

LONG ISLAND/POLITICS/SPIN CYCLE

## SCCC has new policy for partisan political events

"Partisan and/or political entities" can use college facilities, but the events must be open to the public.

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Suffolk Community College trustees have created an "open door" policy for politicians who want to use school facilities for partisan political events.

Under the new policy, adopted unanimously on Thursday, "partisan and/or political entities . . . may be permitted use of college facilities," but events must "be open to the public."

The idea is to encourage students' "political literacy" and expose them to forums that "foster the exchange of ideas . . . and divergent viewpoints," according to the policy. It also would bar "any event, which may cause or . . . incite . . . lawless action or violence."



A new policy at Suffolk County Community College comes after a Republican forum last year that was closed to the public.  
Photo Credit: Danielle Silverman

The change came after Republican Rep. Lee Zeldin in September, amid his re-election campaign, arranged to use a meeting room on the school's eastern campus for a roundtable forum on immigration issues and combating gangs. Also participating were GOP Rep. Bob Goodlatte, the former chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, local law enforcement officials, the Long Island Farm Bureau and the family of a victim murdered by MS-13.

That event was not open to the public, and more than 60 protesters, who said the forum was aimed at criminalizing all immigrants, were kept out.

"This will cure the situation that occurred last September," college trustee Jim Morgo, a Democrat and former chief deputy Suffolk County executive, said of the new policy.

Richard Koubek, outreach coordinator for Long Island Jobs with Justice, praised the change.

"The public should have never been barred from this partisan program" Koubek said. ". . . The college violated a sacred principle of academic freedom and open discussion." Katie Vincentz, Zeldin's spokeswoman, said in a statement the roundtable was a "government event." She asserted that some who sought to disrupt the session were paid by Democrats.

"This change in policy . . . is one that would have turned a productive, governmental event into a political, disruptive confrontation and shameful circus," Vincentz said. But the college "is free to create whatever policies they believe are best," she added.