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**State Lawmakers, Interfaith Leaders Rally at Capitol for Budget Inclusion  
of Buffer Zones Around Houses of Worship**

*Senator Sam Sutton and Assemblymember Micah Lasher Joined by Diverse Coalition  
Calling on State to Ensure New Yorkers Can “Pray in Peace”*

*Video of the Press Conference Can Be Found [Here](#)*

**ALBANY, N.Y. (March 11, 2026)** — New York State Senator Sam Sutton and Assemblymember Micah Lasher today joined interfaith leaders, advocates, and fellow lawmakers at the New York State Capitol to call on Governor Kathy Hochul and legislative leaders to include language establishing buffer zones around houses of worship in this year’s final state budget.

Speaking on the Capitol’s Million Dollar Staircase, the coalition urged state leaders to adopt legislation that would prohibit demonstrations within 25 feet of houses of worship

across New York. The proposal is designed to balance constitutional protections for free speech with the right of New Yorkers of all faiths to gather safely and practice their religion without harassment or intimidation.

The measure [was included](#) in the Governor's preliminary Executive Budget earlier this year and builds on legislation introduced by Sutton and Lasher in 2025 ([A9335/S8599](#)).

Advocates say the proposal comes at a critical moment, as religious communities across the state have expressed growing concern about harassment and demonstrations targeting places of worship.

[According to the New York State Comptroller](#), hate crimes in New York have increased by 69 percent over the past five years, with antisemitism accounting for 44 percent of all hate crimes and 88 percent of religion-based hate crimes in the state.

Recent polling conducted by the ADL Center for Antisemitism Research also shows broad public support for buffer zones around houses of worship and health care facilities. [The survey](#) found that 70 percent of registered voters support establishing buffer zones, including strong majorities across religious and political lines.

"For generations, people of all faiths have gathered in churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples to pray, to reflect, and to strengthen their beliefs. I am proud to stand alongside faith leaders and my colleagues to support legislation creating a 25-foot protective buffer zone around houses of worship," said **Senator Sam Sutton**. "Protecting the right to protest and protecting the right to pray are not competing values. We will protect our communities, we will defend our civil liberties, and we will uphold the values that make this state strong."

"New York must always be a place where people can both exercise free speech and express their religious identity without fear or intimidation," said **Assemblymember Micah Lasher**. "This bill will help our city government and other localities across the state ensure that New Yorkers are able to enter houses of worship without having to run a gauntlet of hate speech. Simple decency and mutual respect demands nothing less."

"No one should be afraid to go in and out of their house of worship," said **Senator Liz Krueger**. "It is critical that we protect our civil liberties and the rights that we have, even when we don't agree with each other."

"Every New Yorker deserves to practice their faith without fear," said **Assemblymember Nily Rozic**. "No one should face harassment, intimidation, or physical obstruction simply for trying to enter their house of worship. Strengthening these protections is about ensuring that our communities will not tolerate hate or intimidation, and that everyone has the right to gather, pray, and worship in peace."

“This proposal does not impede upon free speech,” said **Senator James Skoufis**. “Everyone should be able to assemble, everyone should be able to articulate, even if we disagree. It is their right to speak those words, but it is not their right to impede and infringe upon the freedom of religion and the freedom to worship here in the state of New York.”

“This bill does not take away anyone’s right to assemble. It does not silence protest. It does not restrict speech, prayer or expression,” said **Assemblymember Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn**. “What it does is protect every New Yorker’s fundamental rights. In a democracy your right to protest cannot include the right to block someone else’s freedom. The First Amendment is not just one right it’s a bundle of rights. It protects speech, assembly, expression, and the free exercise of religion, and this bill recognizes that these freedoms must co-exist. It is constitutional, it is reasonable. It is necessary. It is not a restriction, it is democracy.”

“I am a very proud co-prime sponsor of this legislation,” said **Assemblymember David Weprin**. “I represent one of the most diverse districts in the state of New York, with many, many religions. I have the largest mosque by population in my assembly district. I have the largest Sikh Gurdwara in the state with over 10,000 members. I have many synagogues and many religious institutions. Hate crimes have increased significantly, particularly against the Jewish community, but also against the Muslim community and the Sikh community and so many other religions. This is an essential piece of legislation. No one should be intimidated from going to their house of worship, and 25 feet is certainly reasonable. We need to have a buffer zone. It needs to be done as soon as possible.”

“This legislation is based on peace, on kindness, on allowing people to do what they do,” said **Assemblymember Stacey Pheffer Amato**. “I’m proud to be a sponsor of this bill. We grew up loving one another’s differences and diversity - that’s who New Yorkers are. To think in this country and this state that you would be stopped and hated for what you choose to do is unacceptable. This is commonsense, and let’s get it done in the budget.”

“I represent parts of the Catskills. Sullivan County and parts of Orange County. People come to my district in the summer to relax and enjoy and exercise their religious rights,” said **Assemblymember Paula Kay**. “We are the home of the original Woodstock festival, and Woodstock means peace. We all need to work together, and it is so important that this legislation gets supported and passed in the budget because religious freedom is freedom.”

“We need to make sure every single person in this city has the right to worship without being harassed,” said **Assemblymember Keith Powers**. “This legislation protects two rights: The right to protest and to speak, and the right to practice your religion, which is a constitutional right.”

Faith leaders from Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, and other religious communities joined lawmakers to underscore the urgency of ensuring that people of all faiths can access their

houses of worship safely.

“I represent one of the largest Muslim Arab organizations in Brooklyn and we work with more than 30 groups that are all representing the Muslim faith. We support this bill,” said **Mohammad Razvi, CEO of the Council of Peoples Organization**. “Let us pray in peace. You have the right to speak. We have the right to have our peaceful prayers.”

“Every New Yorker should feel safe entering a house of worship,” said **Rabbi Yosie Levine of New York City’s Jewish Center**. “People don’t come to my synagogue to argue about politics, they come to feel the warm embrace of the community. They come to pray and nothing should ever stand in the way of people expressing their faith. In Hebrew, we call a house of worship a ‘migdash’, which roughly translates to a sanctuary. And we call it a sanctuary not just because it’s hallowed ground, but because it’s meant to serve as a refuge from the rhetoric and rancor of the politics that dominate our public discourse. The language of the bill we’re advocating for doesn’t diminish anyone’s right to protest. It simply draws a boundary round our houses of worship so everyone can engage in prayer without worrying that they’re going to be harassed or intimidated.”

“This is not a Jewish issue. Obviously, our Jewish brothers and sisters are always going to be a target, and as people of faith we stand with them and we support them,” said **Bishop Orlando Findlayer of the New Hope Christian Fellowship**. “When we hear of an attack there are nine attacks we don’t hear of. We believe in the Constitution, and we don’t want to infringe on anyone’s right, but we are also saying when we go to worship don’t infringe on our right to worship. Don’t block the doors of our places of worship. We want to worship because the Constitution says we can worship freely. This is common sense. We don’t want the buffer law, we need it – not in June, we need it now. Pass it in the budget so those who choose to worship can do so without fear. To those who are not on board we say: Get on board!”

“Hate crimes are up significantly in New York yet hate crimes against the Jewish community comprise a majority of the hate crimes in New York,” said **Assemblymember Jeffrey Dinowitz**. “And New York represents the largest Jewish community outside Israel. There is absolutely no conflict between protecting people’s right to assembly, their right to protest and their right to worship as they choose – or not protest, for that matter. This bill is carefully crafted to ensure that everybody’s rights are protected. This bill needs to be passed, and I hope we can do it now, in the budget, but we should do it as quickly as possible. People in New York deserve to go into their house of worship without being harassed or attacked.”

Participants emphasized that the proposal is narrowly tailored to preserve First Amendment protections while preventing harassment and intimidation outside places of worship.

The coalition is urging Governor Hochul and legislative leaders to include the buffer zone

provision in the final state budget, which must be adopted by April 1.

“I want to thank the incredible leadership of Senators Sutton and Kreuger, Assemblymember Lasher, for bringing this bill to Albany. It has never been more important,” said **Eric Goldstein, CEO of the UJA Federation of New York**. The largest Jewish community outside of Israel is feeling more unsettled than it has been in my lifetime. We can’t afford to have houses of worship where people think twice about whether or not to come in. We can’t see our community going underground. The beauty of this bill is it carefully calibrates between freedom of expression, freedom of protest and freedom to worship. This is not simply a Jewish issue. Recent surveys show that 70 percent of all faiths in New York believe that houses of worship need to be protected. And that simply is what this is doing.”

“Targeting worshipers at the door of their house of worship is not persuasion, it is intimidation,” said **Mark Treyger, CEO of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York**. “No Jew, no Muslim, no Christian should ever have to calculate risk before they enter their house of worship. So, I want to thank the lawmakers and the governor for having the courage to act. It is not easy for elected officials to act in this political climate. But this is about doing the right thing at the right time. Let’s get this over the finish line, so we can have faith without fear.”

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