

Public Comment Statement at Stamford Board of Representatives Meeting

Tuesday, September 3, 2024

Public Figures Should be Held Accountable for Antisemitic Behavior

Hello Honorable Board of Representatives,

My name is Shira Tarantino. I'm a Stamford resident and a proud mom to two children in Stamford Public Schools. My first name, Shira, means "song" in Hebrew. And my last name, Tarantino, is my husband's: his family immigrated to the US about 100 years ago from a little town off the southern coast of Italy to seek a better life for themselves.

All four of my Ashkenazi Jewish great grandparents escaped the deadly pogroms in Poland and Russia, a generation before WWII. They set sail to the new world with only the clothes on their backs, some family photos, and a brass teapot.

With the exception of those who are Native American or of Lenape (Len-AH'-pee) descent, all of us are from somewhere else other than here. Each of us has a story to tell.

Today, our city of Stamford is a vibrant tapestry of diverse cultures, languages, beliefs, and religions, woven together by the threads of our shared humanity. As representatives, your duty is to listen to all voices in your district, advocate for every individual, and ensure that our community thrives in an environment free from prejudice and hate.

Antisemitism, or prejudice against Jews, is a corrosive force that undermines the fabric of our society. It manifests not only in violent attacks but also in harmful rhetoric that poisons public discourse and sows division. Words are powerful. This is not merely an issue of individual bias, but a systemic problem that demands our collective action.

It is unacceptable for any elected official to make disparaging or hateful comments about any group. Such actions not only reflect poorly on our city, but also contribute to a broader culture of intolerance.

Public figures should be held accountable for antisemitic behavior. Our city must set a precedent by demonstrating that such behavior will not be tolerated. If we fail to address these issues, we risk normalizing hate and perpetuating an environment where ignorance thrives. I don't know anyone who wishes their children to live in a community where they are made to feel unsafe.

I applaud the Board of Representatives in implementing a mandatory educational forum for our elected leaders. This initiative should focus on understanding antisemitism, engaging with the Jewish community, and addressing all forms of bias and hate. By fostering dialogue and

awareness, we can equip our leaders with the tools to prevent and challenge discrimination at all levels.

Let us confront ignorance with education and hatred with unity. Together, we can create a community where every individual is valued and respected. Let's set a good example for our children, *Baruch HaShem*.

Shira Tarantino
Stamford, CT