



News

from
Assemblyman
**DOV
HIKIND**

SUMMER 2011

WHO SAID YOU CAN'T FIGHT CITY HALL (AND WIN)? Fort Hamilton Parkway pedestrian islands soon to be removed

After a year-long battle with the NYC Department of Transportation, Assemblyman Hikind has declared victory on behalf of the community with the announcement that the pedestrian islands along Fort Hamilton Parkway from 45th to 48th Streets will be removed. A vociferous critic of the islands, the Assemblyman claimed that they impeded the work of ambulance crews rushing to Maimonides Medical Center, firefighters, sanitation personnel, and negatively impacted business owners and local residents by eliminating over a dozen parking spaces.

"This is a real coup for the people of this community," the Assemblyman remarked. "This is a prime example of what can be achieved against all odds."

As part of his campaign to remove the islands, Assemblyman Hikind had collected and presented to NYC Department of Transportation officials over 1,000 petition signatures from local residents. He also threatened to file a lawsuit against the Department of Transportation for creating a hazardous situation.



Outraged seniors join Assemblyman Hikind in denouncing the pedestrian islands.

The Department of Transportation had defended the installation of the islands claiming they were necessary to improve senior safety after repeated accidents and fatalities in the area. But the Assemblyman disputed the DOT's reasoning. "Seniors are the ones who are most likely to be stuck in the back of an ambulance while emergency personnel struggle to maneuver around these ridiculous islands," he noted. "If the DOT was so concerned about senior safety, they would remove these islands and allow emergency vehicles to pass unimpeded."

"DOT did not consult with the people who live and work in this community before installing these islands,"



Jubilant residents and community activists join Assemblyman Hikind as he announced the pending removal of the pedestrian islands.

the Assemblyman charged. "They did not take into consideration that Maimonides Medical Center is one of the busiest hospitals in the city, with dozens of ambulance companies shuttling patients to the emergency room where every second counts."

The Assemblyman commended DOT Commissioner Jannette Sadik-Khan and Brooklyn Borough Commissioner Joseph Palmieri for doing the right thing. "It takes real courage for someone to reconsider their position especially in government," he noted. "Both commissioners have my personal gratitude and that of the entire community for their willingness to correct a dangerous situation."



Assemblyman Hikind reviews the petitions with Leibish Daskal.

CLOTHING THE NEEDY



Assemblyman Hikind helped to distribute 100 winter coats provided by Health Plus to children in need. The event was organized by Jonathan Zalisky (c.), Community Relations Coordinator for Health Plus.

SOME BRIGHT SPOTS IN A DISMAL YEAR

The New York State budget, which was passed on time for the first time in five years, contained a number of painful cuts that were necessary in order to deal with a \$10 billion deficit. While many of these were unavoidable, Assemblyman Hikind is pleased to report that in one of the most difficult budget years in history a number of proposed cuts in programs and services were saved or restored.

These include:

- Mandated services to private and parochial schools, which will no longer have to provide an accounting of the services rendered.
- 105 senior centers throughout the city were faced with closure, affecting 10,000 seniors. Full funding was restored, allowing the centers to remain open.
- The EPIC program will continue to provide assistance to help seniors pay for their Medicare Part D premiums and for drugs covered by their Medicare Part D plan.
- The Summer Youth Employment Program (NYSEP), which had been facing complete elimination, has been restored to 2010 levels.
- TAP (Tuition Assistance Program) funding will be available to eligible rabbinical college students.
- Rent regulations will remain in effect until 2015, ensuring that 100,000 apartments in New York City will remain affordable to middle class New Yorkers.



THE CHECK IS NOT IN THE MAIL

Assemblyman Hikind has joined forces with the FBI to investigate reports of postal fraud involving checks intended for donations and membership dues that have been stolen from synagogue mailboxes. Over 30 synagogues and non-profits from Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, Long Island, Rockland County, Teaneck, Deal, and even Southfield, Michigan, have reported check thefts ranging in amounts from \$20 to as much as \$18,000. In one case, a donation for \$250 was altered and cashed for \$1250.

To date, eleven banks and check cashing businesses have been identified in the investigation, in locations as diverse as Missouri, Florida, Ohio, Israel, as well as New York.

“I have no doubt that there are additional synagogues and institutions which have also been victimized and simply do not realize it. The amounts stolen could easily total millions of dollars,” the Assemblyman said.

The Assemblyman has encouraged the community to review returned checks to ensure that they were endorsed by the intended payee. Synagogues are advised to take precautions, including securing their mailboxes or installing mail slots, in order to prevent future thefts.

In the meantime, the FBI continues to work on this case, and hopefully will have some major developments to report in the coming months.

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Assemblyman Hikind displays copies of some of the stolen checks with representatives of some of the synagogues that were victimized.

TUITION ASSISTANCE AT LONG LAST

During one of the most difficult fiscal sessions ever in Albany, landmark legislation was passed and included in the state budget. Assemblyman Hikind has announced the historic passage of the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) provision which will provide state funds to income eligible rabbinical college students to offset the cost of their tuition. These students had previously been ineligible for TAP funds because their schools were not under the State Education Department's direct supervision. When fully implemented, the benefits offered by this law will total \$18 to \$20 million.

“With the passage of this legislation a grave injustice will be corrected. It sends a message that the State of New York finds a rabbinical education to be equivalent to a secular college education.”

-Assemblyman Hikind

“Ultimately, the passing of this legislation is a matter of equity,” the Assemblyman said. “New York State denied these rabbinical college students tuition assistance even though the federal government saw fit to provide aid to these same students in the form of Pell grants. With the passage of this legislation a grave injustice will be corrected. It sends a message that the State of New York finds a rabbinical education to be equivalent to a secular college education.”

“It took ten years of work to achieve this legislation,

and we had many disappointments leading up to this moment,” the Assemblyman remarked. “There is no question that this bill could never have become a reality without the stalwart support of Senate Majority Leader Skelos, as well as the strong commitment and leadership of Speaker Silver and the Governor.”

With the TAP passage accomplished, Assemblyman Hikind, a long-time proponent of school choice, will be sponsoring the Educational Investment Incentives Act. This bill would authorize a personal tax credit of up to \$6,000 and a corporate tax credit of up to \$15,000 for contributions to public education entities or to charitable organizations which offer tuition assistance.



Community activists in Albany last year lobbying Speaker Sheldon Silver on behalf of TAP: (L-R) Shiya Ostreicher, Simon Ostreicher, Assemblyman Hikind, Speaker Silver, Gedaliah Weinberger, Chairman of the Board of Agudath Israel, Shimon Lefkowitz of Agudath Israel, Jacob Sofer.

JOB FAIR FARES WELL

The current economic decline, rising inflation and high unemployment rates have taken their toll on our community, and more and more people are finding themselves out of work. In an effort to make a small dent in the situation, Assemblyman Hikind recently joined with the Orthodox Union to sponsor a job fair.

Directed by Michael Rosner of the OU, the fair attracted over 500 applicants and 50 hiring firms representing a variety of industries, including communal agencies, information, banking/finance, health care, and employment search firms. Applicants, who were required to pre-register and to bring along their resumes, had an opportunity to meet and interview with actual employers offering

real jobs. At last count, 77 jobs were acquired.

“The highest form of charity is to help someone get back on his feet,” Assemblyman Hikind remarked. “When we planned this event I said that if we can help only one person obtain a job it will have been well worth the effort. The fact that so many applicants were successful is gratifying beyond belief. Helping individuals find employment creates a chain reaction, as it helps the yeshivas, local businesses, etc.”

The Assemblyman is currently planning another job fair in Boro Park for some time in August. For further information, please call his office at 718-853-9616.



Assemblyman Hikind with representatives from one of the firms that participated in the job fair.



The scene at the job fair was bustling and purposeful.

COMMUNITY HEROES



At the Boro Park Shomrim melave malke, with coordinators Abe Kaztow, Simcha Bernath and Yanky Daskal, Assemblyman Hikind expressed his appreciation and admiration for the organization's selfless dedication to the safety of the community. The Assemblyman was one of the original supporters of the group back when they started out and were known as the 'Bakery Boys.'

TRAGEDY HITS HOME

Our community is still trying to recover from the horror of the kidnapping and murder of Leiby Kletzky, Yehuda ben Nachman, a"h. It is a tragedy that has touched all of America. We have received cards, letters and e-mails from throughout the country conveying sympathy, shock and sadness. Individuals of diverse religions have written to say that they have Leiby in their prayers, many of them offering to help in any way.

We are heartened by this outpouring of support and concern at this devastating time. Our next newsletter will be dedicated to the memory of Leiby.



SPECIAL ROOMS FOR SPECIAL CHILDREN

Assemblyman Hikind joined Mr. Joshua Weinstein, founder and president of Shema Kolainu-Hear Our Voices, at the dedication and ribbon cutting ceremony of two special additions to the Brooklyn school and center for children with autism. Both the "Snoezelen" Sensory Room and the Daily Living Skills Center were sponsored by Assemblyman Hikind.

Designed specifically for children with autism, the Snoezelen Room helps to improve auditory, visual-spatial and motor skills in a safe surrounding. This warm space is rich in textures, colors, lights, scents and sounds.

The Daily Living Skills Center helps students master basic living skills and everyday activities by reproducing these events in a controlled setting, including a mini supermarket, laundry center, kitchen, bedroom and gym.

"I am delighted to have the privilege of helping this vital school in any way, and I am honored to be a part of today's event," the Assemblyman remarked.



Assemblyman Hikind and Shema Kolainu founder Joshua Weinstein at the ribbon-cutting of the Snoezelen Room.

DAY OF HEALTH



Assemblyman Hikind had his blood pressure checked at the annual Nachas Health Fair. Nachas Health and Family Network provides health screenings, entitlement counseling and senior services, and Holocaust reparations assistance.

ASSEMBLYMAN DOV HIKIND

DISTRICT OFFICE: 1310 48th Street • Brooklyn, New York 11219 • 718-853-9616 • Fax: 718-436-5734

ALBANY OFFICE: ROOM 551 LOB • Albany, New York 12248 • 518-455-5721 • Fax: 518-455-5948

hikindd@assembly.state.ny.us