

Sharp Increase in Security Funding and Effort to Expand Eligible Areas

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WASHINGTON -- The omnibus spending package that emerged from House and Senate negotiations today contains at least one provision that the Jewish community will surely welcome. After determined lobbying by a coalition of Jewish groups, including Agudath Israel of America, the FY 2016 allocation for the Non-Profit Security Grant Program (NSGP) has been boosted to \$20M, a \$7 million increase over FY 2015, and the highest level since FY 2007.

Such an increase in the NSGP has been, over the years, a top priority of the coalition, which is led by the Jewish Federations of North America, to help safeguard the nation's most vulnerable sites. Specifically, the federal program provides funding to acquire cameras, concrete barriers, reinforced doors and other such security enhancements for non-profit institutions, in selected cities, at high risk of terrorist attack. Shuls, yeshivos and other Jewish community institutions have been among the major beneficiaries of the program over the years.

"Amid the recent violence, Congress understands that it must do all in its power to protect its citizens and institutions against any and all terrorist threats." Said Rabbi Abba Cohen, Agudath Israel's Vice President for Federal Affairs and Washington Director. "The Jewish community has a particular

stake in this issue as it is no secret that we are a vulnerable and high risk target.”

It is also noteworthy that the bill also requires the Federal Emergency Management Agency to consider expanding eligibility for the program to jurisdictions outside of currently specified urban areas. Every year, Agudath Israel receives inquiries from synagogues and schools that are situated outside these areas that, despite the risks they face, are denied assistance. While Agudath Israel and the other groups made some progress over the years on expanding the range of eligible urban areas, it still fell short of the need.

When NSGP was first implemented in 2005, its allocation stood at \$25 M but dropped over the years to a low of \$13 M. A spike in incidents, combined with determined advocacy has caused the funding to creep back up over the years.

Rabbi Cohen noted with thanks the key roles played by Senators John Hoeven (R-ND), Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), and Roy Blunt (R-MO), as well as Representatives Michael McCaul (R-TX), Peter King (R-NY), and Bill Pascrell (D-NJ).

“Given the increasing terrorist threat, funding levels must increase if NSGP is to adequately secure American institutions,” observed Rabbi Cohen. “This significant increase will help provide more security to more institutions in more communities – enhanced protection that our nation urgently needs.”