

## Stamford Democratic City Committee moves to expel Anabel Figueroa

By [Brianna Gurciullo](#), Staff Writer Aug 29, 2024

STAMFORD — The Stamford Democratic City Committee took the first step toward removing Anabel Figueroa from the body Wednesday night, voting to hold a hearing on her potential expulsion.

Figueroa — a DCC member, state lawmaker and member of Stamford’s Board of Representatives — has been under fire for saying that Hispanic voters in her state House District [couldn’t allow a Jewish person to represent them](#).

On Thursday, leaders of the local Jewish community issued a statement saying the Board of Representatives should take action to remove Figueroa from the board after she rescinded a resignation notice.

Local Democratic Party leaders have [called for Figueroa to resign from her three elected roles](#) because of her recent remarks about Jonathan Jacobson, a colleague on the Board of Representatives who received the DCC’s endorsement to [run for the state House’s 148th District seat this year](#) over her.

Figueroa, who won the seat in a special election in early 2023, forced a primary after losing the party endorsement. Jacobson [defeated her in the primary election](#) on Aug. 13.

Figueroa did not attend the DCC’s meeting Wednesday at Stamford Government Center. Thursday morning, she did not immediately return a request for comment.

After the meeting, which was closed to the press, committee leaders said the DCC voted 37-0, with two abstentions, to hold an expulsion hearing for Figueroa.

Carmen Lopez, a retired state Superior Court judge, said she is representing Figueroa on a pro bono basis. Asked to comment on the DCC’s vote, Lopez said: “We’ll wait until they set the hearing date.”

Two people who abstained from the vote were Chanta Graham, an alternate who was seated in the place of absent District 3 member Terry Adams, and Marggie Laurie, an alternate for District 8 who was seated in Figueroa’s place.

The DCC is supposed to have 40 members, but one seat for District 4 was recently vacated.

This month, Eva Padilla resigned from the committee after DCC leaders [called for her to step down because she had used an “antisemitic trope”](#) in a Facebook post about the race

between Jacobson and Figueroa. In the post, written in Spanish, she referred to Jacobson as “the Israeli lawyer” or “the Israelite lawyer,” depending on the translation.

The calls for Figueroa to resign from her positions have come in response to remarks she made in two interviews before the Aug. 13 primary.

“The Hispanic vote is going to determine on Aug. 13 who will win to represent or who will continue to represent you,” Figueroa said in Spanish in one of the interviews. “We cannot permit a person who is of Jewish origin, of Jewish origin, to represent our community. It’s impossible.”

In the other interview, also conducted in Spanish, Figueroa was asked to describe the 148th District.

“We are mixed. The Hispanic population is very big. But, also, I have quite a few African American people ... and they are also with me because they know, who is better than someone from the same minority to represent us?” she said. “A Jewish person, never.”

Since the election, Figueroa has said it was also her message when she knocked on doors that: “We can not allow a person from that community, from the Jewish community, to represent us.”

“And I would tell them why: Because they don’t understand our language. They don’t understand our needs. They don’t understand what it is to arrive here as an immigrant,” Figueroa said, in Spanish, in an interview this past weekend with La Voz Hispana de Connecticut.

Figueroa immigrated to the United States from El Salvador in the 1980s.

She said her "intention never, never was ... to be antisemitic" and that she has [offered apologies](#) several times.

“Maybe I expressed myself incorrectly when I said that,” she said. “Maybe I should have said we needed someone of our color, from our nationality, who would understand our needs.”

In another interview, Figueroa [told Connecticut Public Radio](#) that her remarks about Jacobson “were taken out of context and manipulated” and she claimed that Mayor Caroline Simmons and DCC leaders “orchestrated” the controversy. Figueroa and some other members of the Board of Representatives have [complained that they have been politically targeted](#) because their positions don’t always align with those of party leaders and the Simmons administration.

DCC Chair Robin Druckman rejected Figueroa’s claim.

“Anabel Figueroa has nobody to blame but herself for the situation that she created,” Druckman said in a statement this week. “Her words are her own and there is no missing context. Anyone can ... hear and see for themselves that she not only used this abhorrent language but she continues to do so.”

Before her own comments came to light, Figueroa had condemned the Facebook post by Padilla, “proving that she is good at demanding accountability from others yet unwilling to be held accountable herself,” Duckman said.

On Aug. 16, Figueroa sent an email to Board of Representatives President Jeff Curtis [notifying him of her resignation as a city representative](#) for District 8, a role she has held since 2001. A week later, she [told Curtis she was rescinding her resignation](#). A city attorney said Figueroa didn’t submit her resignation to the mayor, as Stamford’s charter sets out, so she was still a board member. She is up for reelection to the board in 2025.

The United Jewish Federation of Greater Stamford, New Canaan & Darien released a statement Thursday from nearly a dozen leaders of the Jewish community, including a number of local rabbis, who urged the Board of Representatives to “act to ensure that elected officials who engage in this kind of divisive and hateful rhetoric can no longer serve on the board.”

“The egregious nature of her remarks makes her continued tenure on the Board of Representatives of our cherished city — for any length of time — intolerable,” their statement said. “Stamford has long been a diverse, inclusive and welcoming community. It can rightly be proud of its spirit of collaboration and support for all among us.”

“That kind of collaboration and support among the various groups that make up our city requires ongoing nourishment and leadership, and can quickly be torn apart by implicit tolerance of the kind of hateful and undemocratic expressions repeatedly made by Rep. Figueroa,” the statement continued. “A community should not be judged by the hateful statements of any one person, even one who is an elected official, however hurt we may be at that longstanding official’s betrayal. Instead, the community should be judged by how it responds to those hateful statements.”

In the state legislature, House leaders have stripped Figueroa of her committee assignments. She also no longer has a job as a unit coordinator at Norwalk Hospital.

Her attorney, Lopez, said that after reading news stories about Figueroa’s comments and the reactions to them, she reached out to Figueroa to “offer support.”

Lopez said she was “amazed at the backlash” over Figueroa’s remarks.

“I understand that the Jewish community as well as the Latino community are groups that have been oppressed,” Lopez added.

But she said it struck her that none of the members of the DCC’s executive board, which called on Figueroa to resign from all her elected positions, are Hispanic. About 30 percent of Stamford’s population is Hispanic or Latino, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.

“You really want to take away the voice of the Latino community?” Lopez said.

Lopez said Figueroa was under “intense” pressure to resign from the Board of Representatives.

“In my opinion, that was coercion,” Lopez said. “She was constantly being badgered.”

Noting that she is a lifelong Democrat, Lopez said Democrats are “famous” for pressuring members of their own party to step aside and cited President Joe Biden’s decision to bow out of the presidential race in July.

*Includes reporting by staff writer Ignacio Laguarda.*