

# Press



# Release

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## For Immediate Release

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### **Rockland County Legislators Affirm Right To Free Speech While Strongly Condemning Illegal Behavior Taking Place On Some U.S. College Campuses**

#### **Legislators Urge A Return To Peaceful Protests & Debates; Call On Universities To Provide Safe Environments For Jewish & All Other Students**

**New City, NY (May 8, 2024)** – In a bipartisan vote, Rockland County legislators have unanimously adopted a resolution affirming the right to free speech while also strongly condemning the illegal behavior taking place as part of some protests on some U.S. college campuses.

County legislators are urging students and the public at large to return to peaceful protests and debates while also calling on colleges and universities to provide safe learning environments for Jewish and all other students.

Rockland County Legislative Majority Leader Alden H. Wolfe, the main sponsor of the resolution, was also joined by County Legislators Paul Cleary, Beth J. Davidson, Thomas F. Diviny, Toney L. Earl, Joel Friedman, Lon M. Hofstein, Jay Hood Jr., Douglas J. Jobson, Will J. Kennelly, Jesse M. Malowitz, Aney Paul, Raymond W. Sheridan, Philip Soskin, Dana G. Stillely, Aron B. Wieder, and Itamar J. Yeger as sponsors.

“The reality of what is taking place on our college campuses can’t be ignored,” County Legislator Wolfe said. “We all stand in support of the right to peaceful protest, to civil discourse on any issue, even those issues on which we may strongly, vehemently disagree. That’s the American way and quite frankly, it’s the human way.

“However, unfortunately, in many instances, that civil discourse has transformed into something much uglier,” Legislator Wolfe said. “It has transformed into illegal activity, to threatening activity, to conduct that is blatantly and boldly anti-Semitic. As a body I think it is important that we stand up for the right to free speech and also condemn conduct that is not the type of conduct that we want to see on our college campuses.”

Legislators are also urging all college and university administrations to actively work to provide and to ensure a safe learning environment for Jewish and all other students.

Both pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian protests have taken place since Oct. 7, 2023, when Hamas terrorists entered Israel, murdered 1,200 children, women and men and kidnapped an additional 240 people, retreating to Gaza and possibly elsewhere. Within hours, Israel launched an offensive to root out the terrorists, destroy Hamas infrastructure and rescue any hostages still alive.

Early protests were mostly peaceful but included some arrests and the display of signs calling for violence, including “Death to America,” “Burn Tel Aviv to the Ground,” and “Final Solution” – a reference to the Nazi policy of exterminating Jews.

Pro-Palestinian protests began on college campuses on April 17, with demands expanding from calls to end the war to demands that universities divest from Israel on the grounds that a genocide of Palestinians was allegedly taking place. They also demand a halt to U.S. military support of Israel. Within days, some protestors began taking over buildings, breaking into buildings and barricading themselves in buildings, and refusing lawful orders to disperse from campuses.

Since April 17, students and/or outsider organizers set up encampments on approximately 45 campuses across the country. At some of the schools the following has been documented:

- Jewish students have been assaulted.
- Protestors have set up checkpoints and prevented Jewish students and faculty from entering spaces and buildings, and thereby prevented them from attending classes.
- Classes have been cancelled and/or changed to remote learning due to an inability to ensure students’ safety.
- Jewish students were specifically advised not to return to campus after the Passover holiday due to fears for their personal safety.
- Public buildings have been broken into, damaged, and barricaded.
- Graduation ceremonies have been cancelled due to the inability to ensure students’ safety, with some universities negotiating with the protestors to ensure no disruption to commencement activities.
- Campus and student life have been completely upended, with students unable to do classwork or get to libraries to study.

“We remain committed to the fundamental right to free and peaceful protest and exchange of ideas, but we absolutely condemn the anti-Semitic rhetoric, disruptive tactics and criminal behavior that has grown out of legitimate protest,” County Legislator Itamar Yeger said.

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