



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Simcha Felder

## Senate Unanimously Passes Felder's & Lentol's Legislative Resolution in Memory of Holocaust Rescuer Rabbi Michael Ber Weissmandl

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Senator Simcha Felder (D-Brooklyn) and Assemblyman Joseph Lentol (D-Brooklyn) introduced a Legislative Resolution in Albany yesterday -- which was passed unanimously -- honoring the memory of Rabbi Michael Ber Weissmandl, who is credited with saving countless European Jews, especially Jewish prisoners in Auschwitz, during the Holocaust. The ceremony took place in the Senate Chamber in Albany and was attended by members of

Rabbi Weissmandl's family and the Jewish community.

According to some accounts, Rabbi Weissmandl is credited with rescuing approximately two-thirds of the Holocaust survivors living in Brooklyn today. Senator Felder spoke about Rabbi Weissmandl's valiant efforts saying,

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meaning whoever saves a single life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world. In the course of his lifetime, Rabbi Michoel Ber Weissmandl saved many worlds."

The **Resolution** Senator Felder introduced reads in part, "WHEREAS, Rabbi Michoel Ber Weissmandl was instrumental in providing the United States with situational awareness of the Jews in Europe, specifically regarding Auschwitz, the largest and most notorious of the Nazi concentration camp networks, which ultimately led to a halt to the deportations of the remaining Hungarian Jewry; and

WHEREAS, Rabbi Michoel Ber Weissmandl's daring efforts to save the Jews of Slovakia from extermination at the hands of the Nazis during the Holocaust included helping to establish the "Working Group," an under-ground organization which raised funds to negotiate ransom with German and Slovakian officials in order to delay mass deportations and, via the famous Europa Plan, to secure the release of Jews; and

WHEREAS, Rabbi Michoel Ber Weissmandl was also able to smuggle letters and telegrams to leaders with abilities he hoped would help save the Jews of Europe, including President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill and alerting them to the progressive Nazi destruction of European Jewry; in addition, he provided actionable intel in terms of where the railroads and crematoriums should be bombed; and

WHEREAS, The courage, wisdom and tenacity of this determined man laid the groundwork for several rescue missions, including the Mantello Mission, and the Wallenberg Mission, which freed tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to honor the memory of Rabbi Michoel Ber Weissmandl in the United States to save the European Jewish populace during World War II.”

In the book *Witness to History*, author Ruth Lichtenstein calls Rabbi Weissmandl, “a visionary committed to Jewish rescue,” who “was little appreciated by his contemporaries.” Mrs. Lichtenstein goes on to detail the life and activities of Rabbi Weissmandl and how he became involved in these rescue efforts:

“Before the outbreak of World War II, Weissmandl worked on behalf of Jews persecuted and expelled from Austria’s Burgenland district. He enlisted the aid of the Bishop of Canterbury, whose friendship he had earned in his scholarly travels to England before the war. These activities foreshadowed Weissmandl’s intense exertions with the Working Group and the Europa Plan. During the war, he dedicated all of his time to rescue efforts, yet he retained his traditional dress and a full beard, despite the harassment and serious risk to his life he incurred.

After the failed Slovak uprising in August 1944, the Germans liquidated the Slovak Jewish community. Rabbi Weissmandl and his family were arrested and sent to the Sereď labor camp, where he continued his relief efforts. . . En route to Auschwitz, Rabbi Weissmandl used a saw to file the lock on the cattle car door and jumped from the train, though he was unable to save his wife and five children, who were murdered in Auschwitz. Rabbi Weissmandl found refuge in a bunker near Bratislava with seventeen Jews, among them Rabbi Menachem Mendel Halberstam, the Stropkover *Rebbe*. In the winter of 1945, all those in the

bunker, including Rabbi Weissmandl, escaped to Switzerland with the help of Dr. Rudolf (Israel) Kasztner.

Rabbi Weissmandl arrived in Switzerland a shattered man. He had lost his wife and children in Auschwitz; his father-in-law, Rabbi Ungar, had passed away on February 21, 1945, while hiding in the forest with his son; and his closest colleagues were dead. He had spent more than five years pleading for money to rescue Jews to no avail, and he was haunted by the memory of those he could not save. After the war, Rabbi Weissmandl rebuilt the Nitra Yeshivah, which he eventually reestablished in Mount Kisco, New York.”

In further tribute to Rabbi Weissmandl, Assemblyman Joseph R. Lentol also introduced an identical Legislative Resolution in the Assembly, and posthumously awarded the Liberty Medal to Rabbi Weissmandl. “Rabbi Weissmandl was a defender of freedom and of liberty,” Assemblyman Lentol said. “He is a hero for all generations of Jews – but also for everyone who needs a brave man to look to when help is needed for those persecuted and threatened with annihilation in today’s world.”

“Even 55 years after his death, the memory of his heroic acts still burns brightly for so many people in the Jewish community,” added Senator Felder. “It is an honor for us to pay tribute to Rabbi Weissmandl and to publicize his brave and inspirational actions. His selfless behavior is a lesson for the ages.”

To view the entire text of the Resolution, click here:

<http://open.nysenate.gov/legislation/bill/J2987-2013>

**Photo Captions:**