



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Tony Avella

Avella Says Comrie Misled Senate on Questionable Tax Break

TONY AVELLA May 26, 2017

Queens, NY – Earlier this week, State Senator Leroy Comrie passed legislation providing a retroactive property tax break to a religious institution, Congregation Beth-El Shepardic Center, in Senator Avella's District. The problem with this legislation, as Senator Avella pointed out on the floor of the Senate, is that the house of worship did not own the property during the period in which they are asking for the break.

Rather, this retroactive break would be applied to help the previous owner of the property who racked up more than \$200,000 in real property taxes during the 10 years prior to selling it to Congregation Beth-El Shepardic for \$10.

How could something that has all the makings of a fraudulent plan to game the system and deny the State the right to collect back taxes pass the Senate? Simple, Senator Avella says, Senator Comrie presented exaggerated and incorrect statements about why the tax break was needed for the Congregation.

Senator Comrie referred to the property as "abandoned and difficult to move for over a dozen years." The congregation has been using it for the past 12 years with no issue so that was misleading and false. Senator Comrie also discussed the Congregation's "need and ability to purchase the property." That, again, is untrue. The property is, and has been, owned by Congregation Beth-El Shepardic since 2015. Finally, Senator Comrie claimed on the floor that

the Congregation was working to clear up the past tax issues “so that they could get a mortgage to own the property.” However, they purchased this property for \$10 already.

“Perhaps my colleague in government did not know all the facts of the Congregation Beth-El Shepardic Center case or maybe he was misled by them. Either way, he needed to have done his research to ensure that this property was actually eligible for this exemption. His sponsorship of this bill has allowed it to get passed the Senate and one step closer to becoming real. If this tax-exempt status is granted and I am right about the Congregation’s intentions, this legislature would be doing a great disservice to taxpayers across the state, especially all of the houses of worship that play by the rules,” **said Senator Avella.**

“I have no problem giving a house of worship the tax-exempt status they are entitled to and deserving of. However, when a religious institution is applying for a property tax exemption status for a year in which they did not own the property I begin to get suspicious. Being able to get this tax-exempt status for that year does not help the Center and will only help the previous owner of the land which strikes me as unsavory,” **added Senator Avella.**