



Jews for Racial & Economic Justice

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April 25, 2017

Dear Chancellor Milliken:

As one of New York City's leading Jewish social justice organizations—with over 2,000 members, and counting—we at Jews For Racial & Economic Justice were thrilled to learn that our friend and colleague Linda Sarsour is to be the commencement speaker this year for CUNY's School of Public Health. There is, as we are sure you know, an increasing body of evidence that racism and xenophobia are fundamental drivers of health disparities, and so it is hard to think of a more appropriate speaker than Linda, who has done so much, both locally and nationally, to bring about a world in which everyone can thrive. She has stood with us against anti-Semitism, both in words and actions—most recently, raising money from the Muslim & Arab community to repair the cemeteries desecrated by anti-Semitic vandalism. To date, from the \$20,000 goal, Linda's work was critical in raising over \$162,000. We have worked for years with her as partners and allies to advance our shared commitment to justice, starting in 2010 when we came together to oppose the NYPD's surveillance of Muslim communities. These are only some examples from a very long list of her support for all, including Jews.

Since being named by President Obama as a “Champion of Change,” joining Bernie Sanders across the nation as an official surrogate, and helping to lead the massively successful Women's March, Linda's profile has grown and so has the irrationality of her critics. We have become aware that some have voiced concern about her selection as speaker, accusing anyone critical of Israeli policies as ‘anti-Semitic.’ Increasingly, the majority of American Jews understand that criticism of specific Israeli policies and practices, both by Jews and non-Jews, does not represent anti-Semitism. We reject those concerns about her selection as patently absurd. Linda was with us last week at our Passover #SederinTheStreets, just as we were with her at the JFK Terminal 4 protests against the Muslim Ban; she has stood with us for years—as we have stood with her. Like Linda, we reject entirely the narrative that Jews, Muslims, Christians and others cannot stand together in the fight against injustice. She has also made it very clear to our own community of Mizrahi Jews who trace their ancestry from Muslim-majority countries that we are, and always have been, family. We are allies—indeed, we must be allies, as anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and xenophobia are deeply intertwined.

We could continue. But the vital point is that New York's Jewish community stands with Linda, and we would be hard pressed to find someone more deserving of the honor of speaking at CUNY's School of Public Health Commencement.

Sincerely,

Audrey Sasson, Executive Director

Karen Zelermyer, Chair of the Board of Directors

On behalf of Jews For Racial & Economic Justice and our 2,000 members