METRO

De Blasio says slamming Jewish funeral in Williamsburg was 'tough love'

By Julia Marsh and Amanda Woods   April 29, 2020 | 1:06pm | Updated

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Mayor Bill de Blasio insisted it was "tough love" when he slammed "the Jewish community" after thousands of mourners clogged Brooklyn streets for the funeral of a rabbi who died of COVID-19 — but admitted Wednesday he regrets how he delivered the message.

Hizzoner tweeted his outrage Tuesday night after the group of Orthodox Jewish mourners gathered en masse — a blatant violation of social distancing mandates — near Rutledge Street and Bedford Avenue in Williamsburg to pay their respects for the rabbi, identified by The Yeshiva World as Chaim Mertz.

"I spoke last night out of passion," de Blasio said during a Wednesday press conference. "I could not believe my eyes … It was deeply, deeply distressing."

"This is a community I love," said the mayor, who emphasized his "long, deep relationship with the Orthodox Jewish community."

"If you saw anger and frustration, you're right," he said. "I spoke out of real distress that people's lives were in danger before my eyes."

"I regret if the way I say it in any way gave people a feeling of being treated the wrong way — it was not my intention," de Blasio added. "It was said with love, but it was tough love."

Hizzoner called the funeral "by far the largest gathering" in the city he'd heard of since the start of the coronavirus crisis, "and it's just not allowable."

He added that the city will no longer permit these kinds of gatherings "in any community" as the crisis continues.

"I understand when people are going through mourning, they're in real pain, but we have to understand what it means to hold a large gathering in New York City today," he said. "It means unfortunately that people who go to that gathering, some will be sick with that disease; it's just a fact — we know this. Some will spread the disease to others. People, as a result, will die."

Peter Gerber

"The notion that people would gather in large numbers, and even if they didn't mean to, would spread a disease that will kill other members of the community, is just unacceptable to me," he continued. "So we have to do something different."

De Blasio took heat from Anti-Defamation League head Jonathan Greenblatt, World Jewish Congress president Ronald Lauder and even Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) for his tweet.

The criticism centered around the mayor's grouping of the city's entire Jewish population — more than 1 million people — into his tweet. The mourners who gathered in Williamsburg were of the Satmar sect of Hasidic Judaism.

"My message to the Jewish community, and all communities, is this simple: the time for warnings has passed," the tweet read. "I have instructed the NYPD to proceed immediately to summons or even arrest those who gather in large groups. This is about stopping this disease and saving lives. Period."

Police Commissioner Dermot Shea said Wednesday that 12 summonses were issued at the gathering for a variety of offenses, social distancing and a refusal to disperse.

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