

Religion and State in the Past Month

Week of February 26:

This week in the Knesset, the State Control Committee continued to deal with the issue of the State conversion system's Exceptions Committee. We were pleased to learn that for the first time the authorities in charge of conversions decided to allow those accompanying the converts to testify before the committee discussing the matter at hand, and in the event that a conversion was rejected, the committee would agree to explain its decision. Committee Chairperson Karin Elharar (Yesh Atid) continues to demand a response from the conversion authorities regarding a variety of issues related to the functioning of the Exceptions Committee, which mainly discusses the conversions of non-Jewish spouses married to Israelis. A follow up meeting is scheduled for May.

Write MK Elharar and express your opinion about her comprehensive focus on the details of the conversion process. See the page of MK Elharar on the JPW website (Hebrew): <http://www.mishmar.org.il/km.php?kmid=611>

Week of February 19:

The Constitution, Law and Justice Committee held a heated discussion relating to the possibility that a woman could be appointed to the position of director-general of the rabbinical court. At the debate, representatives from the Ministry for Religious Affairs claimed that the management role is a religious one, and therefore it would be difficult to appoint a woman, who may not share a common language with the President of the Supreme Rabbinical Court. It may be recalled that women may not serve as judges in the religious courts, and this week's debate focused on the management role that is currently still closed to women.

Week of February 12:

This week the Knesset plenum passed the preliminary reading of a bill extending the authority of the rabbinical courts. With the consent of the parties, they may now provide verdicts on issues that are altogether civic ones, and not even religious issues. The law may have many problematic implications. Not every conflict is a case in which opposing sides have equal power, and therefore, the parties' 'agreement' is likely to drag the weakened side to a tribunal where their chances of winning are slim. Rabbinical Courts have been complaining for many years about the unbearable case load, which causes many delays in cases in which they have **exclusive jurisdiction** – e.g., divorce cases.

Will the divorce cases now be even further delayed?

See the bill on the JPW website (Hebrew):

<http://www.mishmar.org.il/page.php?p=14541>

We regret that MK Rachel Azaria (Kulanu) and MK Shuli Mualem (Jewish Home) chose to vote in favor of the preliminary reading of the bill. Both have been known as activists on behalf of *agunot* (women who have been refused divorces) even before they became parliament members.

Write MK Rachel Azaria and MK Shuli Mualem and express your opinion on the subject.

MK Azariah's page on the JPW website (Hebrew):

<http://www.mishmar.org.il/km.php?kmid=811>

MK Mualem's page on the JPW website (Hebrew):

<http://www.mishmar.org.il/km.php?kmid=761>

Week of February 5:

The "People, Religion and State" caucus continues to be active. MK Yehuda Glick (Likud) has joined MK Aliza Lavie and Elazar Stern (Yesh Atid) as a third chairperson of the caucus- Welcome! This week the caucus held a meeting on the conduct of the religious councils and improvement of religious services in Israel. All participants wished to convey a single message: if the conduct of the religious councils and the manner that appointments are made are not remedied, the public's consumption of religious services will continue to decrease greatly. For further reading on the JPW website

(Hebrew): <http://www.mishmar.org.il/page.php?p=18542>

Week of January 29:

The Education and Culture Committee held a discussion concerning the placement of female students in the ultra-Orthodox sector. In the discussion, which was led by committee chairman MK Yaakov Margi (Shas) the Ministry of Education presented data concerning the struggle to fight discrimination which occurs against students from Sephardi origins, who are not accepted for studies at educational institutions due to their ethnic background. On the other hand, harsh statements were made concerning the conduct of the ministry and the state, since these do not impose substantive sanctions to combat the problem.

For further reading on the on the JPW website (Hebrew):

<http://www.mishmar.org.il/page.php?p=18462>

