

## 2019-K281

Assembly Resolution No. 281

BY: M. of A. Lavine

COMMENDING Harry Rapaport, of Melville, New York,  
for rescuing 38 hidden Torah scrolls from  
Czestochowa, Poland, in 1988 and 1989

WHEREAS, From time to time this Legislative Body takes note of  
certain extraordinary individuals it wishes to recognize for their  
valued contributions to the success and progress of society and publicly  
acknowledge their endeavors which have enhanced the basic humanity among  
us all; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its  
long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to  
commend Harry Rapaport for rescuing 38 hidden Torah scrolls from  
Czestochowa, Poland, in 1988-1989; and

WHEREAS, On Wednesday, May 1, 2019, Harry Rapaport will serve as  
guest speaker at an event hosted by the New York Chapter of the National  
Association of Jewish Legislators; and

WHEREAS, Harry Rapaport's mother, the former Rose Witelson grew up  
in Lodz, Poland, a city with 223,000 Jews before World War II, 34% of  
the city's population; at the age of 18, she and her parents and brother  
lived in the Lodz Ghetto, the second-largest ghetto in all of  
German-occupied Europe, from September of 1939 until August of 1944; and

WHEREAS, The Jewish population in the ghetto had been reduced to approximately 86,000 and when Soviet soldiers finally liberated the ghetto, only 1,200 Jews remained; and

WHEREAS, As the front approached, Rose Witelson was deported to the Auschwitz Concentration Camp, followed shortly by her family who did not survive; later, she married Moishe Rapaport, and together, they had a son, Harry, while they were living in the Bad Reichenhall displaced-persons camp in Germany; and

WHEREAS, Moishe Rapaport had been forced into the death camp of Treblinka, from which he escaped; and

WHEREAS, From an early age, Harry Rapaport has been acutely aware of the plight of the millions who suffered through the Holocaust; and

WHEREAS, Realizing he was part of the last generation that still has any connections to actual survivors of the Holocaust, Harry Rapaport traveled to Poland in 1988, and brought seven Torah scrolls back to the United States, which he subsequently donated to schools, museums and synagogues around the United States; and

WHEREAS, After learning of some hidden Torah scrolls from one of two Jews who still lived in Czestochowa, he returned to Poland and found 31 Torah scrolls in an attic of a building that housed a knitting mill and a bicycle shop; knowing that saving a Torah was like saving a soul, he convinced the government to allow him to take the Torah scrolls to the

United States to be examined and donated to those who truly understood the significance of this historic find; and

WHEREAS, Upon his return to New York, Harry Rapaport donated two

Torahs, including one more than 500 years old, to his synagogue, Temple Beth Torah in Westbury, New York; another is at the Jewish American War Veterans Museum in Washington, D.C., and another at the Mid-Island YM&W Hebrew Association in Plainview, New York; and

WHEREAS, With him throughout have been his wife, Judy, and their two children, who have shown him love and support and are rightly proud of his many achievements; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is proud to recognize Harry Rapaport for the determination and tenacity he displayed while recovering the holy scrolls; with his tremendous pride for his heritage, he has truly benefited this great Empire State in immeasurable ways; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commend Harry Rapaport, of Melville, New York, for rescuing 38 hidden Torah scrolls from Czestochowa, Poland, in 1988 and 1989; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Harry Rapaport.