

Open Letter to the New Rochelle Community:

Over the last week or so, the attacks against me have increased via social media/websites, and now calls, and lies about my character and my beliefs are being spread. I say with complete confidence that I am highly qualified to serve on the New Rochelle BOE because of my long experience as an educator in public institutions, my committed engagement in the district over many years, and my record of engaging productively with people when we disagree.

Over the last several days, some members of the Jewish community who belong to area synagogues have reached out to me privately to ask where I stand on issues re Israel, campus protests, Jamaal Bowman, etc; they indicated in their messages that they were struggling to reconcile the narrative they were hearing about me in their synagogues with what they heard me actually saying in public candidate forums, and my qualifications. I think they were surprised to learn that much of what they have been hearing about me is false; moreover, I think they were pleased to know that I welcomed and engaged in an honest dialogue.

So, I'm going to share a few words that I've said either at forums and/or in my direct communications with people who have reached out (and I encourage you to (re)watch forums here: [League of Women Voters](#); [PTA Council](#); [NAACP New Rochelle Branch](#)).

Sincerely,
Rosa Rivera-McCutchen

Regarding claims that I am "anti-Israel" & antisemitic

I am NOT “anti-Israel”, as some have said. My opinions about global conflicts in general are frequently informed by an ethic of humanity and care, rather than a deep historical or political analysis. That has its limitations, of course. But it's a big part of what people who know me and how I work and move in this world understand about me--and I think it's why people who know me, but don't always agree with my politics, *do* respect me and are confident in my commitment to act with integrity.

I believe in a two-state solution (though, I will be honest in saying that I don't fully understand what that means or what it will take; I don't know the history that has gotten us here). I generally believe it because I can't imagine an alternative that centers humanity. I believe that innocent people shouldn't be attacked and that sexual violence is abhorrent. I also generally believe that in any conflict there are some people on all sides who benefit from the continuation of the conflict and have an interest in keeping the conflict going (again, this is my general sense of human nature not a deep historical understanding). I don't think advocating for the rights of Palestinians makes me antisemitic; nor does it mean that I am disregarding the rights of Israelis and Israel's existence. It doesn't mean that I am propping up Hamas nor does my critique of what I think I know about Netanyahu mean that I think Israel should not exist.

People's thinking on all sides of most difficult issues is often too simplistic, and that can be incredibly unproductive. Dialogue, especially where there is complexity and disagreement, is productive and necessary for our community (and the world).

Regarding my support of campus protests:

First, it's important to know I actually have limited knowledge of or engagement with the details of any of the protests. Again, my opinions about conflicts are frequently informed by an ethic of humanity and care, rather than a deep historical or political analysis.

With that said, the short answer is that my thinking about the campus protests is nuanced. Leadership responses to protests varied wildly across institutions, and from what I could tell, the Columbia and NYU administrations, for example, did not handle it well. I never went to the encampment at Columbia, but I did go to the one at CCNY, which did not seem to be as charged as the one at Columbia or NYU campuses. What I came away with from my visit was that students were expressing a desire to be heard, and it seemed to me that so many institutions (formal and informal) seemed to be shutting down speech because it was too hard and too charged. My support of the encampments/protests (writ large) was in response to that. At Hunter College (which was new to me at the time since I'd been at Lehman College for 13 years prior), I learned that students and colleagues, including some who were Jewish, who were protesting on the street had been "doxxed" for expressing support for the people of Gaza. There was a truck that broadcast their pictures and personal details, along with language labeling them antisemitic. That type of rhetoric makes everyone less safe because it stifles the necessary dialogue that leads to seeing each other's humanity.

I'll also say that I often battle my inner rule-follower when it comes to civil disobedience. On the one hand, people who are not politically activated (or people who are activated, but disagree with the majority perspective and feel silenced and threatened as a result) deserve to go about their work/life/schooling without disruption. As a parent to teenagers/a young adult with often unrealistic and idealistic critiques of EVERYTHING, I often have to work very hard to not roll my eyes at the ways young people seem to want to disrupt everything without considering, "What's left if you tear it all down? What are the proposed solutions, not just the critiques?" On the other hand, some of the most incredible transformations in our society and world have come about through civil disobedience activated by very young visionaries (who were thought to be too idealistic by many around them). This is a tension that is real for me, and one that I think about through dialogue with people who have multiple perspectives.

I'll close with some words my opening statement at the PTA Council Forum:

Let me be clear: I believe that all kids, whether they are Students with Special Needs, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, Israeli, Palestinian, Jewish, Muslim or Christian, or kids of any other faith, Black, White, Latinx, English Language Learners...ALL kids deserve to feel safe and included. I believe care and safety are necessary conditions that must be met if we want students to thrive. School boards and district leaders have a responsibility to ensure that our schools are free from all forms of bigotry and hate.

My record of advocacy in the school district, in the broader New Rochelle community, and in my professional work demonstrates that I live these values on a daily basis. And those who have engaged with me, even when we disagree on hard issues, know that I enter into those conversations with an open mind and integrity. We must commit to partner with our communities to ensure that all histories are valued and not erased, and we have to turn harmful incidents into powerfully transformative opportunities to teach.