



Fall 2023

Prosecutors take aim against antisemitism

Swastikas projected on a West Palm Beach building. Antisemitic materials thrown onto driveways in Wellington and Boca Raton. Demonstrations by neo-Nazis outside Disney World. These are the ugly signs of a disturbing rise in antisemitism witnessed this year in Palm Beach County and across Florida.

The State Attorney's Office has been a leader in Florida for holding these offenders accountable in criminal court. Two non-residents recently were convicted, and cases are pending against three other perpetrators who are charged with dumping flyers that are intended to inflame or incite hatred against the Jewish community.

And even more prosecutions are now possible with additional penalties, thanks to a new state law on public nuisances that was sponsored by state Representative Mike Caruso of Delray Beach.

Littering of antisemitic garbage, which harasses or intimidates the property owner, can now be charged as a first-degree misdemeanor. If the litter contains a credible threat, the crime rises to a third-degree felony. Anyone caught projecting a hateful image on a building without the owner's consent, or trespassing on college campuses to threaten or intimidate others, also faces prosecution.

In another change, willfully and maliciously interrupting or disturbing a religious service or a funeral can now be charged as a first-degree misdemeanor. If a credible threat is made, the crime is enhanced to a third-degree felony.

As the fall season begins, there have yet to be any charges filed in Palm Beach County under the new law – violators first need to be caught in the act and identified. Because they are cowardly and act at night or wear masks, it is difficult to bring those who disseminate hate to justice.

State Attorney Dave Aronberg, along with Sheriff Ric Bradshaw, is urging citizens to be vigilant and alert authorities if they witness the dumping of antisemitic materials in their neighborhoods or any other hateful acts.

"It's important for members of the community to say something if they see something," Aronberg said. "Help us find out when they are doing this and identify them, using their doorbell cameras, for example. Because if we can identify them, we will charge them."