



AGUDATH ISRAEL OF AMERICA
FEDERAL AGENDA 2018

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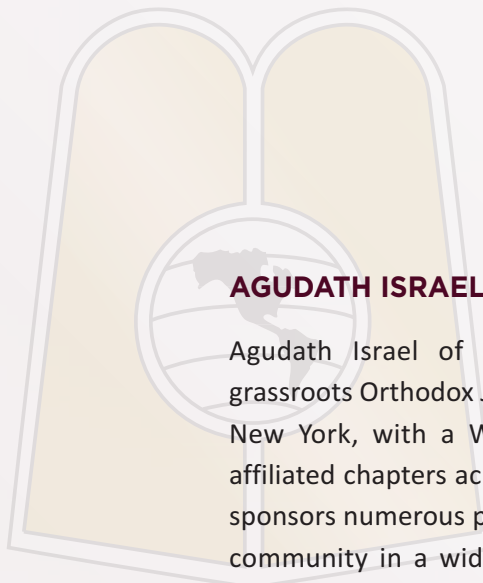
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AGUDATH ISRAEL OF AMERICA

Agudath Israel of America is a 96-year-old national grassroots Orthodox Jewish organization, headquartered in New York, with a Washington Office, state offices and affiliated chapters across the United States. Agudath Israel sponsors numerous projects and programs that service the community in a wide variety of settings. 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 & INTERNATIONAL

- Advocating for a **Middle East peace** agreement, including a resolution of the Palestinian issue that is based on the right of Israel to live as a Jewish state within secure borders. This will happen as long as 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 –including the imposition of conditions by any means other than through direct negotiations — will only embolden rejectionists. We also encourage the United States to continue and enhance its strategic and security relationship with Israel, including the most advanced and effective weaponry and defense systems.

Agudath Israel commends President Trump for his courageous and principled stand in announcing our government’s formal recognition of **Jerusalem** as capital of Israel, backing up legislation passed overwhelmingly two decades ago by a bipartisan Congress. We also applaud the Trump Administration’s advocacy at the **United**

Nations, where Ambassador Nikki Haley has openly and directly called out the world body for its blatant animus and double standard in regard to the Jewish State.

- Combating 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 and other extremists bent on the destruction of Israel, Jews and free societies. This isolation of terrorists includes the continued non-recognition of Hamas and other such groups, and severe consequences for a Palestinian Authority or any entity or country that abets, condones or honors terror or terrorists. It is absolutely unacceptable that Israeli citizens should have to suffer continued missile attacks and the daily – and very real– threat of bloodshed.



Agudath Israel commends the House of Representatives for its passage of the **Taylor Force Act**, legislation that would withhold financial aid to the Palestinian Authority as long as it continues to make “reward” payments to the families of those who commit terror. We will continue to work hard for passage in the Senate and eventual enactment into law.



- Preventing a **nuclear Iran**, which poses grave danger to the United States and the West and a mortal threat to Israel and to countries in the region. The pact concluded with Iran contains serious flaws that not only fail to address this problem but will more likely exacerbate it. We have already witnessed grave Iranian violations of the agreement. The damage done by the agreement can be minimized, however, by American insistence upon tangible and verifiable progress by Iran in fulfilling its commitments, a zero tolerance policy when Iran does not comply with its obligations, and a readiness on the part of the U.S. to abandon the pact or impose additional and harsher sanctions when Iran fails to act in good faith.

Another vital concern that remains for Agudath Israel is the safety and security of **Iranian Jewry**. Living at the whim of a virulently anti-Israel and anti-Semitic regime, many thousands of Jews seek to leave the country. Unfortunately, due to recent U.S. immigration restrictions, the decades-long American rescue of religious minorities facing persecution in Iran (Jewish, Christian, Baha'i, etc.) has slowed down to a standstill. We urge the Administration and Congress to do everything possible to restore the flow of these refugees to freedom and security.



American funded Iron Dome missile defense battery

- Urging the United States, the beacon of the free world, to condemn and do all in its power to combat the open and ugly manifestation of **anti-Semitism**, expressed in both words and violent deeds. 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. Applying a delegitimizing double standard when evaluating the actions of Israel and Jews, whether it is seen in world bodies or in the pronouncements of the “boycott, divestment and sanctions” (BDS) movement at home or abroad, must be roundly condemned. We must also remain vigilant when religious rights – such as kosher slaughter and ritual circumcision – are being threatened, and when individuals, synagogues, cemeteries and other institutions are attacked.



EDUCATION

- Ensuring that funding for America’s schools embodies and safeguards the principle of “**equitable participation.**” As a government liaison for over six decades on behalf of the entire range of Orthodox Jewish educational institutions we have found that, all too often, private and religious schools do not receive the funding that is mandated under law. Our success in helping to craft and promote provisions in ESSA that strengthen local transparency, accountability and flexibility was a major step forward and we plan to build on this achievement when we confront the reauthorization of IDEA, where equitable participation has been sorely deficient, and in other federal education proposals as well.

- Advocating for legislation that will provide parents the full range of **school choice** for their children – public, private or religious. A longtime leader in the school choice movement on both the federal and state levels, Agudath Israel strongly believes that allowing parents to choose the education best suited for their children is sound public policy and squarely within constitutional parameters. We support various forms of school choice, including vouchers, tax credits and education savings accounts.

One education-related change we strongly endorsed in the recently passed tax bill is the expansion of **529 savings plans** to include K-12 tuition, which will make it easier for parents to save their own money for their children’s schooling. Agudath Israel is currently working in states to optimize this benefit for these parents. And, in the months ahead, we will continue to work cooperatively with President Trump, Secretary DeVos and congressional allies, in crafting and promoting landmark federal school choice legislation – perhaps in the form of a “**scholarship tax credit**” or other innovative approaches.

- Emphasizing the need for the reauthorization of the **Higher Education Act** to better reflect the unique circumstances of Jewish and other religious post-secondary institutions. A top priority relates to changes in the Pell Grant and other campus-based programs, which must include greater flexibility in income limits for larger families, restore the “ability to benefit” option so students without high school diplomas will not be permanently shut out of federal student aid and ensure that students close to graduation are not closed out by running out of grants. Additionally, we must correct the methodology for evaluating



institutions based on their student outcomes and graduation rates, which produces skewed results for many non-traditional schools.

Agudath Israel also supports provisions in the Higher Education Act that would prohibit accreditors and governmental entities from taking adverse action against faith-based institutions because of policies and actions related to their **religious missions**. Furthermore, we support protections in the bill that ensure “**equal access**” on public university campuses for student religious groups.



- Advocating for greater participation of students with religious dietary requirements in **school-based nutrition programs**. Jewish schools, like many in the nonpublic school community, participate widely in the USDA-administered programs, whose goal must be to maximize inclusion of needy students. Reasonable and workable accommodations must be made for kosher and other dietary laws when program requirements limit the availability, affordability, and accessibility of nutrition foods to children. We must also explore the possibility of expanding nutrition programs to the higher education level, where the compelling need for such programs for economically disadvantaged students has steadily

529 SAVINGS ACCOUNTS TO K-12 TUITION,
COULD POTENTIALLY ALLOW TUITION FOR GRADES K-12 TO BE STATE TAX DEDUCTIBLE.

A graphic illustration of a blue graduation cap (mortarboard) with a gold tassel, resting on a stack of several US dollar bills. The bills are fanned out at the base of the cap. A small blue icon of an open book is visible in the bottom right corner of the graphic.

THE UPDATED 529 PLAN: A DEVELOPING STORY

A NEW, TAX-ADVANTAGED OPPORTUNITY FOR YESHIVA PARENTS:

The logo for Agudath Israel of America, featuring a red shield with a white Star of David and the text "Agudath Israel of America" and "אגודת ישראל של אמריקה" below it.

1. What is a "529" plan?
A special, tax-advantaged federal tax-advantaged account designed to encourage saving for college (including certain post-secondary expenses). The federal tax advantage is that earnings on funds contributed to 529 accounts are not federally taxed. If a parent deposits \$1,000 into Child's 529 account at Child's birth, the 529 account is worth \$2,500 when Child attends college. If the \$2,500 is properly used to pay college expenses, there is no federal tax on the \$1,500 earned.

2. Are there any benefits to 529 plans at the state level?
Yes! In many states, the principal contributed to the plan is deductible for state income taxes. State laws on this point vary widely.
Example: NYS Parent deposits \$10,000 into Child's NYS 529 account to save for college. If Parent's income was \$100,000 that year, after the 529 contribution, NYS will view that income as \$90,000. Depending on Parent's specific tax circumstances, Parent can realize a NYS tax benefit of several hundred dollars. NYC residents, and those in higher tax brackets, would realize significantly greater tax benefits.

3. Are there other potential 529 benefits?
Yes. Upromise, a Sellie Mae company, offers automatic deposits to 529 accounts, at no cost to account holders, of up to 5% of retail, travel, and other purchases when paid by a Upromise linked credit card. These free contributions may not be game-changing, but they add up.
Also, the availability of a tax-advantaged account, with tax advantages for contributors in certain states, incentivizes assistance from friends or family who may not have otherwise assisted.

4. Why are you telling me this? What's changed?
While 529 accounts have been available for use toward paying college expenses for decades, effective 1/1/2018, federal law expands the allowable use of 529s to include K-12 expenses.

5. What does that mean for me, a yeshiva parent?
In addition to being a significant, symbolic, national school-choice victory, encouraged by Agudath Israel and other groups as part of our **tax advocacy efforts**, on the federal level, it means that a new, beneficial vehicle will be available for the tremendous expense our community bears in paying yeshiva tuitions. Parents (and others) can set up and deposit money in 529 accounts, have that money grow, federally tax-free, and use the funds for K-12 yeshiva tuition.

6. You said that a change occurred at the federal level to expand 529s to K-12 expenses. What does that mean for the state deduction opportunities mentioned?
That is a critical question now. If allowed, this would be of further assistance to parents who are currently unable to deduct yeshiva tuition from their state income taxes.

AIDING & SECURING JEWISH INSTITUTIONS

- Lobbying for the continued vitality of programs that enhance the **security** of Jewish and other institutions highly vulnerable to violence by domestic and foreign extremists. Recent months have seen numerous reports of synagogues, schools, community groups and cemeteries being threatened and desecrated. The President and Congress must continue to condemn these actions but must also provide material support for security equipment to protect their facilities.

Agudath Israel has been instrumental for over a decade in creating and maintaining the **Non-Profit Security Grant Program**, which has helped secure many at-risk terrorist targets. In light of the continuing spike in anti-Semitic incidents, we urge Congress to include in its FY 2018 NSGP Appropriations a critically needed boost to **\$50 million**, as well as an expansion of the funding to include **non-UASI areas**.

- Ensuring that steps are taken to continue and enhance the **faith-based initiative**, which levels the playing field for religious groups to administer federal programs for the needy and vulnerable. With a proven track record for success, faith-based participation should be encouraged and we should amend laws that do not put religious institutions on the same footing as similarly situated secular entities when it is constitutionally permitted to do so.

Agudath Israel applauds the Supreme Court’s ruling in **Trinity Lutheran Church v. Comer** and will seek to enshrine it legislatively in a manner that will expand faith-based participation in appropriate federal programs. One area in which we have played a leading role has been **federal disaster relief** where funding goes to a range of community entities (including zoos!) but, because of FEMA policy, unjustly excludes “houses of worship” from the list of beneficiaries. We commend President Trump for changing this policy



so as to conform to the Trinity decision and we are currently engaged with congressional leadership to ensure, through passage of the **Federal Disaster Assistance Nonprofit Fairness Act**, the participation of houses of worship, religious schools and other faith-based entities in the federal disaster relief program.

- Supporting measures that support our **charitable institutions and giving**. As budget cuts will have a profound effect on many social programs and 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. We are pleased that in the recently-passed tax bill the “charitable deduction” was retained, but we must keep watch to ensure that other tax provisions – for example, the doubling of the standard deduction – will not have unintended negative consequences for charitable giving. For this reason, Agudath Israel has supported the **Universal Charitable Giving Act**, which allows charitable deductions for non-itemizers and thereby retains incentives for non-profit contributions.



RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

- 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 and enhanced provisions governing the federal religious compensatory time law. In line with recent Supreme Court decisions, we must also focus on the religious rights of corporate employers, who also deserve protection when federal regulation implicates their faith-based beliefs and practices.
- Protecting the **rights of religious entities** to maintain policies that are in accord with their religious beliefs and mission. Excessive government regulation can destroy the very character of religious entities, particularly schools. The autonomy of religious entities must be protected in regard to its employment and hiring policies, and they should not be forced to adhere to religiously-objectionable beliefs or practices at the expense of suffering the loss of tax exempt status, accreditation, federal contracting, funding, etc. Regarding religious schools, this autonomy must extend to curricular and assessment requirements, and such independence must be safeguarded even in the context of school choice programs.

Agudath Israel welcomed the U.S. Department of Justice Memorandum recently issued by Attorney General Jeff Sessions setting forth all the protections for religious liberty in federal law. It is a strong statement of support that staunchly defends the rights of individuals and organizations to receive accommodation for their religious beliefs and observances. It will be useful in guiding federal agencies to ensure that religious



Meeting of the the Council of Torah Sages, which serves as Agudath Israel of America's highest rabbinic body



liberty is upheld to the greatest extent possible and to prevent future discrimination against religious individuals or organizations.

- Opposing any **health care reform** proposal that would force a religious entity or individual to violate their religious beliefs. Some religious groups objected to Obamacare’s contraception mandate on these grounds and we applaud President Trump for taking steps to respect the religious rights of employers. Others have also pointed to the requirement that physicians participate in gender reassignment surgeries, where such operations run contrary to the doctors’ religious beliefs. 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.

Agudath Israel commends the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for recognizing the interplay between medical care, social mores, and matters of religious freedom, and for establishing within its Office of Civil Rights a division that will focus on **faith and conscience**. As technology advances and societal values are questioned there is a great need for such a focus.

- 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 96-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 Siyum Hashas celebrates the completion of a 7.5 year, worldwide, Talmud study program.

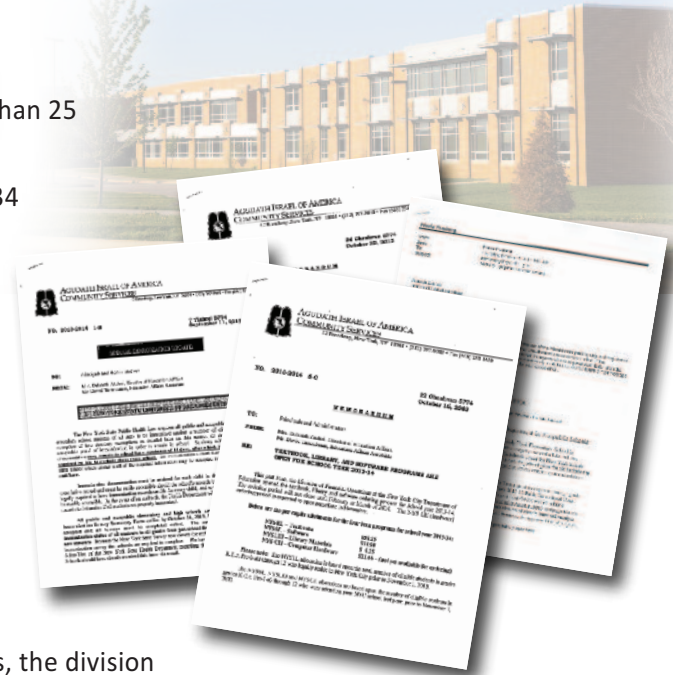
The **OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS** and its staff of attorneys works to safeguard religious and civil rights of observant Jews through a variety of channels including an Agudath Israel Washington Office.

- 8 regional offices
- Active government advocacy in more than 25 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 more than 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 4,000 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.
- Offered 1,000 elderly senior citizens free, kosher hot lunches and a wide range of social services.



AGUDATH ISRAEL OF AMERICA



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

- More than 90% of COPE graduates find jobs in their field
- Junior Accounting Program: 172 students enrolled in 2017; more than 2500 since inception
- CPA Track Program: 110 students enrolled in 2017; more than 700 since inception.
- Counseled 18,226 clients
- 5,195 job placements

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.

- 4,000 boys from 25 cities participating in 5 annual Siyum Mishnayos events
- 115 branches across the country with 10,000 participants

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

- 150 branches in 39 cities
- 100 senior advisors
- 200 branch leaders
- 200 branch leaders
- 1,000 leaders
- 1,000 Shabbos Group leaders
- 10,000 participants
- 500 paired big and little sisters in 7 cities

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 2,500 campers
- 5 campuses in the Midwest which service 9 camps and 1,840 campers





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