



AGUDATH ISRAEL OF AMERICA **FEDERAL AGENDA 2015**

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AGUDATH ISRAEL OF AMERICA'S OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

Agudath Israel of America is a 92-year-old national Orthodox Jewish organization, headquartered in New York, with a Washington Office and affiliated chapters across the United States. Agudath Israel sponsors numerous projects and programs that service the community in a wide variety of settings. Through its Office of Government Affairs, Agudath Israel advocates before federal, state and local bodies on behalf of Orthodox Jews and their growing network of educational, religious and charitable institutions.



ISRAEL AND INTERNATIONAL

- Advocating for a **Middle East peace** agreement that is based on the right of Israel to live safely within secure borders. This will come as long as the United States clearly demonstrates its **ironclad support and commitment to Israel** – both morally and materially – thus persuading the Arab nations that they have no choice but to come to the negotiating table. Any perceived weakening of this bond will only embolden rejectionists.

- **Combatting the scourge of terrorism** in Israel and around the world and making clear that acts of violence against innocents will not achieve the aims of Islamic extremists bent on the destruction of Israel and free societies. This includes the continued non-recognition of Hamas and severe consequences for a Palestinian Authority or any country that in any way abets or condones terror.

- **Preventing a nuclear Iran**, which poses a mortal threat to Israel and to countries around the world. This might include negotiations, but only with the recognition that such talks must not be allowed to go on indefinitely without meaningful, tangible or verifiable progress. Without such progress within a reasonable amount of time, the United States must be prepared to impose additional and harsher sanctions – and other effective means – to neutralize the Iranian threat.

- Urging the United States, the beacon of the free world, to condemn and do all its power to **combat the open and ugly manifestation of anti-Semitism** – expressed in both words and violent deeds – at home and abroad. Calls to “Gas the Jews” and other such venomous expressions of hate cross the line of legitimate political discourse and expose the motives and intentions of those who make such statements.



AIDING AND SECURING JEWISH INSTITUTIONS



- Ensuring that the reauthorization of the **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)**, the major federal funding bill for both public and private schools, includes provisions that **safeguard the principle of “equitable participation.”** All too often, private and religious schools do not receive the funding that is mandated under the law. The reauthorization should address that problem by requiring greater accountability on the part of school districts and more meaningful recourse for private school parents.
- Advocating for legislation that will provide parents the **full range of school choice** for their children – public, private or religious. Allowing financially struggling parents to choose the education best suited for their children is sound public policy and fully within constitutional parameters. We will also seek to ensure that any proposed plan for Universal Pre-K be structured in a way that would allow religious schools and providers to participate.
- Lobbying for the continued vitality of the **Non-Profit Security Grant Program**. Jewish institutions – synagogues, schools and community groups – are primary targets of Islamist extremists and White Supremacists and are at high risk of terrorist attack. They are in desperate need of security equipment to protect their facilities. Although the original appropriation was \$25 million, that amount has been reduced to \$13 million, and the recent dramatic rise in anti-Semitic violence shows the need for a substantial increase.
- Combatting laws that do not put **religious institutions on the same footing** as similarly situated secular entities when it is constitutionally permitted to do so. For example, the Stafford Act allows **disaster relief funding** to go to a range of community entities (including zoos!) but unjustly excludes “houses of worship” from the list of beneficiaries. We saw how devastating this was to Orthodox Jewish communities trying to rebuild after Super Storm Sandy.
- As budget cuts will have a profound effect on many social programs, and on those that benefit from them, charitable institutions will be asked to step up and seek to address some of society’s most pressing needs – the young and the elderly, housing, employment, health care, etc. But they often lack the resources to do so. It is therefore vital that congress **support a strong “charitable deduction”** and other tax provisions and proposals that will encourage giving to our non-profits and charities.



RELIGIOUS RIGHTS

- Advocating for employees who require **reasonable accommodations for religious observance**, such as taking time off for the Sabbath and holidays. Problems in this regard continue to face religiously-observant employees and current law needs to be strengthened through enactment of the proposed **Workplace Religious Freedom Act**. One area that we also plan to explore and strengthen will be the federal religious comp time law.
- **Protecting the rights of religious entities to maintain hiring policies that are in accord with their religious beliefs and mission.** This is particularly relevant in regard to programs that come within the Faith-based and Community Partnerships Initiative, as well as various other proposals – such as the Employment Non-Discrimination Act and recent Executive Orders on federal contracting and on the administration of federal programs – whose hiring provisions may conflict with a religious organization’s religious character.
- **Opposing any health care reform proposal that would force a religious entity or individual to violate their religious beliefs.** Some religious groups have objected to the contraception mandate on these grounds. In the Orthodox Jewish community this problem is perhaps most relevant to “end-of-life” issues, where Jewish law prescribes strict guidelines as to whether or not life sustaining treatment is required.
- **Blocking any attempt to weaken the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA)**, which has become the primary source of religious protection in the U.S. Unhappy with the high level of protection RFRA affords religious entities and individuals, some have attempted to carve out certain classes of people and activities from the scope of its protection. But religious freedom should not, per se, be sacrificed in favor of other interests; doing so would have a devastating effect on America’s First Freedom.



AGUDATH ISRAEL OF AMERICA is a 92-year-old national organization which represents Orthodox Jewish communities throughout the United States. Agudath Israel advocates on behalf of Jewish schools, social service and health care needs, religious liberty and an array of other pertinent issues. It also sponsors numerous programs that service the broader Jewish community.

In 2012, Agudath Israel sponsored the Siyum HaShas which brought together 90,000 Jews to MetLife stadium while an additional 50,000 tuned in via broadcast in 120 locations worldwide.

The **OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS** and its staff of attorneys works to safeguard religious and civil rights of observant Jews through a variety of channels including a full-time Agudath Israel Washington Office.

- 10 State Offices
- Active government advocacy in more than 20 states
- Representation in 34 States

The **EDUCATION AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT** at Agudath Israel of America advocates on behalf of Orthodox Jewish schools. Through a series of workshops, seminars and newsletters, the division helps Jewish schools navigate the maze of applicable laws, regulations and governments sponsored programs. The organization serves as a liaison between the schools and the local, state and federal governments.

- Represents the interest of more than 700 elementary and secondary schools under the umbrella of the National Society for Hebrew Day Schools
- Advocates on behalf of nearly 250,000 students nationwide.,
- Arranges workshops relating to government regulations that pertain to nonpublic schools, as well as government programs for which they are eligible to apply
- Responds to numerous daily calls from principals and administrators, answering questions on a wide range of issues.

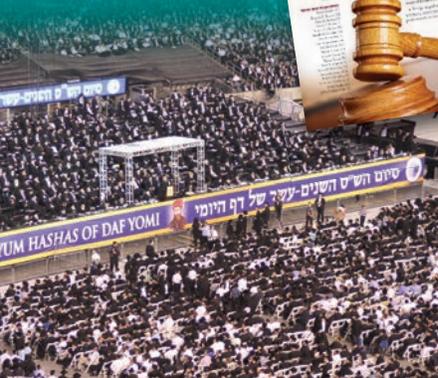
PROJECT LEARN, the special education division of Agudath Israel of America, advocates on behalf of children with special needs and assists parents who are dealing with the full range of the special education needs of their children. Project LEARN is also involved in special education legislation, activism, and advocacy.

Agudath Israel's **LEGAL SUPPORT SERVICES LLC** is a network of lawyers who volunteer their time and skills to assist with individual cases that meet the organization's criteria. These include custody battles between spouses of different levels of religious observance, immigration related problems, Sabbath and holiday observance issues, and zoning issues which affect Jewish institutions.

The **CONSTITUENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT** assisted 10,000 callers last year with a myriad of social services issues.

Agudath Israel of America's **COMMISSION ON SENIOR CITIZENS**

- Sponsors three senior citizens centers in the New York area.
- Offers 1000 elderly senior citizens free, kosher hot lunches and a wide range of social services.





COPE AND PROFESSIONAL CAREER SERVICES (PCS), with offices in both New York and New Jersey, provide training, job readiness and career placement for young men and women

- The New York office served more than 350 people
- More than 85% of COPE graduates find jobs in their field
- Junior Accounting Program: 192 students enrolled in 2014; approximately 2000 total since inception
- CPA Track Program: more than 65 students enrolled in 2014, with over 440 in total since inception

ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY SERVICES provides assistance to hundreds of immigrants every year by offering English language courses, preparing participants for employment

SOUTHERN BROOKLYN COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION is committed to helping low and moderate-income residents obtain and maintain affordable housing. It also provides a broad spectrum of housing services to strengthen the viability and quality of life in Brooklyn neighborhoods.

- Serves 300 clients annually.



PIRCHEI AGUDATH ISRAEL OF AMERICA is a national youth group program of Agudath Israel of America.

- 20,000 participants ranging from Pre-K – 8th grade.
- 10,000 children in New York State
- 115 branches nationwide

BNOS AGUDATH ISRAEL OF AMERICA is an afterschool youth program for Orthodox Jewish girls.

- Youth groups in 39 cities
- 100 branches
- 100+ advisors
- 1,000 branch leaders
- 10,000 participants
- 5000 members in New York State
- Bnos 1 on 1, which pairs 6th, 7th, and 8th graders with 11th and 12th graders, currently has over 250 pairs with 200 of them in New York State



Agudath Israel's **CAMP DIVISION** provides a beneficial summer experience for thousands of children.

- 4 campuses in New York State which service 7 camps and 2500 campers
- 5 campuses in the Midwest which service 9 camps and 2700 campers



Camp Agudah, Ferndale, NY





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