

March 31, 2025

Mr. Bill Harmer and Mrs. Pat Weiser:

Thank you both for taking the time to meet with me on Wednesday.

While it was a challenging conversation to have, we managed to discuss a variety of issues surrounding Patti Smith being invited to VersoFest.

In our conversation, you both said multiple times that if someone said or posted something that was considered hate speech, then you would be having a different conversation at the Board level.

Here are my concerns:

1) The posts that I provided to you (below) *are* considered hate speech.

After I showed you the first post, you argued that Palestine rights or using language like “Palestine for Palestinians” is not Anti-Semitic, it’s political speech. You said, “we can disagree with it, but we can’t conflate it with hate.”

Then, you quoted a definition you found on the United Holocaust Museum website and said that’s what you used as your guide in order for you to judge whether or not this is considered hate speech.

This leads me to my next concern:

2) The Director of the Library and the Chair of the Board of Trustees are acting as the authority on hate speech.

The Library is not, and should never be, in the position of being the arbiter to determine if hate speech is being used against a marginalized group. Your own personal awareness of hate speech should not be determining whether or not it actually is.

You are not in the position to determine if what was said is “offensive enough” to be considered hate speech, in a vacuum. That is why the Library has a Board of Trustees and there is a process to be followed when issues arise.

This should have been addressed immediately and completely with the proper research and a Board vote back in early January, when this was first brought to your attention by *many* members of the community..

March 31, 2025

The fact is, there are *many* organizations and people that are authorities on Anti-Semitism and hate speech.

I am including and attaching to this email several links and videos that clearly outline what hate speech and Anti-Semitism look like and how it is identified.

- 3) The Board was never provided the necessary information, nor given the full authority to make their own decision about whether or not the Library should continue to host the guest in question.

The Board received a summary of events with an already foregone conclusion that everything would continue as it was originally planned based on the Library Director's discretion. To say that there was unanimous approval to not rescind the invitation is misleading.

It is my understanding that The Director of the Library serves at the pleasure of the Board of the Trustees. Therefore, it is your obligation to provide your Board Members with complete and accurate information and/or follow up with any new or additional information that is pertinent to any ongoing issues within the community.

- 4) You stated that you are mandated to follow ALA guidelines and cannot censor anyone or anything in the library.

However, the ALA endorses the widely acclaimed article written by Lester Asheim, "Not Censorship, but Selection" which gives the library some freedom and guidelines in order to select materials without it being considered censorship.

<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/NotCensorshipButSelection>

When I asked you, what would you do if you invited someone to speak about their book or to give a lecture who was later found to be accused of sexual assault, pedophilia or racism, you didn't really have a response.

The standards need to be the same for *all* guests. You cannot pick and choose when to stand behind freedom of speech and when not to.

The Westport Journal quoted our First Selectwomen saying that there is no place for hate in our town. <https://westportjournal.com/community/tooker-no-place-for-hate-in-westport/>

"It is up to all of us to stand together and speak up – clearly and unequivocally — against hate, and specifically antisemitism, and any language or actions that feed or normalize it. "

Dismissing or ignoring what is being posted, only normalizes hate speech.

March 31, 2025

I am not blind to the fact that we are currently one week away from this event.

At this late date, I am sure many people would suggest weighing the effects that canceling a speaker would cause for the Library and the Town vs. examining and upholding the policies of the library.

Honestly, I considered dropping this issue entirely and choosing to focus on how to do this better in the future, but I can't. For me, it's not just about this specific issue.

What's been uncovered is an inconsistency in the policies and procedures at the library that, in this case, are detrimental to a specific group of people, but it impacts everyone.

The library needs to be held accountable to uphold their policies and procedures. The Board deserves to have all of the information available on this subject provided to them so that they can determine the best course of action. And the members of the community that were asked for their opinions on whether or not the post that you decided to show them would be considered hate speech, deserve to be asked about ALL of the posts, not just one.

Therefore, I am requesting that you immediately forward this email along with all of the attachments to the Board members so that they have complete information and the opportunity to vote on this matter.

Lastly, I am aware that the ADL suggested that you do counter programming to balance the issue of bringing someone in that will highly upset the Jewish community.

I know that there is a Common Ground Initiative in place and that you've been trying for over a year to find the right programming. I'm just curious, did you try to create programming *at* VersoFest that would counterbalance the issue? This would be the perfect time and place to bring some measure of balance.

One idea is to simply find some way to honor the victims of the NOVA music festival.

Perhaps The Common Ground Initiative along with the VersoFest could collaborate to put together photos of the victims of the NOVA festival with battery operated candles in front of them and a poster board with lyrics to a song and/or play music that was playing at that festival to honor them. It could be placed somewhere prominent, but not in the way of the current set-up and it could be left up throughout VersoFest.

It's not too late to implement something into your programming that would make a significant difference. I would be happy to be part of helping make this happen, because we *all* deserve to live in a town where there is no place for hate.

Sincerely, Melissa Levy - Mom, "Westporter" and RTM District 2

Attached are the examples of hate speech that I found. I have included the meaning behind each one to give more context.

POST #1

Patti Smith post dated: February 6th, 2025

A flower image with the words: "Palestine belongs to the Palestinians"

Patti comments: "This is indisputable."

The messaging in this post calls for the complete elimination of Israel and the eradication of all Jewish people. That is the definition of hate speech.



POST #2

Patti Smith post dated: May 1, 2024

A young girl holds a sign that reads: “ Thanks to students. Stand with Gaza, be a human.”
Patti comments: “From the young to the young”

This post was in response to and condoning the students in our American Universities for inciting violence on Jewish students. It is akin to praising the white protesters who blocked black students from schools.

This was the experience for multiple college kids in our community.

This is also an example of language that dehumanizes the Jewish people by claiming that because they (or anyone) are not with Gaza, they are not human.

This is the definition of Anti-Semitism and hate speech.



thispattismith · Follow
Gaza - Palästina

thispattismith This is gratitude from the young to the young.
46w

46,918 likes
May 1, 2024



POST #3

Patti Smith post dated: February, 14, 2025

An AI generated image of a young girl holds a sign: “our land is not for sale”

Comments: This is the sacred TRUTH, the land is not to buy nor steal. Palestine belongs to the Palestinians.

This is an AI generated image, meaning that it is a created image and would be considered propoganda. Another form of hate speech and Anti-Semitism.

Patti comments that this is the TRUTH



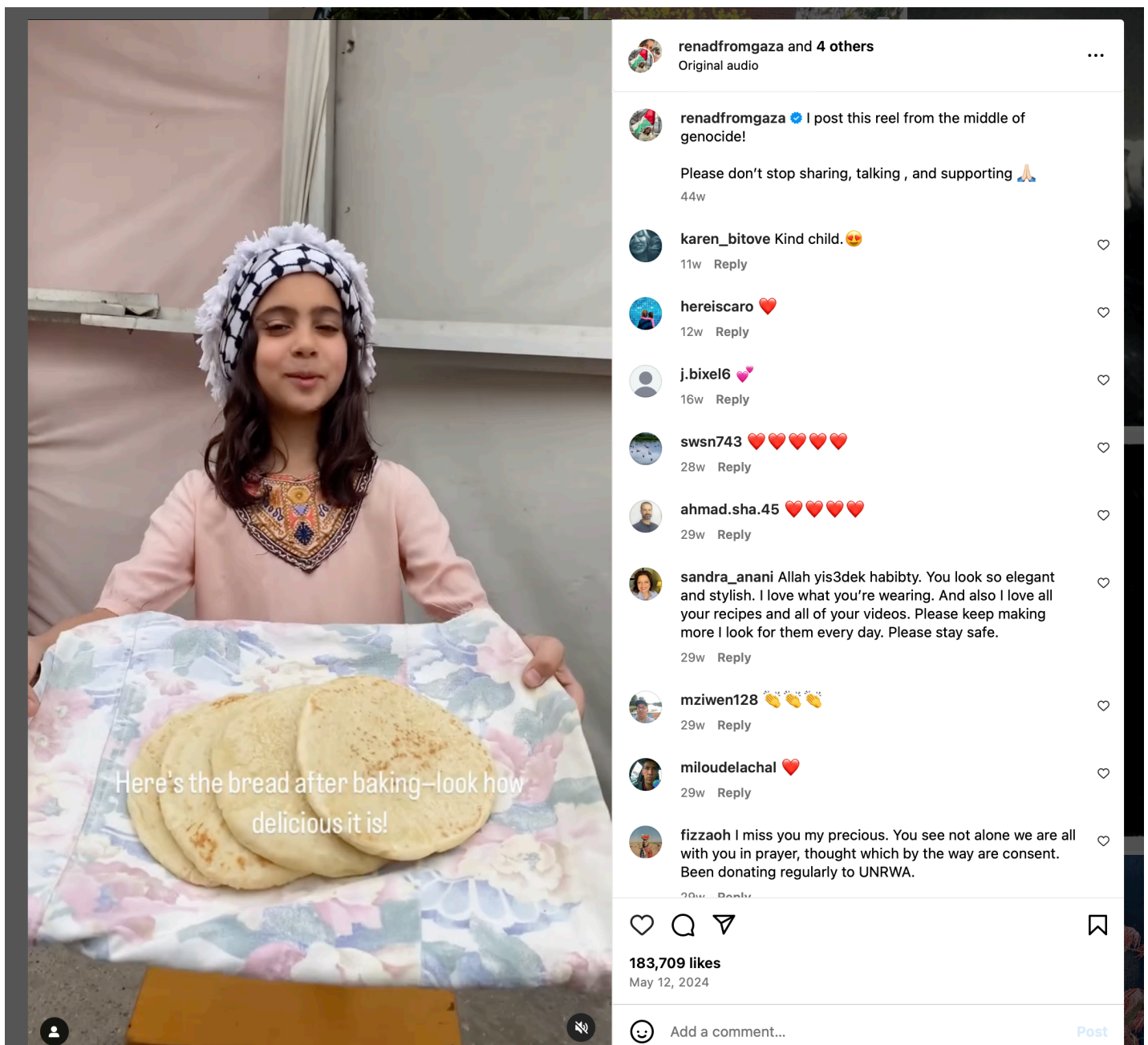
POST #4

Patti Smith post dated: May, 12, 2024

Renadfromgaza comments: I post this reel from the middle of **genocide!**

A repost is defined as AMPLIFYING content. Whether it's a post or a repost, Patti Smith is using her platform to express these dangerous views.

Implying that Israel is committing genocide when they are defending themselves, is called Accusation in a Mirror. Accusation in a mirror is a false claim that accuses the target of something that the perpetrator is doing or intends to do. This idea was first implemented by Joseph Goebbels, a German Nazi.



March 31, 2025

Links to information on Anti-Semitism, Hate Speech and Accusation in a Mirror

Watch these videos to learn more:

<https://www.ushmm.org/antisemitism/what-is-antisemitism/explained>

2:10

<https://www.ushmm.org/antisemitism-today>

3:02 - anti-Semitism and Israel - focuses on what's going on right now

Other links and articles that have important information:

Anti-Semitism and Hate Speech

<https://www.standuptohatred.com/booklets>

<https://www.projectshema.org/our-work>

<https://antisemitism.adl.org/>

<https://www.adl.org/about/adl-and-israel/anti-israel-and-anti-zionist-campaigns>

<https://www.standwithus.com/>

Accusation in a mirror

<https://www.un.org/en/genocide-prevention>

<https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/>

[UN%20Strategy%20and%20Plan%20of%20Action%20on%20Hate%20Speech%2018%20June%20SYNOPSIS.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/UN%20Strategy%20and%20Plan%20of%20Action%20on%20Hate%20Speech%2018%20June%20SYNOPSIS.pdf)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accusation_in_a_mirror

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2020327

<https://lawecommons.luc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=lucjlj>

Attached to this email is more information on hate speech and anti-semitism.

I have also strung together clips from the movie October 8th to highlight what the new definition of hate speech and anti-semitism are to the leaders in this field.

Please Note: Any video clips included here are being used under the “fair use” act and intended for educational and research purposes only.