

Testimony at Jackson Township council meeting on March 1, 2017

by Avi Schnall, Agudath Israel of America

Good evening.

I wasn't planning on speaking, but obviously I'm here.

I'm here because I heard something which struck a nerve. I'm going to address it because if I wouldn't I'd be remiss. We are well aware of the incidents occurring around our state, the bomb threat that took place yesterday morning in Cherry Hill, similar incidents that took place in New York City and in 20 locations throughout the country, so no one should ever stand up and say that religious discrimination is getting old and tired because unfortunately religious discrimination is not getting old and tired.

This township has many areas that are heavily commercial. There are shops, stores, strip malls, and large fairways. They are by no means considered residential neighborhoods. No one is claiming we should build "monster buildings" and place them right in the backyards of residents. No one is claiming that! No one wants that. No one is asking that here tonight. Not one member of the over 100 people that are here tonight at probably the worst time to go out at 7:30 to leave their families. They didn't all spend over an hour here tonight just to have a good time. They came tonight because they feel affronted. The residents of this town feel that this ordinance singles them out, and it does. No one outside of the Orthodox community is even contemplating building a school and I know that. I called the Catholic Conference and asked them, they said, "we wish we could build a school". I called independent schools and asked if they are building a school here, and they said "no, not us". I called the Muslim community and they said "not us". No one is building a school here.

There is a way to make this work for everybody. There's a way that everybody can agree to an ordinance that will maintain the beautiful quality of life which attracted so many people to move here, which attracted so many people to stay here, and which attracted so many people over many generations. We want to maintain that and we should maintain that. This ordinance does not maintain that and it is hurtful. Thank you.