

Chinn reaches plea deal on sexual assault charges



Former teacher, youth advisor under parole supervision for life

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An East Windsor youth educator pled guilty to two counts of second degree endangering the welfare of a child and is expected to receive a five-year suspended sentence under a plea agreement.

Sentencing for Rabbi Menachem Chinn is scheduled for Oct. 13, according to Mercer County Prosecutor Angelo J. Onofri. Chinn will also be under parole supervision for life, and will have to register as a sex offender under Megan's Law.

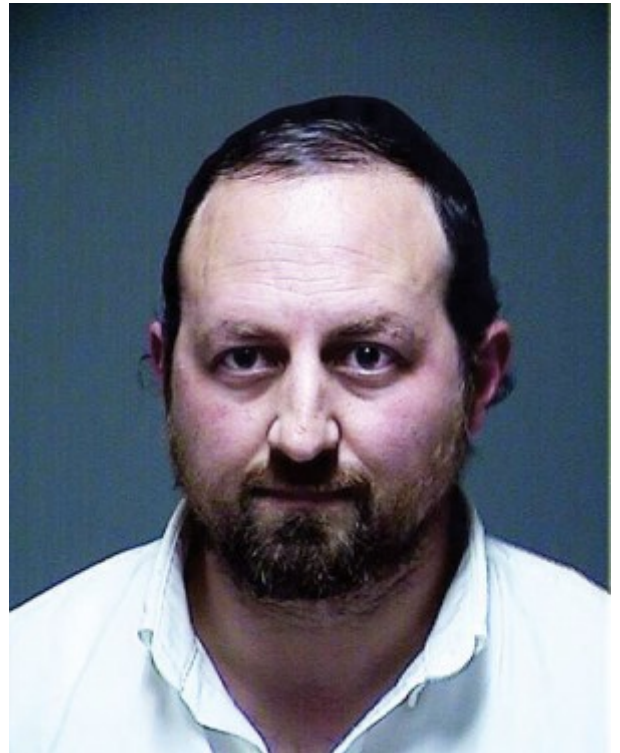
Pleading guilty on July 7 before Mercer County Superior Court Judge Peter E. Warshaw in Trenton, Chinn, 40, admitted to touching the genitals of one victim at his East Windsor home and having a second victim touch his genitals at Shalom Torah Academy in Morganville, where he taught sixth and seventh grade boys and was a youth advisor. The boys were students of his at separate times, one in 2005 and the other in 2012. Shalom Torah Academy declined to comment.

Chinn was also the director of the Twin Rivers chapter of the National Council of Synagogue Youth (NCSY), the youth movement affiliated with the Orthodox Union. His position was part-time and he was suspended without pay at the time of his arrest in April, according to Rabbi Ethan Katz, regional director of New Jersey NCSY.

Both Shalom Torah and NCSY referred to Chinn as a rabbi on their websites, though according to reports he was never officially ordained. Chinn is no longer on the staff page of either website.

Chinn had been affiliated with NCSY for 15 years, during which time the organization said it had not been made aware of any complaints about his conduct.

In a statement sent to NJJN in response to a request for comment, Katz and NCSY international director Rabbi Micah Greenland said, "NCSY is committed to the teens of Twin Rivers and we are actively working with Rabbi [Aaron] Gruman to identify a new NCSY couple for the community. We look forward to making an announcement in the near future." Gruman is spiritual leader of Congregation Toras Emes in the Twin Rivers section of East Windsor, which has a large number of Orthodox residents.



Menachem Chinn will reportedly receive a five-year suspended sentence after pleading guilty to sexually abusing two underage boys. Photos courtesy Mercer County Prosecutor's Office

The statement continued, "...we are available to assist teens or parents with any issues that may have developed as a result of this situation, and we have relationships with several independent mental health professionals who are available if this service can be of help to you or your family."

Greenland and Katz also stated the administration and staff of NCSY had cooperated fully in the investigation conducted by East Windsor Police and the special victims unit of the prosecutor's office.

They called the incidents "deeply troubling," adding, "The safety and well-being of NCSY participants is the organization's utmost priority at all times, and NCSY has zero tolerance whatsoever for improper or illegal behavior. Towards that end, NCSY maintains robust policies and procedures for all our staff, including appropriate behavioral standards, criminal background checks, an Ombudsman hotline that is checked multiple times daily, and extensive staff training."

Under terms of the plea agreement, Chinn will be barred from teaching and will be ordered to have no unsupervised contact with children under the age of 18, including his own six children.

Onofri also said Chinn will be required to undergo a psychological evaluation and comply with any and all prescribed treatments. His travel outside the home will be limited to activities such as visiting a doctor or attending religious services.

Chinn was held in the Mercer County Correctional Center since he was arrested April 20, but was released July 7.

The investigation began when the first victim contacted the authorities alleging Chinn touched him inappropriately on one occasion in 2012 at the rabbi's home when the victim was 12. Chinn was arrested at police headquarters and charged with one count of endangering the welfare of a child and one count of sexual assault.

Less than two weeks later, a second alleged victim, now an adult, came forward and told authorities the teacher had inappropriate sexual contact with him at Chinn's home numerous times between July 2010 and May 2011 — Chinn had been his teacher, and he was a member of Chinn's NCSY chapter. The second accusation led to an additional count of endangering the welfare of a child and of sexual assault filed May 2.

Following the initial allegations, The Trentonian interviewed Chinn's wife, Ruth, who called the charges "ridiculous." She told the newspaper that she recalled the 2012 incident in question, and said that "a bunch of kids" were in the couple's basement for a youth program when one of the boys screamed in pain from an apparent leg cramp, and thinks her husband massaged the boy's foot to work the cramp out.

"It's on the bottom of your foot. Nowhere near anything private," she told The Trentonian, which reported that the Chinn family has six children.

NJJN left multiple voicemail messages at the Chinn's home in the days following each accusation, but the calls were never returned.

NCSY adopted strict standards of conduct in the wake of a scandal involving Rabbi Baruch Lanner, the former NJ regional NCSY director and principal at Hillel Yeshiva High School in Deal. In 2000, Lanner resigned from the OU following a New York Jewish Week report documenting his long history of emotional and sexual abuse of young people of both genders. Lanner was initially convicted of sexually abusing two teenage girls at the school in 2002, however an appellate court ruled in 2005 that he should only have been convicted of abusing one of them. The other abuse conviction was upheld and Lanner served three years of a seven-year sentence beginning in 2005 before he was released on parole in 2008.

A subsequent investigation by the OU found the abuse had gone on for decades and had been covered up by religious authorities. The organization now has an extensive manual of conduct, standards, and behavior, last updated in September, which includes detailed descriptions of inappropriate actions that constitute sexual

harassment or abuse. According to the statement, it's commitment to the "physical, psychological, and emotional well-being of all NCSY professionals, volunteers, and NCSYers is non-negotiable."

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