

Anti-Hate Crime Rally & Rally for Hope

By Henry Levy

Queens College was the site of a coalition of diverse organizations and public officials on April 13th attempting to deal with the scourge of hate crimes plaguing our city and offering visions of hope to combat them.

Frank Wu, President of Queens College offered the staunch support of the higher education community to stop bigotry and anti-Semitism from infecting our nation. Governor Kathy Hochul, the star of the event, prior to her prepared remarks announced to relief of all present that the suspect of recent subway shooting spree had been arrested. Then the Governor announced nearly \$16 million in grants to strengthen safety and security measures at buildings owned or operated by nonprofit organizations at risk of hate crimes or attacks because of their ideology, beliefs, or missions. A total of 205 organizations received 327 grants, which are available through the state's Securing Communities Against Hate Crimes program and administered by the state Division of Criminal Justice Services. The funding will allow synagogues, churches, religious schools, civic organizations, and other nonprofit organizations to secure their facilities and better protect individuals and families they serve. Additionally, the FY 2023 Enacted Budget directs \$25 million towards grants and increases the reimbursement cap for victims of hate crimes by \$2,000.

The Governor said, "We see acts of hate, it hurts all of us as human beings. It doesn't matter the victim. These are all children of our state, people of our state, and we care about them deeply."

So many of our neighbors have been attacked or degraded simply for the act of walking down a street, being on a subway, worshipping in a synagogue, going to school at a yeshiva, going out to just conduct their everyday lives. Too many of our Jewish brothers have had to suffer the indignity of torment for being spit upon just by wearing a yarmulka.

And I think about when I went to a yeshiva about a year ago and there had just been an attack on the streets and a young boy came up to me and he says, my friends say maybe I shouldn't wear my yarmulka. Maybe I shouldn't wear this because that means people will target me and attack me. And I said, no, no, my son, you wear that with pride because your ancestors never gave up. They never forgot. And that is a strength that you wear for the rest of your life, a statement, and you will not bow to hatred."

Governor Hochul touched on the expanded arrest eligibility for hate crimes which were not covered before. At the same time most New Yorkers are still disgusted with the current no bail policy that has allowed criminals to plunder stores and act as out of control marauders knowing they will just be set free to repeat these offenses again and again and again. The Governor proposed some fixes but not enough and judges need the final word.

In describing securing the safety of our religious institutions she said, "It means security cameras. It means protection. It means identifying our vulnerable locations. So we are allocating \$25 million for communities against hate crime grants. And today I'm not naming the organizations because they need to have their security protected, but of that we're allocating \$16 million today and you'll be notified if you're one of those recipients. 80% of which is going toward the Jewish community. We have \$20 million directly for the Asian American communities, \$10



Top Photo: (from left) Melinda Katz, Queens DA; Assembly Member, Nily Rozic; Assembly Member, Dan Rosenthal; NYS Governor, Kathy Hochul; Donovan Richards, Queens Borough President; Frank Wu, Queens College President; Congresswoman Grace Meng; Jo-Ann Yoo, Asian American Federation Executive Director; Senator Toby Stavisky; Rabbi Joe Potasnik, NY Board of Rabbis; and a young Asian girl holding an anti-Asian violence sign. Photo: Henry Levy. **2nd row:** (left) NYS Governor, Kathy Hochul; (right) Congresswoman Grace Meng; **3rd row:** (left) Donovan Richards, Queens Borough President; (right) Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, NY Board of Rabbis; **4th row:** (left) Frank Wu, Queens College President; (right) Melinda Katz, Queens DA; **Bottom:** (left) Assembly Member, Nily Rozic; (right) Senator Toby Stavisky.

million for hate crimes, \$10 million for additional social services. We can help people heal, let's focus on that."

Congresswoman Grace Meng spoke of the rash of anti-Semitic incidents in the city, Sikh's being attacked in Richmond Hill, having to comfort families in the Asian community who were victims of hate crimes and ongoing gun violence and said, "I know people are scared." She thanked President Biden for signing her hate crimes bill into law and spoke of the solidarity among different communities to confront the criminals and rally behind the victims. Meng said, "When Asians were targeted, people in the Black, Jewish, Muslim, LGBTQ communities came to us. They felt part of the AAPI (American Asian and Pacific Islander) community."

Jo-Ann Yoo, the Executive Director of the Asian American Federation thanked the Governor for this new funding to fight hate crimes and added, "It's a sad way to live when we have money for infrastructure to provide public safety."

Donovan Richards, Queens Borough President, one of the most diverse communities in the country said, "There are some people that have a problem with our kind of diversity. They attack others that don't look like us or act like us. We need to do better to help victims of hate crimes and hold perpetrators accountable."

Senator Toby Stavisky, Chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee remarked that on Friday as the Jewish people celebrate Passover we are reminded that the struggle is not over and that the Asian community, with the highest rate of poverty faces racism, bigotry and injustice.

Assembly Member Nily Rozic, the sponsor in the State Assembly for a comprehensive Holocaust education bill said, "This is no time for symbolic gestures but a time for change."

Assembly Member Dan Rosenthal reminded us that 2021 saw a 100% increase in hate crimes. He said, "The Holocaust did not begin at the gates of Auschwitz, it began after years of hatred."

Rabbi Joe Potasnik, executive director, New York Board of Rabbis said, "Some years ago, following the hateful attack on the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Rabbi Meyers stood up and said to everyone that after the Holocaust when we said 'Never Again' we didn't put a question mark, we put an exclamation mark. When hate mongers marched in Charlottesville and said, 'Jews will not replace us' many Christians formed a protective perimeter and said, 'If you want them you have to go through us.' Congresswoman Meng, when there was an attack in Chinatown we all walked together and told the AAPI community 'You belong to us'. We may have different faiths but we are all one family because if you scratch an anti-Semite you find a racist. Anti-Semitism is anti-Christianity, is anti-Muslim, is anti all the other faiths we have in this world. This holiday season is about the broken and the whole. The broken matzah and the whole matzah. We may not be able to heal all of the broken but we have a responsibility to help all of the broken. We as clergy need a greater presence in the classroom. If we want our young to learn about respect we have to show them what respect means. If we want them to love thy neighbor we have to show them what it is to love thy neighbor. It is not enough for any of us to hear a sermon we have to see a sermon. It is about all of us as one people making life meaningful for all people."