

BELMONT HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

ACTS OF HATE OR BIAS DON'T NEED TO LEAVE US HELPLESS

Fran Yuan, on behalf of Belmont Human Rights Commission

The Belmont Human Rights Commission strongly condemns all acts of racism, anti-Semitism, and hatred that debase, abuse or terrorize individuals as well as whole communities. Since 2004, the Commission's charge has been to address and respond to the full range of discrimination in Belmont in the areas of commerce, education, public accommodations, employment, housing, and access to municipal services. In addition, the Commission serves as a resource to the community, increasing awareness about issues related to diversity and discrimination. The Commission assists individuals in resolving disputes and, when appropriate, refers individuals to appropriate outside resources.

Most recently, there have been a number of disturbing incidents in neighboring communities. The arson fires in May at the home of Rabbi Avi and Luna Bukiet at the Chabad Center for Jewish Life in Arlington and Chabad Jewish Center in Needham shocked members of local towns and brought a vigorous response and rally of solidarity for the victims and their communities.

Anti-Semitic attacks across the country have risen markedly over the past years, including in Massachusetts where 2017 and 2018 saw the highest number of incidents as reported by the Anti-Defamation League. The October shooting at a Jewish synagogue in Pittsburgh that killed 11 congregants stands out as one of the most heinous nationally.

At the Museum of Fine Arts last month, middle school students of color on a field trip were met with racist comments, bringing to public light the racism that often goes unseen and unacknowledged. Fortunately, Museum administration responded meaningfully and quickly to address the incident. However, it must continue to work with communities color to ensure that all museum goers feel truly welcome and represented.

June is Pride month and many cities across the country celebrate with a parade and complementary week-long events. Unfortunately, this has been overshadowed by recent tweets from Bishop Thomas Tobin of Providence, Rhode Island urging Catholics to boycott Pride events because they are "contrary to Catholic faith and morals" and "especially harmful to children". While he has been met with a full-throated backlash and an outpouring of support for LGBTQIA community, the mere airing of his demonizing views are offensive and especially harmful to children who are part of this community.

Observing or personally experiencing incidents of bias and hatred can be overwhelming, at times numbing, infuriating, and frightening. They can impact targeted individuals in devastating ways on a long-term basis, especially at a young age, as in the case of the aforementioned students at the MFA. There are things we each can do to make a difference and counter the rhetoric of prejudice and hatred and the violence it foments.

Here are some things to consider:

- Be an upstander. Learn to be more than a bystander. Learn to intervene when needed. Speak out and stand up for those who are being targeted by hate speech,

bullying, or other acts of bigotry and discrimination. If you're not sure how to do this, educate yourself. Some resources can be found at:

<http://stepupprogram.org/topics/discrimination/#scenario>

<https://www.afsc.org/story/recap-bystander-intervention-training>

- Support those who are the targets of hateful acts. Join in protests, marches, vigils and other actions that send the message that most of us won't stand idly by while these acts happen.
- Report incidents to a person with the authority and ability to intervene or mediate effectively. Call your local Human Rights Commission. In Belmont, we can be reached at: 617-993-2795 or through e-mail at belmont.hrc@gmail.com
- Participate in local groups that work against prejudice and hate. Join Belmont against Racism (<https://belmontagainstracism.org/>) and make a donation that supports grants for educational programs in the schools and community and order a lawn sign from them that says "No matter where you're from, we're glad you're our neighbor" in six different languages; attend a Human Rights Commission meeting; and volunteer to help plan events and strategize to do the work that is needed in our community.
- Support national groups that work to support those at risk, bring perpetrators to justice, monitor hate groups, and educate the public. Groups such as the ACLU and the Southern Poverty Law Center are reputable organizations that work towards these important goals.

Again, to reach the Human Rights Commission, call 617-993-2795 or e-mail to belmont.hrc@gmail.com. All community members deserve a safe and welcoming place in which to live, work, and thrive!

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