



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on June 17, 2020

Brooklyn Jewish Community Residents and Leaders Reopen Park Closed by City

After the New York City Parks and Recreation department closed numerous parks and playgrounds around the city for the stated purpose of protecting children from the risk of contracting the coronavirus, some residents in heavily Jewish neighborhoods in Brooklyn decided that enough was enough.

On the evening of June 15, residents of the South Williamsburg neighborhood in Brooklyn held a rally outside Middleton Playground, which had been closed per the orders of New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio. The park has reportedly been broken into at least 25 times over the past several weeks, as residents have tried to gain access to it.



Following the rally, members of the community [took bolt cutters](#) to the lock on the park's gate, allowing residents to enter the playground. The rally was led by state Assembly Member Joseph Lentol, who said in a statement that he did not see the locks being cut but understands the "frustration which would lead that to happening."

"When attending today's rally, I said I believe that the playground should be open and said so very strongly," Lentol said.

"Our families do not feel that they are being heard. I see this rally as a peaceful message, with the clipping of the locks as a strong signal that the families are unhappy and fed up. They want activities for their children and they want to be heard. The city must come up with a better plan than cutting off access to playgrounds entirely," Lentol continued.

Middleton was not the only playground to be opened by residents this week. The following day, residents encouraged by political leaders from their community [cut the chains off three gates](#) at Kolbert Playground in Brooklyn's Midwood neighborhood approximately a half-hour before de Blasio, while speaking during his daily City Hall morning press briefing, said the public did not have the authority to reopen such playground areas.

Soon afterwards, residents cut the chains off the gates at Dome Playground in Brooklyn's Borough Park neighborhood.

Not surprisingly, de Blasio reacted negatively to such actions and criticized the mostly Jewish residents for bypassing the park closures.

"We're not going to allow people to take the law into their own hands," the mayor said at a June 16 press conference, adding that playgrounds will remain closed until the city reaches phase two of the



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reopening process.

"I understand people's frustrations, but if folks act prematurely and that causes the disease to start spreading again, then that's the kind of thing that will undermine our ability to get to phase two and stay in phase two," de Blasio said.

Rabbi David Niederman had a different perspective on the controversy: "They can't keep [the children] locked up, on the fifth floor, for three months," he told New York's ABC Eyewitness News. "It's impossible."

The New York *Daily News* quoted Moshi Blum, who said the neighborhood's residents were enraged that their children couldn't use the playground while thousands of George Floyd protesters could freely pack together on city streets.

"Most of us have large families," Blum said. "We see thousands [of protesters] gather, why should this be a problem?"

Image: screenshot from [Twitter post](#)

Warren Mass has served The New American since its launch in 1985 in several capacities, including marketing, editing, and writing. Since retiring from the staff several years ago, he has been a regular contributor to the magazine. Warren writes from Texas and can be reached at wmass@thenewamerican.com.

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