

RYAN KARBEN

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Hon. Helen Diane Foster
Commissioner of Human Rights, State of New York
One Fordham Plaza, 4th Floor
Bronx, New York 10458

Dear Commissioner Foster:

I urge you to invoke your authority under [NYS Human Rights Law §295\(11\)](#) to address rapidly increasing tension and conflict between Orthodox, primarily Hasidic, Jews and other communities in Rockland County. This conflict, rooted in competing and sometimes irreconcilable cultural and political demands, is poisoning a diverse community, impeding the revival of the East Ramapo School District, preventing planning for the county's growth and unleashing spine-chilling expressions of anti-Hasidic bigotry, sometimes by public employees.

This not-so-civil culture war has left the population exhausted and enraged; local political leaders, caught between vocal constituencies, are unable or unwilling to address the toxic environment. A never-ending cycle of mutual recrimination dominates headlines that should be filled with plans to move Rockland forward.

These tensions are peaking under the reign of a new County Executive elected on the explicit promise to buck the political influence of the Hasidic community. Many residents chafed while the previous administration willfully ignored the deteriorating educational conditions in East Ramapo, blindly assented to development and stubbornly refused to acknowledge the grievances of those threatened with displacement by the 5% annual growth rate of the Hasidic population in the state's smallest county.

Now, an over-corrective rebalancing by County Executive Ed Day is amplifying intolerant voices while his administration sues to stop yeshiva construction and vetoes plans to address the Hasidic housing shortage-- while not appointing a single Hasid to any position in his government despite the community comprising 20% of the county's population.

And it's just getting worse.

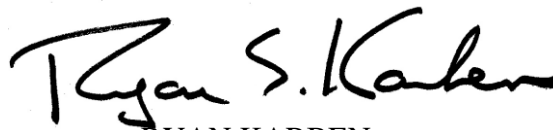
Before Passover, an Orthodox advocacy group released a video called the [Jew in Rockland](#), which recklessly compared these tensions to the Nazis' Final Solution. The media subsequently identified the administrator of a virulently anti-Hasidic Facebook group as a [county government employee](#) who is required to provide services to the same community he savagely disparages as social, economic and political parasites. The County Executive defended the employee's free speech rights and launched his own [critique of Hasidic children](#) disrespecting a 9/11 memorial near a county playground by climbing upon it.

The Hasidic community must abandon a self-defeating mindset that confuses criticism and accountability for the exercise of its political power with anti-Semitism. The broader community needs to find another way to address the unstoppable Hasidic baby boom with sound planning and better infrastructure, while integrating this culturally distinct and insular group into a shared conversation about the entire county's future.

Your assistance is desperately needed to lower tensions and create a healthy place for disagreement and dialogue. The division can engage leaders, activists and citizens and task them to develop a plan to manage this conflict. Through study, hearings, school-based programming and broad community engagement, honorable compromises can address short term challenges while cultivating a template to deal with the consequences of larger demographic trends.

Anything is better than the current descent into permanent, unabating and uncontrollable hostility.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ryan S. Karben". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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