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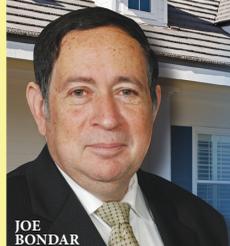
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# Cover Story

## Rabbi Ariel Sadwin Our Community Liaison to the Government Eli Nissel

Walking down the hallway of 23 Walker Avenue in Pikesville and into the office of Agudath Israel of Maryland, one feels a distinct sense of professionalism and mission. Pictures of legislators and government leaders posing with Agudah members adorn the walls. The contemporary designs of the office and boardrooms clearly have been intended to reinforce the sophisticated image of modern-day Orthodox Jewry that the Agudah works tirelessly to promote. Modeled after its impressive nerve-center at 42 Broadway in Manhattan, the Maryland division of the world-renowned organization exudes the same ideals and airs as the world headquarters. The office serves as the base of operations for the dynamic director of the Maryland Agudah, Rabbi Ariel Sadwin.

Growing up in Silver Spring and attending Ner Israel for the overwhelming majority of his Yeshiva years, Rabbi Sadwin credits his parents and yeshiva for the direction his life has taken. "My home was one in which service to the community was paradigm," he says wistfully. "And the yeshiva greatly reinforced the lessons of achrayus that I received as a child." He recalls the years in Ner Israel when he maintained a leadership position in the yeshiva's Chinuch Atzmai campaign. Bochorim are sent out across the country to raise funds for the yeshiva's sister school in Yahud, Israel. "Many yeshivas send their boys out to raise money," he notes, "but the fact that Rabbi Weinberg would send us out on behalf of a *different* institution taught us an indelible lesson of responsibility to others and to the entire Torah world." In fact, his leadership role in that campaign was instrumental in his progression to the Agudah.

In 2007, community leaders in Baltimore started to recognize the growing need for a one-stop community liaison to our government. They observed how effective the Agudah

officers were in other states, most notably New York, and they felt that the time had come for Baltimore to make use of a similar office. The timing could not have been better. At the same time, Agudath Israel of America was looking to expand its vision by establishing field offices in major cities

opening doors and helping to establish connections. Rabbi Sheftel Neuberger, riding on the back of the relationships developed by his father Rabbi Herman Neuberger a"h, passed on the torch and introduced Rabbi Sadwin to many of the region's influential policymakers.



At the state rally for nonpublic school scholarship tax credit: Rabbi Sadwin; State Senate President Mike Miller; Governor Larry Hogan; Archbishop of Baltimore, William Lori; State Senator Ed DeGrange.

across the United States. Recognized for his strong background in administrative work in the Yahud campaigns and his value system acquired through his years in kollel, Rabbi Sadwin was hired from a broad field of candidates.

Rabbi Sadwin admits that the job was intimidating in the beginning. Arriving straight from the world of the yeshiva and being thrown into the halls of the government was quite an adjustment. From tables of seforim and interacting with chavrusas, he found himself in cavernous hallways and boardrooms, interacting with the most sophisticated officials in the non-Jewish world. He learned quickly that with proper respect and professionalism the doors were open wide for him. Many of Baltimore's communal leaders were valuable in

Mr. Howard Tzvi Friedman has played a major role in the success of many of the organization's undertakings and always makes his enormous cache of high level contacts available when there is a need in the community.

Rabbi Hillel Tendler, Esq. introduced him to some key Annapolis education lobbyists, and to his connections at the University of Maryland Medical System, then the hosting institution of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME). This paved the way for his highly productive relationship with Dr. David Fowler, the current Chief Medical Examiner for the state of Maryland. This relationship has been of utmost importance in maintaining the dignity of niftarim in dozens of extenuating circumstances and has led to the creation of similar relationships in a number of other states.

Rabbi Shmuel Bloom, then Executive Vice President of Agudath Israel of America charged Rabbi Sadwin with his first project: accessing Title I benefits for eligible students in the Orthodox Jewish community. For many years money from this federal program which should have been helping scores of students in our community had been getting lost in the pipelines. The reasons for this were elusive, and Rabbi Sadwin set out to forge connections with officials in the Department of Education and to ascertain why the money had not been previously forthcoming. He partnered with Mr. Matthew Riley, then-principal of Cross Country Elementary School, the "zoned school" that serves the largest part of Baltimore's Orthodox community in order to rectify the situation. Title I benefits are allocated through the channel of the local public school, and if there are obstacles preventing that school from receiving them, then nobody in the neighborhood can benefit from them. Rabbi Sadwin worked together with Mr. Riley to help arrange eligibility for his school, thus enabling children from our community to receive the benefits as well.

Carrying on the legacy of the late Rabbi Neuberger, Rabbi Sadwin continues a fruitful and genuine relation-

AGUDATH ISRAEL OF MARYLAND  
MID-ATLANTIC REGION

אגודת ישראל במדינת  
מאריילנד

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**SINCE ITS INCEPTION** in November 2007, Agudath Israel of Maryland (AIMD) has evolved from its initial focus of assisting the Jewish day schools to its current status as a full-service community and government affairs enterprise. It has effectively addressed countless issues of interest and concern to the Jewish community - institutions and individuals alike - amassing a long list of impressive accomplishments. Its impact upon Jewish Maryland - both Baltimore and Silver Spring - has been remarkable.

- Title I remedial education services
- Textbooks and technology funding increases
- School construction grants to update facilities
- Special Ed funding increases for children with challenges
- Education tax credits advocacy leadership
- Digital learning expansion to cut school costs
- School transportation program development
- Autopsy prevention/medical examiner protocols and liaising
- Workplace religious accommodation regulations/consultation
- Local government assistance - housing, health, and food benefits
- Terminal care/end-of-life religious rights
- Voter registration and interaction
- Public Works advocacy and liaising
- Passport and immigration assistance

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FISCAL IMPACT: \$10 MILLION AND GROWING

Having just recently celebrated its 7th anniversary, AIMD's advocacy and leadership has generated \$10 million in government funded services to Jewish day school students and families in Maryland. That figure includes federal education services (Title programs), state funded programs (textbooks, technology, construction grants), school transportation subsidies, special education programs and services - all of which have been either created or expanded by the efforts and advocacy of AIMD.

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ship with the Associated and a number of its partner agencies, including the Baltimore Jewish Council (BJC) and Center for Jewish Education (CJE), and works closely with them on numerous projects benefitting Baltimore's Jewish private schools. Funding for textbooks and educational technology, school construction grants, special education programs, and many other projects has come in large part due to their combined efforts.

His relationships with other religious groups, specifically within the Catholic community, are invaluable as well. Rabbi Sadwin is the president of the Maryland chapter of the Council for American Private Education (CAPE), a unified body of private and parochial schools banded together to advocate on behalf of the nonpublic schools throughout the state. Working closely with the Maryland Catholic Conference in Annapolis and other allies, the Agudah of Maryland has been the leader in the ongoing effort to produce education tax credits for corporations donating to private schools. "The Jewish and Catholic communities have many common interests and concerns," he remarks. "Whether it's our conservative approach to end-of-life issues and assisted suicide, the sanctity of the institution of marriage, or religious schooling, we find much common ground. Being there for each other has born much fruit throughout the years."

Another area in which he has been heavily involved in helping the schools is student transportation. Baltimore is one of the few cities in the nation where the local transportation authority offers subsidized city busses directly to the various schools. Six runs are made in the morning, and then again at the end of the school day, servicing several hundred students daily. Rabbi Sadwin concedes, "I know this isn't free door-to-door yellow school busing, but we are always exploring different angles to get new or improved options for our families".

Rabbi Zalman Nissel, Chief Operating Officer of Baltimore's Bais Yaakov, says that Rabbi Sadwin is a key supporter of the school. "I work very closely with R' Ariel on a variety of issues," he says. "He consistently displays a keen understanding of our community's needs and has immense

dedication to see projects through. We recently noticed an error that an agency had made in its calculations, and Rabbi Sadwin was instrumental in having the error corrected and funding for the program reinstated. Bais Yaakov is fortunate to have his support."



*At the pre-election campaign meeting with the Vaad HaRabbanim - Rabbi Hopfer, Gov. Larry Hogan, Rabbi Sadwin*

When asked about his typical day, Rabbi Sadwin smiles.

"There are not many typical days in this line of work. During the months in which there is less going on legislatively and the trips to Annapolis are fewer, time and effort is spent addressing a broad range of communal and individual issues. It is also prime time for relationship building as well as fundraising. But I may have my day all planned out, and then an urgent matter may arise that requires my immediate attention. When that happens, all else gets placed on the back burn-

cent efforts he was involved in. "Just this past Monday, after having returned from the Agudath Israel of America dinner in New York late the night before, I thought I knew what was in store for that day. I had a meeting first thing with some community

leaders and rabbonim, followed by our weekly Agudah national staff video conference and then a lunch meeting with some colleagues. It looked like it was going to be a fairly typical, productive day. But glancing at my phone in the early morning, I saw that I had received five texts and calls during shacharis. Misaskim of New York was desperately trying to reach me. There had been a terrible accident on Route 95 in northern Maryland, and a man from New Jersey had been killed in the crash. They needed me to contact the medical examiner's of-



*Rabbi Sadwin and Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. David Fowler*

er. If the hands of time would stop, I would still have months worth of work to catch up on because of all the things I cannot get to on a daily basis."

He relates some examples of re-

office in order to avoid autopsy and have the body released. Having been thrust into the position of liaison, much time and effort went into ensuring that everything proceeded smoothly, and my

schedule was thrown completely off due to the urgent nature of the issue."

Another recent issue posed to him: A lady who works as a nurse in a Washington area hospital called Rabbi Sadwin with a problem. She was being forced to work a weekend shift, including Shabbos, unless she found a suitable replacement, and she was tired of making these arrangements. Was she able to take action against her superiors at the hospital? "In such a situation," he says, "I will generally coach a person through their options. Sometimes it can involve retaining an attorney. Similar to the national Agudah, I have an unofficial network of local attorneys, each with their individual specialties, who are willing and able to assist in such cases, sometimes even pro-bono or for reduced fees. In other instances, I can draft a letter myself and start a dialogue with the appropriate authorities, acting the part of a non-attorney representative. In some instances, the mere fact that I represent an organization renowned for its leadership on issues of religious liberty as Agudath Israel, that itself is able to carry much weight. In this particular circumstance, there was no legal action required. The hospital was in full right to make this request of their employee. Had they been unwilling to allow for a shift switch, they would be failing to make a reasonable accommodation for her religious observance, which they are required to do under state and federal law. I coached the woman how to approach the issue with her employer, and the issue will hopefully be resolved with that."

People turn to the office of the Maryland Agudah with all sorts of other personal issues as well. Some people call when they just need a little personal advice and coaching, and they do not have a specific rabbi or mentor to utilize. He gets calls regularly from individuals needing assistance with their personal health insurance. Regardless of the issue, large or small, Rabbi Sadwin is there for the community to support them and point them in the right direction.

The efforts of his office are not limited to Maryland, either. Although around 85% of his time and effort is invested in projects pertaining to the communities in Baltimore and Silver Spring, the complete title of the of-

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office is “Agudath Israel of Maryland and the Mid-Atlantic Region”. Rabbi Sadwin’s political territory includes the communities in Virginia and Pennsylvania, as well. Every so often he finds himself in Harrisburg meeting with Pennsylvania lawmakers and private school coalition partners. He has seen the scholarship tax credit program that benefits Jewish day schools across Pennsylvania grow into one of the finest and most successful in the country. He works to obtain benefits for the Jewish institutions across Virginia, including the Rudlin Torah Academy and Yeshiva of Virginia in Richmond. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have become available to the schools there through Virginia’s scholarship tax credit program, an effort in which Rabbi Sadwin was intimately involved.

“It is clear that Rabbi Sadwin is a leader among the coalition of school choice and tax credit folks here in Virginia,” says Rabbi Hal Klestzick, longtime educator and administrator at the Richmond schools. “He worked tirelessly over the last five or six years with the bill’s sponsor in the State House to push for the passage of Virginia’s tax credit bill. Thanks to his talent, leadership and efforts, our Jewish schools in Richmond are expected to see new revenue well in excess of \$100,000 this year, allowing us to offer “free tuition K-12”, and thus to include many families with children who would otherwise not be receiving a Jewish education.”

Delaware does not have many notable Jewish institutions, but it does have a stretch of highway very familiar to Jewish travelers. Rabbi Sadwin’s relationship with Delaware’s chief medical examiner has been called upon in emergency situations.

I ask Rabbi Sadwin what he enjoys most about his job.

He smiles and pauses, clearly having expected the question.

“There is a tremendous sense of satisfaction when helping others in need, and knowing that you may be the only person who can effectively help them. Many issues I deal with are private in nature and never see the light of day. Only I know just how vital the role is that I fill, and that provides an unmatched sense of fulfillment. To be able to say that I go to work every

day for the purpose of performing acts of chessed on behalf of the tzibbur is something for which I am truly grateful. Additionally, I have the opportunity to make a Kiddush Hashem every day, sometimes multiple times per day. Holding leadership positions in

Clearly, many officials respect “the rabbi” and are eager to help out Baltimore’s approximately 10,000 Orthodox Jewish constituents when called upon.

Rabbi Sadwin smiles as he recalls a humorous sto-



*At the AIMD leadership delegation in 2011, Former Gov. Martin O'Malley meets with young Jewish business leaders.*

various secular organizations and alliances, I am able to demonstrate what the Orthodox Jewish community is all about and how a Ben Torah conducts himself. With all of the negativity that has been directed towards the frum world in recent times, it is vital that the non-Jews with whom I interact see the real nature of an ehrliche Yid and walk away with an appreciation for Jews, perhaps breaking a previously held stereotype.”

“As part of my mission, I wear my religion on my sleeve. Unlike other Jewish lobbyists who may try to conform to the standards of the outside culture, we at the Agudah are passionate about displaying our pride in being Torah Jews. This uncompromising

ry from his early years on the job. He was walking down the hallway in House of Delegates office building in Annapolis, when one of the state delegates edged up behind him. “Hey Rebbe!” he called out, attempting to show off his knowledge of the yeshivish parlance. Without missing a beat, Rabbi Sadwin turned and responded with a grin, “You can only call me Rebbe if you listen to me and do what I tell you.”

He recalls having been asked in the past if he sees difficulty relating to people from the outside culture, having been raised in a yeshiva setting. “Conversation about sports is the great equalizer,” he responded wryly. An avid follower of all sports,

When asked how his job compares to those of his counterparts in other parts of the country, Rabbi Sadwin smiles wearily. “I am constantly in touch with the Agudah’s other regional directors. Our legislative goals are almost identical, but some have a much harder time than others passing bills to help their communities. Maryland lacks the political balance that many other states have, and thus we have had more difficulty here than some of my colleagues encounter in their states.” Rabbi Sadwin jokes, “hey, wouldn’t it be great if Pennsylvania would annex Baltimore and include us in their \$150 million scholarship tax credit program!”

It’s been a growing journey. Whereas Rabbi Sadwin started out years ago under the mentorship of many of the Agudah’s long-standing officers, Rabbi Sadwin now finds himself mentoring others who are new to the field or who are interested in pursuing professional askanus as a career.

We talk about community awareness of the Agudah’s mission. There seems to be somewhat of a disconnect between the Agudah’s agenda and its perception with the average community member. Many are not aware just how tangible and relevant the office’s involvement with the community’s institutions is. The Agudah is not in the habit of flaunting its accomplishments, and many of its successes are sensitive in nature and not broadcasted to the public, for good reason.

“Our challenge is not so much changing public perception as much as it is garnering public awareness in the first place,” Rabbi Sadwin says. “Community support is crucial to the work that we do at the Agudah, and it is very important that all community members are fully supportive of our mission, and not just those in leadership positions who see the results firsthand. People don’t necessarily realize how much the decisions in Annapolis affect their children’s futures and the hard work that goes into ensuring that those decisions are made to their benefit. My goal is that the appeal of our organization should grow, enabling our effectiveness to grow exponentially with it.”



*Rabbi Sadwin and daughter Miriam testifying to the House of Delegates in support of scholarship tax credits for npublic schools*

value system undoubtedly earns us the respect of many an official.”

“There are many Jewish lobbyists that an elected official will encounter, but not often do they meet someone who so obviously represents an unadulterated version of Torah Judaism” he says with pride.

with an acute affinity for the sports franchises in his family’s native Massachusetts, Rabbi Sadwin uses his firm grasp and intimate knowledge of the sports world, especially his beloved New England Patriots and Boston Red Sox, to deflate, or level the playing field.