

**FAQs**  
**The New Agreement between the**  
**Rabbinical Council of America and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel**  
**concerning Status Letters**  
**July 21, 2019**

*\* This is a new process which promises to yield great results. At the same time, because it is new, there will be bumps in the road. As we get real time experience in processing your letters, in confronting unusual circumstances, and in dealing with the rabbanut, we are sure that changes and tweaks will be made. So, please bear with us and feel free to share your insights, suggestions, and experiences with us so that we can work out our kinks and better serve you and your communities.*

**1. What does the agreement actually do?**

The agreement recognizes the ability of the RCA to vouch for our members' reliability in matters of yuchsin. To do so, members interested in our ishur will complete the RCA Status Form which requires them to offer the necessary backup for their letters. Letters which involve issues of conversions or divorces will be handled by the Beth Din of America (BDA).

**2. What will the ishur say?**

The ishur will essentially state, "The RCA certifies that Rabbi Ploni Almoni is a member in good standing of the Rabbinical Council of America and may be relied upon in the matter of the Jewish status of John Doe."

**3. What is unique about this agreement?**

The important element of this agreement is that the rabbanut agrees that decision making concerning RCA members' letters is best made by the RCA and by the BDA, and that our decisions will be accepted by the rabbanut.

**4. Will the Beth Din of America have a role in vetting the qualifications of RCA members regarding status letters?**

No.

**5. What is the role of the Beth Din of America in this new agreement?**

The BDA was involved in crafting this agreement and will continue to serve its role as the authority on conversions (GPS and other conversions) and divorces. If there is either a get or a gerut involved, the letter will be referred to the Beth Din of America for the ishur. The BDA will do its normal drisha va-chakira of its standards and, if satisfied, will issue an ishur. An ishur from the BDA will be accepted by

the rabbanut. The BDA's ishur will not be on the rabbi's letter-it does not certify, qualify, or disqualify rabbis-but on the applicant's status.

**6. What is the mechanism in place to review the reliability of a rabbi's letter?**

As we said above, this is a new process and we will learn much with experience. On an interim basis, the Executive Vice President will handle these inquiries in consultation with appropriate parties. As we learn more, we will continue to develop suitable processes.

**7. Are there any penalties being considered for RCA members, who, in the future, are found to have misled the Rabbanut in their attestation letters (e.g., failing to indicate that a person was a convert, when the Rabbi knew or should have known)?**

If, chas ve-shalom, the RCA determines improprieties in the writing of a letter--we hope that will never be the case--the RCA will investigate this matter and reconsider the issuance of future ishurim. In addition, other avenues, including the establishment of a Vaad Hakavod, will be considered.

**8. Will the RCA play any role in the certification of status letters from non-RCA rabbis or laymen who come forward and seek assistance?**

No. As indicated in all of our communications, non-RCA members may continue to request ishurim via the BDA. The BDA does not certify the rabbi; it investigates and certifies the status of the applicant. The RCA will deal only with its own members.

**9. Will the RCA become involved in conversion-related matters?**

No. These matters will continue to be addressed by the BDA.

**10. What impact does this agreement have on the GPS?**

None. The GPS is a separate process. In addition, issues of conversion will be handled by the BDA as in the past.

**11. My letters have been accepted in the past. Do I still have to fill out all of this paperwork going forward in order for my letters to continue to be accepted?**

We cannot advise you definitively at this time; experience will tell. You can continue to send letters directly to Israel. However, sending the letter to the RCA for an ishur will guarantee automatic acceptance. Letters sent directly to Israel maybe referred back to us if they have any questions. However, this has been the source of some of the complications in the past.

**12. I am concerned about the turn-around time. Sometimes people come to me at more or less the last minute. If it will be necessary to not only fill out this paperwork, but also to wait for the ishur to be issued before giving the letter, will that be a bone of contention due to time pressures that sometimes exist?**

Under normal circumstances, we expect the ishur to be approved and sent to Israel within five working days. If there is a need for immediate attention, please call the RCA Office and we will attempt to expedite ASAP.

**13. What is the procedure?**

1. Verify the information about the applicant. The "RCA Status Form" ([http://rabbis.org/pdfs/Yahadut\\_Form.pdf](http://rabbis.org/pdfs/Yahadut_Form.pdf)) will help you do that.
2. Write your letter on your professional stationery vouching for the individual, state that you are an RCA member, and sign it in ink.

**14. What if I am uncertain as to how to proceed administratively or halakhically?**

Call! Contact Rabbi Mark Dratch (212-807-9000, [mdratch@rabbis.org](mailto:mdratch@rabbis.org)), the Beth Din of America (212-807-9042), or the rav with whom you discuss your sheilos.