

To the Rockefeller Institute of Government,

I write to you as Chief of Staff at Agudath Israel of America, one of the oldest and largest nonprofit umbrella groups representing Orthodox Jews in America.

Most of our constituents wish to have their children raised with a keen awareness of their Jewish background and heritage, and self-fund their children's education in nonpublic schools. Thus, we are perhaps not the stakeholder one would expect when requesting feedback regarding Foundation Aid designed to fund public schools.

Yet, this expected omission is precisely the issue I write to you about.

The Foundation Aid formula does not account for nonpublic school students at all in its multiplier for Weighted Student Count. While this may have negligible impacts in some areas, in places like the East Ramapo Central School District, where 3/4 of students attend nonpublic school, this oversight has serious repercussions. The district must provide certain services to nonpublic school children yet receives no Foundation Aid to provide them.

This all but guarantees a fiscal deficit, pitting public school parents against nonpublic school parents, all vying for a share of an impossibly small pie, destroying communities. As a leading national Jewish organization, we have watched, with dismay and sometimes alarm, the communal strife caused by this deficit, and how it has exacerbated antisemitism.

We harbor other concerns about 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 and grown dramatically in the last quarter century.

Qualitatively, East Ramapo Central School District 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. In addition, the EN% (Extraordinary Need) component of the PNI (Pupil Need Index) will be distorted, because it counts the Census amount times 0.65 for children in poverty, and the number of children in poverty has risen significantly in East Ramapo since the year 2000.

We would also like to flag the District Wealth adjustment which is, in part, predicated on the Selected Actual Valuation (AV) of Taxable Real Property Per Pupil. If the purpose of this measure is to compute how much a district ought to contribute toward education, this has already been accounted for in the Expected Minimum Local Contribution portion of the formula. Thus, it must be intended to measure actual wealth. Actual Valuation of real estate is helpful when calculating one's net worth but is an illiquid asset valuation. Put simply, as opposed to a pure, income-based measure, the value of one's home does not pay the bills. In districts like East Ramapo, wherein home values have appreciated significantly but actual income has not kept pace, this would be an especially troublesome feature of the Foundation Aid formula.

While the children of many of our constituents attend nonpublic school, Agudath Israel of America believes that all children, whether they attend public or nonpublic school, should have the resources necessary to succeed.

The Foundation Aid formula has been a volatile issue in East Ramapo for decades. Thank you for researching this issue so that districts like East Ramapo are not shortchanged, and for considering our comments for alternative formulaic approaches for how to accomplish that.

Sincerely,

Avrohom Weinstock, JD

Chief of Staff

Agudath Israel of America