



City Council Toolkit

How to work with your City Council to
combat anti-Hindu Hate

Table of Contents

Engaging with City Councils and Responding to Hate

Section 1: How to Engage with your City Council

- Before the Meeting
 - Review Public Comment Rules
 - Pre-Register or Sign Up On-Site
 - Prepare and Rehearse
- During the Meeting
 - Check the Agenda
 - Make Connections
 - Be Respectful
- After the Meeting
 - Connect with Community Members
 - Follow Up
 - Stay Engaged

Section 2: Standard Talking Points

- On Hindu American Identity and Community
- On Anti-H-1B Rhetoric
- On the Responsibility of Elected Officials
- On Inclusion and Religious Freedom
- On the Impact of Hateful Rhetoric
- On Building a Stronger Community Together

Section 3: City Council Rules of Conduct

- Understanding Meeting Procedures
- Maintaining Order During Meetings
- How Councils Should Respond When Hate Speech Occurs
- After an Incident: What to Demand

Section 4: Sample Testimonies and Statements

- When Hate Is Coming from a Sitting Council Member
 - Calling for Accountability
 - On Fair Representation
 - On Hindu and Indian American Contributions
- When Hate Is Coming from Outside Agitators
 - Calling for Protection of Civic Space
 - On Civil Discourse and Community Values
 - Interfaith Statement of Solidarity
- Statements for City Council Members
 - Responding in the Moment
 - Formal Condemnation
 - Reaffirming Community Values

Section 5: Additional Resources and Support



Engaging with City Councils and Responding to Hate

City councils play an important role in shaping the tone and safety of civic discourse. Residents have the right and responsibility to participate in public meetings, express concerns, and encourage elected officials to uphold the values of fairness, respect, and accountability.

In recent years, city council meetings across the country have increasingly become places for hateful and divisive rhetoric targeting Hindu and Indian American communities. Spaces that should welcome every resident are being used to divide us. Our community deserves better, and this toolkit is here to help you push back.

This toolkit provides practical guidance for community members on how to effectively engage with city councils, deliver impactful testimony, and ensure councils uphold their rules of conduct when harmful rhetoric appears in public meetings.

Section 1: How to Engage with your City Council

City council meetings are one of the most direct ways to make your voice heard as a community member. Whether you are speaking out against anti-Hindu rhetoric from a sitting council member or responding to outside agitators who have brought hate into your community's public spaces, showing up and delivering clear, composed testimony is one of the most powerful tools available to you.

This section provides guidance on how to prepare for and participate in a city council meeting effectively.

Before the Meeting

Review Public Comment Rules

Each city council has specific guidelines for public participation, including time limits and allowable topics. Review your city council's policies ahead of time so you understand how the process works. Most city councils allow 2-3 minutes per speaker, so plan your remarks accordingly. Also, please note that city councils have the discretion to shorten the allotted time based on the number of speakers.

Pre-Register or Sign Up On-Site

Some cities and towns offer both pre-registration and on-site sign-up options for public comment, though policies vary by municipality. Most cities require speakers to register in advance via online forms or by calling the City Clerk's office to guarantee a spot, while in-person attendees can usually fill out speaker slips immediately before the meeting. Be sure to check your city or town's procedures before the meeting.

You do not need to have children in the district, be a U.S. citizen, or hold a green card to deliver public comments or email members of the board of trustees. However, some councils may give priority to city residents or business owners, so check your city's policy beforehand.

Prepare and Rehearse

Write out your testimony in advance. Be sure to state who you are, what your role is in the community, and how the issue impacts you, your family, and your community. Clearly state your concerns and what changes you are requesting. Practice delivering your testimony and make sure your remarks stay within the allotted time. Feel free to adjust the suggested talking points or sample testimony in this toolkit to reflect your own experiences and perspective.

During the Meeting

Check the Agenda

Review the meeting agenda so you know when the public comment period will occur and how the meeting will proceed. This will help you be ready when it is time to speak.

Make Connections

Personal stories are powerful. Share how the issue affects your family, community, or personal experiences to help board members understand why the change you are requesting matters.

Be Respectful

Address the council professionally and remain calm, even if the discussion becomes frustrating. Avoid obscene gestures, personal attacks, or name-calling. Refrain from speaking beyond your allotted time, and promptly conclude your remarks when asked. Be mindful of Maintaining respectful conduct helps ensure your message is heard and taken seriously.

After the Meeting

Connect with Community Members

Your best support system for staying up-to-date, continuing to engage with city council members, and showing widespread interest in the issue is to work together with your local community members who share your concerns. These connections may also become your allies for future similar initiatives.

Follow Up

After the meeting, consider emailing a full version of your statement to the city council members. This allows you to expand on points that may have been limited by the speaking time and ensures your concerns are clearly documented.

Stay Engaged

Monitor statements and updates from the city council to see whether they make a public statement or make changes to policies. Advocacy often requires ongoing engagement, attending future meetings, communicating with city council members, and staying informed about developments.

Section 2: Standard Talking Points

The following talking points can help guide the remarks by community members across different cities and contexts. Whether you are speaking at a city council meeting, writing to an elected official, or organizing within your community, these points provide a consistent and compelling foundation. Personal stories and local context can make your message even more powerful, but keeping the core ideas consistent helps ensure our community speaks clearly and with unity.

On Hindu American Identity and Community

- Hindu Americans are a proud and integral part of this community. We are your neighbors, your colleagues, your fellow taxpayers, and your fellow citizens.
- Hinduism is one of the world's oldest living traditions, practiced by over one billion people globally and by millions of Americans.
- The Hindu American community contributes to every sector in the US, from medicine, technology, and business to education, the arts, and public service.
- Anti-Hindu bias and misinformation are real concerns that affect families and students in communities like ours.

On Anti-H-1B Rhetoric

- Criticism of immigration policy is a normal and important part of civic discussion. However, those debates should never become an excuse to stereotype or target Indian Americans.
- Public conversations should focus on policy while continuing to treat every member of the community with dignity and respect.
- Using immigration as an excuse to spread fear or hatred toward an entire community is divisive, misleading, and dangerous.

On the Responsibility of Elected Officials

- Elected officials represent all members of their community, regardless of faith or background.
- Our community is not asking for special treatment, we are simply asking for the same dignity, respect, and protection afforded to every community.
- When hateful rhetoric goes unchallenged in public spaces, it can send the message that some communities do not fully belong. Leaders have an important role in making it clear that hate has no place in our city.

On Inclusion and Religious Freedom

- Religious freedom means more than the right to worship privately. It also means being able to live openly according to one's beliefs without fear of bias or discrimination.
- Communities are stronger when they respect and support people of different faiths and backgrounds.
- Anti-Hindu bias, like all forms of religious bigotry, has no place in our schools, civic institutions, or public discourse.

On the Impact of Hateful Rhetoric

- Words spoken in public forums matter. When harmful rhetoric about Hinduism or Hindu Americans goes unchallenged, it can normalize prejudice.
- This affects families and children who hear their traditions misrepresented or mocked.
- Addressing such rhetoric is an important step in ensuring that every community member feels respected and safe.

On Building a Stronger Community Together

- Our goal is to strengthen the community, not divide it.
- Hindu Americans have long contributed to the civic, cultural, and economic life of this country.
- Standing against anti-Hindu hate is not a partisan issue, it is about ensuring that every member of the community is treated with dignity and respect.

Section 3: City Council Rules of Conduct

City council meetings are intended to be open forums where residents can speak to their elected representatives. At the same time, councils have a responsibility to ensure that these meetings remain respectful, orderly, and safe for everyone involved. While the First Amendment protects a wide range of speech, local governments can set reasonable, neutral rules about how meetings are conducted so that participation does not become disruptive, intimidating, or unsafe.

Understanding Meeting Procedures

Most city councils follow established procedures that explain how the public can participate. Because council meetings are considered limited public forums, councils may set practical guidelines for when and how people speak. These rules must apply equally to everyone and cannot favor or silence any viewpoint.

Typical procedures include requiring speakers to sign up before speaking, either online or at the meeting itself, and to briefly introduce themselves before making their remarks. Councils often establish a neutral speaking order and set time limits, commonly two to three minutes per person, to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to be heard. Many councils also accept written comments, which can be submitted if someone cannot attend the meeting or if time runs out during the public comment period.

Maintaining Order During Meetings

City councils also have the authority to maintain order during public meetings. If an individual engages in threatening, violent, or intentionally disruptive behavior, the meeting chair may issue a warning and, if necessary, take steps to remove the individual from the meeting.

However, disagreement and criticism of public officials are a normal part of civic life. Rules intended to maintain order should focus on disruptive behavior, not on the opinions being expressed.

How Councils Should Respond When Hate Speech Occurs

Although hateful or offensive speech may sometimes be legally protected, public officials are not required to remain silent in response. Elected leaders have an important role in setting the tone for their communities. When harmful rhetoric is voiced in a public meeting, council members can respond by clearly stating that such remarks do not reflect the values of the community.

When hate speech occurs, council members should:

- Address the issue immediately after the speaker finishes, rather than ignoring it or waiting until later.
- Name the bias clearly (for example, identifying remarks as anti-Hindu, antisemitic, racist, or otherwise discriminatory).

- Reaffirm the city’s values of respect, dignity, and inclusion for all residents.
- Avoid repeating the harmful language itself; instead, describe the type of bias involved.
- Ensure that hateful rhetoric is not left unchallenged, as silence can be interpreted as acceptance.

Responding clearly and calmly helps reassure affected communities that their concerns are recognized and taken seriously.

After an Incident: What to Demand

When harmful rhetoric appears in a public meeting, it can leave lasting impacts on the community. In those moments, it is important for local leaders and residents to respond thoughtfully and constructively. This may include issuing a public statement, holding community conversations, or supporting efforts that promote understanding across different communities.

Community members can continue to play an important role by staying engaged, speaking at future meetings, submitting written comments, working with local leaders, and organizing with neighbors and community organizations. Consistent civic participation helps ensure that the values of respect, inclusion, and dignity remain visible in local public life.



Section 4: Sample Testimonies and Statements

The following sample testimonies and statements can be adapted for use by community members, interfaith partners, and elected officials. They are organized by context and speaker. Fill in the bracketed fields with your name, city, and relevant local details before delivering or submitting them.

Testimony Templates: When Hate Is Coming from a Sitting Council Member

These testimonies are for community members addressing anti-Hindu rhetoric or conduct from an elected official within the council itself.

Sample Testimony 1 — Calling for Accountability

Good evening, Mayor and Council Members. My name is [Name], and I am a resident of [City Name].

I stand before you today to formally denounce the rhetoric targeting the Hindu American community that has come from within this chamber. [City Name] is a place we call home, yet recent statements made here have turned a space of civic engagement into a platform for bigotry. Such rhetoric is not just offensive, it is a targeted attack on our dignity that fuels real-world fear and harassment in our community.

An elected official holds a position of public trust. That trust comes with a heightened responsibility not to sow division or demean the very constituents they were chosen to serve. Critique of policy is always welcome in a democracy, but attacking an entire community based on their faith or heritage is fundamentally different, and it has no place in this chamber or in this city's leadership.

I urge this council to take disciplinary action, enforce its Code of Conduct, and publicly affirm that the Hindu community is an integral and respected part of [City Name]. [City Name], and cities across this state have set the example. We ask [City Name] to do the same.

Thank you.

Sample Testimony 2 — On Fair Representation

Good evening, Mayor and Council. My name is [Name], and I am a resident of [City Name].

The refusal of [Council Member Name] to apologize for their recent remarks about the Hindu and Indian American community is more than a personal failing, it signals a refusal to represent all constituents fairly. Equality and respect are not optional. They are the minimum standard for public service.

No resident of [City Name] should have to wonder whether their elected official sees them as an equal, regardless of their faith or background. This council has a responsibility to send a clear message that such breaches of public trust are unacceptable, and I urge you to take the appropriate disciplinary action today.

Thank you.



Sample Testimony 3 — On Hindu and Indian American Contributions

Good evening, Mayor and Council. My name is [Name], and I am proud to call [City Name] my home.

I want to put some facts on the record. The Hindu and Indian American community is not a burden on this city. We are job creators, business owners, educators, healthcare providers, and neighbors who have invested deeply in the prosperity of this community. Indian Americans own thousands of small businesses across this state, contributing billions to our economy and employing Americans from every background.

To dismiss our community with stereotypes or hateful rhetoric ignores generations of Americans who honor both Indian and American values: values of peace, pluralism, hard work, and service to the greater good. I urge this council to reject the rhetoric that divides and instead honor the values that all of us share.

Thank you.

Testimony Templates: When Hate Is Coming from Outside Agitators

These testimonies are for community members responding to organized outside groups bringing hateful rhetoric into public meetings.

Sample Testimony 1 — Calling for Protection of Civic Space

Good evening, Mayor and Council Members. My name is [Name], and I am a resident of [City Name].

I am here today because our community has witnessed an organized effort to bring hateful and divisive rhetoric into our public spaces. Outside groups with no stake in this community have come here to spread misinformation about Hinduism and to intimidate Hindu residents. What we have seen is not civic engagement, it is a coordinated campaign of harassment, and it has no place in [City Name].

I am asking this council to make clear that this city does not welcome hate, regardless of where it comes from. I am also asking that the council establish and enforce clear rules of conduct for public comment to ensure that our meetings remain safe, respectful, and productive for all residents.

The Hindu community will continue to show up, speak up, and make our voices heard. We ask that this council stand with us.

Thank you.

Sample Testimony 2 — On Civil Discourse and Community Values

Good evening, Mayor and Council. My name is [Name], and I am a resident of [City Name].

As Americans, we encourage debate and differences of opinion. But there is a fundamental difference between criticizing policy and demonizing an entire community based on their faith or ancestry. What we have witnessed at recent meetings crosses that line clearly and deliberately.

Such rhetoric is dangerous, divisive, and dehumanizing. It creates a climate of fear that falls hardest on the most vulnerable members of our community, including children who hear what is said about their faith in public spaces. [City Name] must set a higher standard, one where all residents can participate in civic life without fear of being scapegoated or mocked.

I urge this council to enforce its rules of conduct consistently and to make clear that bigotry has no home in [City Name].

Thank you.



Sample Testimony 3 — Interfaith Statement of Solidarity

Good evening, Mayor and Council. My name is [Name], and I represent [Organization].

We stand in solidarity with the Hindu American community of [City Name]. The hatred that has been expressed in and around this chamber does not reflect the values of this community, and it causes harm not only to Hindu residents but to all of us who believe in a city where every person is treated with dignity.

Our faith traditions may differ, but we are united in the conviction that hatred has no place in our public institutions. We urge this council to speak clearly and act decisively. Silence is not an option.

Thank you.

Testimony Templates: Statements for City Council Members

These statements are for elected officials who wish to respond to hate speech in the moment, issue a formal condemnation, or reaffirm community values on the record.

Sample Statement 1 — Responding in the Moment

As a representative of this city, I must interrupt to remind all speakers that while we provide a forum for public comment, our City Council Code of Conduct requires all remarks to be civil and respectful. I want to state unequivocally that the Hindu American community is a vital and cherished part of [City Name], and we do not condone rhetoric that mocks their faith or targets their heritage. Our city's strength is built on being a National League of Cities 'inclusive community,' and we will not allow this chamber to be used as a platform for bigotry or xenophobia. We remain committed to protecting the dignity of all residents and ensuring that [City Name] remains a welcoming home for every culture and creed. Thank you.

Sample Statement 2 — Formal Condemnation

I want to make it absolutely clear that [City Name] stands as a city of inclusion, and the [City Name] City Council has zero tolerance for rhetoric that targets or demeans our Indian Hindu neighbors. Our Rules of Procedure are designed to maintain a forum of mutual respect, and using this platform to disparage sacred beliefs is a violation of the civic spirit we uphold. We are immensely proud of the cultural and economic contributions the Hindu community brings to our city, and we will continue to denounce Hinduphobia in all its forms. This council remains dedicated to ensuring every resident—regardless of their background or faith—feels safe, valued, and respected in our public halls and throughout our community.

Sample Statement 3 — Reaffirming Community Values

As a member of this council, I must address the comments made today and reaffirm that our city's strength is rooted in its diversity and the protection of all residents. We stand in firm solidarity with our Hindu American community and reject any rhetoric that targets their faith or heritage, as such bigotry contradicts the core values of [State Name] hospitality and mutual respect. Our public forums are intended for constructive civic engagement, and we denounce any attempt to use this platform to spread hate speech or religious intolerance. We remain committed to ensuring that every neighbor, regardless of their background, feels safe and welcomed in the community we are all building together.



Section 5: Additional Resources and Support

For additional guidance, resources, or support, community members are encouraged to contact the Hindu American Foundation (HAF). The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) is an educational and civil rights organization established in 2003. HAF focuses on educating the public about Hindus and Hinduism and advocating for policies and practices that ensure the well-being of all. HAF is a non-partisan, non-profit tax-exempt public charity pursuant to Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)3.

If you have questions, would like additional materials, or need assistance responding to incidents of anti-Hindu bias, please reach out to us through the following channels:

Contact Us: [Contact Form](#)

Website: <https://www.hinduamerican.org/>

Social Media: [X](#), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), [Instagram](#)