

VA'AD HARABANIM RABBINICAL COUNCIL OF BERGEN COUNTY, INC.



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Dear Friends,

It is with a very heavy heart and an urgent sense of responsibility that we share this difficult though critical message with you. *Tzedakah* is a paramount Torah value that has become a trademark of the entire Jewish community. In our community the generosity of giving in terms of time, energy and money for the entire spectrum of valuable causes is absolutely remarkable and we hope that this will continue to flourish. At the same time we would like to reinforce the *psak* that Rav Hershel Schachter שליט"א recently shared with our community, which is essentially explicated in the *Shulchan Aruch* itself.

The concept that "charity begins in the home" is codified in the *Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 251:3)*. This *halacha* teaches us that the primary responsibility of *tzedakah* is to support the needs of our closest neighbors first. The needs of our immediate community have increased tremendously in recent times, and we simply cannot afford to ignore this policy. The financial stress upon the families who live in this community demands a more focused allocation of our *tzedakah* in order to maintain our financial survival.

Rav Schachter suggested that about 75% of our contributions be directed towards local charities and institutions. In addition, the needs of our community should have priority over comparable needs in Israel. This should guide our community.

We must therefore sincerely try to follow this guideline, while at the same time maintaining (or increasing) our current levels of giving. We also recommend that our schools and shuls focus their fundraising efforts and publicity on the institutions that serve our community.

It is our hope and prayer that our community will continue to show strength and generosity and that we will achieve stability and security for all of our members and of our precious institutions.

The Rabbinical Council of Bergen County