

# Families Task Force

## BOL Meeting Minutes - Final



Task Force Co-Chairs: Nancy  
Barr & Kathy Halas

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Thursday, February 1, 2024

10:00 AM

Committee Room

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### CALL TO ORDER

*Please note: Meetings of the Board of Legislators and its committees are held at the Michaelian Office Building, 148 Martine Avenue, White Plains, New York, 10601, and remotely via the WebEx video conferencing system. Legislators may participate in person or via Webex. Members of the public may attend meetings in person at any of its locations, or view it online on the Westchester County Legislature's website: this website also provides links to materials for all matters to be discussed at a given meeting.*

BOL: Legislator Nancy Barr, Legislator David Imamura, Legislator Judah Holstein, Legislator Jewel Williams Johnson, Legislator Erika Pierce, Legislator Catherine Parker, Legislator Emiljana Ulaj, Shatika Parker, Althema Goodson

GUESTS: Catalina Blanco Buitrago, Jan Fisher, Cristina Alston, Joanna Jimenez, Berit Berger, Emiljana Ulaj, Dana Hysell, Rachel Klein, John Befus, Carolyn Fluckinger, Virginia Foulkrod, Emilyn Tofflerthey, Terry Kirchner, Jessica Lares, Cindy Kanusher, Susan Weisman, Catherine Borgia, Frank Williams, Nancy Tunis, Carola Bracco, Maryanne Joyce, Rachel Halperin, Kerry Megley, Thomas Sullivan

### MINUTES APPROVAL

#### I. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

## Discussion regarding Anti-Semitism and Hate Incident Reporting

Guests:

Rachel Klein, Executive Director of Hilels of Westchester

Esti Heller, Student at Purchase College SUNY

Emilyn Toffler, Student at Sarah Lawrence College

Catalina Black Buitrago, Sr. Assistant District Attorney, Westchester County DA Office

Berit Berger, Exec. Assistant District Attorney, Westchester County DA Office

Legislator Nancy Barr began the meeting by recognizing Stan Stepphard who was a dedicated Families Task Force member from Port Chester who passed away the week prior. She outlined his enthusiasm and robust energy toward wanting to create transformation. One of the topics he cared deeply about was what education around Anti-Semitism.

Rachel Klein continued the meeting by providing some background regarding her career and how she got started with the Hilels of Westchester. The Hilels of Westchester provide support to Jewish Life on college campuses. She said for over 10 years she has realized there was a bullying problem on the college campuses and while they typically average 1.5 instances of Anti-Semitism a year since the events of October 7th, there have been more incidents than her and her team can manage.

She suggested some of the solutions to these issues are anti-bias training, looking at current tools and work on communicating these tools and resources to the public and lastly, making sure law enforcement and first responders are fully equipped with how to handle Anti-Semitism through training.

Ester Heller, a student and Jewish community leader at Pace University described her experience on campus which included losing many of her non-Jewish friends, newly formed anti-Jewish groups and an increased amount of incidents. She also says the tension on campus can be seen and felt and made it very difficult to exist on campus as a Jewish student.

Legislator Barr thanked Ester for her heartfelt explanation and asked what year she was and if she has noticed the difference from being on the campus in the beginning until now. Ester said there has always been some incidents but there's been a drastic increase since October 7th.

Legislator Williams-Johnson asked Ester what if anything the school has done in relation to the incidents? Ester said that while the school has been receptive to their complaints they haven't taken any actions to solidify their support.

Legislator Pierce asked, if there was one thing that can be asked of the administration what would it be? Ester said she believes there needs to be more education around the conflict in the Middle East and information should be provided to help students decipher what's happening in the Middle East and what should be happening here.

Co-Chair Halas asked about any guidelines or resources that have been provided in what is and isn't allowed as it relates to protesting and such. Ms. Halperin jumped in to describe her experience with Purchase University being a public campus which includes the right of

students to protest. She described incidents where accommodations and protocols would be made and followed to account for scheduled protests. She said during one of those protests she brought two conflicting protest policies to Gov. Kathy Hochul's Taskforce but had not heard back yet.

Legislator Barr explained that the County does not have jurisdiction over things related to education but the County can still advocate and come up with solutions to assist with these issues.

The next student Emily Toffler who attends Sarah Lawrence College described their experiences on Sarah Lawrence which include very thick tension and a sit down that was done.

The Legislators asked questions to further understand the issue and ways in which the Legislature could be helpful.

The Westchester County DA's office was present to shed light on the ways in which their office has been educating communities around hate crimes and hate incidents as to help decrease those actions. They noted that they have seen an increase in the reporting of hate incidents especially in the last few months since the international conflict. They emphasized the need of training and said their office along with the Westchester County Human Rights Commission is making its way around the county to anyone who wants to know more.

The FTF members agreed to sign on to a support letter for the Hate Crimes Modernization Act.

**II. OTHER BUSINESS**

**III. RECEIVE & FILE**

**ADJOURNMENT**