

Rothman To Advocate for Teaneck Kids at 'National Mock Trial' Emergency Meeting Today

For Immediate Release

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-- Congressman Demands:"Let Our Kids Compete!"--

(WASHINGTON, DC) - At a specially convened emergency meeting in New Brunswick later today, Congressman Steve Rothman (D-Fair Lawn) will demand that the National Mock Trial Board of Directors allow for the full participation of the team from Torah Academy of Bergen County (TABC) in the Trial's national finals to be held in Charlotte, North Carolina next month. Because of its members' observance of the Sabbath, the squad from the Teaneck-based Orthodox Jewish yeshiva is effectively being barred from competing in the bulk of the tournament. The Torah Academy team won the New Jersey state championship on March 15th, entitling it to represent the Garden State in the five-round national moot court competition, of which the final three rounds are currently scheduled to take place on Saturday, May 7th.

"No team, whether it be from an Orthodox yeshiva, an Islamic academy, a Seventh Day Adventist school, or any other educational institution, should be disqualified from participating in a national competition because of its members' religious beliefs," said Representative Rothman, a strong advocate in the United States Congress for religious freedom and civil liberties. "It is particularly outrageous that the National Mock Trial - which was founded, organized and underwritten by lawyers, judges and bar associations from around the United States - should be so insensitive to these fundamental questions of equal access and the rights of religious minorities to full and fair participation in what purports

to be a contest between the best teams in the entire country," said Congressman Rothman. "I hope that tonight's meeting will change the minds of the organizers and convince them to rearrange the schedule to accommodate those teams whose religious beliefs preclude them from competing on certain days. A national tournament open to academic institutions from every walk of American life should not force students to choose between their faith and their desire to compete against the best and the brightest. To do so is to violate the very tenets upon which our nation was founded," said Congressman Rothman, who is traveling to New Brunswick from Capitol Hill expressly to attend the meeting.

Even after being contacted by Congressman Rothman and the New Jersey State Bar Foundation, the National Mock Trial Board of Directors has failed to reschedule the dates of competition. TABC also sent written requests for rescheduling in 1999 and in 2004. In a letter mailed earlier this year to TABC Principal Rabbi Yosef Adler, the National Mock Trial Board cited "unfairness to the other teams" and logistical obstacles in defending the Board's intransigence in considering TABC's request. In response, Congressman Rothman sent a letter to the organizers in which he wrote, "I respectfully urge you to allow qualifying students of all faiths to compete fully in this prestigious national championship without betraying their religious beliefs."