

# Agudah's Albany Day 2020 Highlights Security, Reimbursements and Educational Integrity

March 5, 2020



by Sandy Eller

Not all bridge builders have advanced degrees in engineering.

Armed with determination and a passion for public service, over three dozen men and women headed north to Albany on March 3rd, arriving at the state capital with a legislative agenda addressing critical areas and detailing Agudath Israel of America's many accomplishments over its nearly 100 year-long history. Delegates spent a full day in meetings with lawmakers, building metaphorical bridges in an effort to effect change at the state level on high priority issues that directly impact New York's Jewish community in a significant way.

This year's Albany Day followed two targeted trips to the state capital, with representatives of the Hudson Valley's Jewish communities speaking with lawmakers about local concerns on February 4th and a separate contingent representing Long Islanders heading to Albany on February 11th. Taking those initiatives one step further, the larger Agudah delegation that traveled to Albany this week met with legislators to discuss doubling security funding to nonpublic schools amid escalating anti-Semitism and restoring the \$7

million reimbursement to nonpublic schools to fulfill a state mandate to collect and transmit detailed student immunization data. Also on the agenda was an effort to ensure educational integrity for yeshivas in the wake of draconian efforts by state officials to regulate private school curricula in light of over 140,000 comments submitted last summer, the vast majority of which opposed the proposed regulations.

Participants began their day by splitting into small groups to address their concerns, spending more than two hours in back to back meetings with 25 members of the Senate and the Assembly including Senate Majority Leader Senator Andrea Stewart Cousins and Deputy Majority Leader Michael Gianaris. Other meetings were held with Senators Brian Kavanaugh, Leroy Comrie, Toby Ann Stavisky, Roxanne Persaud, Simcha Felder, Andrew Gounardes, Todd Kaminsky, Joseph Addabo and John Liu, as well as with Assemblymembers Robert Carroll, Rodneyse Bichotte, Marcos Crespo, Maritza Davilla, Felix Ortiz, Peter Abatae, Clyde Vanel, Dan Quart, Andrew Hevesi, William Colton, David Weprin, Steve Cymbrowitz, Jeffrey Dinowitz, and Michael Miller.

At the official luncheon session numerous other legislators joined the Agudah delegation, with those voicing their support including Assemblywoman Helene Weinstein, Assemblyman Joe Lentol, Assembly members Daniel Rosenthal and Stacey Pheffer-Amatto, who have been leading the charge to secure funding to protect nonpublic schools, and Assemblyman Simcha Eichenstein, who has championed the immunization reimbursement effort. Others joining the luncheon included Senators Phil Boyle, Brian Benjamin, Anna Kaplan, Andrew Lanza, and Jen Metzger along with Assemblymembers Michael Benedetto, David Buchwald, Vivian Cook, Michael Cusick, Dick Gottfried, Charles Lavine, Amy Paulin, Nick Perry, and Nader Sayegh.

An afternoon meeting with high ranking members of Governor Cuomo's staff including Deputy Secretary for Legislative Affairs and Policy Dana Carotenuto, Deputy Secretary for Education Dan Fuller, Special Counsel to the Governor Beth Garvey and Deputy Secretary for Public Safety Jeremy Shockett was also extremely productive. That session was organized and moderated by Michael Snow, Governor Cuomo's Director of Jewish Affairs.

,The discussion included an unscheduled conversation on the impact of the coronavirus on schools and shuls in response to breaking news of a confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis in a Westchester resident that had three yeshivas closing for the day and the Department of Health directing the Young Israel of New Rochelle to close its doors for the foreseeable future.

Agudah director of New York government relations Rabbi Yeruchim Silber said that the capital was unusually busy, with advocates for multiple causes flocking to Albany to meet with lawmakers during the height of the legislative season. Having a large group representing the Agudah's constituency is crucial, observed Rabbi Silber.

"We spend significant amounts of time in Albany lobbying legislators but having individuals coming to meet with elected officials gives them a better appreciation of the fact that we represent a broad community," said Rabbi Silber. "Seeing people taking the day off from work to travel to Albany makes it clear that the issues we raise are extremely important to our members and casts the spotlight on the people who are behind us."

Agudah executive vice president Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel noted that the Agudah delegation was grateful for the opportunity to pave the way for new relationships with key officials while also renewing friendships with those they have worked with in the past. The fact that this year's group was kept to a limited size also made Albany Day a more effective lobbying tool, giving participants a rare, hands on opportunity to effectively communicate their concerns with elected officials, observed Rabbi Zwiebel.

"These trips up to Albany are extremely valuable and if you are not seen and on the scene, then it becomes a lot harder to do the work we have to do," said Rabbi Zwiebel. "We are grateful to those who spent the day in Albany and were actively engaged in lobbying, enhancing Agudas Yisroel's team so that we can more effectively promote the interests of the community throughout the year."



Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart Cousins meeting with, clockwise, Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, Mr. Shlomo Werdiger, Chairman, Agudah's Board of Trustees, Mr. Chaskel Bennett, Member, Agudah's Board of Trustees, Mr. Avrohom Schlisselfeld, Marks and Paneth, Albany Day Sponsors, Rabbi Yeruchim Silber, Amanda Godkin, Senior Counsel to the Majority Leader



Assemblyman Joe Lentol, Mr. Shimmy Pelman, Mr. Avrohom Weinstock, Mr. Pesach Osina, Mr. Yossie Menczer

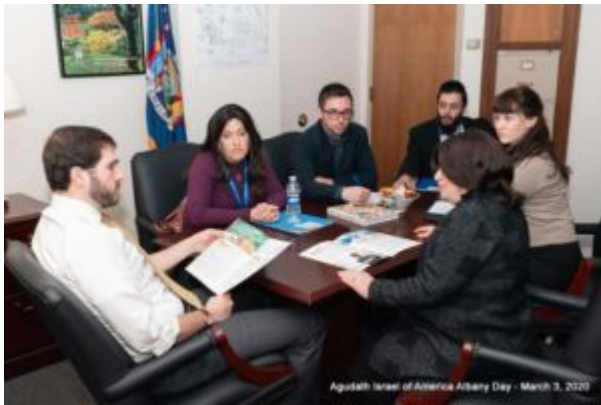


Mr. Leon Goldenberg, Member, Agudah's Board of Trustees, Assemblyman Nader Sayegh, Mr. Shlomo Werdiger, Chairman, Agudah's Board of Trustees



Meeting with Senate Deputy Majority Leader Michael Gianaris- clockwise from left - Rabbi Hershel Horowitz, Mr. Shlomo Werdiger, Chairman, Agudah's Board of Trustees,

Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel,  
Senator Gianaris, Mr. Chaskel  
Bennett, Member, Agudah's  
Board of Trustees, Rabbi  
Yeruchim Silber, and Mr.  
Avrohom Schlisselfeld, Marks and  
Paneth, Albany Day Sponsors.



Meeting with Senator Andrew  
Gounardes and staff, Mrs.  
Shoshana Bernstein, Member of  
the Senator's staff, Rabbi Yaniv  
Meirov, Mrs. Heather Idels, Mrs.  
Deborah Zachai



Assemblyman Michael Benedetto,  
Chair Education Committee,  
Rabbi Chananya Berman, Mr.  
Avrohom Weinstock



Rabbi Yaniv Meirov, Mr. Chaskel  
Bennett, Assemblyman David  
Weprin, Rabbi Yeruchim Silber,  
Mr. Shlomo Werdiger, Chairman,



Rabbi Avrohom Jaffe,  
Assemblyman Steve Cymbrowitz,  
Mr. Avrohom Weinstock, Rabbi  
Yeruchim Silber

Agudah's Board of Trustees,  
Assemblyman Daniel Rosenthal,  
Assemblyman Simcha  
Eichenstein, Mr. Leon  
Goldenberg, Rabbi Chaim Dovid  
Zwiebel, Mr. Josh Mehlman,  
Rabbi Avrohom Nissan Perl,  
Rabbi Labish Becker, Mr. Ami  
Bazov, Rabbi Mordechai Biser



Assemblyman Mike Cusick



Senator Brian Benjamin



Assemblywoman Helene  
Weinstein, Chair, Ways and  
Means Committee, addressing



Assemblyman Joe Lentol  
addressing the luncheon

the luncheon



Mr. Shimmy Pelman,  
Assemblyman David Weprin,  
Assemblywoman Stacey Pheffer-  
Amato, Mr. Pesach Osina, Rabbi  
Yaniv Meirov



Rabbi Yeruchim Silber,  
Assemblyman Dick Gottfried



