

LEAGUE MAY SUE YONKERS SCHOOL BOARD

The Catholic League has pledged to sue the Yonkers School Board if it seeks to deny transportation to children attending non-public schools. Initially, the school board voted to withdraw funds for transportation on fiscal grounds, stating that the cutbacks would trim \$970,000 from the budget. But when the Archdiocese of New York and the Catholic League announced that they would fight this decision in court, the school board said it would provide transportation for at least the first few weeks of the school year. Yonkers is a city just north of New York City.

The league cited New York State law, explaining that it explicitly requires that school districts which provide monies for transportation for public school students must do likewise for students who attend private and parochial schools. And it cited a 1986 federal court order that mandated desegregation in Yonkers: that ruling stated that the Yonkers school district must provide transportation for non-public school students.

The furor over this issue erupted in anti-Catholic bigotry when Lorraine Siegel, the PTA Council president, held a sign at a community meeting that read, "Public Schools Bus to Integrate. Catholic Schools Bus to Separate." Dr. Catherine Hickey, a Yonkers resident and the Superintendent of Schools for the Archdiocese of New York, accurately said that it was "a wicked sign, inflammatory and bigoted." Her encounter with Siegel led the PTA leader to retire the sign.

The Catholic League issued the following news release on this matter:

"The decision by the Yonkers school board to deny

transportation to students who attend private and parochial schools falls most heavily on Catholic schoolchildren, as they are the principal users of bus transportation to non-public schools. Therefore, the disparate impact that the Yonkers decision creates is suspect, both morally and legally.

“It was settled in 1947 by the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Everson v. Board of Education*, that public monies for bus transportation for children attending parochial schools was constitutional. Moreover, New York State law and a federal court decision in 1986 settle the issue even further by requiring school districts like Yonkers to provide bus transportation for children attending Catholic schools.

“It is estimated that if the Catholic schools closed in Yonkers, it would add approximately \$50 million a year to the school budget. That alone ought to give the school board pause. But more important is the right that parents who send their children to Catholic schools have in being treated equitably.

“The Catholic League is prepared to take legal action to ensure that the rights of parents and children who use Catholic schools are protected. This is not a case the Yonkers school board can win.”