

Thousands of Orthodox Jews gathered in Albany for the independence of New York State's religious and private schools

ALBANY, NY, UNITED STATES, May 18, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Thousands of Orthodox Jews gathered on Monday May 16 2022 in Albany NY to rally in support of maintaining the independence of New York State's religious and private schools. The gathering was called by the Rabbinical Union, and took place in Lafayette Park, adjacent to the Department of Education building.

Monday was the date of the NYS Board of Regents' last scheduled meeting before the end of the commenting period on proposed regulations for private schools. If passed, the regulations would be the first in the history of the United States to dictate the curriculum and hiring practices of private schools.



Jewish children on the steps of the NYS Department of Education building expressing warm prayers to the Almighty to grant us the ability to be able to continue with pure holy Torah education

Orthodox Jews travelled to Albany to deliver their unequivocal message, coupled with a plea to the Board of Regents. "Substantial equivalency is an attack on religious freedom" proclaimed the banner above the dais, upon which sat near forty of the state's respectable rabbis, including renowned leaders of large congregations and Torah institutions. "Torah Education has succeeded for 3,000 years" stated another banner.

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If, G-d forbid, the regulations pass, we have no option but to put our children first”

Rabbi Yaakov Shapiro

The rally included a broad spectrum of ages, ranging from

8 years old school children to 90 year old rabbis, and all between who left their classrooms and jobs to attend this crucial demonstration.

A delegation of rabbis met with some of the Regents in the NYSED building before the rally began. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," was the message conveyed by Rabbi Elya Ber Wachtfogel, Dean of Yeshiva Zichron Moshe In South Fallsburg, and one of the most prominent leaders of Orthodox Jewry worldwide. Rabbi Chaim Flohr, the octogenarian dean of multiple educational institutions in suburban New York, passionately described the painful situation which NYS would be putting the Orthodox community into by passing the regulations. Quoting King Solomon, the rabbi depicted the message taught in yeshivos: "My son, fear G-D and the king (Proverbs)." "We obey G-D and the government - in that order. Our schools' curriculum is dictated by our religion, and we will fight all the way to the Supreme Court, if it comes to that", vowed Rabbi Flohr, pleading with NYSED officials not to "force us into a position of noncompliance" with the law. "We are loyal citizens of the state," he continued. "In Rockland County, where I live, we pay an exorbitant school tax to support a public educational system from which we do not benefit much.

We are not asking for anything in return. We did not come here today to seek any government funds. We came to ask to be left alone, and be allowed to educate our children the way G-D has commanded us to."

Outside, in the park, the same message was echoed by Rabbi Yaakov Shapiro, a brilliant author and pulpit rabbi in Queens. "Even if we wanted to change our curriculum it's not our decision to make! We don't own our religion" he thundered. "We are custodians of it" and we are not authorized to compromise it. "If, G-d forbid, the regulations pass, we have no option but to put our children first."

It was obvious to see a designated corner at the rally where hundreds of children were seated, in groups of classes adjoined by their mentors and principals. "The State Education Department



Jewish Rabbis rally in Albany regarding new proposed NYSED regulation on Substantial Equivalency in religious schools



My Grandfather went to Jail in Russia for teaching Torah - I'M READY TOO!

was to be proud of our community, of the behavior of their children and of their upbringing” indicated Rabbi Shapiro, while staring at the youth crowd. “Look at them here! Hundreds of children! Look at their behavior. Tell me, have you seen an assembly like this of adolescents of so many of them so well behaved” he signaled.

The rally included more speeches by prominent rabbis in the Yiddish language expressing their great concern about the regulations, as well as the firm decision and staunchness not to change anything in education.

Inside the building, Rabbi Hersh Klein introduced the next speaker Rabbi Blum, a rabbi from Westchester County. The rabbi told of the famous meeting of great rabbis with Austrian Emperor Franz Josef in the mid-nineteenth century. That meeting is considered, in the Orthodox community, to be one of the seminal events of modern Jewish history. Then, as now, Jews who chose to leave the fold tried to harness government power to force all of their former co-religionists to reform their religion. In a choked up voice The Rabbi related that, Rabbi Menachem Katz, (known as the Tzeilemer Ruv) began weeping uncontrollably before the Emperor. In response to the Emperor's inquiry as to why he was crying, Rabbi Katz replied, "Please realize that those who claim that they just want to "improve" our communities, are really bent on changing our religion. I beg you to allow us to keep our beliefs and our way of life." To which the Emperor replied: "I will not force you to change your religion."

The rabbis then joined the rest of the crowd at the rally. Some speakers led the assembly in prayer, while others spoke in heartfelt tones, but the message remained the same. "Torah Education has succeeded for 3,334 years" and it shall continue to do so. "We will do everything in our power to protect our rights."

The rally ended in a march to the front of the NYSED building. Hundreds of schoolchildren sat on the stairs of the impressive edifice, singing songs of faith, signaling the determination of this community that their way of life will continue, unhindered, forever.

Rabbi Yaakov Shapiro
Rabbinical Union
[email us here](#)

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