



AGUDATH ISRAEL OF AMERICA
MISSION TO ALBANY

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2015



THE AGUDATH ISRAEL ALBANY AGENDA 2015



**RABBI CHAIM
DOVID ZWIBEL**
Executive Vice President



**RABBI SHMUEL
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*Vice President for
Community Services*



SOL WERDIGER
*Chairman,
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AGUDATH ISRAEL'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. As New York is home to the largest concentration of Orthodox Jews anywhere in the world outside the State of Israel, Agudath Israel over the years has placed special emphasis on advocacy in the Empire State.

Agudath Israel has played a major role in the development and enactment of numerous laws that protect the civil and religious rights of Orthodox Jewish New Yorkers, in settings as diverse as universities, workplaces and hospitals.



ADVOCACY ON BEHALF OF NEW YORK'S ORTHODOX JEWISH SCHOOLS

Perhaps the single greatest focus of Agudath Israel's advocacy efforts in New York has been education – protecting and advancing the interests of the growing network of elementary and secondary Orthodox Jewish schools across New York and the constituencies they serve. There are approximately 375 such yeshivos and day schools, with a broad array of affiliations: Hasidic, Lithuanian, Modern Orthodox, Ashkenazi and Sephardi. Collectively they enroll approximately 130,000 students – nearly a third of the total nonpublic school enrollment in the state.

Agudath Israel's service to these schools includes high level advocacy with legislative bodies and education departments that results in millions of dollars of grants and services... a dedicated division, Project LEARN, that advocates for children with special education needs... an education affairs division that is available around-the-clock to deal with individual schools and all of their myriad issues, and generates a steady stream of newsletters and hands-on workshops that provide essential information on government laws, rules, regulations and programs essential to the operation of yeshivos across the state.

Executive staff of Agudath Israel are acknowledged leaders of the broader nonpublic school community in New York. Most notably, Agudath Israel's executive vice president co-chairs the New York State Coalition for Independent and Religious Schools, chairs the Committee of New York City Religious and Independent School Officials and is a member of the New York State Commissioner of Education's Nonpublic School Advisory Council.

Agudath Israel's long track record of advocacy and service on behalf of Orthodox Jewish schools reflects its recognition that these schools are the very lifeblood of the community, and that their wellbeing is the key to Jewish continuity and growth. Yet the high cost of yeshiva education places tremendous strain on parents who choose such schools, and threatens the long-term viability of these schools. Accordingly, Agudath Israel's top legislative priority for 2015 is enactment of The Education Tax Credit.



EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

The Education Tax Credit (ETC) would provide a substantial state tax credit – and thus a powerful incentive – for contributions to public schools and to scholarship organizations that provide scholarships for needy students attending private schools. Similar programs in other states, such as Pennsylvania and Arizona, have proven extremely successful in motivating private giving to scholarship organizations.

Here in New York, increasing numbers of legislators have signed on as sponsors or supporters of the proposal. And, for the very first time, Governor Cuomo has proposed an ETC in his executive budget.

The time has come to enact the ETC. Public schools will benefit, nonpublic schools will benefit, and most of all, needy families will benefit by having access to significant scholarship funding for their children's tuition.



MANDATED SERVICES AND CAP

Nonpublic schools are statutorily entitled to reimbursement for their actual costs in carrying out certain state mandates, including compliance with the Comprehensive Attendance Program (CAP). However, the state has been delinquent in carrying out its statutory mandate. It is estimated that the state's outstanding obligation to nonpublic schools for CAP (and certain other mandated services expenses), accumulated over the past 11 years, currently exceeds \$350 million.

We are grateful that last year the state set aside \$16 million to begin paying down the CAP debt, and that the Governor has now proposed an additional \$16.8 million for the same purpose in this year's executive budget. However, the bottom line is that the debt is substantial, and far more is needed. We therefore urge the Governor and the Legislature to substantially accelerate the payment of the CAP debt.

We further urge that, in addition to setting aside a substantial allocation to pay down the accumulated debt, the budget should allocate the full amount of the current year's CAP obligation – approximately \$60 million according to the original formula developed by SED to calculate actual CAP costs. This allocation will ensure that the debt does not continue to grow.



OTHER LEGISLATIVE MATTERS



SECURITY FUNDING: We are grateful that in each of the past two sessions, \$4.5 million has been appropriated for security equipment for nonpublic schools. However, in the wake of recent developments in the Middle East, Europe, and even here in the United States, we need to make our school facilities more secure to protect our precious children. For obvious reasons, this issue is of particular concern in the Jewish community. We respectfully urge a significant increase in security funding for nonpublic schools.

EAST RAMAPO SCHOOL DISTRICT: In mid-November of this past year Henry Greenberg, appointed by the New York State Education Department to study the difficulties facing the East Ramapo School District, issued a report calling for the unprecedented step of appointing a state monitor who would fully participate in all school board deliberations and have unilateral veto power over decisions of the board. A bill has now been introduced to implement this proposal.

We do not agree that a new monitor should be put in place who would have veto power over the democratically elected School Board's decisions. Mr. Greenberg made no finding of illegality that would warrant such a drastic remedy.

However, we do concur with Mr. Greenberg's finding that the current funding formula does not work well in this district, given its unique demographic profile reflected in the fact that the large majority of the district's 33,000 school children attend nonpublic schools, and that additional funds must be allocated from the state. Were adequate funding made available, we are confident that the district's problems would recede even without the drastic step of appointing an independent monitor. We therefore urge that sufficient funding be allocated for the East Ramapo School District that will allow the district to adequately serve the needs of all its schoolchildren, both public and nonpublic.



INFERTILITY FUNDING: For each of the past 12 years, New York State has generously allocated funding to enable infertile couples to receive treatments that have helped them realize their life dream of having children. This is particularly meaningful in family-oriented communities such as the Orthodox Jewish constituency represented by Agudath Israel. However, the funding levels for this program have been declining; what began more than a decade ago as a \$10 million allocation dwindled last year to \$1.9 million. We urge the Governor and legislator to reverse that downward trend, and to significantly increase funding for this vital program in this year's budget.

FUNDING FOR EMPLOYMENT TRAINING AND PLACEMENT: Employment training and placement is a particularly high priority social service need in the Orthodox Jewish community, where many of our most talented and responsible young men have spent their young years through early adulthood in the non-traditional learning environment of a yeshiva. Our own experience has shown that when given proper training in a culturally sensitive fashion, these men go on to become highly productive breadwinners. Critical to the success of such training and placement initiatives is state funding, and we seek budgetary support in this important area.

PROTECTING PATIENTS RELIGIOUS RIGHTS IN END OF LIFE CARE: We categorically oppose any effort to legalize assisted suicide. At the same time, we urge that a patient's religious beliefs and wishes be accommodated in end of life care situations. This fundamental right should be explicitly acknowledged in state law.

SPECIAL EDUCATION: The number of Jewish students attending special education schools or needing special education services in mainstream schools across the state continues to increase. At the same time, science based supports as well as educational programs that have helped many with special needs become productive citizens have increased as well. We are hopeful that with state support for the right specialized programs and services, more students with special needs will move out of the special education system into the regularly developing population.

AGUDATH ISRAEL OF AMERICA

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 including the approximately 375 yeshivos located in New York State.
- Advocates on behalf of nearly 250,000 students nationwide, including approximately 130,000 students enrolled in New York State schools.
- Sent out a total of 66 informational memos to yeshiva principals and administrators in New York City and 36 memos across the state.
- 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 Borough Park, Flatbush and Washington Heights.
- 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.



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

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





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