

# Private School Services Enhanced in New Federal Education Bill

After eight years of starts and stops, both House and Senate leaders have finally reached agreement on legislation reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the federal government's primary funding mechanism for public and private schools. Debate and a final vote on the bill are expected in the coming days.

The new bill is noteworthy for several important refinements but particularly so for the improvements made in regard to private and religious schools, notes Rabbi Abba Cohen, Agudath Israel of America's Vice President for Federal Affairs and Washington Director. During the past eight years, Rabbi Cohen worked closely with Obama Administration officials and congressional leaders to develop legislation that would make more programs available and accessible to private and religious school students with the goal of putting these students on an equal footing with their public school counterparts.

"ESEA has always required 'equitable participation' of private and religious school students but the reality never really lived up to its full promise," observes Rabbi Cohen. "This bill represents a meaningful step forward in better serving these students, including our children attending yeshivos and day schools, particularly in regard to the federal remedial education program, known as Title I."

Among the provisions included in the bill that Agudath Israel and its private school allies helped craft are: procedures that ensure that monies that are generated by, and intended for, private school students are in fact used to serve those

students; a consultation process that includes a broad array of options to optimally provide services to private school students; greater accountability on the part of a school district, and easier recourse to state and federal authorities, when it denies services to private school students; and a wider range of programs that will require equitable participation of private school students.

“This bill has been a long time coming, with much sweat invested in it. Our schools and our children will hopefully enjoy its benefits. We urge Congress and the President to speedily pass it and enact it into law,” the Agudath Israel representative concluded.