

‘Love is the Answer’ protesters cry at State House rally against hate



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Comments

Robert O. Trestan, regional director of the Anti-Defamation League, addressed the crowd at the State House.

By **Cristela Guerra** | GLOBE STAFF NOVEMBER 21, 2016

“Just put it up, Mom,” 4-year-old Bodhi Bennett pleaded from his perch on his mother’s shoulders. He wanted the people to see their sign.

Amanda Darisse, 38, smiled and handed it to him. He lifted it high over their heads.

“Love is the answer,” it said in bold black letters.

Bodhi didn’t know why his mother decided to drive from Salem to Boston on a cold Monday morning. He doesn’t understand politics. He doesn’t understand hate.

Still, there he was, at the Massachusetts Speaks Out Against Hate rally, which came amid concerns the election of Donald Trump as president will stir turmoil in the country.

Bodhi and his mother stood near the State House steps, as Bodhi proudly hoisted his sign among the many. Around her, the crowd, estimated by organizers to be 400 strong, was as diverse as the city.

“As parents, we’re an example to them every day about how kindness needs to be a part of your everyday life,” Darisse said. “It’s a necessity.”

As a mother of two, Darisse said she’s thinking about the world her 9-year-old daughter, Soleil, and her son will grow up in. She wants better for them.

“I wanted to be another voice that said, ‘Hate speech, violence is not acceptable,’ ” Darisse said. “It isn’t right, it isn’t OK, and we are better than this.”

The Anti-Defamation League of New England has recorded about 25 hate incidents in recent weeks, three times the usual rate. Elected officials from the state and the city joined with 30 local organizations and community leaders to lead the event, which organizers described as nonpartisan.

“I’ve spoken to a lot of organizations and coalitions we work with every day. People are getting calls,” said Robert Trestan, director of the league’s New England office. “People on the ground in communities and cities across the Commonwealth are concerned.”

Mayor Martin J. Walsh cited statistics: the percentage of the city that's Asian, the percentage that's African-American, the percentage that's Latino, or lives with parents born in another country.

Walsh held a citywide conversation on race Saturday. The dialogue had been planned long before Trump's election. Still, Walsh acknowledged the election's impact.

"I saw Boston. I saw America," Walsh said about Saturday's forum. "I saw hope there, and I saw love there."

Walsh said Monday's rally wasn't about who won the presidential election. It was about protecting each other.

"We need to find common ground," Walsh said. "We should be tolerant of many different views. We should respect the Democratic process, but we will not remain

One such incident happened earlier this month at a store in Cambridge.

Harmann Singh, a first-year law student at Harvard University, spoke of being "aggressively accosted." A man followed him around, Singh said, cursing because he thought the student was a Muslim. Singh called on those before him to intervene when they witnessed hatred.

He said no one in the store said anything.

"This type of hate and intolerance can occur anywhere and to anyone," Singh said. "At a moment when many of our brothers and sisters across the country do not feel safe in their own homes, we must stand up for those around us."

Activist Jose Briceno said he's seeing those fears firsthand in Boston and nearby communities. He's hearing from undocumented immigrants who are afraid of losing family members. He's also hearing of people targeted because they look different. They don't look "American."

“They’re human beings,” said Briceno, 40, who lives in Cambridge. “They have the same dreams as the rest of the population.”

As the event drew to a close and the crowd dispersed, singing “God Bless America,” Tom Pappas, 58, of Dallas and John Carter, 39, of Waco, Texas took in the scene. They were handed antifascist fliers. They happen to be Trump supporters.

“I’m against racism,” Pappas said. “But I don’t think Trump’s campaign was about racism.”

He said even though he disagreed with the rally’s reasoning, he respected people for speaking up.

He said he hopes they give Trump a chance.

Nearby stood 12-year-old Isaac Zelermyer, who attended the rally with his family. He isn’t old enough to vote, but he’s old enough to have a few words for the

“My hope is that Donald Trump is president for everybody even if he wasn’t my first choice,” said Zelermyer, who lives in Brookline. “I want him to try his best.”

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