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To the Rockefeller Institute of Government,

I write to you as a former parent of religious schools in the East Ramapo School District, and I still live in the same district. . Although you might think that I have no stake in the formula, as a resident I am still affected by the formula being skewered, since it raises the taxes on all residents, who end up being punished for a large portion of the parents choosing to educate their children in the local Yeshivas. So I feel that I still have a relevant stake in having the formula that corrected to reflect the reality on the ground, and offer this feedback regarding Foundation Aid designed to fund public schools.

The Foundation Aid formula does not account for the children of my community at all, who attend the Yeshiva schools, while the parents still pay the taxes as all other residents do. While the formula might not affect other areas because of the smaller percentage of children who attend private or religious schools, in the East Ramapo Central School District, where three quarters of students do not attend public school, this lack of adjustment to the formula, or inability of the system to adjust to reflect the facts has serious repercussions. The district must provide certain services to private and religious school children yet receives no Foundation Aid to provide them.

This all but guarantees a fiscal deficit, pitting public school parents against private and religious school parents, all vying for a share of an impossibly small pie, destroying communities and goodwill among neighbors. As a Jewish parent, I feel the hostility caused by this deficit; its bad feelings, hatred and strife has endured for many many years, and has exacerbated antisemitism against our community.

There are other issues with the Foundation Aid formula. It relies on U.S. Census data from the year 2000. While the use of dated information likely distorts the funding picture statewide, certain districts, like East Ramapo, have changed dramatically since I moved here in September 2000. East Ramapo has grown significantly since that year. The public school system has changed as well, and now includes large numbers of English language learners in public school. These students require, and are entitled to, additional services, further straining an already financially strapped district operating under a bygone Foundation Aid formula representative of a different population.

Thank you for researching this issue so that districts like East Ramapo are not shortchanged.

While my children attended Yeshivas, I believe that all children, whether they attend public or private or religious schools, should have the resources necessary to succeed. Please update the Foundation Aid formula accordingly.

Sincerely,



Walter Levi