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Taking Steps to Protect the Community Amid Rising Antisemitism

By Debra Rubin | February 17, 2022

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Jews are the most targeted religious group in the country for bias incidents and hate crimes. “It is not as simple as building a wall and circling the wagons.”

That assessment from New York/New Jersey Regional Anti-Defamation League Director Scott Richman came February 8 during a Zoom program on Jewish communal security sponsored by the ADL and featuring authorities working to protect the community in the face of growing threats.

Those speaking stressed the importance of security training, the need for a security assessment of Jewish institutions—including schools and day camps—conducting active shooter drills and reporting even small incidents such as graffiti to authorities. “If you see something, say something if something seem a little off,” said Laurie Doran, acting director of the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness. “You don’t have to be an expert to decide whether something is legitimate or not.”

Richman noted, “When the safety and security of the Jewish community wins, everybody wins.” The ADL is holding a virtual active shooter training with the FBI on February 24.

The metropolitan area, like the rest of the country, has seen a sharp spike in antisemitic incidents and while the ADL provides critical education and support, coordinating with others in both the Jewish and law enforcement community is critical.

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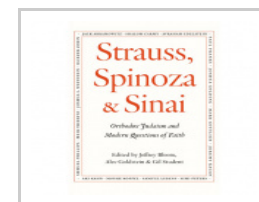


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Mitchell Silber,
executive
director of the
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UJA-Federation
of New York and
the Jewish
Community
Relations Council
of New York, said
his organization

helps facilitate grants and coordinate security training for Jewish institutions in the federation's catchment area, acts as a liaison to law enforcement and with partners in the Secure Community Network, the official safety and security network for the Jewish community in North America.

The former NYPD director of intelligence analysis said he also keeps the various institutions apprised of any security incidents.

That network of security throughout the Jewish community existed before the recent hostage crisis at Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas.

Richard Priem, deputy national director of the Community Security Service, which trains volunteer security teams within the Jewish community to protect their institutions, noted: "The volunteers are really the eyes and ears and the foot soldiers" in the battle to ensure the safety of the community and in protecting lives.

CSS currently has 6,000 volunteers nationally in 125 synagogues, said Priem, who served in IDF special forces and who previously served as counterterrorism adviser for the United Nations and as the ADL's New York director of international affairs. He said when a number of Riverdale synagogues were struck by vandalism, volunteers took shifts watching and taking photos leading to the arrest of a suspect within days. "You don't need to be a member of the police to be the eyes and ears."

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ADL Vice President of Law Enforcement and Security Greg Ehrie said even though recorded antisemitic incidents have reached a rate not seen in 40 years, “We know they are being underreported. Jews are being targeted because of real or perceived support for Israel,” he said, adding those threats are coming from both the right and left. The left is basing its hatred on Zionism while the right’s venom comes from white supremacist groups.

“It’s the perfect storm,” said Ehrie, whose job it is to develop relationships with local, state and federal law enforcement authorities and bring the ADL’s “cutting-edge” research on extremism and critical data to those authorities. “The ADL provides the critical intelligence piece” that has assisted law enforcement thwart incidents, he said.

“You have to be prepared beforehand,” said Ehrie, who formerly was special agent in charge of the FBI’s Newark field office. “It sounds complicated, but these agencies work seamlessly together.” He noted there is “no greater friend” to the Jewish community than law enforcement and that he and other FBI agents all receive training at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Robert Wilson, chief security officer for the Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest, said in addition to law enforcement he also works cooperatively with security leaders from the three other federations having such a position: the Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey, the Jewish Federation in the Heart of New Jersey and the Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey.

Moreover, Wilson encouraged relying on the many sources for guidance on security measures and receiving grants for upgrades, including Federation.

Doran of Homeland Security said the office provides free security resources and facilitates the distribution of millions of dollars in state and federal grants to nonprofit organizations to improve security and develop their own training programs. She said the office does extensive training with the interfaith community, particularly the Jewish community.

“We don’t want to wait until something bad happens,” she said, stressing the importance of keeping the lines of communication open between local, state and federal law enforcement and the

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community. “We want feedback. We’re here to help you feel safe and protected so that when a bad day happens it does not turn into a really bad day.”

Information on services, grants available and how to apply for them are available on the office’s website,

(<https://www.dhs.gov/>)<https://www.dhs.gov>

(<https://www.dhs.gov>).

By Debra Rubin

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