

Rabbi Convicted of Sexual Abuse Is Freed on Bail Pending Appeal

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A New Jersey appeals court has allowed the temporary release of a rabbi convicted of sexually abusing two teenage girls at a religious school where he was the principal.

A two-judge panel of the Appellate Division ruled on Thursday that the rabbi, Baruch Lanner, of Fair Lawn, could be released on bail while he appealed the verdict. Mr. Lanner, 51, was freed later that day after posting a \$150,000 personal recognizance bond, nearly a week after the trial judge ordered him to start serving a seven-year sentence immediately.

The appeals court decision reversed the order of the trial judge, Paul F. Chalet, who rejected bail for Rabbi Lanner when he sentenced him on Oct. 4 in State Superior Court. The panel found that contrary to Judge Chalet's ruling, there were substantial questions that could be challenged on appeal.

Fred M. Zemel, who along with Nathan Dershowitz represented Mr. Lanner in the appeal of Judge Chalet's order, said the ruling meant that the panel thought that the arguments the lawyers would make on appeal were not frivolous and had some merit and a reasonable chance of succeeding.

As part of that appeal, Mr. Zemel said, the lawyers plan on arguing that the trial judge did not give jurors the appropriate options in his charge to them, that he erred in the technical reading of some elements of the case and that the jury's verdict was inconsistent and should be set aside.

A Monmouth County assistant prosecutor, Peter Boser, who prosecuted the case, could not be reached for comment on whether the ruling would be appealed.

Mr. Lanner was convicted on June 27 of charges that stem from incidents from 1997, when he was principal of the Hillel Yeshiva High School in Ocean Township, Monmouth County. Two graduates of the school testified at his two-week trial that they were 16-year-old students there Mr. Lanner touched their breasts, groped them and pressured them with veiled sexual overtures.

Mr. Lanner was indicted in March 2001, when the victims came forward to Monmouth prosecutors. In June 2000, the rabbi was the subject of a number of articles in The Jewish Week that accused him of physically and emotionally abusing boys and girls during a nearly 30-year career working with young people, which culminated in his serving as an executive with the National Conference of Synagogue Youth, the youth wing of the Orthodox Union. He and other top officials of the group were forced to resign as a result of the reports.

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