Coalition and an Executive Board Member of Agudath Israel of America. I am a child of Queens and a longtime Brooklyn business owner. I was a first responder to the terror attacks of September 11th — and I am a proud Jewish grandson of Holocaust survivors.

I know what happens when vulnerability is ignored. My family understands the deep price paid when threats to our people are not taken seriously.

I testify today in strong support of Speaker Menin's Intro [0001-2026](#), establishing a safe protective buffer zone around places of religious worship and the full package of anti hate bills.

We are grateful that this was introduced as the first bill of the session. That sends a clear message: protecting New Yorkers from hate is not secondary — it is essential.

The need is undeniable. Our beloved city has seen an alarming surge in antisemitic incidents. Jewish New Yorkers have been assaulted, harassed and intimidated outside synagogues simply for attempting to attend their houses of worship.

The First Amendment protects both speech and religion. But our Founding Fathers, in their wisdom, chose to lead the amendment with the language of free exercise of religion — recognizing that the right to worship freely is fundamental to a free society.

A safe large protective buffer zone is not about restricting speech. It is about drawing a clear line between lawful protest and unlawful intimidation — ensuring that free speech never comes at the expense of safe worship.

Standing in solidarity with our beleaguered community is important. Statements matter. But if we truly want to protect vulnerable communities of faith, those words must be matched by action.

The legislation before you today turns words into action — and action into safety.

I urge you to pass the full package of bills including 0001, 0175, 0165, 0327, 0388 and 0222.

Thank you.

Chaskel Bennett



**From:** [D'Anna Morgan](#)  
**To:** [NYC Council Hearings](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Support for Int. No. 1 – Protect Places of Worship with Real Security  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 11:48:09 AM

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[REDACTED]

Dear Council,

I write to express strong support for Int. No. 1 and deep concern that Proposed Int. No. 1-A dilutes the intent and urgency of this legislation.

Recent events in New York City make clear why strong, enforceable protections are needed now and why planning exercises alone are insufficient:

- In January 2026, a vehicle was deliberately driven into the entrance of the Chabad–Lubavitch World Headquarters in Crown Heights, an incident investigated as a possible hate-motivated attack on a major house of worship.
- In Manhattan, worshippers near Park East Synagogue have repeatedly raised concerns about hostile and disruptive activity outside the synagogue, requiring increased police presence so congregants could safely enter and exit during services and events.
- In Queens, in Kew Gardens, a pro-Palestinian demonstration took place in close proximity to places of Jewish worship during which participants were chanting that they wanted Hamas “there.” These chants invoked a designated terrorist organization and were directed in the immediate vicinity of congregants entering and leaving religious services. They were widely experienced as threatening and intimidating, regardless of the demonstrators’ stated political intent.
- More broadly, the City Council has acknowledged a rise in antisemitic incidents and harassment near places of religious worship, including protests that have crossed the line from protected expression into intimidation and interference.

These are not abstract concerns. Int. No. 1 responds appropriately by requiring clear, enforceable security perimeters that provide immediate, visible protection and consistent standards citywide.

By contrast, Proposed Int. No. 1-A replaces these safeguards with a discretionary planning framework. It does not require buffer zones, sets no clear standards, and delays implementation for months. While planning has value, planning alone does not deter harassment or violence, nor does it reassure communities facing real threats today.

Places of religious worship should be sanctuaries. I respectfully urge you to support Int. No. 1 and oppose efforts that weaken its protections.

Thank you for your time and continued service to our city.

Sincerely,  
D’Anna Andrea

**From:** [Ms. D](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Protecting Synagogues: Buffer Zone Legislation and Public Safety Authority  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 3:12:03 PM

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Honorable Members of the New York City Council,

I write to urge you to adopt **regulated 100-foot buffer zones** around synagogues throughout the city and to restore the expanded law enforcement authorities that were previously available under **Sections 60 and 61** of city public safety policy. These measures are critical to ensuring the safety and ability of worshippers to access their places of religious practice and nearby transit without harassment, obstruction, or confrontation.

The right to peaceful protest is a constitutional cornerstone. However, there is a meaningful and necessary distinction between lawful expression and conduct that escalates into harassment, obstruction, intimidation, and violence under the guise of protected speech. When demonstrations occur directly at the immediate entrances of synagogues – at times coinciding with worship services, holidays, lifecycle events, or when congregants are arriving or departing – the physical and psychological impact is profound. A **regulated 100-foot buffer zone** would provide reasonable distance to protect safe ingress and egress while preserving demonstrators’ ability to express their views at a respectful remove.

Buffer zones also matter for basic public transportation access. Many Jewish worshippers use subways, buses, and other modes of public transit to get to and from services. When demonstrations crowd sidewalks and entrances near synagogues and adjacent transit stops, worshippers, including children, elderly individuals, and those with mobility limitations, may be forced to navigate through hostile or obstructed conditions just to reach their respective modes of transportation. Reasonably sized buffer zones help ensure these community members can move safely and unhindered to their transit connections.

Equally important are the enforcement mechanisms that support structured preventive security. Former policy directives – commonly referred to as **Sections 60 and 61** – had provided municipal leaders and law enforcement with enhanced authority and clarity in designated public safety conditions.

Under these provisions, the City directed the NYPD to review and adjust patrol guidance and legal frameworks to better protect houses of worship and their congregants, explicitly including consideration of establishing protest-free or regulated zones surrounding religious institutions during times of public safety concern. These directives expressly recognized the government’s interest in keeping public spaces safe and “ensuring New Yorkers’ right to peacefully and safely practice their religion at houses of worship” while protecting free speech

rights.

The rescission of these authorities has weakened the proactive posture that many congregations and city officials previously relied upon. Without clear mechanisms for coordination and enforcement, security responses have become more reactive – addressing incidents after escalation rather than preventing escalation in the first place. Prior provisions had enabled clearer operational planning between the NYPD and private security teams that many synagogues maintain, bolstering coordinated responses when credible threats or organized intimidation tactics arise. Their removal has diminished the overall effectiveness of these collaborative security efforts.

In a climate where threats against religious communities – particularly Jewish institutions – have become more visible and, in some cases, more aggressive, public safety policy should equip law enforcement with the tools needed for proactive, preventive engagement. This is why 100-Foot Buffer Zones and Restoration of Sections 60 & 61 to Protect Houses of Worship is crucial.

Establishing a **100-foot regulated buffer zone** around synagogues, combined with reinstated authority modeled on Sections 60 and 61 for enhanced coordination and preventive action, would help strike the appropriate constitutional balance: safeguarding First Amendment rights, protecting the free exercise of religion, and ensuring public safety without diminishing fundamental civil liberties.

I respectfully urge the Council to take decisive action to protect congregants and all New Yorkers who worship and travel to their places of faith without fear of obstruction, harassment, or intimidation.

Thank you for your leadership and serious consideration of this urgent issue.

Sincerely,

Daisy Vega

**From:** [Dana Raucher](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Cc:** [Romulus, Maille](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Buffer Zone for Houses of worship  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 9:47:16 AM

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Pls see my message to Speaker Menin below

**From:** Dana Raucher [REDACTED]  
**Date:** February 25, 2026 at 9:40:00 AM EST  
**To:** [jmenin@council.nyc.gov](mailto:jmenin@council.nyc.gov)  
**Subject:** **Buffer Zone for Houses of worship**

Dear Speaker Menin,

I want to thank you for working to create buffer zones around houses of worship. We in the Jewish community have seen our physical safety eroded throughout this city. When we meet in our communal spaces – be it synagogues or community centers or schools, we should feel safe. There is an organized movement in this city which is overtly working to destroy that safety for the Jewish community and measures must be enacted to ensure that the city and the NYPD can offer protection.

We have raised 3 children in the city (in your district) and the 92NY center has been the home of our Jewish community. Our children attended programming there since their infancy, and we continue to take part in their classes and afterschool programs. We have also attended high holiday services there year over year, and celebrate our holidays there – Purim, Hannukah, Sukkot, Passover.

Last month a mob descended on our community center in the evening when children are still in their after school programs or taking swim lessons, when community members are using the gym or other facilities. The target was a speech about the future of the Jewish community in America. The mob reached the doors of the Y, despite police presence and harassed patrons of a nearby bodega (suspected of harboring “Zionists”).

Our Jewish communal institutions are already bearing a crushing cost to protect our schools, synagogues, and other communal spaces.

This needs to stop, and law enforcement needs to have every tool to be able to do so. Your proposed safety buffer is essential and thank you for putting it forward.

Jewish individuals aligned with various antizionist groups do not speak for the majority of families in our community who fear for the physical safety of our children and elderly parents.

I want to thank you for your support of this important issue.

Dana Raucher  
Zipcode 10028

**From:** [Daniella Brewster](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Protect our sacred spaces  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 9:20:29 AM

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Dear Members of the NYC City Council,

I'm writing today asking you act on the necessary measures put forth by Julie Menin. Antisemitism is at an all-time high in NYC, and the surge in "protests" happening on the doorsteps on Synagogues means it is time to act. People heading into places of worship need to be protected—and Ms. Menin's proposal does just that—while not trampling on the rights of others to protest (indeed they'll still be able to, just not in a way that intimidates or keeps people from coming to their house of worship).

There have been times in history where we have had to legislate protections of people, and now is one such time. Indeed, we MUST put this in place not only for Jewish people, (who urgently need protection now) but for future worshipers and parishioners for when the pendulum swings the other way, towards other religions. Places of worship are sacred and people going to them should not face direct harassment or intimidation of any kind.

If you fail to enact these common sense measures, the profanity continuing at religious spaces is on you.

Sincerely,  
Daniella Lekach

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Support Bill 0001-2026: Protecting Worship Spaces from Disruption  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 9:08:35 PM

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[REDACTED]

As a New York City resident, NYS Resident and voter, I submit this comment in support of Bill 0001-2026. The legislation reflects a careful constitutional balance between protecting public safety and ensuring unimpeded access to houses of worship while preserving lawful protest. I respectfully address below two arguments raised in opposition concerning floating buffer zones. **FIRST** The rights to speech and protest are not absolute. No one has a right to march themselves into the Oval Office and demand to exercise their freedom of speech there. And no one has a right to exercise their right to speech while impeding access to a house of worship. Restrictions on these rights in the form of flexible floating buffer zones have been repeatedly upheld by our Supreme Court and are entirely constitutionally valid. **SECOND** Opponents of this bill suggest that protests outside houses of worship enjoy some special status because activities inside those spaces "violate international law." Mayor Mamdani expressly stated after the Park East Synagogue debacle that "sacred spaces should not be used to promote activities in violation of international law." Not only is it false that the legality of activities in a space enlarge the right to protest the activity, but not one adherent to this unsupported idea -- including Mayor Mamdani -- has ever identified any law, treaty or international compact governing NYC that has been contravened by activities inside a NYC house of worship. If activities going on in houses of worship violate a law governing this City, which law is it? No one in opposition to this bill, including our Mayor, has come up with an answer. The stalking horse of vague violations of never-identified laws do not give rise to a new elevated status for the right to speech and protest -- nor does it give rise to immunity from restriction. Please protect access to worship spaces alongside the right to free speech and protest. Submitted, © Copyright 2026 End Jew Hatred, All Rights Reserved

**From:** [devorah yael](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Argument in Support of Synagogue Buffer Zones Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 4:05:27 PM

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Honorable Members of The New York City Council,

My name is Deborah Yael and I am a Jewish supporter and Jewish Native New Yorker and American citizen. Kindly, receive my testimony as a caregiver, paralegal and proxy to a hemiplegic wheelchair bound Jewish attorney, and for all disabled and handicapped Jewish New Yorkers who rely on public transportation to reach their houses of worship for spiritual wellness and socialization.

### **Argument in Support of Synagogue Buffer Zones Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990**

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 is a landmark federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life. It mandates equal opportunity, full accessibility, and reasonable accommodations for people with physical or mental impairments. While religious entities such as synagogues are exempt from Title III's direct requirements for places of public accommodation, this exemption does not negate the government's broader obligations under Title II (which applies to state and local governments) to ensure that individuals with disabilities can safely and equally participate in public life—including accessing places of worship via public streets, sidewalks, and transportation systems.

Congregants with mobility impairments who rely on public transit (itself subject to ADA accessibility mandates) and use canes, walkers, wheelchairs, or powered mobility devices face unique barriers when protesters crowd sidewalks and entrances during ingress and egress. These barriers are not abstract:

- **Physical obstruction:** Crowds make it impossible or dangerous to maneuver a wheelchair or walker without collision risk. A person using a mobility aid cannot “just go around” a dense protest line the way an able-bodied individual can.
- **Safety and harassment risks:** Proximity increases the chance of being pushed, tripped, or subjected to verbal abuse that escalates to physical violence—incidents already documented at synagogues amid rising antisemitic protests. For someone with balance issues or reliance on a device, even minor jostling can cause falls, injury, or inability to proceed.

- **Effective denial of access:** Fear of these encounters deters attendance altogether, effectively excluding disabled individuals from religious exercise and community life in a manner that violates the ADA's core promise of equal opportunity.

Local governments, as public entities under ADA Title II, have an affirmative duty to avoid discrimination in their services and activities—including the regulation of public rights-of-way. Failing to enact modest, content-neutral buffer zones (for example, 25–50 feet around entrances) constitutes a failure to provide reasonable modifications to policies and practices that would otherwise allow equal access. Buffer zones do not close sidewalks or ban protest; they simply create a narrow, temporary safe corridor so that a wheelchair user exiting a bus and heading to Shabbat services is not forced into a gauntlet of potential harm.

This is fully consistent with First Amendment jurisprudence on time, place, and manner restrictions. Buffer zones are narrowly tailored to serve compelling government interests in public safety, pedestrian flow, and critically the ADA protected right of disabled persons to access public spaces without discrimination. They are viewpoint-neutral: they apply regardless of the protesters' message and leave ample alternative channels for expression on the wider sidewalk or street.

Opponents may claim buffer zones infringe speech rights, but the ADA requires us to weigh the concrete harm to a vulnerable population against that abstract concern. A wheelchair user cannot “debate” or “ignore” a crowd blocking their path; they are simply prevented from entering their place of worship. The ADA exists precisely to prevent such de facto exclusion. Just as governments may install curb cuts, audible signals, or ramped entrances to fulfill ADA obligations, they may and should establish buffer zones to ensure that the path from public transit to the synagogue door remains open and safe for every congregant, regardless of disability.

In short, synagogue buffer zones are not a special favor to any faith; they are a reasonable, lawful, and necessary accommodation required by the spirit and letter of the ADA to guarantee that Americans with disabilities can exercise their fundamental rights to worship, assemble, and participate in public life without fear of physical obstruction or violence. Enacting them upholds the ADA's 1990 promise: no one should be denied equal access because of a disability—especially not at the door of their own house of worship.

Respectfully,

Devorah Yael

**From:** [Diana](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Buffer zones  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 10:38:18 AM

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[REDACTED]

We need regulated buffer zones around synagogues immediately!  
Diana hochman

**From:** [Dorit](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Buffer Zone around synagogues  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 8:54:38 PM

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Dear Council Members,

Please restore the 100-foot safety buffer around houses of worship just like there are around abortion clinics. Antisemitic incidents continue to make up the largest share of NYC hate crimes, according to NYPD data, and protests outside synagogues in places like Borough Park and near Central Park East have blocked entrances and intimidated congregants and attendees.

This is a content-neutral public safety measure — not a restriction on speech. New Yorkers should not have to walk through hostile crowds to enter a house of worship or attend an event.

Protect safe access. Restore the 100-foot buffer as the bill was originally drafted.

Respectfully,

Doris Konig

Lower East Side

City Council District 1 resident

## Testimony of Eleanor Grosz

February 25, 2026 before the Committee to Combat Hate of the New York City Council.

Good morning Chair Salaam and member of the committee. My name is Eleanor Grosz and I am a resident of Manhattan. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the plan to establish buffer zones at the entrances to and exists from places of worship.

I was born in the Bronx in 1954 and have lived in NY my whole life. I went to Brooklyn Law School and lived in Brooklyn during those years. I work and live in Manhattan, I am Jewish and I attend services at several synagogues on both the East Side and West Side.

Sadly, New York has not been the same for me since October 7, 2023.

It is imperative for the council to adopt the proposed plan to establish buffer zones near houses of worship. As both a first-generation American citizen and an attorney I recognize the importance of protecting First Amendment Rights including the right to peacefully protest. The right to peacefully protest, however, does not include harassment and efforts to intimidate other citizens attending religious services.

Over the past year on three separate occasions, I have been subjected to loud, intimidating protests, including drum banging and amplified antisemitic chanting, where the angry protesters were right up close to the entry of public events I attended.

Last spring while attending a benefit at BAM for the Batsheva Dance company protesters were immediately outside the entrance, screaming as were entering the music hall to see a ballet.

This past fall while waiting in line to attend a concert at Carnegie Hall of the Israel Philharmonic, the protesters, shouting hateful, antizionist slurs and banging a drum were permitted not 10 feet away from those of us waiting to get into the theatre to hear a concert.

And just last month, while waiting to enter the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y to attend a speech, the protesters again were permitted on the same side of the street at the entrance, screaming vile antisemitic slurs and banging drums right up close to those of us in line waiting to enter the building. And they were waiting for us as we left the building including yelling in my face that I was, among other things, a supporter of “genocide.”

I am the child of Holocaust survivors. I know what real genocide is. This last incident was therefore particularly disturbing to me.

I attend synagogue in Manhattan. So far I have not experienced this hostility, effort to disturb and antisemitism on my way into synagogue. And, I hope never to. I and every other New Yorker who hopes to have a peaceful, contemplative experience of worship should not have to worry about the level of hostility that I have experienced at other public events in the City. If the Jew haters and antizionist feel the need to protest outside synagogues, they should be required to stand significantly far from the entrances so that worshipers are not intimidated, interfered with or disturbed.

Thank you.

*Opry*  
*February 20, 2026*  
*New York New York*

Elise Feuerstein Karras, LMSW

Testimony Re: File # Int 0001-2026

Committee to Combat Hate hearing

Wed, Feb 25, 2026

As a lifelong NYC resident, who has lived my life as a Jew here without fear or trepidation, I find that within the past few months, this has all changed. With the increase in Jew hatred incidents around the City, I find I am at a heightened sense of situational awareness.

Walking to synagogue has become an anxiety producing effort for me. I live in a neighborhood where "Free Palestine", a shadow sign for the genocide of the Jewish nation, is written on the restaurants, public walls and playgrounds, subway stations and on the sidewalk.

I support Councilwoman Menin's bill to require the Police Commissioner to develop, establish and maintain security perimeters of up to 100 feet from the entrances to synagogues as well as other places of worship. Synagogues have been the primary target for vile protests and harassment of worshippers. Hateful protests are far and few between when it comes to churches and mosques. Therefore, it is especially important for me and other Jews to feel free to worship without direct hateful words and accusations thrown at us as we enter our sanctuary. I urge that the parameters be at least 100 feet from the entrance. Anything less would endanger our people, children and make living in NYC compromised.

Thank you for your consideration,

Elise Feuerstein Karras, LMSW

Astoria, NY 11106



Elise Feuerstein Karras, LMSW

Astoria, NY 11106

Testimony: Committee to Combat Hate hearing

Feb 25, 2026

I am writing in support for Int 0165-2026, sponsored by Councilmember Eric Dinowitz. This bill would require the NYPD to report on the status of hate crime cases.

Statistics show that in January 2026 alone, the number of cases of Jew hatred soared by 182%. In the past, many of these heinous crimes were not recorded as such, were dismissed or plea bargained and the perpetrators of violent hate crimes against Jews in NYC were set free to do it again.

Of course, sadly, the crimes against other groups and individuals are of great concern, but as a lifelong NYC resident and a Jew, these startling statistics make me quiver, not only for me but for my kids.

People will dispute the statistics and will disregard the violence. The first step in preventing this from happening is to require a formalized reporting system, following the chronology of the incident from beginning to conclusion.

I support this bill whole heartedly and believe it is the beginning of holding criminals accountable for the vile acts they inflict on those they hate.

Sincerely,

Elise Feuerstein Karras, LMSW

Astoria, NY 11106



Goodmorning to all, and an especially to student activists leading our fight for justice across this city and the world. My name is Elise, I'm here as an early childhood educator with 6+ years of classroom experience. I'm here as a student of Brooklyn College, working towards my masters in early childhood. I'm here as someone who cares deeply about the safety of children and families all across this city. If you care about the safety of children and families too, I urge you to vote NO to buffer zones and increased police presence in our schools and places of worship.

This bill is a direct attack on our constitutional right to assemble and protest. Children, young people, and the communities that care about them have long used this right to create impactful change. From protests to protect trans kids at CEC meetings to student led walkouts against ICE and Israeli genocide, young people are a powerful force in confronting systemic injustice. Protests are how we fight for a livable world. This bill attacks our rights and attacks our power, but the power of young people cannot be legislated away.

Further, if we're talking about the safety of young people (and as an educator I think we should always be talking about the real safety of young people), then we should be removing NYPD from our schools NOT creating more paths for police to criminalize students and families demanding a justice they deserve. This package of legislation gives NYPD more power, funding, and leeway in relation to our most sacred spaces. This is a threat to the safety of kids, families, and educators.

Honor young people, honor constitutional rights to protest, vote NO on buffer zones.

## TESTIMONY OF ELIZABETH GYORI REGARDING BUFFER ZONE BILLS THAT WOULD UNCONSTITUTIONALLY PROHIBIT PROTECTED SPEECH

**New York City Council  
Committee to Combat Hate  
February 25, 2026**

As a long-time resident of Brooklyn, New York, I strongly oppose Intros 0001 and 0175, which would undermine New Yorkers' constitutionally-protected right to free speech and expression by prohibiting public demonstrations within 100 feet of any place of worship or educational facility. As many civil liberties groups have highlighted, these bills would prohibit speech—including political speech—on traditional public fora (*e.g.* sidewalks, roads). Indeed, given the large size of the proposed buffer zones and the buildings to which they would attach, it would seem much of New York City would be off limits for protests under the proposed legislation.

Shockingly, these bills would restrict protesters' rights and give law enforcement more tools to punish speech, just as the federal government has been cracking down on all forms of dissent and resistance against its current authoritarian and fascist agenda. Further, existing city and state law is already sufficient to protect places of worship and schools from violence, harassment and other forms of harmful conduct.

At this time, when protesters across the country are engaged in righteous protests for the soul of America, including against the kidnapping of our neighbors by Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE") and American tax-dollars being used to fund genocide and war crimes across the world, the New York City Council should not be seeking to criminalize speech. If anything, elected officials should work to strengthen our free speech rights under city law.

It should also be noted that these bills arose to stifle and criminalize protests outside religious institutions hosting non-religious, political events for the purpose of conducting illegal sales of stolen Palestinian land in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Religious institutions participating or complicit in crimes under international law should not be able to hide behind the guise of religious worship to prevent or criminalize speech criticizing their actions. Under the First Amendment and Article I, Section 8 of the New York State Constitution, speech that some may find uncomfortable to hear is still protected.

Moreover, this is a prime example of how the Palestine Exception—in this case, protecting free speech rights except when that speech concerns Palestinian rights and criticizes Israeli policy and actions—undermines all of our hard-won rights. While these bills were introduced to try to crush pro-Palestine protests, by their language, they target *all* speech and protests outside houses of worship and educational facilities, not just pro-Palestine speech. If New York City wishes to lead

the way in protecting our constitutional rights during this time of extraordinary crisis in our democracy, the Council must first start by voting down and/or withdrawing these bills.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Gyori

Resident of Brooklyn, NY (Park Slope)

## **Testimony in Support of the Committee to Combat Hate Legislation**

To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Elizabeth Harrow, and I am a Jewish New Yorker. I strongly support this legislation. At a time when hate incidents are rising, it is essential that our city take practical steps to ensure people can enter houses of worship safely and without fear.

No New Yorker should feel unsafe practicing their faith. Protecting houses of worship protects the core values of this city: safety, dignity, and religious freedom for all.

Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Harrow



**From:** [Lisa Katz](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Need for the 100 feet buffer zone for the NYC Jewish Community's houses of worship and community centers  
**Date:** Monday, February 16, 2026 9:09:36 PM

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Dear Council,

This testimony is in favor of the 100 feet buffer zone for Jewish houses of worship and community centers.

I would like to express my deep concern regarding the increasing violence and hostility directed toward the New York Jewish community. While FACT legislation is a helpful starting point, the 182% increase in antisemitic incidents necessitates much stronger protections for our community centers and houses of worship. Our new administration houses many antisemites. Our mayor is an antisemite.

Jewish New Yorkers currently face significant intimidation and physical obstacles that make us feel unsafe in our own city. History has shown that silence in the face of such hatred leads to tragedy, and we can no longer remain silent. I have personally witnessed instances such as on the Brooklyn Bridge where protesters were prioritized over the safety and dignity of Jewish citizens, even as hateful rhetoric was openly shouted. "Kill the Jews". Would that be permissible for any other group? In several Brooklyn Mosques, the Imams encourage hurting/killing Jews. In contrast, Jews are brought up to love others.

Our community has long contributed to the fabric of this city, yet many are now seriously contemplating their future here, including the possibility of relocating to Florida or Israel, because we no longer feel protected by our local administration. I am hoping that this nightmare will end after Mamdani's four years.

We are calling for immediate and decisive action to ensure the safety and security of all Jewish residents. A buffer zone of 100 feet is a start. We must make sure Holocaust education is taught in the public schools.

Thank you!  
Elysa Katz

**From:** [Emily Adler](#)  
**To:** [Speaker Menin; Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] An additional point to my testimony  
**Date:** Friday, February 27, 2026 2:48:03 PM

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[REDACTED]

Dear Speaker Menin,

So many thanks to you and your fine committee to combat hate by bringing this critical legislative package forward.

I would like to call to your attention a case of hate speech from November 2023 in which a man named Stuart Seldowitz was arrested for spewing a hateful tirade against a halal cart owner on the upper east side.

If freedom of speech didn't apply to Mr. Seldowitz, not that I condone his words or actions, I ask why protestors' hateful speech and threats against Jews are given the First Amendment right to free speech and the permission to harrass and threaten while Mr. Seldowitz was immediately arrested?

The protesters discussed at the hearing are doing a lot worse. They are forming human chains to prevent entry/exit, they are spewing words of death and violence to Jews, and cheering over babies baked in ovens and women so violently raped that the savagery precludes any proper words describing it. Hand gestures to slit Jewish throats are made. So why aren't they all arrested immediately? Why were they allowed to harrass Jewish students at Columbia for so long?

Why is hate speech intimating violence and death more tolerated when directed toward Jews? Why aren't the same regulations applied in both directions?

I hope these points will provide an even stronger case for passing all the proposed legislation. Thank you for your consideration and for your initiative. I felt very supported hearing your words and the words of the committee members during the testimony.

Sincerely,

Emily Adler  
[REDACTED]

New York, NY 10021

**From:** [Eve chaya Muller](#)  
**To:** [Brewer, Gale; Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] FOR school and houses of worship access and safety bill  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 12:35:50 PM

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CHAYA

**From:** [REDACTED] on behalf of [Ezra Lasdun](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Support Int. 0001-2026 to Let Communities of Faith Pray in Peace  
**Date:** Monday, February 23, 2026 1:10:49 PM

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[REDACTED]

Dear Council Members,

I am a New York City constituent and am submitting this written testimony in strong support of Int. 0001-2026, which would establish a buffer zone in front of houses of worship to ensure safe and unobstructed access at all times. Individuals going into a house of worship should be able to do so without being blocked or intimidated at the entrance.

This protection is especially important given the rise in anti-Semitic incidents in New York State. Synagogues have increasingly become points where protesters gather, creating tense and unsafe situations for anyone simply trying to enter the building. Ensuring a clear buffer zone helps prevent harassment and intimidation and provides a basic measure of safety for people walking into these institutions.

This issue became especially clear on November 19, 2025, when demonstrators stood directly outside the entrance of the Park East Synagogue during an event held inside. People attending the event were blocked and harassed as they tried to enter, showing exactly why this legislation is needed.

This legislation would ensure that individuals can safely and freely enter a house of worship in New York City, without facing intimidation, or harassment.

Critics argue that the Schools and Houses of Worship Access and Safety Act risks infringing on New Yorkers' First Amendment rights. That concern deserves to be taken seriously — but it ultimately misunderstands both the bill's scope and long-standing constitutional principles.

#### 1. The First Amendment Protects Speech — Not Obstruction or Intimidation

The First Amendment robustly protects the right to express opinions, protest, and advocate. However, courts have consistently recognized that this protection does not extend to conduct that blocks access, threatens safety, or disrupts the lawful activities of others.

The Act is directed at harmful conduct — such as obstruction, harassment, and intimidation — not at the content or viewpoint of speech. Individuals remain free to protest, demonstrate, and express disagreement, provided they do so without preventing others from entering or safely using schools and houses of worship.

#### 2. Content-Neutral Time, Place, and Manner Regulations Are Constitutional

The Supreme Court has long upheld reasonable, content-neutral regulations that protect public safety and access to sensitive locations. Laws creating buffer zones, regulating noise, or restricting blocking of entrances have repeatedly been found consistent with the First Amendment when they are narrowly tailored and leave open ample alternative channels for expression.

This Act follows that established framework. It does not target any viewpoint or group; it simply ensures that expression occurs in a way that does not interfere with the fundamental right of others to learn and worship safely.

#### 3. The Government Has a Compelling Interest in Safety and Access

Protecting children, educators, clergy, and congregants is among the most compelling interests government can

pursue. Courts routinely recognize that safeguarding access to education and religious exercise justifies carefully tailored protections against disruptive or threatening conduct.

The Act strikes that balance by focusing on safety and access rather than suppressing speech.

#### 4. Clarity Reduces Arbitrary Enforcement

Far from expanding unchecked authority, the legislation provides clearer standards about what conduct crosses the line. Clear rules protect civil liberties by reducing the risk of inconsistent or discretionary enforcement.

Please pass this legislation.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Mr. Ezra Lasdun



New York, NY 10033-3043

**From:** [Fatin J.](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Opposing Bills Int 1-A and 175-A  
**Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2026 9:52:30 AM

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Hello!

My name is Fatin Jarara and I am writing to urge city councilmembers to vote against Bills Int 1-A and 175-A. I could not make the "Committee to Combat Hate" hearing on February 25th in person.

I am Palestinian and a lifetime organizer for Palestine. I remember how difficult it was for me as a student at Brooklyn College to organize for Palestine without the constraints of such bills. Let's be clear, these bills don't "combat hate", rather they make protesting for Palestine even more limited. Councilmembers concerned with hate brewing in our city should work on opposing real estate events that sell lands and property in illegal settlements in the West Bank and are only accessible to Jews. I regret that these discriminatory events happen at all, but I know it is strategic for Zionist organizers to have them in synagogues and Jewish community centers to claim that Palestinians who protest them are hateful and anti-Jewish. As someone who was born stateless in another country, it is disgusting to see these Jewish-only events being held in our neighborhoods in NYC to facilitate for people who already have citizenship and homes to take over more Palestinian land and homes and further drive Palestinians away from their rights to their land and from statehood.

It is also abhorrent to weaponize the right to abortion and bodily autonomy to further push these bills. These bills will hinder the people's ability to protest at a critical time in our history where protesting is the best thing we can do to oppose criminal activities that happen in our communities. Religious institutions, no matter what they are, should not be shielded from public scrutiny if they are hosting illegal and discriminatory events.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,  
Fatin Jarara

**From:** [Frooty Loopy](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Subject: Hearing  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 9:23:27 AM

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I support Julie Menin's fight with antisemitism in NYC!  
I live in Brooklyn, NY and agree that schools, colleges and houses of worship need more police, security protection.

## Committee on Hate Hearing

022626

Remarks of Garth Symonds

[REDACTED]  
New York NY10024  
[REDACTED]

Dear Council Members,

I was at the hearing on 2/25/26 for 8 hours and was not called to speak so I am writing to you.

Thank you for work on this Committee.

I've been a member of a synagogue, The Jewish Center, at UWS, New York City for about 30 years. We have over 700 membership units. I serve as a volunteer security guard under the auspices of CSS, Community Security Service which helps to provide security to houses of worship. My primary objective is to prevent acts of terrorism or hate affecting the synagogue. Acts of terrorism or hate against houses of worship have become too frequent.

I support the Combat Hate Package. It is important to protect safe access to, and egress from, houses of worship and schools.

Because of the increased threat to Jewish people in NYC, as a Jew and a security guard in New York City I've been on heightened alert. The fear of attack is palpable.

There has been increasing demonization of Jews and Israel. Protesters chant "free Palestine" which calls for the destruction of Israel. They chant globalize the intifada which calls for violence against Israel and Jews. Protesters and prominent politicians accuse Israel of genocide, apartheid, occupation, theft of Palestinian land, killing of babies, and breach of international law, charges which the informed person knows are patently false.

Demonization of Israel is demonization of Jews. An integral part of the Jewish religion and Jewish identity is Jewish peoplehood which includes support for Israel as the historic homeland of the Jewish people. This is the classic definition of Zionism. People who are anti-Zionist in opposing Israel's right to exist and calling for its destruction (which would involve the killing of its 7 million Jews) are opposing a key ingredient of Judaism. That is why their anti-Zionism involves anti-Jewish hatred. The anti-Zionists often try to hide the shame of being overtly antisemitic by saying that they are just anti-Zionist and not anti-Jewish. This is a distinction without a difference. The behavior of the demonstrators

themselves shows that this distinction is false when they target Jews in NYC for what they allege Israel has done, a country nearly 6,000 miles away from NYC.

This demonization has the grave potential to lead to violence against Jews. It has already done so. We saw that recently when a charming young Jewish couple in Washington DC were gunned down outside a Jewish event by a person who attributed his motive to “free Palestine”. I grew up in Bondi, Sydney near the horrific recent terrorist shooting at Bondi Beach which killed 15 celebrating Hanukah and wounded many. This attack was preceded by a huge amount of anti-Jewish and anti-Israel hate; this was not the case when I was growing up at Bondi and there were no acts of anti-Jewish terrorism then. I was heartbroken.

I hope in time that the Supreme Court will recognize that this kind of demonization is so connected to violence that it will be recognized as not deserving of 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment protection.

These protestors outside synagogues aim to intimidate and harass the Jews entering and leaving the synagogue. This was acknowledged by a protestor outside Park East Synagogue demonstration recently.

These demonstrators often support Hamas which on 10/7 did things like rape women while cutting off their breasts and then inserting a knife into their vagina and then killing them or burning a child alive in front of its parents and documents their atrocities with Go Pros. Council Member Inna Vernikov asked at the hearing if one would be intimidated by being accosted by a mob of Hamas supporters? The answer is yes because as supporters of what Hamas did, that puts them into the category of people who would like to kill me because I am Jewish and in a horrific way; also the Hamas Charter makes clear the Hamas objective of killing Jews.

There are 3 issues I address below which incentives anti-Jewish/Israel demonstrators to act in breach of the law and to perpetrate unlawful hate.

1. Free speech has its limits when it involves the commission of crime which is often the case with such protests outside synagogues. These crimes include:
  - 18 U.S.C. § 248 — Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (FACE Act) which makes it an offense for a person to block entrance to a house of worship, obstruct, intimidate, or interfere with worshippers.
  - Menacing in the second degree (PL 120.14) and Menacing in the third degree (PL 120.15)
  - Reckless endangerment in the second degree (PL 120.20)
  - Stalking in the third degree (PL 120.50)
  - Disorderly conduct (PL 240.20)
  - Harassment in the first or second degree (PL 240.26, 240.25) and aggravated harassment in the second degree (PL 240.30 (3))
  - Assault
  - Conspiring to do any of these

In relation to these crimes police can effect arrests but the D.A. rarely prosecutes. In effect, these offenders are placed in a revolving door and released without consequence. There is no deterrent effect for commission of these crimes.

2. The masking laws incentivize protestors to demonstrate while breaking laws because of the difficulty in identifying the perpetrators e.g. after the break-in to Hamilton House at Columbia University and the violence perpetrated against the staff inside, I spoke to the D.A. about not pressing charges. He said he could not identify the perpetrators.
3. The perimeter zone concept in the bills can only work when the police are present at a demonstration and formulate a tailor-made plan based on the facts on the ground. This will encourage demonstrators not to inform the authorities in advance of their demonstrations and to conduct lightning demonstrations before police can appropriately react. We saw this at the demonstration outside Park East Synagogue. To cope with this problem, I would propose that law should say that if the police are not present to implement a plan of perimeter zone separation or other measures, there should be a rule that there is a buffer zone of 100 feet until the police arrive, if at all.

Neither the legislation nor the comments of the attorney for the Police Dept. at the hearing consider the critical security aspects of being a security guard providing security to a house of worship or school. A trained security guard will ensure that people do not congregate near the entrance to the synagogue. If there is a throng of people outside the synagogue, this makes it easier for a terrorist to hide himself and launch an attack. Also, the entrance to the synagogue must be kept clear to allow for entrance and exit especially during an emergency. Also, it's important for the sight lines of those protecting the synagogue to be clear so that they can see any imminent threats to the synagogue. Demonstrations close to the synagogue can interfere with all these pressing security needs.

Thank you for your consideration of these remarks.

Warmly,

Garth Symonds

**From:** [Genevieve Allen](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Committee to Combat Hate: Opposing the proposed "buffer zone" bill  
**Date:** Friday, February 27, 2026 2:53:30 PM

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Good afternoon,

I'm writing to the Committee to Combat Hate, to share my written testimony against the proposed buffer zone bill (Int. 1-A + 175-A). The proposed bill creates a dangerous precedent against free speech and our First Amendment rights, allowing NYPD to determine when and how protestors and demonstrators exercise their rights. At a time when so many of our Constitutional rights are under attack by the federal government, this bill is ill-conceived and should be rejected by the City Council.

Thank you,  
Genevieve Allen

**From:** [Humberto Ducuara](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Buffer Bill Int 001 and Int 175A Testimony  
**Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2026 5:41:21 AM

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Hello,

I am a proud New York county resident. I would like to address my concerns with bills int. 001 and int. 175A recently proposed by council member Eric Dinowitz and supported by city council speaker Julie Menin.

These bills would make dissent a punishable offense and deputize the NYPD to oversee the legality of assembly and free speech. This proposal is invoked to explicitly target protests against the illegal sale of Palestinian land strategically held in houses of worship and schools. Such sales violate the federal Fair Housing Act, New York's Human Rights Law, Real Estate License Law, and Real Property Law, as well Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Rather than addressing these flagrant violations, bills like Intro 175A silence and punish New Yorkers. Distracting from grave legal violations.

I urge our elected officials to take heed of your constituents. This bills if passed will constitute grave violations against free speech and freedom of assembly. It will hold New York elected officials as complicit in human rights violations.

A concerned citizen,

Humberto Ducuara

Hello,

My name is Ian Moran and I am a proud New Yorker residing in Brooklyn. I organize within my community and participate with mutual aid networks to help meet the needs of my fellow community members throughout the city.

I am urging City Councilmembers to vote against Julie Menin and Eric Dinowitz's proposed "buffer zone" bills (Int. 1-A and Int. 175-A) around places of worship and educational facilities. These proposals attack the free speech of protestors and demonstrators of conscience who object to illegal land sales of occupied Palestinian land (and who object to Israeli war crimes and land annexation while advocating for Palestinian human rights more broadly). These include countless Jewish New Yorkers who advocate and organize for Palestinian liberation. These bills would set a dangerous precedent, endangering New Yorkers in a time when violent repression is already rampant across the country. I urge City Councilmembers to uphold and protect the free speech of New Yorkers who carry on a long tradition of speaking out against injustice, the legacy of which has resulted in the diverse, thriving, and dynamic city that we live in today.

Additionally, elected officials should not prioritize the interests of foreign real estate companies violating human rights over their own constituents.

- At the state and city level, illegal land sales violate:
  - **Fair Housing Act, [42 U.S.C. § 3604\(a\)](#);**
  - **New York Human Rights Law ([N.Y. Executive Law §296 \(5\(a\)\) and \(5\(b\)\)](#));**
  - **New York Real Estate License Law [19 CRR-NY 175.17\(a\)](#);**
  - **New York Real Property Law [NY RPP Chapter 50, Article 12 § 441-c\(a\)\(1\)](#)**
- At the international level, there is full consensus on the illegality of the West Bank settlements being advertised at sale events in New York events per [Article 49 of the 4th Geneva Convention](#).
- New York City and state officials must respond to legal complaints documenting the violations of law committed by Israeli real estate and settler recruitment organizations. March 2024 PAL Law Commission cease-and-desist letter served to the NY Attorney General was ignored. Protests against illegal land sales occur in the context of complete inaction by legal, official channels.
- Elected officials have refused to listen to New Yorkers—including Jewish New Yorkers playing key roles in these protests. Houses of worship are not exempt from political protest once they enter the public debate, and especially when they host events that violate state, US, or international law. When any institution hosts public-facing political/commercial events, existing free-speech rules apply; safety should be addressed with narrow, conduct-based tools—not protest bans.

Once again, I urge City Councilmembers to vote against Julie Menin and Eric Dinowitz's proposed "buffer zone" bills (Int. 1-A and Int. 175-A) and strongly denounce thinly-veiled attacks on the free speech of New Yorkers. Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Ian Moran

**From:** [Muhammad Shahidullah](#)  
**To:** [Testimony; Muhammad Shahidullah](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Muhammad Shahidullah for combat hate  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 12:51:23 PM

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Good afternoon

Chair and members of the Committee to Combat Hate,

My name is Imam Muhammad Shahidullah , and I serve as a faith leader working closely with El Haam Academy, an Islamic school serving Muslim families here in New York City. I am here today as an imam, a community leader, and an advocate for the safety and dignity of Muslim New Yorkers.

I am testifying in strong support of Intro 0327-2026, which establishes the Private School Security Infrastructure Reimbursement Program, and Intro 0388-2026, which strengthens hate incident reporting and tracking, and I will also address Intro 1-2026 and Intro 175-2026, which provide protections for houses of worship and schools through buffer zones.

First, regarding Intro 0327 2026, this legislation is critically important for schools like El Haam Academy. As a private Islamic school, we do not have the same level of built in security infrastructure or funding streams that public schools may have access to. Yet the threats and risks facing our students are real. Across the country and here in New York City, Muslim schools and houses of worship have been targets of bias, vandalism, and threats.

Security cameras, reinforced entryways, secure access systems, and trained personnel are not luxuries for us. They are necessities. However, these improvements come at a significant financial cost. For many faith based schools that already operate on tight budgets to keep tuition affordable for working families, investing in security infrastructure can mean diverting funds away from educational programming, student support services, and scholarships.

The Private School Security Infrastructure Reimbursement Program created by Intro 0327-2026 would provide meaningful support by helping schools recover the costs of necessary safety upgrades. This is not about special treatment. It is about ensuring that all children in New York City, regardless of whether they attend public, charter, or private religious schools, can learn in a safe and secure environment.

I also strongly support Intro 0388-2026 and am advocating for the inclusion of anti-muslim hate as a distinct category for data disaggregation and reporting structures. Clear and specific tracking of anti Muslim hate is essential. In our community, incidents often go unreported due to fear, language barriers, or lack of trust. By strengthening reporting systems and ensuring that anti Muslim bias is distinctly identified, the City can better understand the scope of the

problem and allocate resources appropriately. Accurate data informs effective prevention.

Together, Intro 0327 2026 and Intro 0388 2026 represent both prevention and protection. One addresses the physical safety of vulnerable schools. The other strengthens the City's ability to document and respond to hate. Both are necessary.

Regarding Intro 1 and Intro 175, we appreciate the intent to protect houses of worship and schools from harassment and intimidation, and we recognize the meaningful amendments already made. Our children and congregants deserve safety. At the same time, we urge the Council to ensure clear distance limits, transparency in how buffer zones are established, and public accountability so that protections do not unintentionally infringe on constitutional rights or lead to uneven enforcement. Safety and civil liberties must move forward together.

I respectfully urge the Council to pass Intro 388 and 327 and to reconsider stronger amendments before the passage of intro 1 and intro 175 to ensure their strong and equitable implementation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Imam Muhammad Shahidullah

Elhaam Academy

[Imam@dawahusa.org](mailto:Imam@dawahusa.org)



**From:** [Isabelle Pinsky](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Testimony 0001 and 0175  
**Date:** Sunday, March 1, 2026 4:34:31 PM

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Remember the old guy on the Committee who kept telling the same story about how he saw a protest and they were chanting "we are hamas"? Inshallah he got his sound bite.

Putting aside for now any hallmarks this has of a story that never happened, it's actually a perfect little anecdote to illustrate how we don't need buffer zones. Because the current bill would have made that protest illegal, but nothing happened in the story outside of first amendment protected speech. There was was inflammatory language but it didn't come to blows, and no one committed any crime, which is what usually happens. People yell at each other (not a crime) and there is no physical danger. He would know, if he ever bothered to go to protests.

On the rare occasions there is any violence, it is almost always precipitated by police.

Enviado desde mi iPhone

**From:** [JANA COHN](#)  
**To:** [NYC Council Hearings](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Protection for synagogues, churches and mosques  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 10:33:46 AM

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[REDACTED]

Dear Council members,

New York City has been a tolerant city where people of different color and religions. We need to ensure that that continues. The city should not allow protests in the perimeter of oa temple.  
Please make sure that our right to enter and exit a temple, mosque or church is protected

With much appreciation,

Jana Cohn

Sent from my iPhone

TESTIMONY of JEANETTE (JEANNIE) ROSENFELD FISHER  
BEFORE the New York City Council Committee to Combat Hate  
February 25, 2026

FOR THE RECORD

Chair Salaam, Speaker Menin, and Committee Members,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you today.

My name is Jeannie Rosenfeld Fisher. I am a proud first-generation American, the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, and a lifelong New Yorker. For the past 30 years, I've raised my family in Manhattan, where I am an active synagogue member and Jewish Day School parent.

I carved out my morning to be here so that I could express my support for the creation of security zones around NYC's Jewish schools and houses of worship. It deeply saddens me that my community can no longer practice our faith or send our children to school without fear of harassment.

As the daughter of immigrants from a Communist country, I cherish our democracy and the freedoms it affords. But freedom of speech does not mean you are entitled to trample on the rights of fellow citizens to practice their faith safely, free of disturbances and threats.

The New York that I love should lead the way in stemming a tide of bigotry that fosters a hostile environment for Jews and tarnishes our deep commitment to multiculturalism. It should confront the troubling rise in antisemitism head on, as it should all forms of bigotry.

To be clear – this bill does not ban protests. In fact, it does not preclude even the most vile hatemongers from expressing themselves, however objectionable their views.

It simply regulates time, place, and manner. A 100-foot perimeter places a legal buffer around spaces that are central to Jewish life and sends a strong message that the rights of every single New Yorker are upheld in our city.

Those who fight against this reasonable proposal are not defending free speech—they are attempting to normalize physical intimidation and violent rhetoric against those with whom they disagree.

We ask for nothing more than the right to pray, learn, and assemble in peace. I urge you to pass this legislation for the benefit of all New Yorkers.

**From:** [Jennifer Fishkin Kasner](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Cc:** [Brewer, Gale](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Testimony  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 1:11:50 PM

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[REDACTED]

Hello,

I am writing to petition the importance of safe distances from schools and houses of worship. 100-200ft minimum. There is no way for buildings and people to stay safe upon entering and exiting. As well, if people are close enough to throw something in the building or at someone entering or exiting, they are way too close and there is no way for the inhabitants to be protected. The protests are also disturbing to classes and services and programs. In NYC there is very little private property in terms of front lawns and buffer zones and this can be a serious safety concern if people are allowed too close. I hope you will take this seriously. Thank you very much,  
Jen kasner  
Sent from my iPhone

**From:** [Jesse](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Int. 1-A + 175-A Committee to Combat Hate  
**Date:** Friday, February 27, 2026 2:04:33 PM

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**Hearing title:** Committee to Combat Hate, 2/25

**Bills:** Int. 1-A + 175-A

**Name:** Jesse La Russo, resident of Brooklyn

**Testimony:**

If these bills pass, it will practically make protest illegal in the city of New York. The intention of these bills, contrary to what is stated, is not to fight hate. The people supporting these bills are unable to demonstrate any hate crime or discrimination is being done that would warrant such a radical restriction. The question is: is the city council willing to put their name on an effort that strips the rights of New Yorkers in order to satisfy groups that insist on the ability, not just to illegally sell land in the occupied Palestinian territories, but to do it without the ability for anyone to protest this act. Think about what it means to put your name on this and how you will be seen by future generations of New Yorkers.

Thank you,  
Jesse La Russo  
Brooklyn Resident

**From:** [Jodi Turk](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Buffer zones  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 10:15:50 AM

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[REDACTED]

We can't have these protests attend any house of worship. The buffer zone of 110 feet important.  
Jodi Turk

[REDACTED]

Sent from my iPhone

**From:** [Joe Catron](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Wed, Feb 25 2026 @ 10:00 AM - Committee to Combat Hate  
**Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2026 4:01:18 PM

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[REDACTED]

I urge the Committee to Combat Hate to reject Introduction 1-A and 175-A. These cynical, deceptive measures are thinly-veiled attempts to shield internationally-recognized war crimes from Constitutionally-protected public opposition by the thousands of New Yorkers outraged at Zionist atrocities, including both illegal settlements in the West Bank and an ongoing genocide in Gaza. Indeed, if members of the Committee take their mandate or the trust of their voters seriously, they should instead focus their attention on these illegal sales of stolen Palestinian land, each a transparent violation of local, state, and federal law.

Resistance is justified when people are occupied. And from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.

Joe Catron

[REDACTED]

**From:** [Jonah Schloss](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] My testimony for today  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 8:27:40 AM

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CITY HALL TESTIMONY

Good morning.

On November 5th 2023, a few short weeks after the October 7th massacre, the synagogue of my then 97 year old, holocaust survivor great-grandmother held an Israel solidarity evening for the local community. When my grandparents walked across the street from their apartment to the event, they were appalled to see a massive counter-protest right next to the synagogue: hundreds of people lobbing taunts, jeers, and threats at elderly citizens from close range.

Had there been a reasonable buffer zone between the protesters and the synagogue, my relatives would have been able to enter their house of worship and pray for peace instead of having to retreat back to their homes in fear.

I want to be clear about something. This bill is not meant to silence protests or in any way restrict the right of assembly guaranteed in the first amendment of our constitution. This bill merely ensures that everyone gets to exercise their first amendment rights, including both freedom of assembly and freedom of religion, fully and safely.

Thank you.

# Testimony of Jonathan Silverman

Before the Committee to Combat Hate  
New York City Council | February 25, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Salaam, Speaker Menin, members of the committee. My name is Jonathan Silverman. I'm a lifelong New Yorker and a proud member of this city's Jewish community, in support of Speaker Menin's bills.

The American republic has Jewish roots — from the Liberty Bell's Torah verse<sup>1</sup> to the very word "federal," which comes from the Hebrew *brit*, covenant.<sup>2</sup> An attack on Jewish communal life is not an attack on one minority. It is an attack on a tradition that helped build this democracy.

Yet today, that tradition is under coordinated assault. Chants of "We support Hamas" outside synagogues.<sup>3</sup> Shouts of "We don't want no Zionists here."<sup>4</sup> Families jeered walking to services. This is not spontaneous outrage. Scholars of modern conflict describe it as networked, multi-front, and strategic, targeting not military objectives but civilian morale and institutional legitimacy.<sup>5</sup>

Hostility toward Jews has always repackaged itself.<sup>6</sup> In the 1870s they said, "I don't hate Jews — I'm simply an antisemite." In 2026 they say, "I don't hate Jews — I'm simply anti-Zionist."

The vocabulary changes. The target never does.

And the strategy is working. Parents hesitate before bringing their children to services. Congregants quietly quit. Smaller synagogues drop programming they can no longer afford to secure.<sup>7</sup>

The opposition counts on tricking you. They are counting on this committee to accept a mislabeled product — intimidation marketed as free speech, a campaign of fear sold as political protest.

Buffer zones are not radical — they have protected abortion clinics for decades.<sup>8</sup> George Washington promised the Jews of Newport: "to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."<sup>9</sup> He closed with the prophet Micah: that every person shall sit under their own vine and fig tree, and none shall make them afraid.<sup>10</sup>

**Council members, please vote for the buffer zones around synagogues and schools.**

**Thank you.**

## Notes

1. Leviticus 25:10, inscribed on the Liberty Bell: “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.” Commissioned 1751 by Isaac Norris, Jr., Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly.
2. “Federal” from Latin *foedus* (covenant), translating Hebrew *brit*. Daniel J. Elazar, *The Covenant Tradition in Politics* (Transaction, 1995–1998); Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic* (Harvard UP, 2010).
3. “We support Hamas” chanted near a synagogue and Jewish school in Kew Gardens Hills, Queens, January 9, 2026. Forced early closure of after-school programs at a daycare and two elementary schools. Times of Israel, Jan. 9, 2026.
4. “We don’t want no Zionists here” and “intifada revolution” chanted outside Park East Synagogue, Manhattan, November 19, 2025. The synagogue’s senior rabbi, Arthur Schneier, is a Holocaust survivor. Fox News, Nov. 20, 2025; CNN, Nov. 26, 2025.
5. Fourth-generation warfare theory describes modern conflict as networked and decentralized, targeting civilian morale and institutional legitimacy rather than military objectives. Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (Free Press, 1991); William S. Lind et al., “The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, Oct. 1989; Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone* (Zenith Press, 2004).
6. *Antisemitismus* popularized by Wilhelm Marr in 1879 to replace *Judenhass* (Jew-hatred) with pseudo-scientific vocabulary. Moshe Zimmermann, *Wilhelm Marr: The Patriarch of Anti-Semitism* (Oxford UP, 1986); Robert Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession* (Random House, 2010).
7. UJA-Federation survey: nearly half of Jewish adults in the New York area fear for their safety at Jewish events; 44% say fear keeps them from attending. Smaller congregations have curtailed programming due to security costs.
8. *Hill v. Colorado*, 530 U.S. 703 (2000), upheld buffer zones around healthcare facilities. Supreme Court declined to overturn, Feb. 2025. NYC enacted its own buffer zone around reproductive health clinics in 2008.
9. George Washington, Letter to the Hebrew Congregation at Newport, R.I., Aug. 18, 1790.
10. Micah 4:4. Quoted by Washington in over forty letters.

Submitted to: [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov)

Committee to Combat Hate | New York City Council | City Hall

**From:** [Julie Gans](#)  
**To:** [Testimony; Brewer, Gale](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Petition  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 8:48:34 AM

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Hello,

I am writing to petition the importance of safe distances from schools and houses of worship. 100-200ft minimum. There is no way for buildings and people to stay safe upon entering and exiting.

As well, if people are close enough to throw something in the building or at someone entering or exiting, they are way too close and there is no way for the inhabitants to be protected. The protests are also disturbing to classes and services and programs.

"When you are standing outside a house of worship, you aren't protesting, you are intimidating."

In NYC there is very little private property in terms of front lawns and buffer zones and this can be a serious safety concern if people are allowed too close.

I hope you will take this seriously.

Thank you very much,

Julie



**Julie Gans | Founder Gans Gross Team**

Lic. Real Estate Salesperson

[julie.gans@compass.com](mailto:julie.gans@compass.com)

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**From:** [Karena Northland](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Committee to Combat Hate, 2/25, Int.1-A+175-A  
**Date:** Friday, February 27, 2026 10:40:48 PM

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[REDACTED]

Hello,

My name is Karena Northland. You must protect the right to protest and most of all STOP and condemn all ILLEGAL sale of Palestinian land. Especially in NYC. This is in regards to the bills known as Committee to Combat Hate, 2/25, Int.1-A+175-A

Please protect justice, equity and peace. Protect the peoples rights not only in the United States, but the world. Palestine and Palestinians deserve to be treated with dignity and integrity. They also deserve to do as they please with their own land. And as time has shown, Palestinians have loved their land deeply and cared for it for centuries. Please do the right thing and let Palestine be free from colonizer, war, pain, exploitation, and all they have suffered.

Serve morality with humility. Protect life!

Sincerely,

B. Karena Northland

Good afternoon,

My name is Kat Green and I am the founder of Endora, a non-profit that provides security consultation to human rights organizations. My work began with protecting abortion facilities, and expanded cross movement to support any organization that is targeted by hate groups, due to the significant overlap in players that target vulnerable communities.

I am here to express my opposition to Julie Menin and Eric Dinowitz' proposed "buffer zone" bills around places of worship and educational facilities.

**THESE BILLS TARGET FREE SPEECH AND THE RIGHT TO PROTEST. But perhaps more importantly, they do not provide any novel protection to the organizations they claim to support, and may put them at greater risk.** Historically, inhibiting free speech around dissenting opinions contributes to conspiratorial thinking, and promotes violent rhetoric and actions against marginalized communities. And as we have seen in the case of the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act being disproportionately applied to inhibit free speech and freedom of the press in Minneapolis, any legislation passed to protect an institution needs to be looked at critically in how it can be misused to provide cover for authoritarian motives. Places of worship are already protected by both the FACE Act and hate crime laws. The proposals accelerate the escalating national criminalization of dissent, and would compound the abuse of existing legislation, which the Trump administration is now weaponizing to prosecute protesters and journalists.

**REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH & JUSTICE ORGANIZATIONS BROADLY OPPOSE THE BILLS. THESE BILLS WOULD RESULT IN INCREASED POLICE PRESENCE, INTIMIDATION, AND CHILLING OF FREE SPEECH.** The legislation would become another tool for surveillance, mass arrests, and selective enforcement, especially against communities of color and the movements challenging entrenched power already disproportionately targeted by law enforcement. There is already documented and widespread use of excessive force and uneven application of the law by law enforcement against protesters, particularly by the NYPD's Strategic Response Group.

I urge all City Council members, particularly those who claim to value democracy, to vote against these bills. We need our City Council to stand for New Yorkers' freedom of speech and assembly.

**From:** [Bway Mail](#)  
**To:** [NYC Council Hearings](#)  
**Cc:** [District35](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Testimony to the Committee to Combat Hate held February 25th in regards to Intros 1a and 175a  
**Date:** Friday, February 27, 2026 4:20:33 PM

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Testimony to the Committee to Combat Hate held February 25th in regards to Intros 1a and 175a

My name is Ken Schles, I'm a father, a lifelong New Yorker, and a Jewish member of Jewish Voice for Peace. I'm also a childhood survivor of antisemitic violence. I strongly oppose Intros 1a and 175a to create arbitrary deployable "buffer zones" around places of worship and educational facilities.

These bills, presented as part of a package to combat antisemitism, are divisive. They pit parts of NYC's Jewish community against others in the Jewish community who hold dear the right to protest. These bills don't address hate. They threaten NY's storied tradition of activism, protest and the public's ability to speak truth to power. These bills give police "discretion" to criminalize proximal acts of protest. In Minnesota, it was also by "discretion" that DHS officers murdered peaceful protesters deemed to be in the "wrong" place. Constitutional rights should never be contingent on police "discretion." They send a chilling message to those wanting to assemble to address grievances and advocate for their rights.

Thursday was a long day for the students of Columbia University. At 6:30am Ellie, a neuroscientist student, was abducted from their dorm by ICE agents impersonating undercover NYPD agents searching for a small child.

By noon hundreds of students gathered in protest, and after a rally, marched. Many covered their faces in fear of retribution.

NYC Public Advocate Jumaane Williams talked of the lies of MAGA and their claims of going for the murders, r\*pists and the worst of the worst, when it's become plainly clear they are coming for our neighbors and the best of the best — hard working scholars, doctors and tax paying family providers.

The Public Advocate emphasized the danger the administration is putting us in, especially NYers of color. Manhattan Borough President Brad Hoylman-Sigal said this was the most egregious violation of our rights by DHS in NYS to date.

If Speaker Julie Menin and CM Dinowitz had their way, students would not have the right to protest. On Wednesday's NYC Council hearing on legislation aimed to address fears in the Jewish community about growing antisemitism included discussions about "buffer bills," proposed legislation to deploy 100' "buffer zones" around places of worship and educational facilities.

Given NYC's density, these bills in their original form would have effectively shut all protest in NYC, making NYC a police state. Even the police objected to them on constitutional grounds. Yes, a last minute rewrite eliminated an enforced 100' rule, but as they stand they still send a horrible message. Rewritten these bills would do nothing to change existing publicly accessible protocols for NYPD management of protests. They are, at best a political ploy, a signal to zionist that their fears will be countered with police force.

They still send a horrible message to NYers wanting to exercise their right to protest. According to civil liberties advocates, they violate the 2023 four tiered protocols settlement arrived at in the US Southern District Court after NYPD engaged in gross violations of rights during the BLM protests of 2020, do nothing to address the underlying

reasons for the rise in antisemitism, nor do they address the base reason protest occurred around synagogues in NYC this past year: the illegal sale of stolen Palestinian land in occupied territories. Places of worship should not be a cover for illegal acts. Period. These sales violate numerous local, state, and federal anti-discrimination, housing, and real estate laws because they are open only to members of one religious group and advertise properties available only for purchase by members of that group. They also violate international law: Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention unequivocally prohibits an occupying power from "transfer[ring] parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies." And where was NYC when our fair housing laws are not enforced against discrimination as these sales were blatantly discriminatory?

These barrier bills in their neutered state will do nothing different than what is already in statute and law. So why are they continued to be offered? They send a message to chill political speech and open the door for the police to further profile and target marginalized groups.

My reading of the barrier bills is that they primarily act as a mechanism to politically isolate Mayor Mamdani. And if this is their intent, they are very ugly and divisive. If Mayor Mamdani objects to the bills on grounds that they are ineffectual or only serve as a platform for council members to grandstand, or that they produce wasteful bureaucracy, he gets labeled as an antisemite. It's very, very ugly stuff.

In our upside-down world, valid claims of antisemitism have been weaponized against Jews. In places of higher learning, antisemitism is used as a pretext to eliminate research funding; to threaten accreditation. My daughter, currently studying for her Masters at Columbia, tells me how fearful students and faculty are to speak their minds or even walk on campus. After this week's abduction, a fellow student confided her fear of returning to her dorm room. She describes a chill that has befallen the campus since Columbia caved to federal demands. Columbia has repeatedly broken promises to keep students safe. On that campus students even cover their faces at off-campus protests for fear of administrative retribution or actions by ICE. These barrier bills would extend that chill throughout the city, making my New York unrecognizable.

By end of day, the Columbia student, Ellie, was released, but many already have died from abuse at the hands of DHS. A protest like the one on Thursday at Columbia would have been illegal if Intro 175a passed in its original form. These new bills send the wrong message especially now when our rights are being violated by federal authorities. "Do not obey in advance" is the foundational first lesson from Timothy Snyder's book *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, warning against preemptively adopting self-censoring behaviors, or complying with expected demands of an aspiring authoritarian regime. The NYC Council must not do the work of tyrants or accelerate the erosion of our freedoms.

Reject the buffer bills Intro 1a and 175a.

Ken Schles

  
Brooklyn, NY 11238

**From:** [Kim Christel](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Committee to Combat Hate 2-25, Int. 1-A and 175-A  
**Date:** Friday, February 27, 2026 9:41:45 AM

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Good morning,

I am writing in support of the bill to add protective buffer zones. I am tired of angry mobs thinking they have a right to harass jews under the guise of some cause they do not believe in. I work at Columbia University and I have seen what happens when mobs are allowed to rush buildings with no consequences.

There is a campaign by extremists to write in and express dissent for this bill. Please understand that these extremists have not experienced the level of harassment, hate, and discrimination that jews have experienced. In fact, they are the ones doing the hating and harrassing. They are not writing from a place of personal experience or concern for everyone's safety. They will likely say their cause is free speech, but that is a farce. The moment there is an angry mob threatening them for their identities, they would support this bill. They simply don't want to protect jews, and in fact, want a less safe environment for jews.

Please understand that the amount of dissenting voices you receive is indicative of the very real, prevalent, and pervasive problem of jew-hatred in this city. Please do what you can to protect New Yorkers.

Regards,  
Kim

**From:** [Laura Rosenblatt](#)  
**To:** [NYC Council Hearings](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] 100-foot safety buffer  
**Date:** Friday, February 27, 2026 7:35:20 PM

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Dear Council Members,

Please restore the 100-foot safety buffer around houses of worship just like there are around abortion clinics. Antisemitic incidents continue to make up the largest share of NYC hate crimes, according to NYPD data, and protests outside synagogues in places like Borough Park and near Central Park East have blocked entrances and intimidated congregants and attendees. This is a content-neutral public safety measure — not a restriction on speech. New Yorkers should not have to walk through hostile crowds to enter a house of worship or attend an event. Protect safe access. Restore the 100-foot buffer as the bill was originally drafted.

Thank you  
Laura Rosenblatt

**From:** [Laurence M. Marie](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Committee to Combat Hate, 2/25; Bill Int. 1-A + 175-A  
**Date:** Friday, February 27, 2026 2:23:05 PM

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[REDACTED]

Columbia University's students, faculty, and staff's legitimate action protesting our student Ellie Aghayeva's illegal arrest yesterday would not have been possible with the new proposed buffer zone.

I hence request that this legislation is not passed.

Thank you.

Best regards,

Laurence Marie (she/her)  
Lecturer in French, [Columbia](#) University

**From:** [Linda Sadacka](#)  
**To:** [NYC Council Hearings](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Written Testimony of Linda Sadacka Submitted to the New York City Council  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 7:44:47 PM

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[REDACTED]

Honorable Speaker and Members of the Council,

My name is Linda Sadacka. I am a community organizer and advocate who works closely with families and houses of worship in my community and abroad.

I am submitting this testimony to support reasonable buffer zones around houses of worship, not to stop protest, but to preserve basic dignity and safe access for people practicing their faith.

During today's discussion, much of the justification for protests centered on claims that certain religious institutions host events connected to political or international disputes. People may strongly disagree with those issues, and protest is a protected and important part of democracy. But the individuals walking into a synagogue, church, or mosque are not policymakers or negotiators. They are ordinary people coming to pray.

If disagreement with an idea becomes justification for confronting people at the doorway of a house of worship, then no doorway remains neutral ground.

Parents arrive pushing strollers. Grandparents move slowly with walkers. Families come seeking prayer, comfort, and community. They should not have to pass through shouting crowds or emotionally charged demonstrations simply to enter a religious space.

Since October 7, fear within Jewish communities is real and undeniable, but the principle here extends to people of every faith. When demonstrations move from public squares to the immediate entrances of houses of worship, the nature of protest changes. It stops being persuasion and begins to feel like personal pressure directed at individuals who have no control over global events.

Buffer zones do not silence anyone. Protesters remain visible and heard. They simply create space so worshippers are not forced into confrontation as a condition of practicing their religion. That is not special treatment. It is the same common-sense balance cities apply in other sensitive settings where access matters.

What concerns me most is what children learn from moments like this. When a child approaches a place of prayer and encounters hostility at its entrance, they are not learning politics. They are learning whether their faith is protected or whether they must defend it just to participate in community life.

Houses of worship should never become political battlegrounds. Once that line disappears, something deeper in our civic culture is lost.

How we draw that boundary today will shape the kind of city our children inherit tomorrow.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Sadacka

Hello,

My name is Lorenzo and I would like to correct the narrative that has been pushed by some of our leaders in office in regards to the protest at places of worship.

First, let me start with WHO. The protestors consist of Jewish New Yorkers, Arab New Yorkers, Black New Yorkers, Latinx New Yorkers and Asian New Yorkers who are NOT protesting at houses of worship because the occupants are Jewish. This has been a FALSE narrative and SMEAR of these protestors by leaders who are supposed to be HONEST and represent ALL NEW YORKERS.

A house of worship is supposed to be just that. A HOUSE OF WORSHIP, NOT a house of worship that is being used to conduct ILLEGAL ACTIVITY BASED ON INTERNATIONAL AND US LAW. The occupants are using a house of worship as a SHIELD to their ILLEGAL ACTIVITY that consist of the auctioning and selling of STOLEN Palestinian homes and land in the West Bank.

THIS IS ILLEGAL. THIS IS WHY THE PROTESTORS PROTEST these houses of worship, NOT because the occupants are Jewish. It's absolutely DISGUSTING THAT House Leader Menin would NOT investigate the issue BEFORE spreading LIES publicly about why this DIVERSE group of Jewish, Black, Latinx, Asian, and Arab New Yorkers were there protesting ILLEGAL ACTIVITY that the "law and order" NYPD should be cracking down on and enforcing THE LAW.

Protestors will be reaching out to Mayor Mamdani to ensure he uses his VOICE as well to CORRECT THE RECORD. CORRECT THE SMEAR and truly ensure that ALL NEW YORKERS are represented and protected under the law.

THANK YOU.

**From:** [M.J. Williams](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Committee to Combat Hate - Int. 1-A and 75-A  
**Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2026 12:39:38 AM

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Dear Committee Members:

My name is M.J. Williams, I am a Jewish resident of New York City, an attorney, and a descendent Holocaust survivors. From all of these positions, I respectfully OPPOSE Speaker Menin's and Council Member Dinowitz's proposed bills Int. 1-A and 75-A concerning places of worship and educational facilities.

These bills are solutions misdirected at what is not the problem. As the artist Macklemore has clarified: **"the problem isn't the protests, it is what they are protesting."**

Throughout the long history of this City, places of worship and educational facilities have been sufficiently protected from any actual risk arising from protest activity through a wide array of tools and tactics available to these institutions' leadership and to law enforcement.

There has been no change to vaulted 1st Amendment protections for political expression nor to the well-settled, familiar, and lawful "time, place, and manner" restrictions that balance 1st Amendment activity with safety.

**These bills, however, will upset longstanding balances struck between the need for protest and actual needs for safety. These bills are unjustified and unduly threaten and suppress protest. The bills are calculated to direct the New York City Police Department to suppress protest by over-enforcing "time, place, and manner" restrictions against protests when reprehensible activities are held in places of worship or educational facilities. These institutions do not deserve nor need legislation that violates the 1st Amendment. The problem is not the protests, but what they are protesting.**

To be clear, the Speaker's and Council Member's bills arose in response to non-religious, unlawful, and unethical activities held in the Park East Synagogue and a yeshiva in Kew Gardens. Real estate sales of property in occupied Palestine are strategically held in religious institutions as cover for their unlawfulness. These commercial activities violate city, state, and federal laws because they exclude buyers based on religion and violate international laws. Protests of these reprehensible commercial activities were organized and held precisely because City Council and other bodies have failed to prohibit real estate sales of land in occupied Palestine in New York City.

These bills will encourage continued misuse of religious institutions for offensive commercial

and political activities while suppressing protest of the same. Again, the problem is not the protests, but what they are protesting.

With respect, I encourage City Council to consider bills to prohibit real estate sale of property in occupied Palestine. In the meantime, I ask the Committee and all Council Members to oppose bills Int. 1-A and 75-A.

I am available to discuss my testimony further with Council Members or staff and can be reached at [mjwilliams@mjw-law.com](mailto:mjwilliams@mjw-law.com).

With respect,  
/s/  
M.J. Williams

--

.....  
M.J. Williams  
M.J. WILLIAMS LAW

[REDACTED]  
pronouns: she/her

[REDACTED]

**From:** [MARCIE CAPPELL](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Cc:** [Brewer, Gale](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Committee to Combat Hate/Combating Antisemitism  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 10:04:47 PM

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[REDACTED]

I am writing to you to support the proposed bill to restrict protests in front and near houses of worship in NYC. All New Yorkers should be able to feel safe walking to and entering houses of worship. In the last few years many Jews (myself included) and our children have not felt safe while trying to exercise our right to religious freedom. We should be able to pray in our neighborhood synagogues without hearing screaming (sometimes through megaphones and accompanied by the banging of drums). If people want to protest they should be allowed to do so but not in front of houses of worship. If they want to protest Israel let them go stand in front of the consulate. What purpose does protesting in front of a synagogue serve other than to intimidate and instill fear in Jews who are fellow citizens? For generations Jews have been targeted and made to feel frightened in the countries that they lived. These protests only serve to do the same. Please ban them within 100 feet of houses of worship.

Marcie Cappell

**From:** [Marcus Gauthier](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#); [Speaker Menin](#); [District5](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Committee to Combat Hate 2/25/26 Int. 1-a + 175-A  
**Date:** Friday, February 27, 2026 2:55:29 PM

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Good afternoon,

My name is Marcus Gauthier. I am a New York City (Upper East Side) resident and labor law attorney. Unfortunately I was unable to attend the recent hearing on the proposed "Buffer Bills" due to the timing of the hearings. Please allow this correspondence to serve as my testimony regarding the proposal.

In short, I urge you to reject the proposed Buffer Bills as patently unconstitutional and counter to the very interests of democracy.

While I understand the need to protect New Yorkers from harassment and discrimination due to their religious beliefs, the proposed bills would not adequately address the problems, and would instead have a chilling effect on the fundamental First Amendment rights of New Yorkers. Additionally, the bills would give excessive power to the NYPD's Strategic Response Group, which has a history of routinely violating the rights of New Yorkers and specifically targeting vulnerable New Yorkers.

The entire concept of creating a buffer zone where people are not permitted to protest is counter to the very principles enshrined in the First Amendment. Places of worship have been used as shields by those seeking to evade New York, US, and international law. The protests that have been referenced in these hearings and in the bills were not antisemitic in nature, and to conflate criticism of the Israeli government (and those acting on its behalf) with hate speech towards members of a religious community is dishonest and antisemitic in itself. Many of the protesters involved are Jewish themselves and certainly have no animosity towards the Jewish people. Continually painting any protesters as antisemitic further blurs the very real distinction between members of a religion and illegal acts by a foreign government that is in no way synonymous with that religion.

These bills are simply a thinly-veiled attempt to further punish the Palestinian and Muslim community in New York - a group that has routinely been persecuted by the NYPD and has regularly been the subject of Islamophobia and religious hatred themselves, including by members of City Council (namely, Ms. Paladino).

Simply put, the proposed bills would not adequately address the problem of antisemitism, while in itself creating further problems and stripping New Yorkers of their fundamental rights. I would also note that the proposal would open the City up to significant costs by way of legal challenges, which would be inevitable should the proposals pass.

My recommendation is that the City Council instead look into the reasons for these protests (i.e. recruitment events for settlers on illegally obtained land in the West Bank and real estate auctions of said land), and address why such events in blatant violation of our laws are permitted to proceed in our City.

Respectfully,  
Marcus Gauthier, Esq.

**From:** [Willa Hernández](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] NO TO BUFFER ZONE BILLS  
**Date:** Friday, February 27, 2026 11:03:16 PM

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Committee to Combat Hate  
2/25

Bill Int. 1-A + 175-A

I will always protest against churches campaigning to strip women of their right to choice. I will always stand on the steps of the House of God to stand up for what is right. This has never been a problem until recently. I have stood on the steps of many churches, run by disgusting men using their sad attempts at controlling women. Just as Catholics will continue to get abortions, people will continue to protest the hypocrisy of the Church.

I will always protest against illegal land sales taking place in a House of God. The West Bank is being desecrated, as every liberal Zionist will sadly and shamefully admit, and using synagogues as a buffer to offer safety to those stealing and profiting off of Palestinian land should always bring anger and contempt. These land sales could easily take place literally anywhere else and using the name of Hashem for protection will always be unacceptable. The protesting will never stop. You should be writing a bill to ban illegal land sales in places of worship.

Your sad attempts at stripping my rights and the rights of my fellow Americans will never stop our freedom of speech.

I am not religious but I was raised amongst Bible thumpers and orthodox zealots. I have respect for both church and temple. They are offered many rights under freedom of religion, they don't pay taxes and yet are protected by cops paid by our tax dollars. It is time for them to show mutual respect to all Americans. We have freedom of religion but that can never override our freedom of speech.

Margaret Wilhelmina Hernandez Zoodsma  
Flatbush, Brooklyn  
11226

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**From:** [Plater, Mars](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Comments on Committee to Combat Hate 2/25 bills Int. 1-A and 175-A  
**Date:** Friday, February 27, 2026 9:29:18 AM

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Hello,

I've been in NYC for 19 years, currently living in Rockaway Park (and commuting very far to teach in Stamford, CT.)

As a historian, I'm extremely concerned about bills Int. 1-A and 175-A. I'm about to submit my manuscript for a book about the history of parks in nineteenth-century New York City. One of the most striking things I've learned through more than a decade of research is that freedoms of speech and assembly were once much, much freer in our city. The proposed bills would constrain these threatened constitutional rights still further.

Here's what I've found: Parks used to be forums, where New Yorkers worked through ideas and disagreements about what justice means. These were the sites where democracy happened. Though parks were especially important to women and men of African descent who were disenfranchised at the time, all New Yorkers who struggled to be heard met there to push their voices into political debates. Freedoms of speech and assembly today are a shadow of what they once were. Rules against protesting in some parks in the 1850s attempted to shut down lively debate. Then a permitting system introduced and strengthened in the 1870s controlled open spaces and streets, criminalizing spontaneous responses to injustices that were once a crucial way that ordinary New Yorkers weighed in on political decisions that impacted their lives. These policies justified extreme police brutality and repression of constitutional rights, as in the case of the Tompkins Square Riot/Tompkins Square Outrage of 1874. Once in place, policies that were once unthinkable became the norm, shrinking freedoms of speech and assembly. Today, police barricades around free speech zones for permitted protests that are out of sight to minimize disruption are a depressing reminder of

how much has been lost.

I urge you to protect what's left of our constitutional rights, rather than shrinking them still further. Bills Int. 1-A and 175-A further restrict where people can protest while adding bureaucratic hurdles to a process that is already far too full of constraints. Policies like this always result in more arrests of people who are just trying to share their opinions with political leaders—as is their right. Protests strengthen democracy, while the Committee to Combat Hate will undermine it.

I'm happy to answer any questions you have. You can reach me here or at 

.

Sincerely,  
Mars Plater

Mars Plater, PhD

pronouns: they/them/their

Assistant Professor of History, UConn-Stamford

[www.marsplater.com](http://www.marsplater.com)

**From:** [Maya Sikand](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Written testimony to the Committee to Combat Hate, 2/25  
**Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2026 9:22:34 AM

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Good morning,

My name is Maya Sikand. I am a resident of New York city, an immigration attorney who represents low income New Yorkers from all faiths and walks of life, and the granddaughter of a New York City pastor. I grew up attending the New York Cho Dae Church in Queens, which my grandfather founded to be a spiritual sanctuary for the Korean American community of New York City.

I am writing today to strongly oppose bills 1a and 175a

Increased police presence outside New York City places of worship or educational facilities will not make us safe or protect us from hate. Rather, increased police presence will fill congregants with fear, especially immigrant congregations and congregations of color, and lead to the erosion of religious spaces as a safe and important sanctuary for New York City's faith communities. We are all too familiar with the horrific violence that the NYPD unleashes on New Yorkers from all walks of life and the idea of trusting them with enforcing these bills is ludicrous.

The hypocrisy of these bills is blatant. Rather than actually protecting New Yorkers from hate, they are weaponizing fear to target the movement for Palestinian liberation. The places of worship proposal is intended to strengthen the city's protection of illegal sales of stolen Palestinian land.

Instead of listening to widespread calls for ending the illegal sale of Palestinian land, these bills silence and punish New Yorkers, further expose us to police brutality, and distract from grave violations of local and international law.

I urge all council members to vote against these bills. City Council must listen to New Yorkers asking for an end to illegal land sales, and protect our right to protest these illegal events.

**From:** [Maya Wolf](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Buffer zones and bring back section 60&61  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 10:56:36 PM

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The mob of angry Jew haters (including non Jews and Jews that have internalized antisemitism) outside city hall yesterday as well as those that spoke out against buffer zones around houses of worship proved why they are in fact necessary. These protesters argue that not allowing them access to the doorsteps of houses of worship would impinge on their freedom of speech- how so? One can see right through this argument as a buffer zone would not limit speech; however, what it will do is not allow harassment, intimidation and violence of the Jewish people in front of their establishments— which is clearly the ultimate goal of these protesters. To understand the motivation behind these protesters, is to understand just how un-American and un-NY they really are. The Jewish people have been an integral part of America and this city. Today, many American and NY Jews look around in disbelief at the hate spewed against them at the schools they attend, in their workplaces, on the streets they walk... They question whether history is rhyming with 1930s Germany - which started out as protests against Jews and ultimately led to the extermination of 6 million Jews. Is it? Show NY Jews that you will not allow history to rhyme with 1930s Germany by voting for buffer zones and to bring back section 60&61.

Thank you for your time.

Maya Wolf  
Sent from my iPhone

My name is Megan Haller, I live in the Bronx, and I'm a senior at SAR High School, a Jewish Day school in Riverdale. The synagogue I attend every week is the Riverdale Jewish Center on Independence Avenue. The RJC has always been a place where I feel part of a community, and this is where I celebrate holidays, pray, and lead young children in services. It's not just a synagogue, it's a second home.

Lately as I'm walking into my synagogue, things feel different. I worry that one day when I'm least expecting it, I'll turn on the corner and there could be an angry mob of protestors screaming at me and blocking my way into the building. The story of what happened at Park East Synagogue scared me. Many protestors lined up right outside, shouting violent words, and shoving people in a way that created an unsettling environment. New stories of hate crimes against Jews all over NYC pop up like wildfire, and I always have a fear that my synagogue is going to be next.

Some weekends, our local police, the 50th Precinct, stand outside to make sure everything is running smoothly. I love seeing Detective Rasha Jamsheer there. She and I became good friends and seeing her familiar face provides me with a sense of relief. The Police being there makes me feel safe, and as a token of my appreciation, every Thanksgiving, I bake cupcakes and bring them to the 50th Precinct. On weekends when I notice that they aren't there, my fears escalate because I feel vulnerable.

**This bill is not about silencing anyone's right to freedom of speech, it's about my safety and the safety of Jewish community, and our ability to walk into our local synagogue and worship freely without fear of being harassed.** The 100 foot buffer zone would allow people to still protest, however it creates a safe space around the synagogue for people to worship in peace. No New Yorker should feel worried about being able to walk into a house of worship or be who they are - and neither should I.

**From:** [Melissa Fusco](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Re: Committee to Combat Hate (Int. 1-A + 175-A)  
**Date:** Friday, February 27, 2026 11:38:52 AM

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I am an associate professor at Columbia University, writing at the urging of my colleagues to testify against these proposed buffer zone bills.

Yesterday's emergency action regarding the illegal ICE kidnapping of our undergraduate student, Ellie Aghayeva, would not have been possible under the conditions set forth by this legislation. Our community has already been repeatedly deprived of avenues to react to the federal government's assault on our campus.

I have relatively little to add to the considerations put forth by other faculty members. I take it that the urgency of the situation is manifest.

Melissa Fusco  
Philosophy Department, Columbia University

**From:** [Michael Markovitch](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Protecting Our Houses of Worship  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 1:42:09 PM

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**Dear Council Member:**

**As an Orthodox Jew, I have experienced fear and intimidation while walking to my synagogue on the upper west side with my kippah on. I have seen protests near synagogues, and it can get very scary and ugly while protesters verbally attack you and, in some cases, block your path.**

**This is why it's crucial that there be at least 100 feet of open space between protesters and houses of worship. We Jews should not live in fear when these hate mongers try to intimidate us near our synagogues.**

**Thank you for your consideration.**

**Sincerely Yours,**

**Michael H. Markovitch, Esq.**



**Rockefeller Center**

**1270 Sixth Avenue  
7<sup>th</sup> Floor, Suite 731  
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[www.mmlawnyc.com](http://www.mmlawnyc.com)**

**From:** [Michael Rayhill](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Committee to Combat Hate 2/25 int. 001 & int. 175A  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 11:30:27 PM

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Hi,

I am a resident of the Flatiron district in Manhattan and am writing against proposed buffer zone bills.

The City Council needs to protect the right to protest which is a foundational freedom granted to all Americans.

By voting for the buffer zone bills int. 001 & int. 175A you will be further emboldening the police department which has shown a wanton disregard for New Yorker's civil liberties. We need YOU our elected officials to at a minimum uphold the rights we currently have and not allow a regression and dismanteling of our right to protest.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Michael W. Rayhill

**From:** [michele](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Proposed buffer zone bill  
**Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2026 7:43:45 PM

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Hello my name is Michele Kaplan, I am a disabled Jewish New Yorker living in NYC. I, like many Jewish New Yorkers are against the proposed buffer zone bill, not because we think that people should not be able to pray in peace. Of course they should be able to do so. The problem is that there are many events happening at religious institutions that are very much political and harmful. The truth is Jewish New Yorkers vary in political belief. And there are many of us who do not agree when temples host Zionist events to sell land that is really not theirs to sell. And that should be protested because it's contributing to apartheid and genocide. Never again means never again for all.

I would be more than happy to support a bill that says when a Temple, church, mosque or any other religious building was holding religious events that they should be protected. But when they are holding political events, then the people should have the right to protest that.

Thank you for your time  
- Michele Kaplan

Ableism Is...  
(a form of)  
Discrimination.  
● The false idea  
that disabled people  
are by default, inferior.  
When in truth  
disability  
● is just another way  
for a mind and/or body  
to be.

whatisableism.tumblr.com

*a graphic with a white background and black "typewriter" font text. It reads, "Ableism is... (a form of) discrimination. The false idea that disabled people are by default, inferior. When in truth, disability is just another way for a mind and/or body to be."*What Is Ableism :

Outreach Project

<https://whatisableism.tumblr.com>

**From:** [Turkuler Isiksel](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Testimony regarding proposed buffer zone measures  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 10:58:50 AM

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To the New York City Council regarding proposed State and City Buffer Zone Bills & Measures:

I am reaching out to you in my private capacity as an NYC resident. However, my message is informed by my expertise as a political science professor who studies democratic erosion.

The various proposals to establish protest-free buffer zones around places of worship and reproductive healthcare facilities in New York State and New York City may be well intentioned. I do not question the sincerity of lawmakers who wish to protect the safety and well-being of people who are exercising their religious and civil rights. Nor do I disagree that these are important goals. In fact, laws like this might be very valuable in contexts where religious minorities and persecuted groups live under acute threats of violence (say, Muslims in contemporary India).

However, when lawmakers propose bills, they must pay attention to how they can be mobilized, emulated, amplified, and hijacked by bad-faith actors, with which our political system is teeming at the present moment. As a political scientist, I would remind you that "protest-exclusion zones" are a favorite tool of authoritarian governments, which they use to deprive citizens of their rights to peaceful assembly, expressive freedoms, and the capacity for collective action. In my own borough of Manhattan, which teems with a wonderful array of churches, synagogues, and the occasional mosque, I can't imagine a single street that would be open to protest if this law were enacted.

Happily, our nation does not lack guarantees of religious free exercise. However, grassroots civic organizing and mobilization for liberal causes is under acute threat by the federal government and in Republican-controlled jurisdictions.

The last thing that the NY City Council or NY State Legislature should do is to give law enforcement more excuses to restrict, clamp down on, and punish the exercise of peaceful assembly rights, particularly at this precarious moment for our democracy. It would be a spectacularly self-defeating action for liberal legislators in New York City and New York State to lead the way in the dismantling of our capacity for collective action, which we need now more than ever. You should instead champion and protect our proud tradition of popular sovereignty.

Sincerely,

N. Turkuler Isiksel

**From:** [Nara Garber](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Please vote against buffer zone bills!  
**Date:** Friday, February 27, 2026 11:48:30 AM

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Dear City Council,

**Re: Committee to Combat Hate, 2/25**

As a lifelong New Yorker who believes it is my right to advocate publicly for my beliefs, I strongly oppose the "buffer zone bills," Int. 1-A + 175-A. Protesting the sale of stolen land taking place in a synagogue in no way impinges on religious freedom, just as protesting the abduction of a Columbia student immediately outside the Columbia gates in no way threatens the wellbeing of Columbia students and faculty. The past year has shown how slippery the slope to authoritarianism can be, and these misguided bills are not a protection but an assault on free speech. Give the powers that be a buffer and they'll build a wall. We know this to be true.

Please support New Yorkers' right to protest, which is more important than ever at this critical juncture.

Sincerely,

Nara Garber

  
Brooklyn, NY 11201

My name is Natalie Sanandaji. I am a Persian American Jew born to Iranian and Israeli parents.

On October 7th, I was at the Nova music festival in Israel.

A lot of people will stand up and talk about what happened that day. But I didn't just study it. I didn't just watch it on a screen. I lived it.

I ran for my life for hours. I watched Hamas terrorists shoot people right in front of me. I survived. I was one of the lucky ones. But over 1,200 others who were not as lucky were slaughtered that day.

I am one of the few American survivors of October 7th.

When I came back to New York City, the place I have always called home, I thought I would finally feel safe. I thought I would be able to breathe again.

But instead of relief, I felt tension. Like my body was still in survival mode.

I came home to angry crowds chanting in our streets. To slogans glorifying the very terrorists who carried out the massacre I survived.

Let me be clear about something. My issue has never been with people caring about innocent civilians in Gaza. Of course people should care about innocent life.

My issue is with people chanting for another October 7th.

My issue is with people celebrating "martyrs" who butchered, raped, burned, and kidnapped civilians.

You can care about Palestinians without praising Hamas.

You can want peace without glorifying the deadliest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust.

That distinction matters.

And that is why leadership in this city matters.

At a time when Jewish New Yorkers are feeling increasingly unsafe, we need concrete solutions to fighting this hate.

Because antisemitism in New York City is not theoretical. It is happening in our schools. On our subways. On our campuses. In our neighborhoods.

For me, watching protests that glorify October 7th forces me to relive that day over and over again. This city was supposed to be my safe haven. But increasingly, it feels like a place where Jewish trauma is minimized and Jewish fear is dismissed.

We cannot normalize calls for violence.

We cannot allow intimidation to become background noise.

And we cannot treat antisemitism as just another political disagreement.

Combatting antisemitism requires leadership. It requires accountability. It requires a clear plan.

That is why this Five-Point Action Plan matters.

I am not here as a partisan voice.

I am not here reading talking points.

I am here as a survivor.

As a New Yorker.

As a Jewish woman who wants to feel safe in her own city.

New York must lead. And on this issue, we cannot afford silence.

Thank you.

**From:** [nina berman](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Committee to Combat Hate, 2/25 - Bills int 001 and int. 175A  
**Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2026 9:31:55 AM

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Dear City Council,

I am a native New Yorker and long time resident of Morningside Heights in Manhattan.

I raised my family here and have deep roots. I believe in reproductive rights, immigrant rights, workers rights, LGBTQ rights, environmental justice and human rights for all. I am dismayed, no horrified, that in NYC elected officials would even consider passing the buffer zone bills - int 001 and int. 175A - which would severely limit our right to protest, picket, defend our neighbors and express our viewpoints.

If passed, these bills would have prevented or limited the following:  
Nurses picketing for a fair contract outside of hospitals; professors engaging in anti-ice protests at Columbia University following DHS student abduction; youth led climate actions involving student walkouts and pickets; reproductive rights protests in front of churches who encourage clinic invaders, and on and on.

This is the kind of legislation straight out of the authoritarian playbook and must be loudly condemned. I am disappointed that the City Council speaker, as one of her earliest actions since assuming this role, would seek to deprive New Yorkers of their 1st amendment rights. It must be withdrawn and never again see the light of day.

Thank you  
Nina Berman

**From:** [Nina Sabghir](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Buffer around Places of Worship  
**Date:** Tuesday, February 24, 2026 8:29:50 PM

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We have seen an increase in aggression and intimidation towards people entering synagogues. Regardless of what the event is, this aggression is unacceptable. People should not be prevented from entering a place of worship or participating in activities there, whether they are for prayer or a social event. I urge your support of Council Rep. Julie Menin's bill requiring a 50 foot buffer zone away from any house of worship.

Respectfully,

Nina Sabghir

Be Brave. Be Strong. Be Healthy. Be Kind.

**From:** [N.R.](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Combat hate package  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 9:31:35 PM

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[REDACTED]

Please vote for all the bills in the Combat Hate package.

After 9/11, the muslim community needed protection, during the pandemic asian Americans were targeted. There is always a flavor of the week for hate and we must protect our minorities. This is not a fix all for combatting hate but rather a first line of defense for all New Yorkers.

Despite many of the testimonies heard, this package does not challenge reproductive rights, debate the rights of incarcerated people, or take a side on the war in the Middle East. It is a simple, reasonable and straightforward request for protection. We want to protect everyone attending houses of worship and schools for the safety of ALL New Yorkers. We have this social contract among us and that what makes this city great! Please vote Yes for all the bills.

Noa Rafimayeri  
10025

**From:** [N R](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Testimony in support of intro1-2026  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 4:38:25 PM

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Dear City Council,

The jewish community in New York City is asking for protection. These are diverse houses of worship from ultra orthodox to far left leaning, social justice forward temples. They are testifying that their right to practice their religion is being obstructed and that they themselves are being threatened. I believe them.

Opponents to the bill site evil intent of jews, of the police, of the Trump administration but do not address their own intent. They suggest that they will be limited in their ability to make their political point if limited to 100 feet and not being given direct access to worshippers whenever they wish. This implies that their intent is to scare, intimidate, harass or be within a stone throw to worshippers which implies they intend to intimidate. The right to obstruct and harass is not a protected right while the right to worship is protected under the law and we need to give the NYPD the tools to enforce these laws.

If communities fear increased police presence and prefer not to have a buffer zone, can't they opt out? The bill does not impose protection on houses of worship that do not want an NYPD buffer zone. This law does not diminish their right to protect their congregants from ICE or the NYPD.

Opponents arguments stand on absurd statements that reproductive rights are somehow in conflict with protecting jewish worshippers. In fact, abortion clinics have buffer zones of protection and this logic should lead to the immediate adoption of the bill. Because when crazies get crazy ideas, they do crazy things. I am in support of reproductive rights and I am also in support of religious communities to oppose my position inside their houses of worship. They may be protested but not obstructed, demonized or harassed.

The absurd unfounded accusation that somehow jews are doing illegal things inside their houses of worships is a blood libel ancient as the hatred of jews. **And should be challenged in the council.** There is nothing nefarious going on in synagogues, jewish schools or community centers.

Please pass this reasonable request for protection from the angry mob that jews are asking for.

Respectfully,

Noa Rafimayeri

**From:** [Olga Gilburd](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Testimony in support of "Combat Antisemitism" bill  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 7:58:11 AM

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I am a Jewish resident of NYC and I am writing to support the "Combat Antisemitism" bill introduced by New York City Council Speaker Julie Menin and Council Member Yusef Salaam.

As a Jewish resident of New York City, I love this city for its diversity, its energy, and the sense that people of every background can build a life here. But over the past few years, my family and I have felt something I never expected to feel so often in my own neighborhood: hesitation and even fear. Fear to wear a Star of David openly. Hesitation when walking past a synagogue with police stationed outside.

Antisemitic incidents are on the rise and according to data, now account for the majority of reported hate crimes in our city, even though Jews make up a small percentage of the population. That reality is alarming. It demands more than statements of solidarity. It demands action.

I strongly support the City Council's Five-Point Action Plan to Combat Antisemitism announced by Speaker Julie Menin. This plan is thoughtful, balanced, and rooted in both education and public safety. Investing in Holocaust education is essential. Ignorance fuels hate, and ensuring that students understand the historical consequences of antisemitism is one of the most powerful preventative tools we have.

The proposal to establish safe perimeters around houses of worship is equally important. Every New Yorker — of any faith — should be able to attend services without fear of harassment or intimidation. When protestors position themselves directly in front of synagogues and Jewish institutions across NYC, that is not protected expression — it is targeted obstruction and intimidation. The right to protest does not include the right to block, surround, or harass people entering their house of worship. New York City must implement and enforce clearly defined buffer zones around synagogues and other religious institutions to guarantee safe, unobstructed access. This is a neutral public-safety measure, not a political statement. No community should have to pass through hostile crowds to pray. Equal protection under the law means proactive protection — not reactive statements after something happens. Our safety is a civil right. It should be treated as one.

The focus on security support for schools and community-based institutions is necessary as many smaller institutions simply do not have the resources to adequately protect themselves.

I also believe that better data collection and a dedicated reporting hotline are critical. If we want to address antisemitism effectively, we need accurate information about where and how it is occurring. Policy should be guided by evidence, not guesswork.

What I appreciate most about this plan is that it pairs strong protections with a clear commitment to constitutional rights and the safety of all New Yorkers. This is not about special treatment. It is about ensuring that Jewish New Yorkers — like every other community — can live, pray, study, and gather without fear.

New York has always been a refuge and a home for Jews. Supporting this legislation affirms that our city remains committed to that promise.

Respectfully,  
Olga Gilburd

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] buffer zones around houses of worship  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 10:38:15 PM

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Hi,

I cannot believe that I have to write this note to you to pass the rule to create buffer zones around synagogues and houses of worship. I grew up in New York and it was unheard of to be harassed when going to pray. It is a real shame that we need this buffer zone but we do. There are people who are so filled with hate that they attack, verbally and sometimes physically, jews just because they are jews. It should not be this way - but it is. Until we teach tolerance and acceptance rather than hatred toward others we need laws like this to keep people safe.

People like my 85 yr old father who still attends services.

Please vote yes for the buffer zone.

Thanks,

Orah Weisberg  
Upper West Side.

**From:** [Paige Davidoff](#)  
**To:** [NYC Council Hearings](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] 100' Buffer Zone Bill  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 9:51:57 AM

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[REDACTED]

Dear Council Members,

Please restore the 100-foot safety buffer around houses of worship just like there are around abortion clinics. Antisemitic incidents continue to make up the largest share of NYC hate crimes, according to NYPD data, and protests outside synagogues in places like Borough Park and near Central Park East have blocked entrances and intimidated congregants and attendees.

This is a content-neutral public safety measure — not a restriction on speech. New Yorkers should not have to walk through hostile crowds to enter a house of worship or attend an event.

Protect safe access. Restore the 100-foot buffer as the bill was originally drafted.

Respectfully,

Paige Davidoff

Brighton Beach, Brooklyn

City Council District 46 resident

**Paul Werner, PhD**

**werner@theorangepress.com**

**Public Testimony**

**Before the City Council Committee to Combat Hate**

**New York City Council, February 25, 2026 at 1:00 pm**

**In re: NYC bills (T2026-0731 + T2026-0751)**

My name is Paul Werner. I am a German American Jew whose family has lived on the Upper East Side since the late nineteenth century. My relatives have been congregants at those very same synagogues that are now calling on the State to police the rights and moral obligation of all Jews to debate and disagree over a religious issue, viz., the conflation of the Judaic spiritual tradition with the political aspirations of a foreign state. Religious authorities have called on the host state to violate its constitutional principles of free speech and the separation of Church and State, for the benefit of a faction within the Jewish religious community. This is a violation of the Rabbinic doctrine of *Dina d'malkhuta dina*, which gives precedence to the host state in secular matters. In addition it is a profound violation of the tradition that all Jews may participate in the spiritual and moral life of their own community without being turned over to the Secular Arm of the local Church, nobleman, or City councilwoman. My ancestors did not come here to face that which they had originally fled.

**From:** [ms.ms](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Buffer zones around synagogues and other religious institutions to guarantee safe  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 6:59:21 PM

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When protestors position themselves directly in front of synagogues and Jewish institutions across NYC, that is not protected expression , it is targeted obstruction and intimidation.

The right to protest does not include the right to block, surround, or harass people entering their house of worship.

New York City must implement and enforce clearly defined buffer zones around synagogues and other religious institutions to guarantee safe, unobstructed access. This is a neutral public-safety measure, not a political statement.

No community should have to pass through hostile crowds to pray. Equal protection under the law means proactive protection, not reactive statements after something happens.

Our safety is a civil right. It should be treated as one.

**From:** [ms.ms](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] enforced buffer zone in front of synagogues  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 11:49:00 PM

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Last week, I walked to my synagogue in NYC to pray — something I have done countless times before. But this time felt different.

Protestors were standing directly in front of the entrance. Not across the street. Not at City Hall. Directly in front of the doors.

As I approached, I felt my chest tighten. I wasn't thinking about politics. I wasn't thinking about global conflicts. I was thinking about whether it was safe to walk inside my own house of worship.

I had to pass through shouting, signs, and hostile stares just to pray. That is not what religious freedom is supposed to look like in New York City.

The First Amendment protects speech. It does not protect creating an atmosphere of intimidation at the entrance to a synagogue. No one should have to walk through a wall of anger to access their faith.

A clearly enforced buffer zone in front of synagogues and all houses of worship would not silence anyone. It would simply guarantee safe, unobstructed access. It would allow protestors to express themselves — without turning worshippers into targets.

This is not about politics. It's about dignity. It's about equal protection. It's about whether Jewish New Yorkers can enter their synagogues without fear.

Religious liberty without safety is hollow.

And I refuse to accept that feeling unsafe at my synagogue is the new normal.

**From:** [perakh71\\_perakh71](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] enforce buffer zone  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 11:50:57 PM

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**In the past , I have always felt safe walking into my synagogue in New York City. It's a place of prayer, of community, of quiet strength.**

**But recently, that feeling changed.**

**When I arrived, protestors were standing directly in front of the entrance — not nearby, not across the street, but positioned at the very doors. To get inside, I had to walk straight through them. Through shouting. Through anger. Through the unmistakable sense that I was not welcome.**

**I wasn't thinking about politics in that moment. I was thinking about my safety. I was thinking about my family. I was thinking about whether entering my own house of worship should require courage.**

**No one should have to run a gauntlet to pray.**

**Free speech is a cornerstone of this country. But blocking or surrounding a synagogue so congregants must push through hostility to enter is not simply expression — it is intimidation. The right to protest does not include the right to make people feel physically unsafe at their place of worship.**

**A clearly defined and enforced buffer zone would not silence anyone. It would simply create space — space for protest, and space for prayer. Space for rights to coexist without one trampling the other.**

**This is not about special treatment. It is about equal protection. Every New Yorker deserves to walk into their house of worship without fear.**

**Religious freedom is not real if safety is optional.**

**And I will not accept that intimidation at synagogue doors is something we are expected to tolerate.**

**From:** [perakh71\\_perakh71](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Jews deserve to feel safe gathering at synagogues  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 11:53:12 PM

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[REDACTED]

I never imagined I would feel fear walking into my own synagogue in New York City.

But that's exactly what happened.

When I arrived, protestors were standing directly in front of the doors — not across the street, not at a government building — but at the entrance to my house of worship. To pray, I had to walk straight toward people shouting, glaring, and blocking the path.

My heart was pounding. I felt exposed. I felt targeted. I felt like my identity — not a political position — was the reason I was being forced to push through that hostility.

In that moment, this wasn't about global politics. It wasn't about debate. It was about whether I could enter my synagogue without intimidation.

No one should have to gather courage just to pray.

Free speech is fundamental. But surrounding a synagogue so Jews must pass through anger and aggression to worship crosses a line. The Constitution protects expression — it does not guarantee the right to create fear at the doors of a religious institution.

A clearly enforced buffer zone would not silence anyone. Protestors can protest. But worshippers must be able to enter safely, without obstruction, without harassment, without fear.

If any other community were forced to walk through hostile crowds to reach their church or mosque, there would be immediate action. Jewish New Yorkers deserve the same protection.

Religious freedom without physical safety is an illusion.

I refuse to accept that intimidation at synagogue doors is the price of being Jewish in this city.

DEAR MEMBERS OF THE NYC COUNCIL COMMITTEE TO COMBAT HATE,

MY NAME IS PETER DEBLASIO AND I SERVE AS THE SECURITY DIRECTOR AT MAGEN DAVID YESHIVAH IN BROOKLYN. I AM HERE REPRESENTING MY SCHOOL, TEACH NYS, THE NONPUBLIC SCHOOL COMMUNITY BUT SPECIFICALLY THE JEWISH DAY SCHOOL COMMUNITY.

I AM HERE TODAY TO VOICE MY STRONG SUPPORT FOR INTRO 0327-2026, WHICH WOULD CREATE A PROGRAM TO REIMBURSE NONPUBLIC SCHOOLS FOR THE COST OF VIDEO SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS.

WE ARE ALL AWARE OF THE TROUBLING RISE IN HATE CRIMES ACROSS OUR CITY, AND THE DISPROPORTIONATE NUMBER TARGETING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. BUT RATHER THAN CITE STATISTICS, I WANT TO SHARE WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN REAL LIFE — IN A SCHOOL, ON AN ORDINARY WEEKDAY MORNING.

ON TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2025, AS OUR STAFF AND STUDENTS ARRIVED TO BEGIN ANOTHER SCHOOL DAY, THEY DISCOVERED THAT A SWASTIKAS HAD BEEN SPRAY-PAINTED IN TWO PUBLIC-FACING LOCATIONS ON OUR BUILDING VISIBLE TO ALL ENTERING THE SCHOOL— ONE ON A CONCRETE PILLAR AND THE OTHER ON A WINDOW FACING THE SIDEWALK. IT WAS NOT HIDDEN. IT WAS MEANT TO BE SEEN.

WE IMMEDIATELY CONTACTED THE NYPD AND WORKED CLOSELY WITH THEM TO ASSIST IN IDENTIFYING THE PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS ACT OF HATE. BUT BEFORE THE GRAFFITI COULD BE REMOVED, HUNDREDS OF OUR STUDENTS AND PARENTS WALKED PAST THOSE SYMBOLS OF HATE ON THEIR WAY INTO SCHOOL. YOUNG CHILDREN ASKED WHAT THE SYMBOL MEANT. PARENTS WERE SHAKEN. TEACHERS HAD TO BEGIN THE DAY NOT WITH LESSONS, BUT WITH REASSURANCE.

WHEN WE REVIEWED OUR SECURITY FOOTAGE WITH THE POLICE, WE DISCOVERED THAT OUR SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM DID NOT FULLY COVER THE PERIMETER OF OUR BUILDING. CRITICAL ANGLES WERE MISSING. AS A RESULT, THE SUSPECT COULD NOT BE IDENTIFIED.

THAT IS DEEPLY FRUSTRATING — NOT ONLY WAS OUR SCHOOL TARGETED, BUT WE LACKED THE FULL TOOLS NECESSARY TO HELP LAW ENFORCEMENT HOLD THE PERPETRATOR ACCOUNTABLE.

THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT LINGERED WELL BEYOND THAT DAY. STUDENTS FELT VULNERABLE. PARENTS QUESTIONED WHETHER THEIR CHILDREN WERE SAFE. STAFF WORRIED ABOUT WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN NEXT. A SENSE OF SECURITY ONCE SHAKEN, IS NOT EASILY RESTORED.

PUBLIC SAFETY IS THE FIRST RESPONSIBILITY OF GOVERNMENT. ENSURING THAT CHILDREN CAN ATTEND SCHOOL FREE FROM FEAR SHOULD NEVER DEPEND ON A FAMILY'S TUITION PAYMENTS OR A SCHOOL'S PRIVATE FUNDRAISING CAPACITY. NONPUBLIC SCHOOL FAMILIES ALREADY SHOULDER THE FINANCIAL BURDEN OF EDUCATING THEIR CHILDREN WHILE ALSO CONTRIBUTING AS TAXPAYERS TO THE BROADER PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM. THEY SHOULD NOT BE FORCED TO SHOULDER THE ADDITIONAL BURDEN OF SECURING THEIR SCHOOL BUILDINGS AGAINST HATE.

SECURITY INFRASTRUCTURE LIKE SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS IS NOT A LUXURY — IT IS A NECESSITY. IT DETERS CRIMINAL ACTIVITY. IT PROVIDES CRITICAL EVIDENCE WHEN INCIDENTS OCCUR. AND IT GIVES FAMILIES PEACE OF MIND.

AS A CITY, WE CANNOT ALLOW ATTACKS ON OUR SCHOOLS, STUDENTS, AND EDUCATORS TO OCCUR WITHOUT A STRONG AND EFFECTIVE RESPONSE.

I WANT TO COMMEND THE SPONSORS OF INTRO 0327 FOR THEIR LEADERSHIP. I RESPECTFULLY URGE THE COUNCIL TO PASS THIS LEGISLATION AND ENSURE IT IS FULLY FUNDED IN THIS YEAR'S BUDGET.

DOING SO WILL HELP DETER FUTURE ACTS OF HATEFUL VANDALISM AND GIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO PROTECT ALL SCHOOL COMMUNITIES.

OUR CHILDREN DESERVE TO WALK INTO SCHOOL FOCUSED ON LEARNING — NOT  
FEAR.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND YOUR COMMITMENT TO COMBATING HATE IN OUR  
CITY.

**From:** [Peter Feld](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Testimony to Committee to Combat Hate, 2/25/26, Int. 1A + 175A  
**Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2026 3:57:31 AM

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To the Council:

My name is Peter Feld, a proud lifelong Jewish New Yorker. I thank you for the opportunity to testify against these buffer zone proposals. Restricting my right to protest against illegally segregated sales of stolen Palestinian land does nothing to protect me or anyone else from antisemitism and hate. Whether or not the offered properties are in the occupied West Bank, these real estate sales events are illegal because entry is restricted by religion. To get in, it's not even enough to be Jewish. They make sure you have the right congregation and rabbi. This grossly violates state and federal civil rights and fair housing laws.

If you, our elected leaders, fulfilled your duty to shut down unlawfully restricted real estate events, there'd be no need to protest them. 1a and 175a expand the very tools the Trump Administration already uses to prosecute anti-ICE protesters — and even journalists like Don Lemon! Why would New York City extend laws like that, and enable those illegal real estate sales events to shield themselves from protest by purposely holding them inside synagogues, which does not deserve unique protection under the guise of “practicing faith.” When a house of worship becomes a political actor, it cannot claim religious protection from being protested.

This very hearing proved how buffer zones are targeted selectively against viewpoints such as support for Palestine, even though those views are quite mainstream in New York City and most likely dominant. Prior to the hearing, supporters of the Speaker's legislation were welcomed into a rotunda rally, and were then ushered in to the hearing room for testimony, snagging all the early panels and filling the downstairs hearing room.

Opponents were kept out in the cold, told there was no room. Anyone who said they were there for the inside rally was immediately let in.

When opponents were finally admitted, since Speaker Menin's followers had already filled the lower level, we were directed toward the upstairs gallery, where our hand signals would not be visible, unlike those of Menin's supporters below.

Other Menin opponents remained stuck outside, told there was no room, and that they could not even wait outside in the cold until seats would open up. Eventually, Council staff opened an overflow room, but many opponents had already left after being ordered to. Most opponents gave our testimony after the Speaker had left. I was unable to speak before 5:15 pm and had to leave after waiting all day, the kind of delays that affected mainly opponents of these bills.

Devorah Halberstam was allowed to exceed her length immensely, while Menin bill opponents were not. The Council's management of this hearing showed precisely how politically motivated crowd control is blatantly used to suppress pro-Palestine viewpoints.

Please vote no on 1a and 175a, this silly safety theater that NYPD admits will have zero impact on its practice. The conduct of the hearing itself, capriciously favoring one side, and filled with rancid Islamophobic vitriol that went unreprimanded, was a disgrace to New York City's proud 400-year history.

Peter Feld

[REDACTED]

New York, NY 10003

[REDACTED]

**From:** [Andrue Kahn](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Testimony on Int. No. 1-A and 175-A  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 1:54:39 PM

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Chairperson Salaam and Council Members,

My name is Rabbi Andy Kahn. I'm a member of Jews For Racial & Economic Justice (JFREJ), a 6,000+ member grassroots organization based in New York City. I'm here to voice my opposition to the perimeter bills introduced by Speaker Menin and Council Member Dinowitz. I serve as Executive Director of the American Council for Judaism, an organization founded over 80 years ago to preserve Judaism as distinct from Jewish nationalism.

The legislation is being amended now as a directive to the NYPD. The bill was initially introduced to contain and repress protests of land sale events at synagogues. These amendments do not change the original intent of that directive. When synagogues host West Bank land sales, events that facilitate immigration to Israel, or provide a platform to speakers justifying genocide, those activities are not religious worship. They are political events in direct contradiction to my own, and many other Jewish New Yorkers', core beliefs.

The First Amendment protects freedom of religion, and also freedom of speech and assembly. Hosting such events in a synagogue is a political choice, not religious practice. To use a house of worship to stifle freedom of speech or freedom of assembly uses freedom of religion as a cudgel. It also creates a dangerous conflation of the state of Israel and Judaism that contributes to antisemitism. Antisemitism is, indeed, an ongoing problem that must be faced in our city, but this only exacerbates it.

For more than eight decades, the American Council for Judaism has worked to prevent

precisely this problem. Judaism is a product of centuries-long diaspora, where the manifold expressions of our traditions were formed. To collapse Judaism into singular nationalism erases the diversity of Jewish life, and, in fact, worsens antisemitism by confusing the distinctions between American Jews and the actions of the state of Israel.

As a Jewish New Yorker, I need this City Council to protect me and my fellow New Yorkers from these attacks against our freedom of speech and assembly, not add to them. Please do not support this legislation. Thank you.

Photo

 **Rabbi Andrué Kahn**  
Executive Director, American Council for Judaism

[www.acjna.org](http://www.acjna.org)  [akahn@acjna.org](mailto:akahn@acjna.org)

[419 McDonald Ave Post Office Box 180238 | Brooklyn, NY 11218-9997 US](#)

**From:** [REDACTED] on behalf of [Avi Shafran](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Support Int. 0001-2026 to Let Communities of Faith Pray in Peace  
**Date:** Tuesday, February 24, 2026 1:41:42 PM

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[REDACTED]

Dear Council Members,

As a concerned New York City constituent, I am submitting this written testimony in strong support for Int. 0001-2026, which would require the Police Commissioner to develop and implement a plan to establish security perimeters at places of worship across New York City. It is critical that worshippers are able to enter and exit religious institutions without fear of harassment or intimidation.

I fully support Int. 0001-2026 and urge you to pass this legislation.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Avi Shafran

Sincerely,  
Mr. Avi Shafran  
[REDACTED] Staten Island, NY 10314-5032

Rachel Storch

Testimony in favor

Good Morning, Madam Speaker, Chair, esteemed members of the committee:

My name is Rachel Storch. I am here today to testify in favor of the Proposed legislation.

As the former Chief Operations Officer of Fifth Avenue Synagogue, an historic Manhattan synagogue; as a parent of children who attend Jewish day school; and as a proud Jew living in New York City, I have seen firsthand how deeply community institutions feel the impact of rising antisemitism – from vandalism and threats to the fear that seeps into daily life. As a parent, I have witnessed how that same fear affects our children: walking to school or synagogue, taking the subway, or simply expressing their Jewish identity in public. Fear, that I wish was not realistic, has led parents to keep their children home from school and has kept grownups from attending religious services. No child – and no New Yorker – should feel unsafe because of who they are or what they believe.

The First Amendment protects freedom of speech and religion — cornerstones of our democracy. But those freedoms are strongest when exercised with responsibility, not weaponized to intimidate or silence others. The Combat Hate bills don't restrict speech; they reinforce the rights of all New Yorkers to live, pray, and speak openly without fear.

By promoting education, accountability, and partnership across communities, these bills affirm that free expression and public safety go hand in hand. Passing them sends a clear message that hate has no home in our city. By providing targeted education, accountability, and partnership between communities and city agencies, the Combat Hate package is not symbolic – it is pragmatic, preventative, and necessary.

I urge the Council to pass these bills and ensure New York lives up to its promise as a city that protects and values every community. Thank you.

**From:** [Rebecca Montalbano](#)  
**To:** [NYC Council Hearings](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] 100' Buffer Zone Bill  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 12:58:28 PM

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[REDACTED]

Dear Madam Speaker and our esteemed Council Members,

I am writing to urge you, in the strongest possible terms, to restore the 100-foot safety buffer surrounding houses of worship as originally drafted.

At its core, this issue transcends politics, ideology, or any single community. It is about the fundamental human right to feel safe when entering a sacred space. Every New Yorker, regardless of faith, deserves to walk into their church, synagogue, mosque, temple, or house of prayer without fear, intimidation, or obstruction.

For many in our city, that sense of safety has been shaken. Antisemitic incidents continue to make up the largest share of reported hate crimes in NYC, according to NYPD data. We have witnessed protests outside synagogues in neighborhoods like Borough Park and near Central Park East that have blocked entrances and created deeply distressing environments for congregants simply trying to pray or attend services.

But the implications reach far beyond one faith community.

When access to any house of worship is compromised, the safety of all houses of worship is diminished. An attack on the dignity and security of one religious community reverberates across every religious community.

This buffer is not about suppressing speech or preventing lawful protest. New York has always been a place where voices are heard. Rather, it is about drawing a reasonable, humane boundary so that worshippers are not forced to navigate hostile crowds at the doors of their most sacred spaces.

No one should have to feel afraid to practice their faith.

No one should have to escort elderly parents or young children through chaos to enter a religious service.

No one should have to wonder whether attending worship will place their safety at risk.

Protecting safe access to houses of worship is a moral responsibility and a public safety necessity.

I respectfully call on the Council to stand for every faith community in our city and restore the 100-foot safety buffer in full.

New Yorkers of all religions deserve nothing less than the right to worship in peace and safety.

Sincerely,  
Rebecca Montalbano  
Fresh Meadows, Queens  
Constituent of Council District 23

**From:** [Friedman, Richard A.](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Cc:** [Judith Friedman](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Please pass Int 1-A +175-A  
**Date:** Friday, February 27, 2026 9:15:11 AM

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Dear City Council,

Please pass the buffer bill to protect attendees at houses of worship  
(Int 1-A +175-A).

If you would not allow the KKK to harass worshipers at Black Churches,  
you should not allow WOL to harass worshipers at Synagogues.

Thank you,  
Richard Friedman

**From:** [Robert Singer](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] re house of worship protection  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 7:11:09 PM

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**Honorable Members of the New York City Council,**

My name is Robert Singer, and I write to urge the Council to adopt a regulated 100-foot buffer zone around synagogues citywide and to restore the expanded law-enforcement authorities previously available under Sections 60 and 61. These measures are not symbolic. They are the basic operational tools required to ensure that Jewish New Yorkers can access their houses of worship and nearby transit safely, without harassment, obstruction, or confrontation.

The right to peaceful protest is fundamental. But there is a clear and necessary line between lawful expression and conduct that escalates into intimidation, obstruction, or targeted harassment under the cover of “protest.” When demonstrations are staged directly at synagogue entrances—timed to coincide with services, holidays, or high-traffic arrival and departure windows—the impact is immediate and deeply felt. Congregants are forced into close-quarters encounters at the most vulnerable point of any security plan: the doorway.

A 100-foot regulated buffer zone is a reasonable, constitutional measure that preserves the ability to protest while ensuring safe ingress and egress. It creates predictable space, reduces the likelihood of confrontation, and gives law enforcement a clear standard to enforce. Without a bright-line rule, ambiguity becomes the loophole through which bad-faith actors operate.

This is not only about the doorway. Many Jewish New Yorkers rely on subways, buses, and other public transit to reach services. When sidewalks, entrances, and adjacent transit points are crowded by demonstrators, worshippers—including children, seniors, and those with mobility limitations—must navigate hostile or obstructed conditions simply to reach their train or bus. A buffer zone protects the basic right to move safely to and from religious practice.

Equally important is the restoration of the enforcement framework that once supported preventive security. Sections 60 and 61 provided municipal leaders and the NYPD with clearer authority during designated public-safety conditions. These directives required the NYPD to review patrol guidance, adjust legal frameworks, and consider establishing regulated protest-free zones around houses of worship when credible threats or organized intimidation were present. They explicitly recognized the City’s responsibility to ensure that New Yorkers can “peacefully and safely practice their religion at houses of worship” while protecting

free speech rights.

Their rescission weakened the proactive posture that congregations and law-enforcement partners relied upon. Without these mechanisms, security responses have shifted from preventive to reactive—addressing incidents only after escalation. Prior provisions enabled structured coordination between NYPD and the private security teams that many synagogues maintain. That coordination is now less clear, less consistent, and less effective at deterring organized intimidation.

In a climate where threats against Jewish institutions are more visible and more aggressive, public-safety policy must equip law enforcement with the tools to act before a doorway becomes a flashpoint. A 100-foot buffer zone, combined with restored authority modeled on Sections 60 and 61, strikes the right constitutional balance: protecting free expression, safeguarding the free exercise of religion, and ensuring that public spaces remain safe and accessible.

I respectfully urge the Council to take decisive action so that congregants—and all New Yorkers—can travel to and from their places of worship without fear of obstruction, harassment, or intimidation.

Thank you for your leadership and your serious consideration of this urgent matter.

**Robert Singer**

Staten Island, NY

**From:** [Sabine Black](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Committee to Combat Hate, 2/25 Hearing, Int. 1A and 175A, Written Testimony Submission  
**Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2026 9:59:04 AM

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Name: Sabine Black

I'm writing to submit written testimony for the hearing for the "Committee to Combat Hate, 2/25," regarding Int. 1A and 175A. Please see below. Thank you.

I am a law student and New Yorker who is writing to oppose Int. 1A and 175A, bills that will chill First Amendment-protected rights to protest across the city. From a legal point of view, it is quite clear that we do not need yet another bill that can be used to criminalize these fundamental rights to speech and assembly. However, the fundamental issue here goes far beyond the First Amendment. Too often, the substance of protest is ignored in favor of legal analysis; we cannot ignore the context in which these bills are being passed.

These bills have been proposed in direct response against protests against the sale of stolen Palestinian land. Let me say that again. These protests are against the *illegal* sale of stolen Palestinian land. This land is illegally taken through violence, intimidation, and even murder and torture of local Palestinians -- in context of a broader genocide against the Palestinian people writ large. This is the context of why this bill exists. The rampant anti-Palestinian discrimination and Islamophobia in not even acknowledging this objective reality is staggering.

Int. 1A and 175A will, of course, also target far more than just the Palestinian liberation movement. They will, in short, be yet another cudgel used to crack down on activists, including reproductive justice organizations, immigrants rights organizers protesting against ICE, and more. Across the nation, we've already seen the fascistic effects of legislation which restricts protests at houses of worship and similar sites. In Minneapolis, we have seen protesters against ICE, who simply held signs and chanted in a church, charged with federal crimes under the FACE Act. With Int. 1A and 175A -- our city's equivalent to FACE-- we will see these scenes play out in NYC as well.

Do not forget: Our city, and country, have a long and sordid history of repression against activists for justice. This country has arrested, beaten, and jailed generations of organizers fighting for justice and liberation, from union leaders in the early 20th century; anti-war protesters in the 60s; the Black Panthers and Black liberation movement organizers; and the Black Lives Matter movement and the fight for Palestinian liberation today.

We point the finger at other countries, which we decry as fascist and oppressive; we turn around and do the same to our people at home. City council members: You have the opportunity to make the right choice, and vote against Int. 1A and 175A.

**From:** [Sara Hassan](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Testimony - Committee to Combat Hate 2/25 - Opposing Bills Int. 1-A & 175-A  
**Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2026 1:18:32 AM

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Testimony from Sara regarding the Committee to Combat Hate 2/25 - Opposing Bills Int. 1-A & 175-A:

Good evening. My name is Sara and I am a youth worker, psychotherapist, person of faith, and concerned New Yorker. I am here to oppose Speaker Menin and Councilmember Dinowitz' proposed buffer zone bills around places of worship and educational facilities. These bills will not keep New Yorkers safe, rather they will further limit New Yorkers ability to fight for the kind of justice and dignity that leads to true safety and healing.

First, these bills are not content-neutral: they have been invoked explicitly to target pro-Palestine protests. Israeli real estate companies and settler organizations conceal events for the illegal sale Palestinian land in houses of worship and educational facilities and protesters responding to these blatantly illegal activities happening in their neighborhoods are being maligned and targeted by these bills. Instead of responding to concerned New Yorkers' calls to end the illegal sale of Palestinian land in NYC, these bills silence and punish New Yorkers, limit our right to protest, and further expose us – particularly the racialized and marginalized among us - to police brutality.

These bills would further punish and criminalize protests across various movements for social justice, such as the movement for reproductive justice and for queer and trans rights. Protest at places of worship whose leaders have tried to control public policy and bodily autonomy has been essential to queer and trans activism. This tradition of protest is based on the principles that no institution is exempt from public accountability, and that free speech protections cannot be selectively applied, both of which are threatened by the proposed legislation. In 1989, ACT Up & WHAM! organized their seminal "Stop the Church" action both outside and inside St. Patrick's Cathedral, denouncing Cardinal O'Connor and the NY Archdiocese's homophobic, AIDSphobic, and anti-abortion policies. Councilmembers cannot claim to be allies to our queer community while attempting to pass these bills that would prevent us from advocating for ourselves.

As a youth worker, I am also deeply disturbed by these bills that would subject Black and brown LGBTQ+ youth, who already face disproportionate levels of harassment and arrests by law enforcement, to further violence by increasing police presence at places of worship and educational facilities. Young people deserve the right to advocate for justice for themselves and their communities without subjecting themselves to increased violence. We cannot accept these ill conceived and dangerous bills that will limit our freedoms and stifle our movements. Thank you.

**From:** [Sarah Silverstein](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Buffer zones  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 10:48:26 PM

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Good Evening,

I am writing a letter to support definitive buffer zones and to bring back 60 & 61 which helped synagogue security teams coordinate with NYPD for extra protection.

I personally have been a victim of religious-based discriminatory harassment outside of a synagogue on two occasions right here in Manhattan only a block from my apartment. And I am one of the lucky ones, other Jewish victims who were less fortunate have been physically injured or even killed by those claiming to be “protecting Palestine.” It is not safe to continue to put Jewish lives on the line for political agendas.

It is incumbent upon us to support the definitive buffer zones and bring back 60 & 61 to help protect the Jewish community. When protests become unsafe for Jews to pray in their synagogues and lead to physical threats and violent attacks on congregants, it is not about free speech. It is about the safety of all Jews to pray in peace in our own houses of worship. Please support this bill and prevent a future terror attack on our NYC community.

Thank you,  
Sarah Silverstein

**From:** [Sheryl F Goldwasser](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Buffer zones needed around synagogues  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 10:41:28 PM

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Hello. I attend many synagogues around New York City. If there are no buffer zones, it is very easy for dangerous people to do dangerous things and come into the synagogue unimpeded we need to have buffer zones. We need security because of the uprising and antisemitic activity We need to feel safe in our house of worship. Thank you so much for your help.

Sheryl

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**From:** [Shira Kedem](#)  
**To:** [Testimony@council.gov](mailto:Testimony@council.gov)  
**Cc:** [NYC Council Hearings](#); [Speaker Menin](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Shira Felberbaum Kedem's Full Testimony (Supporting Comments) in Support of  
**Date:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 8:56:50 PM

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- To All Concerned Parties,
- My name is Shira Felberbaum Kedem, and I want to thank you for providing me with this brief opportunity to address you all.
- I am first and foremost a life-long New Yorker.
- I was born and raised on the UES.
- My parents, grandparents, and great grandparents were also born and raised in NYC.
- I am also a proud, Jewish American and active member in a wide range of congregations and other forms of NYC-based Jewish life.
- I am speaking here now to share my wholehearted support for the proposed Buffer Bill, which seeks to ensure the safety of people taking part in houses of worship and schooling irrespective of one's beliefs and background.
- I am speaking here now exclusively as an individual, and NOT in the capacity of any specific organization I am affiliated with.
- However, it is noteworthy that I previously worked for a number of years as a synagogue consultant for six distinct congregations in three boroughs across multiple denominations.
- I currently work as a licensed social worker supporting those living with dementia and their care partners. In this capacity, I routinely engage in Jewish outreach, which brings me into multiple Jewish organizations to speak and facilitate meaningful discussions.
- My connection to the proposed legislation is deeply personal.
- Park East Synagogue (PES), the *shul* (or congregation) already discussed multiple times earlier in this hearing, is the synagogue my husband, daughter, and I walk to, *daven* (or pray) in, learn by, and socialize at on Shabbat practically each week throughout the year.
- Additionally, my daughter is a student at Ramaz, a local Jewish Day School, one referenced earlier by Eugene Major.
- Presumably those participating in this convening understand that the United States government is predicated on the essential nature of various checks and balances.
- **The proposed Buffer Legislation package seeks to address the absence of a practical scaffolding that ensures the safety and well-being of all religiously-minded New Yorkers.**
- The genesis of these bills seems to be predicated largely on the threatening circumstances that unfolded on the evening in question that ultimately threatened the health and well-being of the Jews present at a meeting in a local synagogue, the contents of which ought not matter. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but that is distinct from being able to harass and intimidate others for holding a differing belief.
- A yet-to-be-highlighted aspect of that night is that **in spite of PES being located in a building that has multiple entrances, including one adjacent to a police precinct, the response from NYPD was grossly inadequate.**
- While many have had experiences that prevent them from generally viewing police favorably, on a fairly

consistent basis, the Jewish community has expressed *hakarat hatov* (or appreciation) for the service of the NYPD.

- My family and I make it a regular practice to routinely go out of our way to say hi and thank you to police officers for their efforts to ensure safety and order.
- Following the incident that transpired at PES, I began researching security initiatives that congregants could get involved in and inquired about how I could get trained in them, because I felt strongly that relying on the NYPD, while important to do, was simply going to be inadequate.
- As a social worker, I am trained to actively listen and to bear witness. I do this day in and day out with tremendous gratitude to G-d (*H-shem*) for giving me the capacity to do so. That is what today is all about!
- While I was not physically present on the date in question when blatant acts of intimidation were perpetrated on fellow PES community members, I did hear firsthand accounts of what transpired from multiple *shul-goers* over the *Shabbatot* (or weeks) that followed.
- I was horrified to hear the accounts from numerous individuals who I trust to be reliable reporters.
- Weeks later, I was physically present and actively engaged in the UJA-organized Solidarity Rally that took place in front of PES designed to help community members and related allies heal and advocate for their right to gather at houses of worship without concern for being harassed and intimidated.
- If this hearing has demonstrated anything, it is the following ...
  - Hate abounds,
  - Countless individuals have been indoctrinated by sources of gross misinformation, and
  - Being Jewish is not a monolith: Jews often have differing views from one another, just like as all other groups comprised of individuals with unique life experiences do as well.
- Today's hearing is designed to help combat hate.
- While a buffer zone can not eradicate hate altogether, it can help ensure the safety of those in these designated settings who come into contact with others who are consumed by the hate of others.
- **"Never Again is Now"!**
- Hearing **"Context Matters"** we know our society has lost its moral compass.
- Silence and apathy in the face of evil is never an option.
- As a child, I learned about the Holocaust, but truly found it difficult to relate to; I had no survivors in my immediate family, and the horrors endured seemed far too great for me to be able to fathom.
- Nevertheless, I was told it was imperative to study the horrors of the past, so as to help ensure that history could never be repeated.
- As such, I have listened to countless Holocaust survivors speak, bearing witness to their unfathomable experiences.
- In the wake of the massacre perpetrated on the State of Israel on October 7th, 2023 and the worldwide response beginning the very next day, it is clear that a new-found epidemic of ever-rising Anti-Semitism is soaring.
- 
- Living between the Israeli Consulate and the United Nations, there have been ample opportunities to bear witness to the hate and intimidation being perpetrated against fellow Jews since October 7th, 2023.
- My family and I have participated in countless rallies for the safe return of the hostages, all of whom were brutally taken from their homes and from the NOVA Dance Festival referenced earlier.
- I myself, went to the NOVA Festival exhibit in lower Manhattan that recreated the experience of those engaged in peaceful dancing prior to the aerial and land attack on everyday civilians.
- The depravity of man that I was made aware of through that transformational recreation with artifacts from hundreds of those present that day including live streaming video, sound footage, and actual belongings taken from the location now provides me with more insight than I would ever want to have into how the 1930's of Nazi Germany could turn into the Final Solution and Holocaust (that today in spite of being so well-documented is all but forgotten or worse yet even actively denied).
- The use of words like Holocaust and genocide that have been co-opted by others and even used against the Jews by those who hate the Jews is dangerous.

- **"From the River to the Sea"** is a slogan that calls for the elimination of the State of Israel and the Jews from the world. **It is designed to incite violence.**
- Free speech does not include that which incites violence, and phrases like **"Death to the Jews"** being chanted more than crosses the line from free speech into inciteful, hate discourse; A distinction must be drawn.
- There is an unmistakable double standard when it comes to valuing the lives of people who identify as being culturally and/or religiously Jewish. Certainly if **"Black Lives Matter"**, **"LGBTQIA+ Lives Matter"**, and **"Asian Lives Matter"** too etc., one would think that all lives matter including Jews, but that apparently is not the case.
  - People stand up for the rights of women, but were absolutely silent when they learned of those raped on Oct 7th and thereafter while held in captivity.
  - People stand up for the rights of vulnerable people but seem to discount those dressed in religious garb that makes their Jewish identity readily visible.
  - People stand up for the rights of people of color but seem to altogether discount the reality that not all Jews are Caucasian. They are, indeed, many Jews of color.
  - People are virtually silent in the face of Iran's International Human Rights violations including the mowing down, gunning down, and hanging of tens of thousands of people.
- This proposed legislation benefits members of society engaged in religious observance in all walk of life, in all houses of worship, and in schools with religious instruction regardless of religious underpinnings.
- Thank you for your time and consideration
- Please join me today and countless other concerned NYers in strongly supporting the passing of these proposed bills designed to increase NYers sense of well-being.

Thanks!

**Shira Felberbaum Kedem, LMSW, MS**



Simon Deng  
Co-Founder African-Jewish Alliance  
February 25, 2026

### Simon Deng Testimony

Good morning. My name is Simon Deng. I was born in Sudan. I was enslaved as a child because of my faith and my identity. I believe in protesting. I have protested my whole life. Peaceful protest is a right and it is part of our democracy.

I've traveled the world, spoken before presidents, the United Nations, and countless authorities worldwide. I've seen protests everywhere.

What is happening outside these events in New York is unlike anything I've ever seen. Large crowds are gathering to intimidate people, to scare them so they won't attend their own community events.

People are being harassed and at times physically blocked from access. The effect is clear, people stop coming, events get canceled and communities get silenced.

A buffer zone doesn't stop protest. It makes sure people can attend without fear of being harassed or attacked. We've seen the videos, we have seen what is happening.

New York can protect both free expression and the safety of its people.

Thank you.

Simon Deng

My name is Simon (Shimi) Pelman. I am the elected District Leader of the 27th Assembly District and a 42-year veteran of Community Board 8 in Queens. I also serve as a board member of the Jewish Community Relations Council, the Queens Jewish Community Council, and other civic and Jewish organizations.

Freedom of speech is absolute. Freedom of assembly is absolute. Freedom of religion is absolute. However, to intimidate and harass is not a constitutional right.

We have witnessed protesters and inciters harass and obstruct individuals attempting to enter houses of worship in Manhattan and Queens. No one should be prevented from exercising their right to attend religious services or any cultural events. No one should feel threatened, intimidated, or unsafe while practicing their faith.

For this reason, I strongly support the City Council's proposal to prohibit harassment, incitement, and protests within 100 feet of any religious organization, school, or house of worship. We have seen chants intended to intimidate and hurt people. We have seen objects thrown. This behavior must stop and must be prevented.

Protecting constitutional rights includes protecting people from harassment and intimidation when they are exercising those rights.

Thank you for your consideration.

Simon (Shimi) Pelman

**From:** [SONIA BEKER](#)  
**To:** [NYC Council Hearings](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Protect our synagogues and gathering places  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 10:45:51 PM

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Like no other time in recent history, lies, slander and false narratives are indoctrinating our children, young people and older adults ! This is a disgrace, and also a great endangerment to Jewish New Yorkers! We have contributed so much to building NY's cultural and economic foundation! The anti/semitism we're experiencing is unconscionable, over the top! Please vote to enhance protection for Jewish places of worship and meeting!

Thank you!  
Sonia Beker.

**From:** [Stanley Beekman](#)  
**To:** [NYC Council Hearings](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Safety Barrier Around Houses of Worship  
**Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2026 6:42:20 AM

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[REDACTED]

Dear Council Members,

Antisemitic incidents make up most of the New York City's hate crimes.

There also have been blocked entrances and cars trying to break through the doors of synagogues and places of Jewish importance.

Restoring the 100 foot safety buffer around houses of worship would be a good first step.

Sincerely,

Stanley Beekman  
Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn

**From:** [Stanley Slater](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Testimony on Safe Access to Houses of Worship  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 10:58:36 AM

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Below is my testimony in favor of Int 0001-2026, "Safe Access to Houses of Worship."

First i want to thank Speaker Menin for introducing this legislation to the NYC Council. Also, i want to thank Speaker Menin, Chair Salaam, and the members of the Committee to Combat Hate for conducting this hearing in City Hall yesterday, February 25, 2026.

As a Jew, i was shocked and alarmed by the rowdy, intimidating protest which occurred in front of Park East Synagogue in November 2025. I wondered whether this would be the "new normal" for Jews in New York City. I wondered whether this would be what i could expect when entering my own synagogue on the Upper West Side of Manhattan where i live. I did not witness the protest personally but the news reports of the language used by the protesters was truly frightening. Some examples of language used by the protesters:

--"Globalize the intifada" (in other words, murder Jews wherever in the world they are found in

addition to murdering Jews in Israel)

--"We need to make them scared."

--"Kill the Jews."

Below is a video of the protest:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueF53kwU0kc&t=17s>

The above type of language is highly intimidating to Jews who may be entering or exiting a synagogue. Therefore i applaud the proposed law to keep protesters at least 100 feet from the entrance of houses of worship (including synagogues, mosques, churches, etc).

As you can see in the above video, the protesters are loudly banging drums and metal plates and loudly blasting horns. The proposed legislation should also prohibit these loud noises within 100 or more feet of houses of worship. Firstly, because they are intimidating and secondly because they will disturb prayers,

classes, and meetings going on inside houses of worship.

I would conclude by noting that my own synagogue has to keep increasing its budget to pay for private security both armed and unarmed and to pay for physical upgrades to our facilities such as reinforced glass, double doors, and alarm systems. Financial help from the City of New York for our security needs is necessary and would be much appreciated.

Thank you.

Stanley Slater

[REDACTED]

New York NY 10023

**From:** [REDACTED] on behalf of [Stephen Weinstein](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Support Int. 0001-2026 to Let Communities of Faith Pray in Peace  
**Date:** Friday, February 20, 2026 11:11:16 AM

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[REDACTED]

Dear Council Members,

Please support Int. 0001-2026, which would require the Police Commissioner to develop and implement a plan to establish security perimeters at places of worship across New York City. Harassment and intimidation of people entering and exiting religious institutions must stop.

I fully support Int. 0001-2026 and urge you to pass this legislation.

Sincerely,

Mr. Stephen Weinstein

[REDACTED] New York, NY 10023-5744

## **Steven Saphirstein – Full Written Testimony**

Prepared Testimony New York City Council Hearing – Schools and Houses of Worship Access and Safety Act (Int. 0001-2026)

Good afternoon Speaker Menin and honorable members of the New York City Council.

My name is Steven Saphirstein, and I am a New York City resident residing in Kew Gardens Hills, a neighborhood in Central Queens that has been at the forefront of much of today's discussion. I serve as the Community Outreach Coordinator for Queens Shmira, the Queens Borough Safety Patrol, a volunteer public-safety organization that works closely with the NYPD to help protect residents and respond to community safety concerns. I also serve as Assistant to the Publishers of the Queens Jewish Link, a community newspaper serving thousands of families throughout Central Queens.

I am here today in strong support of the Schools and Houses of Worship Access and Safety Act, legislation that I believe is necessary given the very real public-safety challenges our communities are facing.

We are living through a moment of heightened tension and a documented rise in antisemitic incidents across New York City. For many Jewish residents — particularly those who are visibly identifiable while attending synagogue or community events — the question of safety is no longer theoretical. It is personal, and it is immediate.

My perspective comes from firsthand experience.

Recently, I was directly involved in coordinating community outreach and safety communications surrounding a pro-Hamas protest that took place in Central Queens, near an educational event promoting real estate opportunities in Israel that I helped publicize through the Queens Jewish Link. Due to credible safety concerns and escalating rhetoric, the NYPD's 107th Precinct deployed a significant police presence to maintain order and prevent confrontation.

Working alongside law enforcement, Shmira volunteers assisted with situational awareness, communication with community members, and helping ensure that attendees — including families and religious participants — could safely access and leave the event.

What we witnessed was deeply concerning. Even when protests remain legally permitted, the atmosphere created when demonstrations occur directly outside locations connected to Jewish identity can feel intimidating and volatile. Individuals attending peaceful gatherings should not have to navigate hostile crowds, aggressive chanting, or emotionally charged confrontations simply to participate in communal or religious life.

This places an enormous burden on both civilians and police officers. The NYPD is often forced into reactive crowd management rather than proactive prevention. Officers must make split-second judgments balancing First Amendment protections with immediate safety risks in tight urban environments — an extremely difficult position without clear structural guidance.

Buffer zones provide that guidance.

This legislation does not restrict speech or eliminate protest. New York City rightly protects free expression. But freedom of speech must coexist with freedom of worship and the basic right to access religious institutions without fear or intimidation.

From a public-safety standpoint, prevention works better than escalation. Clearly defined boundaries reduce conflict, lower tensions, and allow law enforcement to maintain order without unnecessary confrontation. Most importantly, they send a clear message that New York City will not tolerate environments where communities feel targeted or unsafe because of who they are or where they pray.

Houses of worship must remain places of peace, not flashpoints for confrontation.

At its core, this issue is about whether New Yorkers can practice their faith without fear. In today's climate, where antisemitic incidents and targeted hostility have become increasingly visible, government has a responsibility to act before intimidation becomes normalized. Clear buffer zones are not about limiting speech — they are about preventing confrontation and protecting access. As someone who works directly with community safety and alongside the NYPD, I can tell you that proactive measures like this reduce tension, protect officers, and protect residents alike.

I respectfully urge the Council to pass Int. 0001-2026 and send a clear message that in New York City, every person has the right to enter their house of worship safely, peacefully, and without intimidation.

Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to the safety of all New Yorkers.

**From:** [Sunny Wilson](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] YES to establish security perimeters at places of religious worship  
**Date:** Monday, February 23, 2026 11:07:43 PM

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[REDACTED]

I'm writing to express my support of the law to establish security perimeters at places of religious worship. This bill would require the Police Commissioner to develop and implement a plan to establish, maintain, and remove fixed security perimeters at a distance of up to 100 feet from each entrance and each exit of places of religious worship in New York City. While New York City is, in the words of the late Mayor Dinkins, a "gorgeous mosaic" of diversity and religious and ethnic plurality, it unfortunately can also be a cesspool of hatred and bigotry. As far back as 2001, in the aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks, mosques and Hindu temples were magnets for vandalism and violence, under the cowardly guise of "patriotism." My own LGBTQ-friendly synagogue was the target of a hateful campaign by members of the Westboro Baptist Church many years ago. One need only look at the daily headlines to read of a firebombing, a shooting or hateful rhetoric spray-painted on the walls of a temple, church or a mosque. Houses of worship seem to be a prime target for the violent and ignorant.

Of course, protesting perceived or real grievances is a sacred right in our Constitution, but just as sacred is peoples' right to practice (or refrain from practicing) the religion of their choice, freely and safely. Recent events across the country – not to mention the entire world – have shown this is becoming increasingly difficult, and sometimes downright dangerous, especially for religious minorities.

If New York wants to continue to be a beacon of hope, freedom and equality for all, it must stand by all its citizens and ensure the right to worship freely and without fear. Enacting the "security perimeter" around houses of worship is an important step towards that end -- honoring both our First Amendment right to freedom of protest, and our equally sacrosanct First Amendment right to freedom of religion.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sunny Wilson

[REDACTED]

**From:** [Susan Bernofsky](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Vote NO on Int 1-A restricting protests in "buffer zones"  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 8:59:51 AM

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Dear City Council members,

After watching our first-amendment rights being chipped away at for years in NYC, with NYPD for years now forcing peaceful protesters into dangerously narrow “free speech area” cages they construct out of metal barricades, I am horrified to see this new proposed measure that would create “buffer zones” around places of worship. While this measure is being sold to us as an innocuous way to “protect religious freedom,” that’s obviously not at all what’s at stake here. Rather, this proposal would prevent New Yorkers from exercising their right to legitimate and protected speech in the public sphere. Everyone knows this proposal has been launched solely in response to recent protests outside synagogues that have hosted presentations by real estate companies that are ILLEGALLY selling Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank to Americans as part of Israel’s ongoing effort to expel Palestinians from their land, in open violation of international law. It is absolutely the right of every New Yorker who is so inclined to protest this. And claiming that these protests of illegal land-theft somehow violate religious freedom is cynical and absurd. This law will merely serve to provide NYPD yet another tool to suppress legal peaceful protest in our city. As a Jewish New Yorker who treasures my First Amendment rights and respects international law, I insist that you vote against this proposal.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Susan Bernofsky

.....  
Susan Bernofsky

[REDACTED]  
New York, NY 10025

**From:** [suzy elenhorn](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Buffer zones around Synagogues  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 1:03:51 PM

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Hi ,

Due to the rise of antisemitism we need regulated buffer zones around synagogues. Please take this into consideration

Thank you  
A concerned Jew

**From:** [toniarenstein](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] I am against the proposed buffer zone bill  
**Date:** Friday, February 27, 2026 3:32:08 PM

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I am a 75 year old Jewish woman who lives in NYC. I am writing to say that I am against the proposed buffer zone bill INT.1-A+175-A. Unfortunately I was unable to get in to the hearing (Committer to Combat Hate 2/25) even though I waited outside in the bitter cold for 40 minutes. I have attended many actions to protest the illegal sale of Palestinian land at synagoges in NYC and feel that is my absolute right to protest these events.

Sincerely,  
Toni Arenstein

**From:** [Vera Royf](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Buffer zone around synagogues  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 11:18:52 AM

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Dear Council Members,

Please restore the 100-foot safety buffer around houses of worship just like there are around abortion clinics. Antisemitic incidents continue to make up the largest share of NYC hate crimes, according to NYPD data, and protests outside synagogues in places like Borough Park and near Central Park East have blocked entrances and intimidated congregants and attendees. This is a content-neutral public safety measure - not a restriction on speech. New Yorkers should not have to walk through hostile crowds to enter a house of worship or attend an event. Protect safe access. Restore the 100-foot buffer as the bill was originally drafted.

Respectfully,  
Vera Royf, District 48

**From:** [weatherwoman365 \(null\)](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Space in front of houses of worship  
**Date:** Thursday, February 26, 2026 11:10:46 AM

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[REDACTED]

Dear Council Members:

Stop being the enablers. Stop. Unless you want their Sharia flag flying here one day, as is happening in London and France.

These so called protestors are paid. Recognize the fact. Otherwise they'd be just as outraged as the massscre of innocent protestors in Orannthat is going on right now. But there is silence on that.

These so called 'protestors' are paid to hate and kill Jews.

Therefore we need 100 feet away from our Houses of Worship, as well as for churches. Remember their Bible calls everyone who is not like them infidels and calls for their death. Yes, the book the mayor was sworn in on says that. Read it. It's there. In plain black and white.

Stop destroying the city by letting these kinds of people rule.

Sent from my iPhone

**From:** [Xiomara Maccou](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Committee to Combat Hate 2/25  
**Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2026 9:40:29 AM

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Re: Int.1-A + 175 -A

I was given extremely short notice on this, but I'm writing to you in hopes that you'll hear my voice. New Yorkers deserve the right to protest the sale of Palestinian land. I'm testifying against buffer zone bills, which prevent exercising that right. There is no reason to introduce measures that strip of us of our constitutional rights.

Warmly,

Xiomara Maccou  


**From:** [Zachary Finkelstein](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Hearing title: Committee to combat Hate (2,25)  
**Date:** Friday, February 27, 2026 9:02:33 PM

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To the honorable city council members of the city of New York.

My name is Zachary Finkelstein. I am a resident of Brooklyn and a University Professor.

In reference to the hearing titles: Committee to Combat Hate (2,25), Bills: Int. 1-A and 175A

I am calling on the city council to protect the right to protest, and stop the illegal sale of Palestinian land in NYC.

Thank you,  
Zachary Finkelstein