

# Rabbinical College of Tartikov

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## News

- Attorneys for the Rabbinical College of Tartikov testified on March 18, 2008 before the Rockland County Legislature, opposing a proposed resolution which challenges landmark federal civil rights legislation.

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### From: Rabbinical College of Tartikov

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#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### Testimony by Roman P. Storzer Before the Rockland County Legislature March 18, 2008

My name is Roman Storzer, with the firm of Storzer & Greene. I have represented more religious institutions in RLUIPA matters than any other attorney in the nation, including several in Rockland County. With Paul Savad and John Stepanovich, I currently represent the Rabbinical College of Tartikov.

We understand that RLUIPA is not a popular law here. It takes power away from local Villages and zoning boards, and therefore a negative reaction is predictable. But it is a good law, and it is an important law.

And, unfortunately, Rockland County has a disproportionate number of cases that demonstrate exactly why Congress passed the law. Nowhere else in the country do these problems arise as often. There have been more RLUIPA disputes here than in New York or Los Angeles.

Zoning laws have been used in the County time and time again to discriminate against and burden the religious exercise of an identifiable group that constitutes a substantial minority of the population: Hasidic Jews. In that respect, Rockland County is different in my experience from any other county in the country. This specific demographic, with its unique culture, worship and education, often clashes with the rest of the population and land use goals.

All too often, the response is that if their way of life is different, they should go elsewhere. RLUIPA should not be used as a sword, some say, since it was meant as a shield. This kind of hyperbole is not helpful. Either religious exercise is protected or it is not.

For example, I represent with Paul Savad, the Bikur Cholim Shabbos House, located near Good Samaritan Hospital, where Orthodox Jews can spend the night if they are visiting relatives on the Sabbath. It is completely forbidden in the Village of Suffern while the Village permits many other uses, including Adult Entertainment Establishments. This is why RLUIPA is needed.

In the 1990s, a jury and a federal appeals court held that the Village of Airmont discriminated against Hasidic Jews. That Village is now trying to break another settlement agreement it has made with a religious institution. Again, this is why RLUIPA is needed.

You have zoning officials admitting in official court proceedings that they are concerned with the Hasidic population moving into Ramapo and the Villages.

The Mayor of Pomona was elected on a platform of preserving the "makeup and culture" of the Village.

You have another Village official telling people publicly not to "cave into them and sell our houses." These statements are not even thinly veiled.

I urge you to consider the implications for all of the citizens of Rockland County if this Resolution passes. You do not want Rockland County to be labeled as a place that does not accept "others."

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*Roman P. Storzer is a Washington D.C. based attorney.*



