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**For immediate release**

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**Federal lawsuit filed against Village of Suffern for violating First Amendment**  
*Village prohibits Jewish “Shabbos House” near Good Samaritan Hospital*

Bikur Cholim, a small not-for-profit religious organization that provides Orthodox Jews with a temporary home and opportunity for prayer during the Sabbath while staying near family members admitted to Good Samaritan Hospital, has filed suit against the Village of Suffern, located in Rockland County, New York, in the federal district court for the Southern District of New York, charging violations of the U.S. and New York Constitutions and the federal Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (“RLUIPA”). The lawsuit challenges the Village’s Zoning Code, which prohibits such a use completely, as well as the denial of a variance to operate in a one family house located directly adjacent to a professional office building and across the street from the Hospital’s parking lot. The lawsuit is also joined by its founder, Rabbi Simon Lauber, and several other individuals whose religious beliefs have been accommodated by Bikur Cholim.

Bikur Cholim (literally, “to visit the sick”) has operated in Suffern for 17 years, most recently within the Hospital itself. While Good Samaritan is fully supportive of Bikur Cholim’s mission, because of its own need for space for its medical treatment facilities, it was no longer able to house Rabbi Lauber’s activity. Bikur Cholim then purchase a residential house at 5 Hillcrest Road in Suffern to continue to serve the Jewish population housing up to fourteen people during the Sabbath and approximately 11 holy days. After numerous citations from the Village for operating what it deemed an “illegal” use—the Village defined its use as a “transient motel” even though it charges nothing for stays—Bikur Cholim applied for a variance, which was unanimously denied. Without recourse to the federal courts, Bikur Cholim would be forced to close its doors.

Orthodox Jewish beliefs prohibit driving automobiles during the Sabbath and on Holy Days. Without Bikur Cholim, such individuals would be unable to assist family members during times of crisis. For example, Plaintiff Malka Stern, a 72-year old woman that stays at the Shabbos House, regularly visits her husband who suffers from Alzheimer’s disease. She is unable to walk the nine-mile round trip down Route 59 (without sidewalks) from her home in Monsey. Mothers nursing hospitalized children would also have no place to stay overnight to observe the Sabbath.

RLUIPA was passed by Congress five years ago to prevent discrimination, exclusion and substantial burdens on religious land uses. While the Village prohibits Bikur Cholim’s use outright, its zoning code permits other multi-person uses such as “dormitories,” “convalescent and nursing homes,” “membership clubs,” “day-care centers” and “colleges” in the same zoning district.

Bikur Cholim is represented in this lawsuit by Paul Savad, a Nanuet, New York based litigator and trial lawyer with over thirty five years experience in the New York metropolitan area, and Roman P. Storzer, a litigator in cases involving constitutional issues who represented the first successful church under RLUIPA, as well as dozens of other religious institutions in New York and across the nation. Mr. Storzer is also the former Director of Litigation of the Becket Fund For Religious Liberty.

The Plaintiffs have asked the court to enjoin the Village’s enforcement of its orders shutting down the Shabbos House; a hearing is expected soon. A copy of the filed Complaint available upon request.