



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Griffo bill would offer additional protections against anti-Semitic acts in New York State

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO December 29, 2019

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In the wake of a number of attacks against the Jewish community over the last month, especially the recent mass stabbing that occurred at the home of a rabbi in Rockland County during a Hanukkah celebration, New York State Senate Deputy Minority Leader Joseph Griffo, R-I-C-Rome, advocated for legislation he introduced this past spring that would provide more protections against anti-Semitism in New York State.

Deputy Minority Leader Griffo's bill was introduced toward the end of this year's Legislative Session. It was referred to the Senate's Investigations and Government Operations Committee.

While discrimination and attacks have been unfairly and wrongfully levied and directed against the Jewish people and their faith for generations, there has sadly been an increase in the number of violent attacks targeting those of the Jewish community throughout New York State and beyond. According to the New York Times, the New York Police Department also has recently stepped up patrols following a "surge" of anti-Semitic crimes reported to police in the city over the last couple of weeks.

Both the federal Department of Justice and the federal Department of Education have concluded that state and federal law prohibits discrimination against persons of the Jewish faith and other religious groups when such discrimination is based on the actual or perceived religious faith, shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics. However, despite such a determination, persons of the Jewish faith or Jewish heritage continue to be threatened, harassed or intimidated in their daily lives, work and while practicing their religion by acts of anti-Semitism.

Deputy Minority Leader Griffo's legislation (S4932-A) seeks to address this problem by amending the state human rights law and the penal law to properly provide protections through the appropriate codification of the definition of anti-Semitism. Further, acts of anti-Semitism that incite, cause or result in any act of violence or injury to a person, or the damage to or destruction of real or personal property will be considered a hate crime.

"Those who commit anti-Semitic acts must be held accountable for their actions," Deputy Minority Leader Griffo said. "These deplorable threats and actions that we have witnessed in our state, country and throughout the world are reprehensible, unacceptable and inexcusable and have spread fear throughout the Jewish community. I am hopeful that this legislation I have sponsored will help to stem anti-Semitic threats and actions from occurring so that individuals and families of the Jewish faith no longer have to be afraid to practice their religion and go about their daily lives."

"I strongly support this legislation," Oneida County District Attorney Scott McNamara said. "The current laws are lacking when it comes to holding those who encourage anti-Semitic violence. If enacted into law, this bill would allow prosecutors to better hold accountable those who incite violence against people of the Jewish faith."

"We appreciate the efforts of Deputy Minority Leader Griffo to help protect the interest of the Jewish community," said Victor Pearlman, executive director of the Jewish Community

Federation of the Mohawk Valley. "I wish to thank Deputy Minority Leader Griffo for his efforts to stem the increase in anti-Semitism in New York State and throughout the country."