



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Alessandra Biaggi

## SENATOR BIAGGI ISSUES STATEMENT ON PELHAM SCHOOL POLICY PROHIBITING STAFF FROM WEARING POLITICAL IMAGERY AT WORK

ALESSANDRA BIAGGI November 17, 2020

**PELHAM, NY** – State Senator Alessandra Biaggi issued the following statement in response to the ongoing discussion of a Pelham [school policy](#) that prohibits staff from wearing symbols or other imagery that could be construed as political while at work:

“While I understand that members of our community have differing opinions and perspectives, it is paramount that we find a way to have a respectful and honest community conversation regarding the decision made by Pelham Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Cheryl H. Champ, to enforce a school policy that prohibits staff from wearing symbols or other imagery that could be construed as political at work. Unfortunately, in the back and forth debate, we have lost sight of the central issue here and one we should all be able to support — ensuring that all students feel safe and respected at Pelham Schools.

Pelham students approached school administrators because they felt uncomfortable in school while members of staff were wearing the Thin Blue Line flag. As Dr. Champ has emphasized, student safety and wellbeing is the utmost priority, and has correctly guided her decision making. While members of the law enforcement community may use the Thin Blue Line flag as a sign of pride and respect for their profession, the flag has also been used

to **amplify** a political agenda of violence against communities of color and disregard for Black lives. This reality has been recognized by **towns** and **police departments** across the country. Regardless of whether you interpret the flag that way, the presence of the symbol in school has made students feel uncomfortable and we must take that seriously. The Superintendent is correct to enforce the policy that staff members not wear any political symbols or imagery while on the job.

There are a myriad of ways for individuals to show their support for New Yorkers in uniform, without promoting a symbol that has been used to intimidate Black and Brown people and, understandingly, has made students upset. I want to be clear – acknowledging the pain and harm that the Thin Blue Line flag triggers is not a rejection of law enforcement. It is a rejection of the systemic and institutional racism, and police brutality, that the flag has come to represent.

I am the proud granddaughter of Mario Biaggi, one of the most decorated police officers in the history of the New York City Police Department and the architect of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C. where the names of many heroes who have died protecting their communities reside. I know first hand the sacrifice that police officers and first responders make to serve our communities. I can value their service and my grandfather's legacy, and still acknowledge the deep pain and suffering that people of color have experienced, and continue to experience, in this country at the hands of law enforcement.

I urge us all to take a moment to reflect on our response to this situation and how we can establish an environment for meaningful dialogue. The Pelham Board of Education welcomes open comment on the matter at their next public meeting tomorrow evening, Wednesday at 7:30PM, in order to facilitate respectful conversation among community members. It is critical that we all approach this in good faith and with a commitment to de-

escalating the situation. We must remain committed to the goal of ensuring Pelham students feel safe and with the understanding that racism remains pervasive and systemic in our society.

Lastly, I want to be clear that making the Pelham community into a spectacle will not cultivate space to heal or grow. Anyone who does not want to communicate in good faith, and does not want to de-escalate the situation, should step aside for those who do.

I look forward to working together as a community to listen, learn, and move forward.”

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