

# Agudath Israel – Darchei Torah Breakfast Hosts Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan

On Sunday morning, February 12, Agudath Israel leaders, board members of Yeshiva Darchei Torah, representatives of local yeshivas, and community activists from Far Rockaway and the Five Towns met with NY State Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan at a well-attended breakfast meeting hosted by Yeshiva Darchei Torah.

Agudath Israel-sponsored breakfast receptions with the Senate Majority Leader prior to the state legislature's crafting of the annual budget have become a traditional yearly event. They provide a venue for community leaders to discuss with the Senator various pieces of legislation that may reach the Senate floor in the coming weeks. As Senate majority leader, Senator Flanagan has significant influence over the budget and the flow of legislation from Albany.

The event began with a tour of the magnificent Darchei Torah campus led by Rabbi Yaakov Bender, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshiva Darchei Torah, and Rabbi Baruch Rothman, the yeshiva's director of institutional advancement and a valued Agudath Israel activist. The group visited some of the yeshiva classrooms where Senator Flanagan briefly addressed the students, and then moved on to the Beis Medrash where the Senator observed the *talmidim* preparing for *shiur* with their *chavrusas*.

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At a breakfast spread in one of the yeshiva conference rooms, Rabbi Bender offered warm words of greeting, thanking the Senator for being "a partner" to the Jewish community in so many ways, for being accessible and showing sensitivity to its

concerns.

The *Rosh Hayeshiva* then introduced yeshiva board member Mr. Alon Goldberger who spoke of the financial plight of many parents, including those earning a decent livelihood, who nevertheless cannot meet yeshiva tuition costs. As strapped as they are, said Mr. Goldberger, these parents continue to give their children a quality yeshiva education at great personal sacrifice. Government assistance, wherever legal and constitutional, is urgently needed.

Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, executive vice president of Agudath Israel, noted that as the former Chairman of the Senate Education Committee, Senator Flanagan's unique grasp of education issues, and his appreciation particularly for the needs of special education population, have been a great blessing to the religious community.

"It's reinvigorating and inspiring to gather together on a yearly basis, to have the opportunity to speak to the leadership of the Senate who has done so much for our community," Rabbi Zwiebel said.

Rabbi Shmuel Lefkowitz, Agudath Israel Vice President Community Affairs, stressed the Torah community's gratitude to Senator Flanagan for so ably representing its views on a wide variety of educational, religious and ethical issues in the legislature.

In addition to thanking the Majority Leader for his consistent support for education tax credits, Rabbi Lefkowitz also drew attention to the substantial gains obtained this past year in Albany thanks to Senator Flanagan's backing. These include sizeable new allocations for reimbursements to NY State yeshivas for mandated educational services, as well as for new and upgraded safety and surveillance equipment.

Rabbi Lefkowitz cited other senators in Albany who represent Orthodox communities in New York State and are serving their

constituencies with dedication. They include Senator Simcha Felder and Senator Martin Goldin of Brooklyn; Senator Elaine Phillips of Great Neck; Senator Andrew Lanza of Staten Island; Senator William Larkin of Kiryas Yoel; and Senator Terrence Murphy of Westchester.

Senator Flanagan in his remarks pointed out that as the result of his prior chairmanship of the Senate Education Committee, education will always be a top priority of his. The resounding support he still elicits from that committee speaks to the deep reservoir of trust he built during those years, he noted.

For a school to succeed in its mission, he remarked, three things are necessary: A safe building. Competent teachers. Money. The senator vowed to continue his fight for the education priorities so important and necessary to the religious community, as well as other issues of paramount concern to its citizens.

Closing remarks were offered by Shlomo Werdiger, Agudath Israel's chairman of the board, who praised Agudath Israel staff and community volunteers for all the work they have done to promote and facilitate the flow of many millions of dollars in state funding for New York's yeshiva community. "Maximizing government support for our yeshivos and day schools has always been a major priority for Agudath Israel," he said, "and with the help of public officials like Senator Flanagan, we hope to continue to deliver tangible results."

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