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**Subject:**

FW: Statement made at DGEIS on 6/10/15

**From:** Elvira Stepinoff [<mailto:elvystep@optonline.net>]**Sent:** Thursday, June 11, 2015 12:57 PM**To:** [tmiller@timmlerassociates.com](mailto:tmiller@timmlerassociates.com)**Subject:** Statement made at DGEIS on 6/10/15

I am sending you a complete copy of the statement I made last evening in the Village of Kiryas Joel, regarding annexation and the DGEIS. Because of cheering and time constraints I was unable to complete my statement. The last two paragraphs are very important and I would like them to be part of the record of the DGEIS.

Thank you, Elvira (Elvy) Stepinoff

My name is Elvy Stepinoff and I've lived in the Village of Monroe for almost 10 years. I too come from a family that lived in the Shtetles, and Jewish Ghettos of Eastern Europe. My grandparents came to this county at the start of the last century looking to escape that harsh life and the Pogroms led by Czarist thugs against Jewish communities. They left behind many friends and relatives who were later destroyed by the Nazi holocaust during WWII. I grew up with the stories of their lives in the old country and the horrors of the death camps that they were lucky enough to escape.

When they came here, however, they were not welcomed with open arms. Rather, like all immigrant groups before and after them, they faced discrimination. There were neighborhoods they could not live in, schools and colleges they could not attend, clubs they could not join, and more. This kind of discrimination, and downright hatred exhibited by some people in our society is not directed just at Jews. Many people considered "different" by the majority are subjected to the same restrictions and worse. Racism and anti-semitism, anti-"other" in general is still too much a part of our society.

So, I grew up learning to work towards civil liberties for all people! -- All people, regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation etc. That is what my grandparents worked for, and my parents, and my children as well.

Now I find myself being called anti-semitic because I oppose annexation of more land into the Village of Kiryas Joel.

I reject that accusation with my whole being. I am not anti-semitic. I am not anti Hassidic. What I am against is the existence of a theocratic government within this country founded on freedom of religion. Isn't that why the Pilgrims came here? I know that's why my grandparents came here. My guess is that is why the Satmars came here.

It is clear that I am not welcome into Kiryas Joel as a resident. Even as a visitor I am told by a sign at the entrance how to dress, who to talk to, and who not to touch. These signs say to me "go away---you are not wanted here". There are many Hassidim living outside the confines of Kiryas Joel, but I know of no one living within KJ who is not Hassidic! That is discrimination. That infringes on my rights to live where I want and practice my moral principles as I see fit.