

**OPEN LETTER FROM UK HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS
TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION**

Rt. Hon. Nadhim Zahawi
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
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United Kingdom

By post and by email to:

sec-of-state.ps@education.gov.uk; barran.ps@education.gov.uk

9 June 2022

Dear Minister,

We, Holocaust survivors in Britain, believe the School Bill 2022 discussed currently in Parliament is prejudiced and hostile towards Haredi Jews. It seeks to introduce changes how we practice our religion under the guise of imposing legislation about what to teach in our independent religious settings, known as yeshivas. This Bill serves a surreptitious agenda: assimilating our Community to majority lifestyle conventions.

The majority of the Haredi community of UK Orthodox Jews are descendants of Holocaust refugees, murdered victims, or the legendary *kinder-transport* orphans. We remain amongst the dwindling number of survivors and can testify how the fierce determination of the refugees and survivors with minimal resources rebuilt the past which enabled Orthodox Jewry's continuity in GB. Our community is bound by shared adherence to the principles of Judaism and abidance to the laws of the land (*Jeremiah 29, Talmud Nedarim 28a, Gittin 10b, BK 113b, BB 54b*). As loyal UK citizens, we remain forever grateful to this welcoming and tolerant country where we could freely practice our religion as a significant faith-ethnic minority population and the largest Orthodox Jewish community in Europe. Following the Holocaust, we have no choice other than protecting our Human Rights and our existential foundations as a people.

Education is essential in preserving the knowledge of Torah, Jewish lore and our 3,000-year customs and traditions to ensure our principal fundamentals endure without dilution or distraction. So, our yeshivas and schools are critical in preserving the community and inspiring the next generation. They enable orthodox families to raise their children in line with a high standard of morals and values, it is well-known that crime rates within our communities are disproportionately low across the board. The academic strength of our yeshivas adds significantly to the cultural diversity and reputation of the United Kingdom; among the jewels in the crown of the thriving UK Jewish community, they are admired internationally. We believe that our faith is a fundamental factor in our children being so focused and successful with their education.

Indeed, anyone who is familiar with our settings first-hand can testify that they not only provide an excellent and safe environment, but they provide our children with the skills and proficiency to become assets to both the local faith community and to the wider society.

As it stands, the government's proposed Schools Bill 2022 threatens to alter fundamental facets of Jewish practices. In all conscience we cannot change the way the yeshivas are run; our national system was successfully established over 19 centuries before England's *Elementary Education Act* of 1870 (*Talmud BB 21a*) as this is our sacred tradition inherited from past generations and any changes to our yeshiva system would conflict with our religious principles and beliefs.

Pupils from the secondary school age proceed to receive religious teaching in yeshivas, which are independent and never funded by any government. Under current law yeshivas are not regulated by the Ministry for Education as they only provide religious teachings and do not provide full-time education. Many provisions in the Schools Bill 2022, particularly Clauses 56, 57 and 58 of Part 4, threaten these principles. For example, the Schools Bill, expands the category of "independent education institutions" so that it will in the future include any institution where a child "*could be expected to receive all or a majority of their education at the institution.*" From the Department's published papers, it is clear the intention is to effectively regulate yeshivas as if they were full mainstream schools. Consequently, yeshivas will be required by law to teach secular subjects that are contrary to our customs and beliefs; if they do not, they will ultimately fail Ofsted inspections who will forcibly close our yeshivas as they already threaten faith schools.

By giving the Department for Education wide-ranging powers to impose requirements and micro-manage yeshivas, the Bill fails to recognise that Haredi families have a fundamental right to educate their children in the manner of their traditions, customs, and principles, as endorsed by Article 2 of the Human Rights Act 1998.

The result of treating yeshivas as if they were schools is to impose on them a duty to teach secular subjects besides religion, fundamentally changing their role and purpose. This undermines the parents and children's right to practice their religion. Effectively this is an existential threat to our UK's children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren's religious future. If our yeshivas become secular schools, they will lose their function in maintaining our religious traditions throughout the generations. This proposed legislation dangerously dilutes the fundamental principles of our existence and adversely affect our future generations.

There is no suggestion yeshivas are currently breaking any laws whatsoever, nor is there any evidence that the home schooling that Haredi families give to their children in the secondary schooling age is in any way inadequate or failing. So, the law has no clear educational purpose. These proposals do little to protect children and forcibly fuels a process of subtle indoctrination of our children's minds by requiring our yeshivas to teach in a manner in direct contradiction to our religious beliefs. This removes from them and their parents the autonomy and ability to express our own character and culture. We can never accept that.

Yet the DfE comments “*although certain faith groups, such as people of Charedi Jewish faith, may be disproportionately affected by the proposals, the benefits it brings to children’s quality of education and in providing oversight of safeguarding through the regulated activity is of greater importance.*” We would respectfully question this assumption. Safeguarding has never been an issue in Haredi schools who have a long and untarnished record of protecting their children. Their schools have never suffered from widespread bullying, violence and knife crimes and other social evils that sadly plague so many schools in this country as repeatedly highlighted by Ofsted Inspection Reports. Unlike current increasing truancy rates in this country, the absence of pupil truancy in Haredi schools, clearly shows their children and parents have full confidence in their school network. The suggestion the proposed change with the 2022 School Bill “*will benefit children’s quality of education*” has little to support this. The academic skills and knowledge that Haredi schools teach, has for years placed their children on a level beyond the national average.

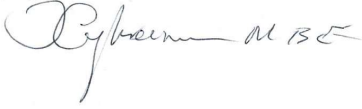
This Bill brings up haunting memories of the past and we are extremely concerned about our and our children’s future in Great Britain which weaponises legalism. We are truly shocked, not knowing what to expect next. If we are forced to change the way we teach our religion, HMG is effectively telling us our cultures and traditions are unwelcome. The DfE published its Equalities Impact Assessment in May 2022 where it is admitted the outcome of amending the definition of independent educational institutions will possibly result in persons of Ultra-Orthodox Jewish faith “*sending their children abroad*”. We do not believe that the Rt. Hon. Nadhim Zahawi is seriously contemplating expelling Orthodox Jewry from the United Kingdom yet this is one effect of this discriminatory Bill. We are entitled to live freely in the United Kingdom, without fear the state might seek to assimilate us or interfere in our religious life. We therefore urge HMG to recognise the fundamental human right of our community to its religious independence.

We appeal to the British Government to grant us the liberty to continue raising our children under the guidance of the Torah and Jewish law in accordance with our sacred religious principles. Many of our ancestors sacrificed their freedom or lives rather than compromising our principles. We are no different. We hope you will understand how important this issue is for our community and fear this ill-advised Bill will provoke unnecessary conflict.

Yours sincerely,

c.c. HRH Prince Charles of Wales, Clarence House, London SW1A 1BA

Mrs Ita Cymerman MBE



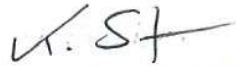
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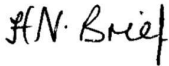
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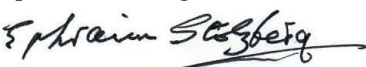
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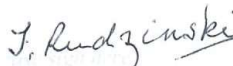
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