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Gov. Murphy pushes Facebook to do more to fight anti-Semitism

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Three weeks after a mass shooting in a Jersey City kosher market, state officials renewed their criticism of a Facebook group that they said included anti-Semitic content.

Gov. Phil Murphy and state Attorney General Gurbir Grewal released a statement late Friday that said Facebook needed to do more to combat anti-Semitism on a page called “Rise Up Ocean County.”

That group has been critical of the population growth in Lakewood, a destination for many Orthodox Jews.

“We appreciate that Facebook has taken some steps to address anti-Semitic content on the page, but much more can be done,” Murphy and Grewal said in the statement. “Facebook must make lasting reforms to stop the spread of hate on the Internet.”

“Facebook does not tolerate hate speech,” Daniel Roberts, a spokesman for the social media giant, wrote in an email to NJ Advance Media. Roberts said that Facebook had worked with New Jersey’s civil rights office to “remove specific content” that “violated our terms,” but he did not give details.

A second Facebook spokesperson, Ruchika Budhraj, said the page had not committed enough violations to be removed permanently.

A representative for the attorney general’s office declined to go into more detail about how officials are pressuring Facebook.

The head of the civil rights office first sent a letter to Facebook in April to complain about the page’s treatment of Jews. One commenter had written, “We need to get rid of them like Hitler did,” according to the letter. It also flagged a video posted to the page called “RUOC DECLARES WAR!” which criticized development in Lakewood.

“Rise Up Ocean County” was created in 2018, and currently has almost 18,000 followers, thousands more than it had earlier this year. A page administrator directed NJ Advance Media to a post the group published Friday.

That statement said their Facebook page was taken down voluntarily earlier in the day because of a “coordinated attack,” but it did not elaborate. It also said the page was intentionally brought back online shortly before the start of the Jewish Sabbath, so the “haters in the orthodox community (there really aren’t that many) can all spend the next 27 hours licking their wounds.”

In a statement earlier in the year, the page's administrators said that their group was not anti-Semitic, but stood for environmental protection, school funding and other local issues. They wrote that they deleted hateful comments, and had banned words like "Nazi" and "Hitler."

Grewal, the attorney general, visited Jewish schools last month after the Jersey City shooting. When one student asked him about hate speech online, he said he and other attorneys general were pushing Facebook to monitor its content more closely.