Agudath Israel of America Letter in Opposition to the Proposed New Substantial Equivalency Regulations

June 1, 2022

Among the 250,000 opposing comments to the NYS equivalency of instruction Regulations, was a letter submitted by Agudath Israel of America’s executive vice president, Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, on behalf of the organization. The letter forcefully articulates the dangers inherent in empowering Local School Authorities to “oversee” yeshivas, particularly as it relates to sensitive religious freedom issues.

The letter also details the flawed approach of broadly omitting significant portions of yeshivas’ curriculum in any review; SED’s incorrect read of the law, as described in case law (359 F. Supp. 3d 215, 224 (E.D.N.Y. 2019)); how to significantly improve the registration and accreditation pathways; and the deep concern of the Regulations explicitly allowing any “persons considering themselves aggrieved” to appeal a substantial equivalency determination, even if they have no connection to, or knowledge of, the school.
COLUMBUS, OH (June 1, 2022) – Today, the Ohio House concurred with the Senate and voted to pass H.B. 583, which addresses numerous education related issues. The bill now awaits Governor Mike DeWine’s signature, which is expected. The bill creates a new law that is welcomed by families and education advocates alike.

Agudath Israel of Ohio’s Executive Director Rabbi Yitz Frank praised the General Assembly for their vision. “Expanding school choice options empowers underserved families to choose the school that works best for their child. While these changes appear modest, thousands of students will benefit from these provisions and will ease the path for further expansion of school choice to all families.”

The bill contains several provisions that expand school choice. Including:

- Allowing students that initially qualify for Ohio’s EdChoice Income-based Scholarship Program, (which is limited to families that earn below 250% of the federal poverty level, or $69K for a family of four), to remain eligible for a full scholarship, even if their family income
rises. Current law awarded scholarships on a sliding scale.

- Allowing siblings of students enrolled in Ohio’s EdChoice Income-based Scholarship Program to qualify for a scholarship
- Eliminating the June 30th deadline for families to use funds in their ACE scholarship account.

This important bill builds on the work of the General Assembly in this most recent state budget bill to continue to expand Ohio’s national leading school choice policies. Those key changes were:

- Increasing the EdChoice and Cleveland Scholarships to $5,500 per pupil in grades K-8 and $7,500 per pupil in grades 9-12.
- Expanding traditional EdChoice scholarship eligibility to include siblings of current scholarship students and students entering 9th grade.
- Increasing the value of special needs scholarships.
- Creating a $750 state tax credit for individual contributions made to Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGO).
- Creating the ACE Education Savings Account program to provide $500 for education expenses for students with income levels below 300% FPL.

Further background information, can be found [here](from the Ohio Legislative Service Commission).

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**Substantial Equivalency**

**Opposition Comment by Medical Professionals**

June 1, 2022
May 29, 2022

Ms. Christina Coughlin
89 Washington Ave., EBA Room 1078
SORIS, SE Regulation Comments
Albany, NY 12234
seregcomments@nysed.gov

Medical Professionals Oppose the Proposed Addition of Part 130 to Title 8 NYCRR (Rule ID# EDU-13-22-00025-P) to Strictly Regulate Private Schools

Dear Ms. Coughlin and Honorable Members of the Board of Regents:

We are physicians and healthcare professionals writing to share our deep concerns with the proposed New York State substantial equivalency Regulations. We are physicians, dentists, PAs, registered nurses, and nurse practitioners. We are graduates of some of the most prestigious schools in the country. We practice medicine in leading hospitals in New York, including NYU, Columbia-Presbyterian, Maimonides Health, Mount Sinai, and medical practices across the state. Our specialties run the gamut from
allergists and anesthesiologists, to surgeons and urologists, and everything in between.

As Yeshiva graduates and successful medical professionals practicing at the highest levels of our fields, our success speaks for itself. To attain licensure, we spent many years working on extensive theoretical and practical coursework at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Our education included rigorous curricula, demanding examinations, intensive research, and grueling rotations. To successfully navigate this journey, we needed to tap into our deepest reservoirs of mental and physical stamina, and attribute much of our success in doing so to the foundational Yeshiva education we received.

Respectfully, the notion that Orthodox Jewish education is vastly inferior to that offered in public school is a gross misdiagnosis; and the purported “cure” of mandating that all private schools strive to be “substantially equivalent” to public schools, as described in the Regulations, is more dangerous still.

In addition to the classic secular studies education, in Yeshiva we learned focus, discipline, and persistence. We learned how to assimilate and analyze large amounts of information and knowledge. We were consistently fed new cases and fact-sets, and learned to approach unfamiliar situations with a can-do and problem-solving attitude.

Our Orthodox Jewish education instilled within us integrity, compassion, and the value of human life. In our practices, we routinely encounter fellow human beings in pain and distress, and we must assess, analyze, diagnose, and problem-solve, with empathy. Often, we must make critical decisions in high-stress situations with the highest of stakes – human life. In these situations, we draw upon both our medical education and the values and skills we were imbued with in our Yeshiva education, to work, as G-d’s agents, to help heal our fellow human beings.

We take these foundational values with us daily. They make us better physicians, dentists, PAs, registered nurses, and nurse practitioners.
They make us better people.

We respectfully ask you to consider our success. Know the system that has been the foundation of our success, and the success of so many, before attempting to alter it. Consider the first-hand perspectives of the many of us who have signed below, and be vulnerable enough to reconsider your own.

Seriously reconsider these proposed Regulations upon Yeshivas and all private schools in New York State.

Respectfully,

cc: The Honorable Members of the Board of Regents

Agudath Israel of America’s Statement on the Racially Motivated Shooting in Buffalo

June 1, 2022
Agudath Israel expresses our grief after the horrific racially-motivated shooting in Buffalo, New York, yesterday. Our condolences to the victims’ families, and our prayers for those injured. The shooter, a self-proclaimed white supremacist and antisemite, killed ten and injured three more – almost all of whom were Black – in a deadly massacre. In a 180-page hate-filled racist and antisemitic manifesto, the shooter labeled his forthcoming attack as “terrorism.” We agree, and we call upon the full force of the judicial system to punish the shooter to the extent the law allows.

We stand in solidarity with the Black community which suffered the deeply painful blow of yesterday’s shooting. In our grief for their loss, we must all renew our efforts to combat racism and hate.

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Agudath Israel Statement on Antisemitic Attacks in Ocean County, New Jersey

June 1, 2022
Agudath Israel of America is shocked and horrified by the brutal attacks on Orthodox Jewish victims in Lakewood and Jackson, New Jersey, over the weekend. We commend the swift and bold response by law enforcement and are particularly grateful to the Lakewood Police Department and those of the surrounding municipalities, the Ocean County Prosecutor, the New Jersey Attorney General’s office, Governor Murphy, and the FBI who have all committed the necessary resources to investigate these alleged hate crimes and secure our community.

We pray for the speedy recovery of all the victims and ask the public to keep Tzvi Aryeh ben Rivka Leah and Moshe Yigal ben Brunyah in their prayers.

During these difficult times, it is incumbent upon us all to turn in prayer to Avinu Shebashamayim, our Father in Heaven, the ultimate protector of the Jewish Nation, to keep us safe and secure.

Statement of Agudath Israel of
America on Senate Passage of the Sunshine Protection Act

June 1, 2022

The issue of extending Daylight Savings Time (DST) has come up over the years on both the federal and state levels and Agudath Israel of America has joined other segments of society in generally opposing these efforts.

Our concerns revolved around two areas. First, as a representative of Orthodox Jewish schools, we shared the views of those in the school community who were concerned about children walking, carpooling or taking the bus to school in the pre-sunrise darkness and the increased risk of accidents and injuries that resulted. Indeed, during the Arab oil embargo in early 1970s, when a year-long DST was attempted (but was quickly ended due to public outcry), there were numerous reported incidents of children being injured and assaulted as they traveled to school in the pitch-black streets. Whatever benefit that might accrue due to extended DST pales in comparison to the cost in safety of our children.

The second concern related to an unintended consequence the change in DST would have on a fundamental aspect of Jewish religious life – morning prayers. Under Jewish law, morning prayers, and the rituals associated with them, are regulated in time-specific ways and must be performed no earlier than certain specified times. Synagogue schedules accommodate those times. With a change in DST, and the later sunrise, the times for prayers and their accompanying rituals will be disrupted – which, in turn, will put into jeopardy their proper fulfillment, discourage synagogue attendance, and
result in late arrival for work.

The U.S. Senate today passed legislation that would make DST year-round and thus implicate these and other concerns. The bill will now move to the House, where the various issues on both sides will be debated. Along with others, Agudath Israel intends to continue to express its concerns to the representatives in that chamber and make clear the negative consequences the change will have on the safety of our children and on our Jewish religious practice.

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**Agudath Israel Participates in Meeting with Eastern European UN Ambassadors Regarding Humanitarian Assistance to Ukrainian Refugees**

June 1, 2022
Slovakian Ambassador to the United Nations Michal Mlynar speaking with Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, Executive Vice President, Agudath Israel

(L-R) UN Ambassador for Poland, Krzysztof Szczerski speaking with Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, Executive Vice President, Agudath Israel, and Mr. Sol
On Friday, March 11, high ranking Agudath Israel of America officials, along with representatives of other American Jewish organizations providing humanitarian assistance to Ukrainian refugees crossing the border into neighboring countries, participated in a meeting with UN ambassadors from a number of Eastern European countries. The meeting was hosted by the Slovakian Ambassador to the United Nations Michal Mlynar, and included ambassadors from Ukraine, Poland, Moldova, Hungary, and Romania.

The meeting was intended to create a dialogue between the organizations, Ukraine, and its bordering countries about how best to coordinate efforts and assist each other. One of the main issues discussed was expediting the transport of food, religious articles, and other supplies, avoiding unnecessary delays as the materials proceed through customs. In addition, Agudath Israel board chairman Mr. Sol Werdiger raised the issue of providing Kosher food for Jewish refugees through the UN world food program.

“It was very helpful to speak with ambassadors of the countries bordering Ukraine. Many refugees are heading there either as a waypoint or, possibly, permanently,” said Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, who participated in the meeting in his capacity as Executive Vice President of Agudath Israel. “We are particularly grateful to have heard directly from the Ukrainian ambassador about the needs of his country and people.”

Mr. Werdiger expressed his gratitude to the Slovakian ambassador for setting up this important meeting and recognizing the work of Agudath Israel. “But what is most important,” said Mr. Werdiger, “are the channels set up by this meeting that will help strengthen the relief and rescue efforts.”
Tens of thousands of you joined us in person, via livestream, and via phone for the Agudah Convention just a few weeks ago. (Did you miss a session? Watch here.) But did you know that there was an entire alternate program, with three tracks, that was going on at the same time?
Mental Health Professionals

Yes. This year’s Agudah Convention had hundreds of frum mental health professionals join to hear hadrachah from gedolim, consult with experts, and
network and brainstorm with colleagues.
Kallah Teachers

There’s more. Over 100 kallah teachers joined us for a special forum where they were addressed by experts, had opportunities to ask questions of gedolim, and were able to raise the level of their knowledge and effectiveness.
Attorneys

And, last but definitely not least, dozens of frum attorneys and law students joined us for the inaugural program of a planned annual legal track of the Agudah Convention.

These tracks, done without fanfare and only advertised to the relevant professionals in each field, demonstrate the commitment the Agudah has to the entire Klal Yisroel. We must always be growing, always serving the Klal, and never resting.

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Highlights: Agudah Convention 2021

June 1, 2022
A Day in the Life: A Look Behind the Scenes

June 1, 2022