



# Borough of Hillsdale

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John J. Ruocco, Mayor

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My fellow residents, I wish to share with you what I said at the end of last night's Council meeting in closing commentary.

*Over the past several weeks, Black Lives Matter ("BLM") signs have been stolen or defaced in the Borough. These actions have been the subject of complaints made to the Hillsdale Police Department and have been or are being investigated. There was also an increase on social media of inflammatory comments regarding the decision of the Pascack Valley Regional Board of Education to change the school mascots. These comments spilled over to other issues like support for or opposition to the BLM organization. It has recently come to my attention that one resident had his fence & garage door defaced with "Blue Lives Matter" spray painted on them, presumably in response to the resident's BLM sign.*

*In these times of heightened discussions about racial discrimination, I think most Hillsdale residents would agree that our nation, indeed, much of the world, still has a way to go before we get to a true color-blind society. The remnants of prejudice have proven hard to eliminate, despite laws, education, and 155 years of cultural interfacing since slavery was abolished in the US. As I said to you in my message of June 7, I have seen tremendous progress during my lifetime, but a "moral gauntlet still confronts us." There is no doubt in my mind that progress will still be made, but we must take personal responsibility for our actions and words.*

*It is easy for me to say "black lives matter" because I believe all lives matter and racial discrimination is wrong and must be eliminated. However, the BLM organization and its supporters have expanded that fundamental human dictum to include a variety of social and political prescriptions that some residents find unacceptable. Thus, BLM signs are now associated in the minds of some as supporting a political point of view, in addition to a moral one. The freedom to express those views as well as opposing ones is guaranteed by our Constitution. When residents' personal property comes under attack for expressing views via a lawn sign, or when residents are summarily denounced as racists because they disagree with aspects of BLM's positions, something is wrong--very wrong. And it runs contrary to the core of who we are as Americans and how our nation came to be.*

*Our residents should not be fearful of exercising their right of free speech. Freedom to express one's views was a prime goal for those who created our nation. There is a reason why that freedom appears in the Bill of Rights as "the first" amendment. Let no one forget that it was used by those in the 1950s/60s civil rights movement to combat the discrimination and racial prejudice experienced by African Americans. If a resident cannot express personal views without having his property destroyed or having his reputation besmirched, we are entering what I call*

*“the zone of censorship” that is embraced by dictators and tyrants. Ironically, social media is becoming a new tool for denouncement and self-censorship by making it easy to slander a person’s reputation, hurl unsubstantiated and often hurtful charges & lies, and evidence gross stereotyping. It chills the willingness of well-intentioned and thoughtful individuals to engage in intelligent discourse.*

*I believe that the overwhelming majority of Hillsdale residents aspire to a color-blind society and cherish our right to free speech. Therefore, the Borough will continue doing everything in its power to ensure that those among us who do not share these values and who instead would destroy property or threaten the physical safety of others will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.*