**2014 Resolution:**

**Increasing Access for and Participation of Jews with Disabilities**

**in the Orthodox World**

Innumerable pastoral and communal experiences of the members the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) amply demonstrates that Jewish communities are profoundly "strengthened by embracing all Jews, particularly those with varying capacities, ways of functioning, and appearances". Therefore, the membership of the Rabbinical Council of America - representing over 1,000 Orthodox rabbis throughout the United States, Canada, Israel, and beyond - has adopted by direct vote a formal resolution which advocates a plethora of approaches towards combating prejudice against the disabled through a variety of educational efforts and towards furthering their full integration into, and access to, all aspects of Orthodox Jewish life.

**WHEREAS** the Rabbinical Council of America recognizes that *tzelem Elokim* (Gen. 1:27), the Divine Image in each and every person, imbues them with inherent and limitless value and dignity; and

**WHEREAS** the RCA recognizes that the principle (Shevuot 39a) of *kol Yisrael arevim zeh ba'zeh* (the entire Jewish people are responsible for another) obligates every Jew to enable all Jews, without exception, to study Torah and perform the mitzvot incumbent upon them; and

**WHEREAS** in keeping with the precept "do not separate from the community" (Avot 2:4), the RCA knows the transformative power of community involvement in the lives of all Jews; and

**WHEREAS** the RCA recognizes that disabilities or ongoing health conditions may be acquired anytime throughout one's life; and

**WHEREAS** the RCA knows that Orthodox communities are strengthened by embracing all Jews, particularly those with varying capacities, ways of functioning, and appearances; and

**WHEREAS** the RCA continues to seek to further increase access and widen opportunities for people with different disabilities or conditions so that they may participate in Torah community life and learning; and

**WHEREAS** the RCA recognizes the importance, in this regard, of the many initiatives led by Orthodox Jewish and other organizations to expand access to and participation in Torah communities for and by Jews with disabilities

**Therefore, the Rabbinical Council of America**

* Supports initiatives to increase access for and participation of people with disabilities in Torah life and learning, encouraging its members to partner with qualified organizations in order to develop educational and informational programs for their communities; and
* Calls upon its members to educate themselves, their congregations, and other constituencies about disability ­related issues, including the physical, communication, educational, and attitudinal barriers faced by Jews living with or believed to have disabilities, and to consider the implications for Jewish law; and
* Calls upon its members to develop regular programs and *shiurim* for their congregations on Torah perspectives on disability; and
* Calls upon its members to speak out against stigma, ostracism, bullying, and other forms of prejudice against the disabled; and
* Calls upon day schools and *yeshivot t*o include curricula and activities related to disability access and integration; and, whenever possible, to invite people with disabilities to lead, or to participate in, these classes and activities; and

Calls upon its members to take personal and communal action to increase physical, communication, and programmatic access to *minyanim, mikvaot*, day schools, *yeshivot*, seminaries, *batei midrash*, camps, event halls, and other establishments, places of public accommodation, and programs that serve Torah communities.