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Yasir Naqvi

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May 15, 2025

His Worship Mark Sutcliffe
Mayor of Ottawa
110 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa, ON K1P1J1

Members of Ottawa City Council
110 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa, ON K1P1J1

Dear Mayor Sutcliffe and Members of Ottawa City Council,

I am writing to express my support for the proposed Vulnerable Social Infrastructure By-law — a timely and important measure that will help protect the rights and safety of residents in our city.

Throughout my public service — as the Member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre and formerly as Ontario's Attorney General — I have consistently worked and advocated to ensure that individuals can access essential spaces free from interference, harassment, or intimidation. In 2017, I introduced Ontario's Safe Access to Abortion Services Act, which established legally enforceable safe access zones (also referred to as "bubble zones") of up to 150 metres around abortion clinics, as well as the homes and offices of abortion service providers. This legislation played a key role in safeguarding access to healthcare services, ensuring that individuals could do so without fear of disruption or harm. The same underlying principle — that access to essential spaces must be protected — applies equally to schools, places of worship, hospitals, and community institutions.

Regrettably, we are witnessing a deeply troubling rise in hate-motivated incidents across Canada — targeting synagogues, mosques, gurdwaras, mandirs, schools, community centres, and senior homes. These are spaces intended to foster care, learning, and a sense of community, yet they are increasingly being disrupted by protests designed to interfere with, intimidate, and harass people accessing these vital institutions. This growing trend undermines the foundations of inclusion and mutual respect that are central to our democratic values. And while this pattern is emerging across the country, recent events have made it clear that Ottawa is experiencing these impacts in very real and visible ways.

Just last month, for the third time since 2021, hundreds of individuals gathered for an anti-trans protest along Broadview Avenue — outside Nepean High School, Notre Dame High School, and Broadview Public School. These demonstrations disrupted the school day, raised serious concerns among students, parents, and educators, and created an atmosphere of fear and unease. A similarly disturbing incident took place in the fall of last year, when a protest outside the Soloway Jewish Community Centre — directly across from a long-term care facility — left elderly residents, including Holocaust survivors, feeling unsafe and unable to travel freely. The demonstration disrupted daily life across the entire campus, which includes a school, nursery, and gym, and had a direct impact on children, families, and caregivers. Unfortunately, protests like these targeting worshippers and children are becoming a norm. Everyone should be able to access spaces like schools, places of worship, hospitals, and community institutions free from interference, intimidation, or harassment. Protecting these spaces is essential to upholding the kind of safe, inclusive, and respectful society we all want to live in.

Let me be very clear: the right to peacefully protest is fundamental in our democracy, and I respect and uphold that freedom. Peaceful demonstration plays a vital role in expressing dissent, advancing justice, and shaping public discourse. But that right is not without limits. It must be exercised in a manner that does not infringe on the rights and safety of others — particularly those accessing essential services or spaces that foster community and care. Bubble zones do not silence protest; rather, they establish reasonable boundaries to ensure that expression does not escalate into instances of interference, intimidation, and harassment. This approach reflects the careful balance our laws strive to maintain: protecting freedom of expression while safeguarding public safety and access.

That is why I support the consideration to establish protective areas which are narrowly tailored around vulnerable social infrastructure. It will be critical that such a by-law takes a careful and balanced approach — one that respects Charter rights while taking meaningful steps to promote safety and access. This is something that I am confident you, as our elected municipal officials, will work hard to ensure.

In January, I wrote to the Attorneys General of Canada and Ontario urging coordinated action to establish safe access zones around places of worship, schools, and other vulnerable institutions. A copy of the letter is attached for your reference. Further, as a result of much advocacy, in the most recent election, the Liberal Party of Canada has committed to introduce federal legislation that would make it a criminal offence to wilfully obstruct or intimidate individuals accessing these spaces. I will continue to strongly advocate for the adoption of this legislation at the national level.

It is my firm belief that we have a collective responsibility to combat hate. All orders of government must work together, within their respective jurisdictions, to help create safe spaces free from hate, interference, intimidation, and harassment.

I commend the City of Ottawa for its leadership in addressing these challenges directly. Incidents of interference, intimidation, or harassment have no place in our communities, and it is incumbent upon all levels of government to take meaningful action. It is not enough to respond after the fact — we must take proactive and preventive measures to protect our communities. This type of by-law represents a thoughtful and principled step in that direction, which is complementary to our efforts at the federal level.

Thank you for your leadership and for your commitment to this important work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yasir Naqvi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Yasir Naqvi

Member of Parliament, Ottawa Centre