

# FIGHT FOR EQUAL TREATMENT IN BIG APPLE

## *NYC Council Member Calls on City to End Religious Bias in Public Schools*

At a June 24 press conference outside New York City Hall, City Council Member Tony Avella announced plans to introduce a resolution calling on the New York City Department of Education to allow a nativity scene or crèche in public schools during the Christmas season.

Current Department of Education policy allows a Jewish menorah and an Islamic star and crescent (both of which are religious symbols) to be displayed during the winter holidays along with a Christmas tree, a secular symbol.

Last year the Second Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that while the city doesn't have to display nativity scenes in public schools, it isn't barred from doing so. The court also ruled that the menorah and the star and crescent (contrary to the city's claims) are religious symbols, not secular ones.

It's high time for New York City schools to stop banning Christian religious symbols while rolling out the welcome mat for those of other faiths.

### **In support of nativity scene inclusion:**

*"The Second Circuit Court of Appeals never said that a nativity scene could not be displayed alongside a menorah and a crescent star. Therefore, it is up to the New York City authorities to either practice inclusion and allow crèches to be displayed or practice discrimination and deny them."*

– **Bill Donohue**, Catholic League president

*"My resolution is purely about inclusion. The menorah and star and crescent are religious symbols. By adding a nativity scene/crèche to the holiday display, Christianity will receive equal representation with other religious faiths during the holiday season."*

– **Tony Avella**, New York City Council

*"It is obvious and appropriate for the people of New York City to have a policy that represents them and they should decide what symbol represents Christianity best during Christmas. A bureaucrat in the city Department of Education should not be the final arbiter as to what symbol is best suited for display."*

– **Brian Rooney**, Thomas More Law Center

*"We want the New York City Board of Education to explain to the people of this city why ... the board continues its refusal to display the nativity scene in the same manner it displays other religious symbols. The board's refusal appears to show blatant discrimination against the nativity scene."*

– **Bridget Kearney**, Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians, Queens County Chapter