

NYPD Cracks Down on Another Jewish Funeral, Stoking Tensions

Tensions between police and members of New York City's Hasidic Jewish community flared again Thursday as officers interrupted a crowded funeral procession to crack down on social distancing violators.

Video posted on social media showed officers in protective masks chasing a minivan through Brooklyn's Borough Park neighborhood as it carried the body of a deceased rabbi. The officers can be heard shouting at dozens of people marching behind the van to get out of the street and onto the sidewalk.

A 17-year-old boy was taken into custody and issued a summons for disorderly conduct after he was accused of pushing a police official, according to a police spokeswoman, Sgt. Mary Frances O'Donnell.

Thursday's confrontation came two days after Mayor Bill de Blasio stoked division with a series of tweets after he went to Brooklyn to oversee the dispersal of thousands of people who crowded the streets of Williamsburg for the funeral of another rabbi.

New York has banned any gatherings of any size for any purpose, as the coronavirus has been linked to at least 18,000 deaths in the city in just a few weeks.

De Blasio called the large gathering "absolutely unacceptable" in one tweet and wrote in another: "my message to the Jewish community, and all communities, is this simple: the time for warnings has passed."

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, sent a letter to Attorney General Bill

Barr on Thursday urging the Justice Department “to closely monitor New York City” for potential religious discrimination in the wake of de Blasio’s tweets.

State Senator Simcha Felder, who represents Borough Park, posted a tweet after Thursday’s confrontation saying “terrorizing people by sending in armies of cops during such stressful times is not helpful at all. @NYCMayor – we need real leadership. Stop the chaos now.”

Dov Hikind, a former state assemblyman who’s the founder of a group fighting anti-Semitism, said he’s been assured that de Blasio ordered the police department to crack down on social distancing violations across the city, not just in the Jewish community.

He said he’s requested data from City Hall to make sure that’s true.

Still, the former lawmaker said de Blasio’s singling out of Jews in his tweets “crossed every line.”

“It encourages anti-Semitism and scapegoating of the Jewish community,” Hikind said. “The mayor played right into the hands of the anti-Semites. I know that was not his intention. I know he’s a decent guy. He didn’t have the decency to just say the simple words, ‘I’m sorry I made a mistake.’”

Borough Park, where Thursday’s funeral was held, has had at least 2,300 people test positive for the virus, according to city data. That’s the sixth most of any ZIP code in the city.

Hikind said people violating social distancing rules in Brooklyn are relatively small in number and are behaving in ways that goes against Judaism’s central tenant of preserving life.

“I’ve begged and pleaded with the minority that exists within our community that don’t give a darn—don’t give a [obscenity]

– about themselves, their families or the community,” Hikind said.

“You can’t have funerals with hundreds of people. You can’t have people praying in synagogues. You can’t do those things when people’s lives are on the line. It violates everything in Judaism.” {eo}

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