

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 30, 2022

During the week of April 18th, several individuals verbally harassed and intimidated an artist of color who was installing a mural at 75 Raritan Ave (overlooking Papa John's). The muralist, Amrisa Niranjan, who was commissioned by coLAB Arts, had met with Black Community Watchline in the fall of 2021 to receive feedback on the design of the mural meant to express the radical hospitality and welcoming spirit of the Highland Park community.

During the mural installation process this artist of color, who also happens to be an immigrant, was met with hatred and racism in Highland Park and her beautiful work of art was immediately vandalized within hours of its completion. Black Community Watchline and the undersigned organizations stand with the artist and condemn all forms of racist harassment, violence, and intimidation. We are outraged by the racial harassment that the artist has experienced and the lack of action by the Mayor of Highland Park to protect and support the artist. The producing director of coLAB Arts shared with the Mayor and Highland Park Council Members clear examples of the racial harassment the artist experienced and requested that they issue a public statement naming and condemning both coded and blatant racism in Highland Park. The Mayor responded by indicating that she would station an officer on site at 75 Raritan Avenue for the duration of the installation.

The Mayor did not station an officer at 75 Raritan Avenue, nor did she issue a public statement condemning the racist incidents. Instead, she requested a photo of the mural, which she posted to [Facebook](#) a week after being made aware of the multiple incidents of racial harassment. In the Mayor's post, she inaccurately represented the intent of the mural and represented herself as the artist's ally after failing to provide the police protection she had initially offered the artist. The incidents of racial harassment the muralist experienced went unnamed in the Mayor's post. In the absence of the Mayor's action to protect the artist, the community organized a number of volunteers to stand with the artist as she completed the installation. The Mayor's actions are consistent with a disturbing pattern that reflects an unwillingness to name and significantly address racial bias and harassment within Highland Park. "Based on my experience as an artist," Amrisa Niranjan stated, "I cannot say I believe Highland Park is a safe place for everyone."

Black Community Watchline has been in discussions with coLAB Arts about the future design and installation of another mural in Highland Park and the safety of artists working on these projects, as well as the protection of the artwork itself. Within 48 hours of the completion of the mural, individual(s) twice defaced the mural, spray painting over the artist's and coLAB Arts' names and covering the woman with a hijab with the letters USA and two Stars of David.

As an organization committed to ensuring that incidents of anti-Black violence, harassment, and intimidation are not overlooked, dismissed, or mishandled by public servants, Black Community



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Watchline and the undersigned organizations call on the Mayor and Borough Council to commit to addressing anti-Black racism and all forms of racially biased and xenophobic incidents by taking the following actions:

- Issuing a public statement naming and condemning anti-Black racism and all forms of racism and xenophobia
- Issuing a public apology to the artist for not providing personal protection and/or the protection of property
- Identifying and communicating a public and transparent process and/or plan for protecting Black and racially minoritized individuals and property subject to racial violence

Sincerely,

Black Community Watchline
Middlesex Black-Jewish Coalition
Antiracism in Action