

Agudath Israel Shares SED Letter to Suffern School District: Provide Equitable Services to Nonpublic School Students

As the Orthodox Jewish community in Monsey grows, it is expanding beyond the borders of Monsey and Spring Valley. New challenges have arisen, including one from the Suffern School District. Agudath Israel's offices received a number of complaints over the past few years regarding this particular district's failure to provide certain basic services to yeshiva students in their jurisdiction, such as transportation, special education services, and others. As the problem became more widespread, Rabbi Hersh Horowitz, Director of the Rockland Community Outreach Center, and Mrs. Chana (Andre) Jaffe, a concerned parent who has been advocating for children who have been adversely affected by the lack of services, have also reached out to the Agudah to collaborate on resolving this issue.

By law, school districts are required to provide certain services to students in nonpublic schools in their district. Because of this, the Agudah worked with the New York State Education Department (SED) over the last year, requesting that they reach out to the Suffern School District to address these serious concerns.

At the Agudah's urging, SED wrote a strong letter to the Suffern School District advising them of their legal obligation to provide services to students enrolled in nonpublic schools in the Suffern district. Such services include transportation, textbooks, health services, and

special education services.

The letter advises that these services must be provided in the same manner as services that are provided to public school students in the district. The letter, which Agudath Israel received after a FOIL request, was written by Renee Rider, NYS Education Department Associate Commissioner, Office of School Services, to the Suffern Superintendent, Dr. Douglas Adams. The letter, which can be read here, states, in part:

“I strongly encourage you to continue outreach to nonpublic schools and parents to ensure the appropriate, statutorily mandated services are being provided by the SCSD. While the District is legally obligated to provide certain services, I hope that as an educator you will make a personal effort to play a role in the learning and growth of all of the students in your community, regardless of the school in which they are enrolled.”

“The Agudah is optimistic that this letter will be helpful to yeshivos and parents in the Suffern district as they move forward to seek the services to which students are legally entitled. We are committed to continue working on their behalf until this situation is fully resolved,” said Mrs. Deborah Zachai, Agudath Israel’s Director of Education Affairs. Mrs. Zachai added that yeshivos should continue to be in touch with her office to provide updates on the situation.

“We are grateful to the Agudah for securing this letter which gives the district its marching orders from SED. We are hopeful that yeshivos and their students will finally begin to receive services which had been denied them for many years,” said Rabbi Horowitz.