



April 29, 2020

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of New York City
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

We are writing to express our anger and disappointment at your scapegoating the Jewish community in response to the funeral of Rabbi Chaim Mertz last night. With thousands of New Yorkers dead, and many more sick, we all understand the danger of COVID-19, the severity of our dire public health emergency, and the need for strict social distancing. But this is not the way, and your threat of arrests and summonses is not the answer.

In the midst of an historic wave of antisemitic hate violence in New York City, our community — like the Asian community — has been feeling the pain of being singled out and blamed for the spread of this deadly disease. This singling out is especially potent because it aligns with longstanding antisemitic tropes that have, for millenia, blamed Jews for societal ills. Laying blame upon Hasidic communities — among the most visible members of our Jewish family — will not stop the spread of COVID-19, and referring to these particular communities as “the Jewish community” both flattens a diverse group of New Yorkers into a single bloc and fuels the anti-Semitic hatreds that bubble beneath the surface of our society.

It has been reported that the NYPD provided a street permit to an event that simply could not comply with physical distancing. That was a mistake. But it is also a mistake to single out an entire community and then threaten incarceration, which in this crisis would put more people in danger of contracting and spreading the virus in already dense jails. We need a public health response that starts from social solidarity, not scapegoating and incarceration.

Yet, at this time your administration is currently proposing major cuts in the budget to the vital services that would keep the most vulnerable New Yorkers healthy and safe, while leaving the budget for policing nearly untouched. Instead of hiring more NYPD officers, this incident underscores the need to fund community-based public health efforts that support all New Yorkers’ safety as well as the existing services that our communities rely on.

Jewish communities of every kind from across the city are doing their best to support those who are suffering during this difficult time. Orthodox communities have organized [blood plasma donation centers](#), testing facilities, and [food banks](#). Other Orthodox community leaders have

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bravely spoken out for the social distancing necessary to saving lives. Still other Jews have [joined mutual aid groups](#) to fill the gaps in the social safety net that have left many struggling during this crisis. As Jews, we come together, at times of prayer, celebration, and mourning, making social distancing particularly crushing for our community. Jews have overwhelmingly led and acted responsibly in this moment of social distancing. To suggest otherwise on the actions of a few is the deepest form of marginalization.

We are hurt by your comments and request a meeting to discuss constructive approaches to respond to the pandemic that recognize the Jewish community's earnest efforts to fight COVID-19, protect vulnerable communities, and avoid heavy-handed over-policing.

Sincerely,

Jews for Racial & Economic Justice

New York Jewish Agenda

Congressman Jerrold Nadler

New York State Senator Brad Hoylman

New York State Senator Julia Salazar

New York State Assemblymember Harvey Epstein

New York State Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal

New York State Assemblymember Dan Quart

Councilmember Brad Lander

Councilmember Stephen Levin

A Wider Bridge

Bend the Arc Jewish Action

Congregation Beit Simchat Torah



Congregation Beit Simchat Torah Ending Mass Incarceration Team

Congregation Beth Elohim

Congregation Bnai Jeshurun

Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance

Lab/Shul

Lucius N. Littauer Foundation

Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism — New York

SAJ-Judaism that Stands for All

Torah Trumps Hate

Uri L'Tzedek: Orthodox Social Justice

Rabbi Rachel Ain

Rabba Wendy Amsellem

Sara Atkins, Torah Trumps Hate

Rabbi Guy Austrian, Fort Tryon Jewish Center

Adam Basciano, Israel Policy Forum

Ross Beroff

Anna Boswell-Levy, Congregation Kol Emet

Cantor Josh Breitzer, Congregation Beth Elohim

Rabbi Lauren Brody-Hyett

Rabbi Angela Buchdahl, Central Synagogue



Rabbi Emily Cohen, Lab/Shul

Rabbi Daniel Cohen, Congregation Agudath Sholom

Rabbi Ayelet Cohen, New Israel Fund

Victoria Cook, Torah Trumps Hate

Stosh Cotler, Bend the Arc Jewish Action

Andrew Davidov, Repair the World Brooklyn

Rabbi Lucy Dinner, Temple Beth Or

Sandi DuBowski

Rabbi Barat Ellman

Rabbi Steven Exler, Hebrew Institute of Riverdale — the Bayit

Rabbi Susan Falk, Jews for Racial & Economic Justice

Ethan Felder, Service Employees International Union

Leo Ferguson, Jews For Racial & Economic Justice

Cantor Lucy Fishbein, Congregation Bnai Jeshurun

Rabbi Jonathan Freirich, Temple Beth Zion

Rabbi Jonah Geffen, Hunter Hillel

Lee Goldberg

Bruce Goldberger

Rabbi Rachel Goldenberg, Malkhut



Rabbi Lauren Grabelle Herrmann, SAJ-Judaism that Stands for All

Rabbi Lisa Grant, Hebrew Union College

Rabbi Rachel Grant Meyer

Rabbi Matt Green, Congregation Beth Elohim

Rabbi Katie Greenberg, CSAIR

Rabbi Reuven Greenvald, Union for Reform Judaism

Frank Hagelberg

Joy Hill

Rabba Sara Hurwitz, Maharat

Rabbanit Bracha Jaffe, Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

Rabbi Andy Kahn

Dr. Elaine Klein

Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, Congregation Beit Simchat Torah

Marc Landis, Democratic District Leader, 67th AD and Union for Reform Judaism

Dr. Ellen Landsberger, Jews for Racial & Economic Justice

Rabbi Eliezer Lawrence

Julien Lederman

Rabbi Ellen Lippmann, Jews for Racial & Economic Justice

Annie-Rose London, Jewish Social Justice Roundtable

Harvey Lubitz, Congregation Beit Simchat Torah



Rabbi Marc Margolius

Rabbi José Rolando Matalon, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun

Rachel McCullough, Jews for Racial & Economic Justice

Ruth Messinger

Jo Ann Mort

Rabbi Joel Mosbacher, Temple Shaaray Tefila

Rabbi Mike Moskowitz, Congregation Beit Simchat Torah

Elad Nehorai, Torah Trumps Hate

Matt Nosanchuk, New York Jewish Agenda

Rabbi Sue Oren

Cantor Barbara Ostfeld, American Conference of Cantors

Rabbi Shuli Passow, B'nai Jeshurun

Rabbi Jonah Pesner, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Rabbi Alexis Pinsky, B'ShERT

Cantor Ayelet Porzecanski, Brooklyn Heights Synagogue

Rabbi Max Reynolds

Rabbi Mira Rivera

Sam Rubin, New York Jewish Agenda

Rabbi Joanna Samuels, Educational Alliance



Johanna Sanders, The Vaid Group

Audrey Sasson, Jews for Racial & Economic Justice

Alan Schwartz, A Wider Bridge

Rabbi Ezra Seligsohn, Hebrew Institute

Russell Semmel

Yona Shem-Tov, Encounter

Rabbi Linda Shriner-Cahn, Congregation Tehillah

Rabbi Aaron Shub, Congregation Shaarey Tphiloh and Levey Day School

Abe Silberstein, Brooklyn Young Democrats

Rabbi Mia Simring

Rabbi Felicia Sol, B'nai Jeshurun

Rabbi Joshua Stanton

Rabbi Elliott Tepperman, Bnai Keshet

Rabbi Rachel Timoner, Congregation Beth Elohim

Rachel B. Tiven

Yehudah Webster, Jews For Racial & Economic Justice

Rabbi Micah Weiss, Reconstructing Judaism

Alex Willick, Avodah

Rabbi Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz, Uri L'Tzedeky,