



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

## His Excellency Archbishop Timothy Dolan Joins Senator Jeff Klein to Support Harsher Penalties for Church & Synagogue Vandals

JEFFREY D. KLEIN June 4, 2010

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Religious Leaders & Elected Officials Call on State Legislature to pass tougher sentencing for vandals of Houses of Worship

State Senator and Deputy Majority Leader Jeff Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester) and His Excellency, Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan joined Christian and Jewish religious leaders as

well as local elected officials at St. Patrick's Cathedral on Friday to support state legislation that would increase criminal penalties for vandalism of houses of worship. Senator Klein and Assemblymember Latimer's bill (S.1909/A.180) would make it a felony in most instances to vandalize or steal from a house of worship or its surrounding property.

"It is extremely disturbing whenever individuals choose to vandalize houses of worship, as these are sacred institutions that enrich our lives and communities. Toughening the penalties for such disgraceful crimes sends a clear message that this behavior will not be tolerated. I call on my colleagues in Albany to join me in fighting to protect all houses of worship across our state," said State Senator and Deputy Majority Leader Jeffrey D. Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester).

Klein and Archbishop Dolan were joined by the bill's cosponsor Assemblymember George Latimer; Monsignor Robert Ritchie, Rector of Saint Patrick's Cathedral; Rabbi Joe Potasnik, Executive Vice President of the New York Board of Rabbis; Emanuel Adler, Esq., Senior Vice President of the Orthodox Union and Chairman of the Synagogue Services Commission; Ms. Laya Pelzner, Associate Director of the Orthodox Union Department of Synagogue Services; Jeff Leb, Executive Vice President of the Sephardic Community Federation; and Rabbi Shmuel Lefkowitz, Vice President of Community Affairs for Agudath Israel of America.

Existing law protects scrolls, religious vestments, vessels and other items used in connection with religious worship that are located in any building or structure used as a place of worship. It does not afford the same protection, however, to religious items displayed

outside of the facility. Current law punishes intentional damage to the property of a house of worship as a class “A” misdemeanor, regardless of the amount of damage caused or the context in which the damage was caused.

Klein and Latimer’s bill expands existing law by creating a new “E” felony crime when property of a place of religious worship is damaged in an amount greater than \$150.00. The bill also broadens current statutes to include and protect property located outside and on the grounds of places of religious worship.

“The severity of punishment under this law must serve as a deterrent to such acts of vandalism. We are all grateful for Senator Klein's leadership on this issue, which affects all people who practice their faith and expect to be able to do so in a climate without harassment or intimidation,” said Assemblymember George Latimer (D-Mamaroneck).

“We, as members of the faith community, recognize that desecration of any house of worship violates every house of worship,” said Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, Executive Vice President of the New York Board of Rabbis.

“Keeping synagogues and their congregants safe from vandalism and violence is crucial. Too often, they are targets of hate and terror. We thank Senator Klein, Leader Sampson, Leader Smith, and the other sponsors, especially Senators Craig Johnson, Schneiderman and Stavisky, for their leadership on this legislation. We are proud to stand united with other

religious leaders in demonstrating that the goal of swift passage is not limited to any one faith group,” said Emanuel Adler, Esq., Senior Vice President of the Orthodox Union and Chairman of the Synagogue Services Commission.

“Desecrating a house of worship causes financial hardship and, even more so, emotional pain to the people who see this. This kind of disrespect is unacceptable,” said Rabbi Shmuel Lefkowitz, Vice President for Community Services for Agudath Israel Of America.

“The Sephardic Community Federation applauds Senator Jeff Klein on introducing and working to pass this important legislation. Final passage and enactment of this important bill will deter criminal acts against all religious institutions and will enable all New Yorkers to practice their religion in peace,” said Jeff Leb, Executive Vice President of the Sephardic Community Federation.

In February of this year, Senator Klein helped clean up graffiti on the rectory wall of Saint Francis Xavier Church in Morris Park in the Bronx. Saint Francis Xavier Pastor Father Matthew Fiore reached out to Senator Klein's office after finding the graffiti on the rectory wall on the first floor of the church on the morning of Friday, February 19th. Within 24 hours of the Pastor contacting Klein's office, Senator Klein and his graffiti clean-up crew went to the church to remove the graffiti.