

PRESS RELEASE FROM
PRESIDING OFFICER DUWAYNE GREGORY



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Anti-Bias Task Force Holds Awards Convocation at Suffolk County Legislature



The Anti-Bias Task Force recently held its annual Awards Convocation at the Suffolk County Legislature. Students, educators and organizations with a demonstrated commitment to combatting prejudice in Suffolk County were honored at the event. (Photo by Steve Gravano).

HAUPPAUGE, N.Y. – The Anti-Bias Task Force, a subcommittee of the Suffolk County Human Rights Commission, recently held its 2015 Awards Convocation at the William H. Rogers Legislature Building in Hauppauge. Students, educators and organizations who combat prejudice and promote understanding between Suffolk County’s diverse communities were honored at the event.

“The morning’s Awards Convocation, which witnessed schools and students receiving Certificates of Achievement in the area of combatting bias, prejudice, and racism, was extremely impressive as it demonstrated the understanding young people in our county have of these issues and how impassioned they are to do something about them,” said Rabbi Steven Moss, co-chair of the Suffolk County Anti-Bias Task Force.

The Task Force is composed of involved citizens who are dedicated to responding to incidents of hate as they arise and who are developing programs to prevent these incidents from occurring in the future. Currently co-chaired by Rev. JoAnn Barrett of Smithtown and Rabbi Moss of Oakdale, the organization has established task forces in each of Suffolk County’s towns and has received the support of four county executives as well as the Suffolk County Legislature.

“These students and educators demonstrate the best of the human spirit,” said Suffolk County Legislature Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory. “Although we have a long road ahead to a world free from prejudice and hate, these citizens make a choice each day to improve their communities by touching one heart and mind at a time. Together, their collective effort has made a tangible difference toward building a culture of inclusion in Suffolk County.”

“It was an honor to attend the Anti-Bias Task Force Awards Convocation,” said 8th District Legislator William J. Lindsay III. “These young people are not only strong leaders, but also creative and talented performers, as evidenced by their presentations at the ceremony. They are also the key to eradicating hate and prejudice from Suffolk County, and we can all learn from their example.”

Among those honored were Alexandra Koumas, a junior at Huntington High School, for her participation in Young Leaders, an organization co-founded by her coach Kevin Thorbourne, a member of the Suffolk County Anti-Bias Task Force. Through Young Leaders, Koumas produced a video in which she asked students how they would define diversity and found many were stumped.

“I think that’s a main part of where we live,” Koumas said, referring to Huntington’s diverse population. “People from all different backgrounds coming together as one community. That’s essentially what diversity is.”

Thorbourne credited the Task Force with creating a “trickle-down” effect. “I take the things I learn from the Task Force to Young Leaders, and those students in turn reinforce those values when interacting with their peers,” he said. “This organization has a meaningful impact far beyond its immediate reach.”

Others honored at the event include:

The Safe Schools Team at Long Island Gay and Lesbian Youth, consisting of Brittany Alvarado, Jaycee Christy, Ethan Diaz, Billy Green, Riley Love and Nicole Nelson.

Johnnie Ramirez of One Mind Club at Walter G. O’Connell Copiague High School.

West Hollow Middle School's One World Youth Club, consisting of Niki Panagiotidis, Courtinee Walker, advisor Angelica Conway and Jay Urena of Reach CYA.

Edmund W. Miles Middle School's Students United for Safe Schools Club, consisting of Kayla Campbell, James Carey, Britney Colas, Courtney Evans, Raiphy Jerez, Sabitha Joseph, Khabirah Kemp, Eddie Marrero, Jr., Jacob Marrero, Jr., Bianca Molina, Giselle Monge, Mikel Murphy, Katirya Tyson-Cordona, Amelia Tisk, Jayden Valentine, Isaiah Williams, Ashley Wilson, Carina Wong-Schult, Ja'Khia Crenshaw, and Fani Canales.

Patchogue-Medford High School's LIFE Through My Eyes, consisting of Estefania Yanza, Zahira Salinas and Karen Volk.

The Confirmation/9th Grade Class of B'Nai Israel Reform Temple in Oakdale, consisting of Alia Blessing, Jacqueline Bukzin, Chloe Bzdyk, Paige Bzdyk, Evan Mauner, Matthew Menis, Tory Steinroeder, Phoebe Taitz and Emily Yellen.

Joseph Lecci of Longwood School District.

Oakdale-Bohemia Anti-Bias Task Force 6th Grade Interfaith Program, consisting of Selden Mosque, B'nai Israel Reform Temple and St. John Nepomucene Church.

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