



**Testimony of Deborah Lauter**  
**Executive Director**  
**New York City Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes**  
**Before the Committee on Public Safety**  
**February 10, 2020**

Good afternoon, Chair Richards and members of the Public Safety Committee. I am Deborah Lauter, Executive Director of the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes (OPHC). On behalf of OPHC, which is a unit in the Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice, we thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding Intro. No. 1847-2020, relating to responses to violent hate crimes.

Let me begin by saying that hate has no place in New York City, a city celebrated for its diversity. And no New Yorker should ever feel targeted or unsafe because of the race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability. I want to thank the Council for its leadership in creating the OPHC and for your input and support since its inception. While of course it is expected that our elected leaders condemn hate crimes after they occur, you have taken action to do something greater — to enable a tangible effort that will *prevent* hate from taking hold in the first place. Our city's holistic approach is the first of kind in the country and I can share that it has received very positive support not just from New Yorkers, but from across the nation and indeed, from around the world. Many are looking to this initiative as a model to address the disturbing widespread rise in hate incidents.

**Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes (OPHC)**

At this time last year, the New York City Council passed legislation to create an Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes – the very legislation that is under consideration for amendment today. That legislation provided that the new office should be open by November. Mayor de Blasio, concerned about the continuing rise in hate crimes, escalated launching the office, which was announced with my appointment on September 3, 2019.

I am pleased to report that in just five short months, we have accomplished much, including completing the administrative work of opening a new office – we are now fully staffed with seven full-time employees.

**Strategies and Initiatives**

One of my priorities over these first months has been to engage deeply with different communities across the city, particularly those who are vulnerable to bias incidents and hate crimes. I have spoken at over 50 meetings in all five boroughs and have solicited input from dozens of leaders from religious, education, and community based organizations, as well as academic institutions and think tanks. This has helped me identify areas where City government

could take a more active role convening stakeholders and augmenting and innovating new tools. In these meetings and town halls I have heard the voices of concern, of frustration, of fear — but also of optimism, energy and resolve to engage in what many of us see as not just the fight against hate, but the fight for the soul of civility and the right to respect.

These first months have necessitated particular attention to the Jewish community because of the increase in hate crimes motivated by anti-Semitism, particularly targeting the religious Jewish communities in Brooklyn, and in the wake of the horrific attacks in the neighboring Jewish communities in Jersey City and Monsey, NY.

At the same time, the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes has also been dedicated to addressing the unique issues and concerns of other communities that are vulnerable to bias incidents. The LGBTQ community experienced the second highest increase in hate crimes last year, including violent assaults and we have been at their side speaking out and working with them to address strategies to combat this disturbing trend. We have engaged with leaders in the Muslim, Sikh, Asian, Hispanic, Black, immigrant, as well as LGBTQ communities who report that their constituents, too, are experiencing an upsurge in bias-motivated incidents and hate crimes, yet most of these incidents are going unreported.

One of the goals of the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes to address this problem of under-reporting, not only so that we can show support and get help for victims, but also so we can fully understand the scope of the problem and recommend strategies and resources to address it. Much of this work is being done through our management of the Hate Violence Prevention Initiative (HVPI) which City Council funded through discretionary grants. Participating organizations include the Arab American Association of New York (AANYC), the Center for Law & Social Justice at Medgar Evers, Desis Rising Up & Moving (DRUM), the Center for Anti-Violence Education (CAVE), Project Witness, New York Anti-Violence Project (AVP), the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), and United Jewish Organizations of Williamsburg (UJO) and the Jewish Children's Museum. We have been overseeing those contracts and convening the full cohort of 15 participating organizations. With Council support, our office has empowered and enabled them to share their challenges and their best practices with others who are engaged in grassroots efforts.

As part of our mandate under the legislation to perform a coordinating role for the City, OPHC has also formed an Interagency Committee for the Prevention of Hate Crimes (IAC), and convened eleven city agencies and the City's five District Attorney offices, all of whom are stakeholders in preventing and addressing hate violence. By bringing them together with an intentional focus on addressing hate crimes, the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes is breaking down silos and engaging educators, first responders, victim service providers, restorative justice advocates, and other subject matter experts. Interagency Committee representatives are sharing information about current programs, resources, and best practices and engaging together in creative thinking and recommendations that will have long-term impact.

I have dedicated almost three decades of my civil rights and human relations career to combating stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, hate and extremism at the state, national and global levels. I am gratified that I can now focus my skills and expertise to benefit New York City. What I

have shared with city agencies, community organizations, elected officials, media and others is that there is not one way to fight hate. It requires a multi-pronged approach. And so I have set forth a three-pillar strategy for the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes, focused on education, community relations, and law enforcement.

### **Education**

I am pleased to report that we are already making significant progress with respect to our education mandate. In December, we partnered with the Department of Education to create resources on promoting respect and addressing hate crimes and Chancellor Carranza sent them to 150,000 educators in the system, urging them to have conversations with their students about the rise in hate crimes and making clear that anti-Semitism, racism and all forms of hate and bigotry will not be tolerated in our school system. We also helped facilitate a partnership between the DOE and the Museum of Jewish Heritage to provide an opportunity for 14,000 students from Brooklyn to tour the Museum's exhibit, *Auschwitz. Not Long Ago, Not Far Away*, with families of students 12 and over to receive free tickets to the Museum. This initiative will educate students and their families about the consequences of hate through powerful images and survivors' stories. We have also been working with the DOE to develop new curriculum resources on hate crimes which will be introduced and available to teachers city-wide in the 2020-21 school year.

### **Community Relations**

With respect to community relations, in addition to our work with the HVPI, at the end of December the Mayor announced a new initiative: the formation of Neighborhood Safety Coalitions. These coalitions, consisting of leaders from community-based organizations, houses of worship, civic associations, tenant associations, community boards, businesses, and community school districts, will address neighborhood safety issues with an intentional focus on preventative measures and programs that will have long-term impact. Neighbors will come together to break down stereotypes and build healthy relationships that foster safety and social cohesion.

Last week, the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes hosted a joint inaugural meeting of the three coalitions, made up of leaders from the greater Borough Park area, Crown Heights and the Williamsburg/Bed Stuy communities. The theme of "CORE Values NYC" guides their efforts to create action plans and programs, with the "CORE" acronym standing for **Community Of Respect for Everyone.**

Last week I had the privilege to participate in a remarkable program that was organized by Community School District 14 Superintendent, Alicja Winnicki, in Williamsburg. Rabbi David Niederman of the UJO and I engaged in a thoughtful, powerful discussion with student leaders and then a school walk with the superintendent, principal, CEC members, student advisors, and students from neighborhood schools. This program has also been done successfully by Rabbi Eli Cohen from the Crown Heights Jewish Community Council in partnership with Geoffrey Davis, Director of the Stop Violence Foundation. We are now looking to expand this model across the Neighborhood Safety Coalition communities, with the enthusiastic support of the Community

School District Superintendents of District 17-Crown Heights, and District 20-Borough Park, who are both members of their respective Neighborhood Safety Coalitions.

To further advance community education, the Office is overseeing the development of new advertising and social media campaigns to confront prejudice, encourage mutual respect, and empower anyone who is a victim of a hate crime to come forward and report it.

#### **Law Enforcement**

And last, but not least, law enforcement. I am proud to sit here alongside the NYPD, who have been vital partners not just in responding to hate crimes, but in seeking ways to address preventative solutions. Commissioner Shea's presence at so many community meetings and the tone he has set for the whole department to take seriously and address the increase in hate crimes has been exemplary. We believe his commitment to community policing, initiatives focused on youth, as well as the new intelligence unit to address racially and ethnically motivated extremism, are all critically important measures. We also were extremely pleased to see the Commissioner's positive response to the Council's request to include hate crimes statistics in CompStat, which we believe is a significant step in heightening awareness and improving response to hate violence. I also want to commend and thank Deputy Inspector Mark Molinari who heads up the NYPD Hate Crime Task Force as he has been especially helpful in providing guidance and partnership to the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes as we have gotten off the ground.

#### **Intro. No. 1847-2020**

When a hate crime is committed, there is an urgent desire — particularly among those who share the victim's identity — to know what has happened, what steps are being taken to respond, and what the outcomes will be. Our elected officials also are eager for information about hate crime incidents to better respond to the inquiries and needs of their constituents. The Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes recognizes the importance of this "need to know" embodied in Intro. 1847-2020 today, and supports the intent of these amendments. We are currently exploring effective, responsible methods of notification that preserve the integrity of an investigation and, at the same time, provides assurance to all parties that an incident is being handled appropriately.

We want to thank the Committee again for convening this hearing today and to express our appreciation for the tremendous support demonstrated by leaders at every level of government and by organizations and individuals all over our city. We support the goals of this amendment and are committed to working with the Council on how to operationalize this bill and uplift communities so that all New Yorkers and visitors feel welcome and safe.

Thank you for your attention. I welcome your questions.





**TESTIMONY OF:**

**Lisa Schreibersdorf – Executive Director**

**BROOKLYN DEFENDER SERVICES**

**Presented before**

**The New York City Council Committee on Public Safety**

**Hearing on Int. 1847**

**February 10, 2020**

My name is Lisa Schreibersdorf and I am the Executive Director of Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS). BDS provides multi-disciplinary and client-centered criminal, family, and immigration defense, as well as civil legal services, social work support and advocacy, for over tens of thousands of clients in Brooklyn every year. We thank the New York City Council Committee on Public Safety, and, in particular, Chair Donovan Richards, for the opportunity to testify about Int. 1847, which would expand the role of the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes (OPHC).

This hearing is happening at a pivotal moment, just as our state legislators and Governor Andrew Cuomo took decisive action toward ending mass incarceration by enacting new bail, discovery and speedy trial laws.<sup>1</sup> Yet, as we speak, this fragile progress is threatened. Opponents of reform are spreading fear and hate, utilizing misleading and outright false headlines, paying for a flood of Facebook posts which spew a steady stream of propaganda designed to force Albany to not only roll back these changes, but pass laws that are even more regressive than those preceding the reforms.

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<sup>1</sup> Lawmakers consulted with all stakeholders, from public defenders and formerly incarcerated New Yorkers to prosecutors and law enforcement for several years and ultimately made critical changes to our pre-trial justice system so that people in poverty would not suffer the extreme punishment of jail before a fair trial in most cases, just as has always been the case for those who could afford to pay bail. They also guaranteed that people facing criminal allegations would get access to the evidence in their cases, which had already been the law in 46 other states across the country.

Perhaps one of the most disturbing examples of this hate and fear-mongering messaging has been about Tiffany Harris, a person whom my office represents. I cannot speak to the details of her case, other than what has been publicly reported. At least two out of three of her alleged victims have said they believe Ms. Harris belongs in a hospital and that is exactly where she is at this time. Ms. Harris has been in a hospital receiving treatment for mental illness since January 1. She has had other arrests for similar behavior that clearly derive from her mental illness, most of them not involving Jewish people. If she were arrested only a few weeks before, Tiffany would certainly be in jail. She would be on Rikers Island in a place beset by violence and rape. She would not be receiving even adequate care and would likely be getting worse while she was incarcerated. Instead, forced by the new law to choose any option but jail, the judge found the solution that was actually more appropriate, more humane and better for public safety in the long run – one which everyone seems to agree makes sense.

The use of charged language in the case of Tiffany Harris, designed to inflame the religious Jewish community, is deeply problematic. As a Jewish person myself, I find it troubling that an oppressed people would contribute to the oppression of another people. In this country, Black people are oppressed by mass incarceration after a long history of enslavement and violent disempowerment, using language that is strikingly similar to what we are hearing at this time about “dangerous” people and the fact that we must immediately incarcerate them, not even provide a trial, much less a fair one.

We cannot ignore this history when we talk about how to solve the problem of hatred, bias and intolerance. And in particular we must not conflate people acting from untreated mental illness with those who know exactly what they are doing when they commit acts against someone because of their race, gender, sexual and gender identity, religion, ethnicity, immigration status or other characteristics.

As a City, our goal should be to combat and ultimately eradicate all forms of hate, discrimination, and violence, but we must know that we cannot achieve this through the criminal justice system. Our society has created a craving for jail by often making it the first and only response to social problems, forsaking opportunities to address problems in any other way. The proliferation of alternatives to detention and incarceration have shined a spotlight on non-carceral solutions, but we must go much further to actually address the roots of social problems by ensuring access to quality mental health and substance use disorder treatment in the community. Instead, we have fostered an addiction to punishment. We use it as a coping mechanism to deal with our anxieties and fear, to satisfy our hatreds and resentments, to park our bias and to validate a simple, but wrong, story about the world.

While it is a positive for the City Council to focus on hate, it is problematic that this is being done at this precise moment, when Tiffany Harris has been used as an example of anti-Semitism rather than a victim of racism against Black people, which would be a lot more accurate. Ms. Harris is a victim of poor services and a lack of will toward adequately funding resources for people of color in this city.

As a Jewish woman whose mother and grandparents lived through the Holocaust, I really do appreciate the look at hate and violence in the wake of the apparent rise in anti-Semitism, something that is extremely scary to me. But why didn't we have this hearing when Black people were suffering in this city in the definitively American version of hate? Why are we having this hearing right as the bail laws are changed and jail was not an option for Tiffany Harris?

Allowing ourselves to fall into the scapegoating of a Black woman with mental illness, someone more likely to be the target of hatred and bigotry than the perpetrator of it, is not only blatantly naive, it is dangerous. And if we adopt any of this rationale or the reasoning that flows from it, we are all complicit in allowing white supremacy to win once again. And that is because the use of punishment before trial is the province of a mob mentality, not a reasonable government attempting to follow the constitution and American values. And the use of predicting so-called "dangerousness" is a uniquely American trope designed to justify such horrors as lynchings of Black people for decades.

Policymakers agree that the use of the criminal legal system and mass incarceration perpetuates, inflicts, and even creates violence, particularly in jails and prisons. In fact, just last week, the Council held a hearing on the exponential increase in violence in City jails, much of which is inflicted by staff on a population that is 86% Black and Latinx. Not only is there violence, but a 2016 investigation in The New York Times found a "scourge of racial bias" and brutality based on race in New York State's prisons, to which the state apparently responded only with a still-going (after three years) investigation.<sup>2</sup>

Many people targeted by hatred in the community based on their identities have the experience of being targeted by law enforcement for that same reason. In particular LGBTQ people of color report constant harassment by police. They are not likely to report incidents of violence due to their fundamental distrust of police and the system. People of color in general tend to under-report acts of hate because they understand that society tacitly approves of the attitudes that give rise to the hatred itself. That is one reason that this hearing, while well-intentioned, has a timing that is not satisfying. It seems to be pandering to one type of hate and does nothing to address another. It does not distinguish between hate derived from underlying attitudes that pervade our society while focusing on surface interactions that are a symptom of those attitudes and are merely the tip of the iceberg. And, by continuing to use police as the first responders, we will do nothing to move into another solution, one that can have a long-lasting impact and one which cuts against the messages our residents are unfortunately getting from Trump and the white supremacy movement, flamed by our very own police chief and other law enforcement officials. To truly foster safety and justice for all New Yorkers, we need to de-link efforts to fight hate and intolerance from the use of the police.

I recognize this de-linking is, in part, the spirit of the OPHC. According to its website, "Embedded in the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, OPHC will take a holistic approach to preventing hate crimes, developing and coordinating community-driven prevention strategies to address biases fueling such crimes, and fostering healing for victims and their communities." Yet

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/03/nyregion/new-york-state-prisons-inmates-racial-bias.html>



even in its name the OPHC remains inextricably linked to criminalization, and the law explicitly directs the office to work with law enforcement, raising questions about which communities will feel safe engaging its services. The placement with the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice also makes clear that there is a law enforcement element to the solution that really does not belong there, except in the most dire cases.

Int. 1847 would expand this mission to require individualized responses to hate crimes and "[p]rovide relevant information to the affected community within 24 hours of a determination that a violent hate crime has occurred. Such information shall include how the administration is responding to the alleged violent hate crime and the resources currently available to affected persons." OPHC would also be required to notify the Mayor, the Speaker, the Public Advocate, and the local Councilmember about the hate crime. But it does not require any diversion or reduced law enforcement role in such situations, even if the victims want it, as was the case when Tiffany Harris was first arrested.

Certainly, providing targeted resources and information to communities and individuals affected by acts of hate and violence is important. However, we must assure ourselves that all the communities of this city living in such victimization and ongoing trauma are to be equally served. The City Council must also be extremely cautious not to fall into the trap of sounding an alarm in communities that are already terrified that will lead them to a misguided and ineffective "solution" in rolling back the new bail law that is, quite honestly, giving Tiffany Harris and her victims a chance at healing, something the old system did not do.

Ultimately, eradicating hate and violence requires solidarity and compassion between all communities – one element of which is a small and fair criminal justice system. BDS looks forward to continuing to work with the Council toward that end.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my comments. If you have any additional questions, please contact Jared Chausow, Senior Policy Specialist, at [jchausow@bds.org](mailto:jchausow@bds.org).



## **Testimony of Anthonine Pierre, Deputy Director of the Brooklyn Movement Center**

### **Submitted to the New York City Council**

#### **For February 10, 2020 Public Safety Committee Hearing at New York City Hall**

Good afternoon Chairman Richards and members of the Public Safety Committee. Thank you to the Mayor's Office of Prevention of Hate Crimes for the invitation to testify today.

The Brooklyn Movement Center (BMC) is a Black-led, membership-based organization of primarily low-to-moderate income Central Brooklyn residents. We build power and pursue self-determination in Bedford-Stuyvesant & Crown Heights by nurturing local leadership, waging campaigns and winning concrete improvements in people's lives.

BMC received funding from the Council last fiscal year to do hate violence prevention work in Central Brooklyn, which we're centering around a type of Black intra-community violence: attacks on Black trans women. In June 2019, the American Medical Association named fatal violence against trans women as epidemic, citing also the disproportionate killing of Black trans women. Of the at least 26 trans or gender non-conforming people violently killed in the United States last year, the Human Rights Commission reports 18 were Black, including Yahira Nesby, a 33-year-old woman shot in Brownsville, Brooklyn on December 19, 2019.

Yahira performed sex work and her suspected killer is a Black cis-gendered man who was possibly a client. As we work to address hate violence in hindsight, I urge this committee to plan proactively around the safety of Black trans women. The healthcare access afforded trans people in New York City relative to much of the country attracts them to move here, but the City fails trans people as a whole on ensuring safety through legal employment and affordable housing. Investing in the futures of Black trans women in New York City means investing in their livelihoods and accounting for the widespread transphobia that makes it difficult for them to truly thrive here.

Too often Black trans women pushed into sex work suffer violence at the hands of Black cis-gendered men, whose masculinity is constructed in opposition to femininity, queerness and trans

identities. In their minds, the violence they dole out to people who are feminine, queer and trans affirms their dominance and by proxy, their maleness.

Many trans women are murdered when a cisgendered male sexual partner finds out they are trans and lashes out in an attempt to reconcile their need for male dominance with their attraction to a trans woman, whose identity gets reduced to their assigned gender at birth. Ending violence against Black trans women means transforming Black masculinity to hold space for people with trans identities to exist, to be desired and to be loved.

This spring, BMC will host several conversations with cisgendered Black men in Central Brooklyn about transforming their own masculinity. How can Black men leave behind the dangerous expectations of masculinity that justify unspeakable acts of violence? How should they safely intervene in instances of violence against Black trans women?

There is nothing simple or straightforward about these questions or their answers. Preventing all forms of hate violence starts with transforming the self, then extending that transformation into the broader community. Preventing the murder of another Yahira Nesby will be the product of tearful conversations, difficult realizations, and a continued commitment to a long-term healing process.

We hold undoing trauma as a goal of a community healing process, equally important to undoing hate. This is why we cannot advocate for the NYPD to be a partner in responding to hate violence, as the traumas Black men and Black trans women have suffered from the NYPD complicate and even impede a process of community healing.

Dr. Oxiris Barbot, the Commissioner of the City's Department of Health & Mental Hygiene, said in a statement to BuzzFeed News last August, "The data shows that involvement with the criminal justice system — even brief contact with the police or indirect exposure — is associated with lasting harm to people's physical and mental health."

Whether or not members of this committee agree with data showing that NYPD interactions are traumatizing to New Yorkers, validating this widely-held perspective is the first step in addressing the nuance of how we experience hate violence. In addressing harms and trauma, policing cannot be both the problem and the solution.

Furthermore, criminalizing aggressors does not contribute to community healing and transformation, best exemplified in the attack of Elyse Maister. Elyse, an orthodox Jewish woman, was attacked in Crown Heights on December 27, 2019, allegedly by Tiffany Harris, a Black woman. Elyse has spoken publicly about the need to prioritize treatment over criminalization for her alleged attacker and it would serve the public well for the Council to follow her leadership in future instances of community violence.

More specifically regards to Int. No. 1847, while OPHC is more than equipped to notify elected officials of hate violence incidents within 24 hours, we have concerns about the office's ability to mount a community-centered rapid response that does not lead with criminalization of community members. We have learned that effective community-centered rapid response requires months and sometimes years of relationship building, scenario planning, and leadership development to execute in times of crisis.

Additionally, in studying the effectiveness of neighborhood safety plans, we ask that safety plan recommendations prioritize transformative justice and healing solutions over relying on the carceral state. We also request that data from community organizations be included as the City works to define communities "vulnerable" to hate violence. As hate violence is often underreported due to fraught community relationships with law enforcement, we are concerned that the most vulnerable communities will be overlooked in their time of highest need.

In closing, I would like to thank Cricket Nimmons, a transgender rights advocate and friend of Yahira Nesby's with whom I consulted for this testimony. Making this city safer for Black trans women ultimately means ensuring safety for all New Yorkers who are subject to transphobia, misogyny, racism, and all the intersections of these oppressions they experience.

We do this work with—not for—Black trans women, intentionally promoting their leadership, voices and experiences in the work. The reorganizing of whose perspective is most prominent centers our goal to affirm their inherent value in a world organized to separate them from their humanity.

Thank you.

Good afternoon distinguished Councilmembers, my name is David Katz and I am the Associate Director of the United Jewish Organizations of Williamsburg, I am here on behalf of our Executive Director Rabbi David Niederman who wanted to join but had a prior commitment and I am happy to deliver his statement in support of the wonderful Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes and its leader Deborah Lauter, that was created by this body.

Williamsburg has been one of the neighborhoods in New York City hardest hit by this vicious spate of anti-Semitic hate crimes to plague our area in recent years. Moshe Deutsch a resident of Williamsburg and volunteer at the UJO was brutally murdered at the Jersey City Kosher Supermarket in December, but well before the Jersey City shooting and the Machete attack in Monsey, Williamsburg, Crown Heights and other Orthodox areas in New York city have been under siege with anti-Semitic, assaults, vandalism and harassment of Orthodox Jewish residents, whose only crime is wearing their faith on their sleeve and ~~looking the way a Jewish person would.~~ In July, Tablet Magazine released a map of ~~all the~~ anti-Semitic incidents in NYC they could track down since 2015 and the results are disturbing and show how pervasive the problem is and has been and how difficult it is going to be to tackle it.

The Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes is not here to replace law enforcement nor should it be. Law enforcement <sup>is most</sup> the critical piece to protect



communities from hate crimes and to respond to those communities in the event of an attack.

<sup>also</sup> We have to understand that the battle against hate crimes should be multi-faceted, necessitating an "all hands on deck approach". It is important for all hands to come together and that needs to be all segments of the local community where these attacks are happening. Their reach is deep in the community and they are the ones who have the most vested in keeping their homes and community peaceful and safe and that is why the Neighborhood Safety Coalition will be an important vehicle to accomplish that.

Speaking to kids in Public Schools in areas where these attacks are happening is a must. Many times we see young kids are the ones perpetrating these attacks and this behavior is being learned somewhere and it needs to be unlearned. In Williamsburg, we have met with the District 14 Superintendent Alicia Winnicki a number of times with Deborah Lauter and the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes. We have spoken with the student leadership to hear from them why they think these attacks are happening and what can be done to prevent that behavior. We have spoken with Principals, Parents to reach community youth and learn from them and try to build bridges and put a stop to the hate.

We thank the City Council again for the creation of this office and appreciate the Council's leadership on this issue and the work you are all doing to put a stop to spread of hate crimes in the City.

Good afternoon.

I want to thank the members of the Committee on Public Safety, as well as all other City Council members here today for their leadership, and for allowing me to speak on this issue today.

My name is Asenhat Gomez, Deputy Director for Programing at El Puente, and I'm here on behalf of our Executive Director, Frances Lucerna, as well as the youth leaders and their families across our 6 afterschool Leadership Centers, the MS50 El Puente Community School, the El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice, as well as the community members we serve through the El Puente Green Light District and Community Arts Programs.

We are here in support of the work of the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes, and the Williamsburg Neighborhood Safety Coalition that this office has launched. Even if we did not have the honor to be one of the Coalition's inaugural members, we would be one of its dedicated supporters.

El Puente has fought for human rights, peace, and justice in North Brooklyn for nearly 40 years. We can attest that, for decades, Williamsburg's diverse communities have come together in times of struggle, and in this critical moment, we must do it again. The recent violent attacks, especially those on our Jewish sisters and brothers, have deeply shaken our neighborhood and reminds us we must make concerted efforts to come together and take action as one united community against hate.

That these incidents are part of wider patterns of hate and violence against people of other faith traditions, against immigrants, against our LGBTQ neighbors and others, signals to us that we cannot do it alone. We need the support and resources of the City to amplify our efforts and empower us with information, so that we can help lift our whole borough, and our city.

El Puente, as our name in Spanish suggests, is committed to building bridges with our neighborhood partners on the Neighborhood Safety Coalition and the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes to inspire unity and understanding that will nurture a community of respect for all. We look forward to City Council's leadership and support in helping us do just that.



## New York City Anti-Violence Project

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**The New York City Anti-Violence Project's Testimony to the Committee on Public Safety  
Hearing on Intro 1847  
Council Member Donovan Richards, Chair, Committee on Public Safety  
February 10, 2020**

Good afternoon, Chair Richards and the Committee on Public Safety, and thank you for hearing my testimony today. My name is Reem Ramadan and I'm the Lead Organizer at the New York City Anti-Violence Project (AVP).

AVP envisions a world in which all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ), and HIV-affected people are safe, respected, and live free from violence. Our mission is to empower LGBTQ and HIV-affected communities and allies to end all forms of violence through organizing and education, and support survivors through counseling and advocacy. AVP is the only LGBTQ-specific victim services agency in New York City, and the largest organization in the country dedicated exclusively to working with LGBTQ and HIV-affected survivors of all forms of violence. As a founding member of the NYC Against Hate Coalition, which last year proposed and advocated for the Hate Crimes Prevention Initiative, we work with partners and allies cross-identity and city-wide with a collective goal of preventing hate violence. The Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes shares a similar goal, and also works with us to strive to achieve it.

With respect to Councilmember Treyger's Intro 1847, while we do think it's important to respond to acts of hate violence in the immediate, we don't think this office is the place to call on to take that responsibility. The office is meant to focus on hate violence prevention and not crisis response. Community organizations are best positioned and most trusted to notify impacted communities about hate violence incidents, and should be funded to do this work, which also includes data collection. Intro 1847 references "violent hate crime" as the standard for this response work, and we are curious about how this is defined.





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At AVP, we use the phrase “hate violence,” a broader definition that includes anti-LGBTQ bias incidents that may not qualify as hate crimes but are harmful to individuals and the community at large. Crisis response is valuable in ensuring immediate safety and expressing solidarity with communities that have been harmed, it does not address the symptoms and real problems of hate violence. New York City must support prevention that addresses the systemic violence our communities face; to address hate crimes before they even happen. The OPHC is part of that strategy and needs to be able to focus on that work with the staff they have.

At AVP, we value work that takes us towards prevention. While we *do* rapid-response work around hate violence, including providing support to survivors and working with communities to build safety in the aftermath of violence, we also do the long-term work with partners and members to ensure hate violence doesn't happen in the first place. We do this by investment in our communities, working across identities, political education and de-escalation tools, and unlearning and redefining what safety means to communities vulnerable to hate violence. What we know right now, from members, is that government should trust our experiences as vulnerable communities exposed to hate violence to help shape what we think response to such acts should look like. They should look to invest in community-based resources that uphold values embedded in restorative justice and community safety.

AVP is at the ready to continue our work with the Council and City agencies to support these efforts.

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## Public Safety Committee Hearing

2/10/2020

Good afternoon. My name is Saad Khaishgi and I deliver this testimony on behalf of the Muslim Community Network, a civil-society based non-profit organization that advocates for and works with the city's diverse Muslim population. Our work includes civic advocacy, such as work on the Eid holiday campaign and introducing halal/kosher food in NYC public schools, as well as working with youth in Islamic Schools, doing diversity education workshops with the DOE and private institutions, as well as interfaith work with other religious groups. We are a partner organization with the NYC Office of Hate Crimes Prevention to gather data on hate crimes being experienced by the Muslim community. Results from the survey will be used to create better prevention and enforcement policies, as well as creating public awareness about the actual number of hate crimes, which is significantly under-reported.

The reality of hate-crimes, and experience of hate by the Muslim community is not being reflected in data, policymaking, or public perception. The Muslim community has not been reporting the realities on ground due to factors rooted in alienation and fear. This would include an uneasy relationship with law enforcement, punitive immigration policies, lack of education and language competency, lack of information into the process and outcomes when reporting a hate crime, as well as cultural barriers due to law enforcement playing a negative role in the majority of countries from where the Muslim community originates.

There are two large underlying factors that are driving the external perception of Muslims.

1. Federal, State, and Local rhetoric: From the White House to Pete King, from anti-Muslim rallies to Fox News, the rhetoric against Muslims has been both harsh and incendiary, blurring the lines for both the public and government agencies as far as differentiating between ordinary Muslims, and religious extremists who are indeed a clear, present, and permanent danger. This in turn has made the Muslim community fearful of interacting with government agencies, because while the political leadership of NYC may speak favorably of Muslims, the impact that the toxic rhetoric has had on people actually working in government and law enforcement has been felt by many within the community. This should not at all be taken as a sweeping condemnation of law enforcement or government employees, but just an acknowledgement that people who already had a biased disposition may feel emboldened due to anti-Muslim rhetoric, and those who were neutral may feel swayed towards negativity.

2. The public perceptions towards Muslims has also sharpened thanks to political rhetoric, and this in turn, has put the Muslim community into a siege mentality of sorts. In a situation where it is hard to tell ally from oppressor, communities tend to recede into themselves. This would also make them hesitant to participate in any kind of activities such as reporting a hate crime, because they feel detached from both the government and other communities, and this creates a perception of futility in trying to receive justice.

There are also several other factors at play, such as the images of Muslims that are projected from the media, as well as the types of literature and training programs that actually reinforce bias.

#### OUR RESPONSE

MCN is working to give Muslim victims of hate crimes a voice by strengthening the reporting of data, and also tackling the issue of underreporting, through creating strong and transparent relationships with mosques, community groups, and notable individuals within the Muslim community. This is a process that is far more complex than it appears, as conducting a hate crime survey requires a safe environment, as well as support from local Muslim institutions within the neighborhood in question. There are also multiple languages spoken within the Muslim community, and to create a culturally appropriate survey for each linguistic group is itself quite challenging. I am pleased to report that progress is rapidly being made in regards to connecting with the mosques and organizations who will assist in facilitating our work. There is also a clear desire being displayed by the community to relay their experiences, once they feel comfortable with the process and the manner in which the survey is conducted. It is also important to note that MCN is the only organization working specifically on the Muslim hate crime issue with the Office of Hate Crime Prevention. With all of this work, we continue to need city investment and funding to help us grow and expand on our initiatives, so as to build a society that respects all of its diverse communities.

If anyone from the esteemed council or audience wishes to discuss the issue further, please feel free to contact me at 646-481-1772, or [saad@mcnny.org](mailto:saad@mcnny.org). Please also look at our website at [www.mcnny.org](http://www.mcnny.org),



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I represent: Brooklyn Movement Center

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: Deborah Hunter

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: Susan Sommer

Address: General Counsel

I represent: Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: David Katz

Address: 32 PENN Street

I represent: VJO of Williamsburg

Address: 32 PENN ST

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Name: Chief Michael Lipetri

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYPD

Address: 1 Police Plaza

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Name: Assistant Deputy Commissioner Oleg Chernyusk

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYPD

Address: 1 Police Plaza

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Name: Asenhat Gomez

Address: 211 South 4th St.

I represent: EL Puente

Address: 211 South 4th St.

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Name: Lisa Schriebersdorf (Executive Director)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Brooklyn Defender Services

Address: 177 Livingston, Brooklyn

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Name: SAAD KURAISET

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Muslim Community Network

Address: \_\_\_\_\_



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Name: BRUCE JACOBI  
Address: 478 ROCKAWAY BLVD  
I represent: COALITION OF ROCKAWAY  
Address: 9 MANSOURI EGT

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Name: Reem Ramadan  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
I represent: NYC Anti-Violence Project  
Address: 116 Nassau St, Fl # 3

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