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September 25, 2026

The Honorable Todd Blanche
Attorney General
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

The Honorable Jennifer Davenport
Attorney General
New Jersey Office of the Attorney General
25 Market Street
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Attorney General Blanche and Attorney General Davenport:

I am writing to you to bring to your attention a series of coordinated governmental actions against the Hasidic Jewish community of Linden, New Jersey. This letter is a follow up to the one I sent to your department last year. I learned of these actions through public reporting and personal discussions with the community in Linden. This situation merits an immediate and thorough investigation by both the Department of Justice and the State of New Jersey into possible violations of the U.S. Constitution, New Jersey State Constitution, as well as various federal and state anti-discrimination statutes.

For more than 35 years prior to the arrival of the Hasidic community in Linden, there were no significant changes to the City's zoning regulations. However, in the seven years since the Hasidic community began to settle there, the City has enacted four major zoning changes. Each of these changes directly impacts the Hasidic community's religious life and unique family needs.

I am aware that the Department of Justice has initiated investigations into antisemitic discrimination against Orthodox Jewish communities across the country based on similar allegations, and I believe that similar action is warranted in this situation.¹

I. Discriminatory Zoning Against Hasidic Place of Worship

¹ Emily Jacobs, *DOJ officials tell Orthodox leaders they have launched probes into antisemitic discrimination*, Jewish Insider (May 7, 2025), https://jewishinsider.com/2025/05/doj-officials-tell-orthodox-leaders-they-have-launched-probes-into-antisemitic-discrimination/?utm_source=cio.

The Hasidic community in Linden has grown exponentially over the past decade.² Starting in late 2017, the City enacted a series of coordinated measures against the Hasidic population to stymie their growth. For instance, while Linden approved the construction of a Hasidic synagogue in May of 2017, the City then paradoxically implemented various zoning revisions that were intended to prevent the construction of this new synagogue. Within six months of approving construction of the synagogue, the City increased the minimum required lot size for houses of worship from 25,000 square feet to 75,000 square feet – a lot size effectively unavailable within City boundaries.³ The City also later “revised” its zoning laws again to make combining smaller lots effectively impossible and a waste of resources according to local land-use attorneys.⁴

II. Discriminatory Residential Zoning

The City of Linden has also used its residential zoning laws in an attempt to institute restrictive measures aimed at suppressing the growth of the Jewish community. Starting in 2023, Linden introduced zoning proposals to count previously excluded areas such as basements, attics, and garages toward the maximum allowable square footage for residential properties. While the inclusion of basements was ultimately reversed following community pushbacks, the proposed limitations clearly targeted large families, such as those in the Hasidic population. The new proposed zoning rules also made residential garages mandatory, which limits the allowable amount of living space by 29%. In addition, the new proposal prohibits installing sanitary facilities or kitchens in basements. These restrictions directly interfere with the Hasidic community’s religious practices, including the use of auxiliary spaces for ritual meals and observance of holidays.

The cumulative effect of the recent zoning changes has made it increasingly difficult — if not impossible — for the Hasidic community in Linden to fully observe their religion. The new lot size requirements make it virtually impossible to establish new synagogues, a critical need for a growing religious community. At the same time, the proposed restrictive building regulations would make it difficult for families to construct homes to accommodate their large families within walking distance of synagogues, which is essential for Sabbath observance, when driving is prohibited. Prohibitions on installing facilities such as kitchens and bathrooms in basements directly hinder the ability to carry out essential religious rituals, including preparations for Passover and the use of mikvahs. Collectively, these measures appear to disproportionately burden the Hasidic community and raise serious concerns about equitable treatment and religious accommodation.

III. October 7 Enforcement Sweep

² Johanna R. Ginsberg, *Streimels in Suburbia*, NJ Jewish News (Apr. 17, 2019), <https://njewishnews.timesofisrael.com/streimels-in-suburbia/>.

³ Suzanne Russell, *Linden rethinks zoning ordinances after pushback from Orthodox Jewish community*, My Central New Jersey (Updated Apr. 23, 2025), <https://www.mycentraljersey.com/story/news/local/union-county/2025/04/18/linden-to-introduce-new-land-and-housing-ordinances/83107695007/>

#~:text=According%20to%20the%20Yeshiva%20World,size%20are%20available%20to%20build.

⁴ Suzanne Russell, *Linden rethinks zoning ordinances after pushback from Orthodox Jewish community*, My Central New Jersey (Updated Apr. 23, 2025),

During the Jewish holiday of Sukkot and the second anniversary of the Hamas attack on October 7, 2025, city officials executed a coordinated sweep issuing more than thirty-four violations targeting Hasidic-owned properties. There is evidence that the addresses targeted in the sweep were drawn from a Yiddish-language community circular as only properties appearing in that religious community publication were cited. Public records requests concerning this operation have likewise been returned empty. This episode adds a troubling symbolic dimension to what is already a legally and factually indefensible action.

IV. Community Services and Infrastructure Targeting

Beyond housing and religious facilities, the City has reportedly engaged in targeted enforcement actions against community services essential to Hasidic life. For example, the City historically permitted families to purchase additional trash cans beyond the standard two provided to residences as an accommodation for larger households. In 2025, the community requested temporary dumpsters ahead of Passover; the Department of Public Works (DPW) agreed and the plan was ready for implementation. Mayor Derek Armstead then personally called the head of the DPW and directed that the dumpsters not be placed. The following year, after repeated follow-up correspondence to a City Council member, the City announced that it would offer a “special garbage pickup” on April 1st, but residents must complete an online form to request pickup, no dumpsters would be provided, no bulk items would be collected, and only standard green and brown bins could be used.⁵

Similarly, school transportation for Hasidic children has been subject to selective enforcement. School buses serving the Hasidic community have been ticketed while parked in lots, even as other vehicles covered under the same ordinance were ignored. In some cases, police reportedly pulled over school buses carrying Hasidic children and barred them from using certain streets, citing concerns that “the asphalt was not designed for high-volume traffic.”⁶ These actions raise serious concerns about discriminatory enforcement and the targeting of essential community services.

Furthermore, the City of Linden’s Construction Official retroactively revoked an already-issued zoning permit for Corner Bite, a kosher pizza store, effectively shutting the business down. The owner, a widow and sole breadwinner, faces serious financial hardship after the forced closure of her business. The City has since confirmed that the Construction Official lacked this authority and a complaint filed with the NJ Department of Community Affairs.

The City’s obstruction of public records is not incidental, but a consistent pattern. In an earlier matter involving a discriminatory drainage violation against a community rabbi, an OPRA request combined with a discovery demand caused the entire city to drop the violation entirely, demonstrating that the City understands the exposure these records create and acts accordingly. As part of a broader effort to document potential discriminatory property tax practices against

⁵ See City of Linden in Message from Mayor Armstead, Public Works (March 24, 2026), <https://linden-nj.gov/category/public-works/>.

⁶ *Id.*

community members, an OPRA request was made for ten years of municipal assessment data.⁷ Only 1 year of data was provided in response which is insufficient to fully document the issue. These obstructions across multiple separate OPRA requests, all relating to enforcement actions targeting the Hasidic community, are evidence of discriminatory intent and deliberate concealment of the coordination behind these actions.

V. Statutory Considerations

The pattern of zoning changes and targeted enforcement actions by Linden against the Hasidic Jewish community raises serious constitutional concerns, warranting both federal and state investigations. The cumulative impact of restrictive ordinances — limiting religious assembly, housing, and essential facilities — combined with selective enforcement of municipal policies, appears to violate the First and Fourteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution, as well as Article I, Section 3 of the New Jersey State Constitution.

In addition, the City's actions constitute potential violations of the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA),⁸ the Fair Housing Act,⁹ and the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (LAD).¹⁰ The City's latest zoning ordinance was reportedly drafted without public input or a transparent explanation of its purpose or impact. City officials were allegedly instructed not to comment on the ordinance, limiting accountability and public understanding. Public meetings on the matter were scheduled during Passover, including one on April 15, 2025, effectively restricting participation from observant members of the Jewish community.¹¹ At a follow-up meeting on April 18, 2025, Jewish attendees were reportedly turned away despite the presence of empty seats — raising serious concerns about a potential violation of New Jersey's Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA), which guarantees the public's right to attend and witness the full deliberative process of public bodies.¹²

VI. Prior Case Law

The City's actions undoubtedly suggest a pattern of religious and ethnic discrimination and must be investigated. Similar conduct has already drawn federal scrutiny in other parts of New Jersey. In *United States v. City of Jackson* and *Agudath Israel of America v. City of Jackson* (D.N.J. 2020), discriminatory zoning ordinances targeting Orthodox Jewish schools and dormitories prompted both DOJ enforcement action and civil litigation. Likewise, in *United States v. Borough of Woodcliff Lake* (D.N.J. 2018), the DOJ sued a municipality for denying zoning approval to an Orthodox congregation. The parallels between these cases and the situation in Linden are striking and suggest a troubling pattern of religious discrimination that must be

⁷ See City of Linden, City Clerk Forms, <https://linden-nj.gov/documents/opra-request-form/>.

⁸ 42 U.S.C. § 2000cc

⁹ 42 U.S.C. §§ 3601–3619

¹⁰ N.J.S.A. 10:5-12.5.

¹¹ See City of Linden, City Council Conference Meeting Agenda (Apr. 15 & 18, 2025), <https://linden-nj.gov/documents/city-council-meetings/>.

¹² Open Public Meetings Act, ch. 231, 1975 N.J. Laws 1 (codified as amended at N.J. Stat. Ann. §§ 10:4-6 to -21 (West 2024)).

investigated to ensure that constitutional and statutory rights of *all* New Jersey residents are upheld.

As you are aware, religious freedom is one of the cornerstones of our democracy, and any attempt to exclude or harass a certain population based on prejudice, particularly by public officials, is deeply upsetting and disturbing. With ongoing issues and new leadership in charge of your agencies, I encourage the Department of Justice and New Jersey Office of the Attorney General to investigate these claims and, if necessary, take legal action to remediate these alarming actions by the City of Linden.

Thank you for your prompt attention and response to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Josh Gottheimer", written over a horizontal line.

Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress