

Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America

2025 Central Council Elections

Meet the Candidates

Dear Members,

Every four years, as prescribed in our Constitution and Bylaws, the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America conducts elections to select members to serve on our Central Council (board of directors). In order to help you learn more about the candidates, the Nominating and Electoral Committee has compiled the following brief biographies, submitted by the candidates themselves, for your consideration. Please note that all submissions were limited to a maximum of 200 words each. We are proud of our members' diverse expertise, dedication, and skills, which we trust they will bring to benefit our organization. We hope you find this information helpful to make an informed decision when voting.

Sincerely,

The Nominating and Electoral Committee

Larissa Cohen, Jeffrey Ezratty, Aaron Levy, Andrew Marcus, David Schribman

Francine Alfandary

I am delighted to submit my candidacy for the Sephardic Brotherhood Board. My parents, Renee Passy and Robert Alfandary, had grown up in Paris and Brussels. Their parents (my grandparents) were Sephardic Jews from Constantinople. My parents met and married in Paris in the 1950s. They made their life in California. They eventually brought my four grandparents to live nearby.

I attended law school at Harvard and settled in New York after graduation. I met my husband, Laurent Nahon, at synagogue. Laurent is also a French-speaking Sephardic Jew. His parents grew up in Oran, Algeria. Together, we raised our amazing twin sons, Louis and Raphael. The boys are rising juniors at the University of Chicago. They are proud of their Sephardic heritage. We are French, Spanish and US citizens.

I am a partner at Pearl Cohen Zedek Latzer Baratz LLP, a law firm with offices in Israel, the US and the UK. I am also on the faculty of Fordham Law School. I am active in the NYC running community, having averaged one marathon a year for over 30 years. I would be proud to further the work of the Sephardic Brotherhood.

Sarah Aroeste

Inspired by her family's roots in N. Macedonia and Greece, Sarah Aroeste is determined to bring Sephardic culture to new generations. Since 2001, Aroeste has toured the globe presenting traditional and original Ladino songs with her unique blend of Balkan sounds, pop, and jazz. She has recorded eight albums, including the all-original Ladino children's album, "Ora de Despertar," the boundary pushing "Gracia," a feminist musical homage to Sephardic heroine Doña Gracia Nasi, and the award-winning "Monastir," an international musical tribute to a once thriving Balkan Jewish community. In 2014 she won the Sephardic prize at the International Jewish Music Festival in Amsterdam, and in 2015 she represented the USA in the International Sephardic Music Festival in Cordoba, Spain. Sarah is currently co-directing with chef Susan Barocas her newest initiative, Savor: A Sephardic Music & Food Experience, which unites Sephardic song and cuisine in multi-sensory platforms. In addition to composing songs, Sarah has published numerous articles and essays about Sephardic cultural preservation and writes Sephardic themed books for children, including "Mazal Bueno" (Kar-Ben 2023) and most recently, "Uno, Dos, Tres: A Sephardic Counting Book" (PJ Publishing 2025). For more: saraharoeste.com

Renee Barocas

My name is Renee Barocas, and I've been a proud member of the Sephardic Brotherhood since birth. My father was from Corlu, Turkey, and my mother from Salonika, Greece. Though my family was not active in leadership, our connection to our Sephardic community has always been a core part of our lives.

Several years ago, my cousin Irving Barocas zt"l asked me a question: "Do you believe in the importance of serving one's community?" I said yes, and soon after, I joined the Brotherhood's Central Council. That decision has been one of the most rewarding of my life. Serving the Sephardic Brotherhood has given me a deep sense of purpose, and I'm proud that four generations of my family are now part of this community - including my grandchildren.

I have a bachelor's degree in business administration and a master's degree in special education. I retired from an interesting career as a bilingual education evaluator, where I tested and otherwise evaluated educational progress and dominant language of high school students with academic problems and recommended programs and services to help them. In the process I worked with their teachers and families. It was a most gratifying career.

Asi Behar

I currently live in San Francisco, after growing up in Beverly Hills and Los Angeles. As the son of an engineer trained by the Israeli Air Force, I've always grown up around tech and have worked and built teams in each of the three primary disciplines in technology - engineering, product, and design - with my current focus being primarily design and product.

Both sides of my family are originally from Turkey (Corlu and Istanbul) - with most of them now in Israel. While I have a deep connection with Israel, I'm most excited about how the Sephardic Brotherhood can instill a closer tie with my Sephardic roots, something I am excited to pass on to my daughter, now just 14 weeks old.

Sedat Behar

Sedat Behar has proudly served for the last two years as President of the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America. He previously served for two years as an officer on the Executive Committee and has also served the last eight years as a member of the Central Council. Born and raised in the Jewish Community of Istanbul, Sedat was trained in the Ulus Jewish Community school as a Hazzan. Sedat is deeply passionate about our Sephardic traditions; proudly learning to speak Ladino from his grandmother growing up in Istanbul, and wants to ensure our language and culture continue to thrive for generations to come. He previously chaired the Strategic Planning Committee, working with a talented group of volunteers to create the Brotherhood's first ever Strategic Plan. Along with many other volunteers and staff, Sedat has worked hard to advance the Brotherhood, bringing it into the 21st century by integrating technology, social media engagement, and new community programs to get the next generation involved. Professionally, Sedat is a senior manager at Google in NYC, and received his bachelors and masters degrees in computer science and economics from Brandeis University. He lives in Tenafly, NJ with his wife Bashak and two children.

Alex Beja

Alex's dedication to the Sephardic Brotherhood is rooted in a proud family tradition spanning five generations, beginning with his great-grandfather Joseph Beja, a founding member in 1916. Since joining the Central Council in 2018, Alex has been an active presence at Brotherhood events and a passionate advocate for community involvement.

As a member of the events and programming committee, Alex was involved in the planning and on-site execution of the successful 2021 Inaugural National Sephardic Community Gala presented at the Museum of Jewish Heritage. His contributions helped ensure the event's success and its role in fostering continued community engagement.

Professionally, Alex is a skilled set and production designer with a passion for bringing creative visions to life. In his full-time role as Gallery Manager and Art Dealer, he works alongside his father bringing a unique blend of creativity and meticulous planning to his industry. If re-elected to the board, Alex's goal is to be a strong voice for the Brotherhood's continued evolution, using his skills to enhance social engagement through dynamic events and community gatherings. He aims to ensure the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America remains a vibrant and welcoming place for all its members.

Jeff Beja

Jeff Beja has been active in leadership of the Sephardic Brotherhood since 2016, when he served on the 100th Anniversary Gala Committee. He joined the Central Council that same year and has served on the Executive Committee since 2017, including roles as Assistant Secretary, Treasurer (2018–2022), and 1st Vice President (since 2022). He's an active member of the Scholarship, Constitution, Finance, and House Committees, and helped modernize the Brotherhood's financial systems.

Jeff is president of the Sephardic Jewish Center of Canarsie, a role he's held since 2008, after serving on its board since age 22. He also serves on the board of the Sephardic Temple of Cedarhurst, where he is Gabbai Kehila, and previously chaired its Talmud Torah. He is a board member of the American Sephardi Federation (since 2017) and a Council of Sephardic Overseers member at Yeshiva University (since 2009).

Professionally, Jeff is the founder and owner of Central Galleries, and holds a Finance and Economics degree from NYU Stern. He also serves as Vice President of the Cedarhurst Business Improvement District.

With his children now active in the Brotherhood, Jeff represents five generations of Beja family service dating back to its founding in 1916.

Samantha Beja

With a lifelong connection to the Sephardic community, I am seeking a position on the board to continue my family's legacy of service. I have been an active Brotherhood member since 2017, following in my father's footsteps. I have been a dedicated member of the events and programming committee, where I spearheaded the successful 2021 Gala as Chairperson.

My work on the committee helped establish a new standard of excellence for our events, programming, and honoree recognition. I am proud to have also played a role in broadening our programming to be more inclusive and welcoming to all Brotherhood members.

In my professional life, I work in technology as a product manager and marketer in the AI industry. With over 15 years of experience in event production and management, I offer a unique blend of skills that will help our Brotherhood thrive. If elected, I will use my professional expertise and passion for our community to engage new members, enhance our programming, and ensure the Brotherhood's future is vibrant and strong.

Zack Ben-Ezra

Zack Ben-Ezra was born and raised in Fort Lauderdale, Florida to a Greek and Turkish Sephardic family. Zack's maternal great-grandparent's family came to America from Salonica, while Zack's paternal great-grandparent's family came from Istanbul. Zack is a fourth generation member of the Sephardic Brotherhood of America and is excited to be a part of the Brotherhood's new initiatives while remaining true to its history and traditions. Zack graduated with a Bachelor's degree in History from Binghamton University and recently graduated from the University of Pennsylvania Law School this past spring. Zack will begin work for law firm in New York City this fall.

David Benezra

Born and raised in the west coast, David has lived everywhere from Los Angeles to Anchorage Alaska. He now lives in Seattle, WA with his wife Sigrid, dog Finn, and occasionally, his 3 college aged kids who drop in from time to time between trips to school, overseas, or other adventures.

He has served as Vice President of Sephardic Bikur Holim in Seattle, as well as President of Sephardic Adventure Camp. Passionate about the preservation and growth of our Sephardic traditions and approach to Judaism, David splits his time between Florida and Seattle.

Alexander Benoliel

Alexander Benoliel grew up in the Turkish Sephardic community of Seattle. He spent many years at Sephardic Adventure Camp and most recently served as Director of Education, creating a curriculum exploring Sephardic customs, history, and language. He is currently studying towards Semikha at Yeshiva University RIETS and a Master's in Jewish History at Revel.

Eli Bensignor

I am a fourth generation member of the Sephardic Brotherhood. My father, Larry Bensignor, is actively involved in the organization today. I never got a chance to meet my grandfather and namesake Eli Bensignor, or his father Moise Bensignor, but they were both lifelong members of the organization too. I am proud to carry on their values and continue the work of the Brotherhood.

I grew up in Maryland belonging to a Conservative synagogue (B'nai Israel), and I currently reside in Minneapolis, MN belonging to a reform synagogue (Bet Shalom). I live here with my wife Meg and my four year old son Jonah. We are also part of an organized group of young Jewish families that get together twice a month to discuss Jewish values in a manner geared toward young children, and it brings me joy seeing how much my son enjoys those group sessions.

I would be honored to be a part of the Central Council. Thank you for your consideration.

Isaac Bensignor

Isaac Bensignor is a PhD Candidate of Aerospace Engineering at the Delft University of Technology in Delft Netherlands. He is also the founding President of the Jewish Student Association in Delft. In this role he supervises the planning of and executes programming for the Delft student, young professional, and Jewish community. This includes Shabbat dinners, casual get togethers, interfaith and intercultural outreach, and educational and outreach programs. Isaac is also the main representative discussing with local leaders, politicians, and the TU Delft Executive Board about the needs of the Jewish community, with the issue of antisemitism being forefront.

Larry Bensignor

As a third-generation member and four-time scholarship recipient, I bring a lifelong commitment to the Brotherhood and a deep fondness for our historic mission. My great uncle Albert Amateau was one of SJB's first presidents; I'm proud to continue that legacy of service.

I chair the Strategic Planning and Governance Committee (which developed and secured approval for the Brotherhood's strategic plan), am a member of the Finance and Investment Committee (where we shape SJB's annual budget and oversee investments) and serve on the Central Council. As a retired attorney (including being general counsel of a \$2 billion corporation), I bring decades of leadership experience across corporate and nonprofit boards and executive teams, with particular strengths in mission-driven strategy, governance, finance, and compliance. I chair a foundation that in four years has raised \$16 million.

I'm proud of how the Brotherhood has grown from a mutual aid and burial society into a relevant, vibrant national organization celebrating Sephardic heritage and culture. I am committed to helping the Brotherhood remain financially responsible, expand meaningful programming, and serve a more diverse, multigenerational membership. I will work collaboratively to ensure the Brotherhood thrives in both honoring our past and building our future.

Michael Beyo

Rabbi Michael Beyo is an internationally recognized rabbi, scholar, and nonprofit entrepreneur whose career bridges tradition, innovation, and global impact. He holds three rabbinical ordinations and has pursued advanced academic studies in Jewish philosophy, history, jurisprudence, and political science, equipping him with a rare combination of spiritual depth and intellectual rigor.

Since 2015, Rabbi Beyo has served as the CEO and spiritual leader of the East Valley JCC in Arizona. Under his transformative leadership, the organization has experienced remarkable growth, revitalized its Jewish educational programming, and expanded its reach to broader interfaith and multicultural communities. His leadership has been defined by strategic foresight, moral clarity, and a commitment to building resilient, inclusive institutions.

He is also the founder of Six Million Voices, a pioneering global nonprofit that leverages cutting-edge immersive technology to educate diverse audiences about the Holocaust and combat the rise of antisemitism. This initiative reflects his broader mission: to

ensure the continuity of Jewish identity and values in the 21st century through storytelling, education, and innovation.

A published author and frequent speaker at academic and communal forums, Rabbi Beyo brings a global perspective, having lived and worked in Italy, England, France, Israel, and the United States.

Jacob Chereskin

Jacob Chereskin lives with his family in the greater Washington, D.C. area. His Sephardic heritage traces back to the Jewish communities of Çorlu and Ankara, Turkey. Jacob's committed to preserving the Eastern Sephardic religious tradition and Judeo-Spanish for future generations.

A recent graduate from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, Jacob is passionate about helping Jewish non-profits strengthen their operational efficiency and communal impact. He also enjoys early 1970s Israeli cinema, especially the films of Moshe Mizrahi.

Isaac Choua

Rabbi Isaac Choua is a scholar, educator, and community leader specializing in global Jewish relations and interfaith dialogue. He currently serves as a Board Member and Rabbinic Advisor for the Sephardic Brotherhood of America, and as Associate Museum Curator at Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum in New York.

He previously served as the Middle East & North Africa Communities Liaison for the World Jewish Congress, as well as Global Interfaith Lead and Manager for the WJC Jewish Diplomatic Corps in the Americas.

Rabbi Choua earned his master's degree in Medieval Jewish History with a concentration in pan-Sepharadi Studies from Yeshiva University's Bernard Revel Graduate School, and holds a BA in Ancient Near Eastern Cultures and Abrahamic Religions from the CUNY Baccalaureate for Unique and Interdisciplinary Studies. He is also the founder and editor-in-chief of haSepharadi.com, a platform dedicated to celebrating the diverse traditions of the broader Sephardic community.

Larissa Cohen

My name is Larissa Cohen. I teach high school Chemistry and College level Forensics under the auspices of Syracuse University. I am completing my first term on the Central Council. During my term, I have participated in various committees including the Scholarship Committee, Strategic Planning Committee, Sephardic Community Gala Committee, and the Electoral Committee. Serving on the Central Council allows me to connect my ancestry with my love and passion for teaching and education. My four paternal great grandparents were all members of the Brotherhood from its' inception, having all immigrated from Salonica. My paternal great-grandfather, Bension Grotas, was an active member of the organization and served as financial secretary for many years. He was the recipient of many honors, including having a scholarship named in his honor. I have been privileged to attend the annual Scholarship Awards where I have the opportunity to meet young members of our Sephardic community and celebrate their achievements. My goal as a member of the Central council is to keep Sephardic traditions alive. I want to continue to connect with our young members and help modernize the organization. I look forward to continuing my service on the Central Council of the Sephardic Brotherhood.

Randy Cohen

My name is Randy Cohen. I am a retired physician and third generation Brotherhood member. My four grandparents emigrated from Salonica and the Brotherhood was instrumental in welcoming and helping them assimilate into their new country. My grandfather, Bension Grotas, served as financial secretary of the Ermandad for so many years that he was posthumously given that title by the organization in perpetuity. Of the many accolades and honors he received, he was most proud of the academic scholarship the Brotherhood established in his honor. I am proud that my daughter is active in the organization, completing her first term on the Central Council in addition to serving on numerous committees. I would like to become a member of the Central Council to serve as a bridge between the old and the new. In the past, the organization helped new arrivals assimilate into American culture while also providing important academic scholarships and burial services. For the future, I feel that the organizations main purpose, in addition to its support of academics, will be to ensure that our rich culture and traditions are preserved for future generations of Sephardim. If elected, I look forward to helping contribute to this goal.

Eitan Danon

Eitan Danon is the President of the Brotherhood's DC/MD/VA chapter. He is a proud Sephardic Jew whose paternal ancestors are from Izmir. He spent more than a decade in various national security roles in the U.S. Government, and currently works at Chainalysis, a blockchain software and data company. He is an adjunct senior fellow in the Center for a New American Security's Middle East Security Program and has written on a range of foreign policy issues. He earned his Masters from Georgetown University and Bachelors from the University of Pennsylvania, where he successfully advocated for Ladino to be offered for credit in the Departments of Jewish Studies and Romance Languages. He was also awarded a Broome and Allen scholarship by the American Sephardi Foundation.

Claire Ezratty

Claire Ezratty grew up in Long Beach, NY with her two Sephardic parents whose descendants come from Greece and Turkey. Claire developed a passion for music at an early age and went on to study Music Education at the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam with concentrations in both cello and classical guitar, studying under Dr. Douglas Rubio and Dr. Marie Elaine Gagnon. She has performed at venues like Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, Madison Theater, and many college campuses with a number of orchestral groups. Claire has experience teaching in the Herricks School District, Hicksville High School, and is now the orchestra teacher at Mark Twain Intermediate School 239 in Coney Island, Brooklyn. Claire brings her students to state-wide and national music festivals and competitions, such as NYSSMA, CMS Young Ensembles, and AADGT Chamber Music. She is currently pursuing a Masters in Music Education at CUNY Queens College.

Jeff Ezratty

It is both an honor and a privilege to stand before you today as a proud member of a family that has been part of the Brotherhood for over 100 years. This remarkable legacy is not only a testament to the values we hold dear, but also to the enduring commitment and connection that spans generations.

Personally, I have been deeply involved in the life of the Brotherhood, proudly serving as the editor of our newsletter from 1985 through 2004. Those years allowed me to help share our stories, celebrate our milestones, and connect our members across time and distance.

In addition, I was honored to serve on the Central Council for 40 years. That experience gave me a front-row seat to the Brotherhood's evolution, challenges, and triumphs, and allowed me to work alongside so many dedicated and individuals.

Ohad Fedida

My name is Ohad Fedida. I'm 27 years old and based in Miami. I lead the Miami division of The Habura, an educational initiative dedicated to preserving and sharing the depth and dignity of Sephardic tradition. My work highlights the intellectual, cultural, and communal contributions of Sephardic Judaism to the broader Jewish world. We've shared classes on Torah, history, and customs, and proudly partnered with the Brotherhood's Sephardic Digital Academy.

I hold a B.A. in psychology from Florida International University, where I conducted research in clinical psychology. I now work as a research analyst in social psychology, specializing in cybersocial threats and foreign influence. My research has been published in leading journals and featured in national and international media. I will soon begin doctoral studies at Rutgers University, focusing on social contagions and extremism.

I am committed to revitalizing Sephardic identity – not as a nostalgic label, but as a living tradition grounded in wisdom, balance, and resilience. I'm running for the Central Council to help restore and promote that tradition as a meaningful framework for today's Jewish life. I hope to contribute my experience in Sephardic education and community-building to help the Brotherhood grow and thrive.

Alexandra (Lexi) Fellus

Alexandra Fellus is a passionate advocate for preserving and sharing Sephardic and Ladino culture. She is the creator of the popular Instagram platform @ladino.with.lex, where she brings Sephardic history, language, and traditions to life for a new generation. Since joining the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America in 2021, Lexi has been an active and dedicated volunteer.

During her most recent term on the Central Council, Lexi is serving as Chair of the National Gala for the second consecutive year, creating meaningful community experiences rooted in heritage and connection. She also generates high-quality, original weekly content for the Brotherhood's social media channels, expanding the reach and resonance of Sephardic stories online. As editor of the Brotherhood's quarterly magazine La Djente, Lexi led a successful rebrand and digital relaunch, making the publication more accessible and engaging for members nationwide.

Lexi is deeply committed to continuing her work amplifying Sephardic voices and stories. As a young mother teaching her son Ladino, she brings an intergenerational perspective to the Central Council. Lexi would be honored to continue serving and supporting the Brotherhood's mission through storytelling, community-building, and cultural preservation.

Jack Gottesman

Jack Gottesman lives in Seattle, WA with his wife and five children, where he serves as President of Sephardic Bikur Holim (SBH), a leading Sephardic synagogue in North America. Deeply rooted in community and tradition, Jack brings the same passion to his professional life as he does to his communal work.

He works at IKO, a family-owned global manufacturer of roofing materials, where he oversees marketing and contractor loyalty programs across North America. Jack plays a key role in strengthening relationships with roofing professionals and driving strategic growth for the business.

In addition to his work in both corporate and community leadership, Jack is set to publish his first book in 2026, *Alice Is Not a Real Waitress: A Spite Book*.

Daniel Hadar

Rabbi of the Sephardic Congregation Temple Moses.

Jay Halfon

In 2016, then President Joe Toledo asked me to provide the Brotherhood with legal services on a volunteer basis. I have been doing so ever since. My connection, however, to the Brotherhood goes many years prior. My grandparents who came from Tekirdağ and Çanakkale were members of the Brotherhood. As a child I attended high holiday services at the Sephardic Jewish Center on 169th Street in the Bronx. I remember the Brotherhood's building next door. I am so pleased to continue my family's relationship with the Brotherhood.

I practice law at the intersection of law, public policy and philanthropy. My firm specializes in legal issues affecting tax-exempt organizations representing nonprofits around the world. I have advised and helped manage many scores of organizations. I believe my commitment to the Brotherhood, love of Sephardic culture and heritage, and my experience in the nonprofit world will allow me to contribute and give back to the Brotherhood. If elected I promise to serve faithfully and diligently to preserve, enhance and protect the organization.

Joe Halio

After serving almost 40 years on Central Council I was disappointed I was not reelected in the election 4 years ago. I was also disappointed I was not appointed to serve on the Council, knowing that the President and Executive Committee can make appointments. I thought and still think that my experience of so many years working on various committees (Scholarship, Religious Affairs, 100th Anniversary) and as an officer would bring true, good perspective to the Brotherhood. Even though I have not been on CC for the past 4 years, I have remained on committees and been in constant contact with the current officers and many members.

Having devoted most of my life outside of my medical practice to various Sephardic causes that all interface with the Brotherhood I believe I can still contribute to the progress of the Brotherhood and help the Brotherhood cooperate with other Sephardim and our Sephardic organizations.

Sephardic Foundation on Aging
Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture
American Sephardi Federation
Es AHaim Society
Hesed V'Emet Castorialis
Sephardic Jewish Center of Forest Hills
Sephardic Temple of Cedarhurst
American Friends of the Jewish Museum of Greece
Holocaust Memorial & Tolerance Center of Nassau County

Robert Kattan

My middle name could easily be 'Sephardi'. Born into a family of all Ladino-speaking grandparents, I grew up hearing (and often speaking) Ladino. My Dad, an immigrant from Salonika, came as a teenager and functioned as the sole support of his mother and sister for years. Borekas, fillas, roskitas, bumuelos, fijones, bamyas, Sephardic rice.....all were the norm for me. I knew no other Jewish food.

My Dad, self-educated and active in Sephardic affairs, served as Brotherhood president in 1946-47 and later as president of Central Sephardic Jewish Community of America for many years. My Mom, a daughter of immigrant parents from Turkey, was active in Alliance Israelite Universelle fundraisers for many years also.

As for me, I grew up in the Brotherhood, having served on Central Council and as Treasurer for 30+ years, and on the Scholarship Committee (previously as chairman) for nearly as many.

Last summer was a highlight for me as I spent nearly 2 weeks on Rhodes with the Brotherhood delegation and found it particularly meaningful. Needless to say, I have attended countless Brotherhood events over many years. I would be glad to serve on Central Council once again.

Baruch-Lev Kelman

Baruch-Lev Kelman is a Doctoral Fellow at the Bernard Revel Graduate School and a Rabbinic Intern at Congregation Shearith Israel (S&P) in New York. Of Turkish, Yemeni, and Italian heritage, he was raised within the rich traditions of Mediterranean Jewry. He is the grandson of noted Ladino writer Matilda Koen-Sarano. Educated at Yeshivat Ma'aleh Adumim, the University of Urbino, and Yeshiva College, Baruch-Lev's research explores the role of classical antiquity in Jewish Renaissance literature. He speaks fluent Hebrew and Italian, decent Ladino, and a bit of Arabic.

Miriam Raphael Klein

As a proud descendant of Ladino-speaking Jews, my heritage has shaped my Jewish identity and deepened my commitment to preserving our Sephardic traditions and culture. Both my parents descend from Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. My Father, Dr. David Raphael, was a prolific writer on Sephardic history and he instilled in me the love of Ladino and sense of responsibility to keep our unique Sephardic legacy alive. The language, music, customs and traditions of our heritage are treasures that I carry with me and strive to preserve. For this reason, I founded with my two children The Ladino High School Club of America (Bivas) in 2022 to share the beauty of the Sephardic-Ladino culture with younger generations who may not yet know its depth. High school is a pivotal time for our youth and the Ladino club offers teens a space to learn about our precious heritage. It also provides a sense of belonging and opportunities for leadership and growth. Most importantly, it creates a network of students who foster a love of Judaism with a shared purpose. If elected, I would do my utmost to ensure that the Sephardic voices of our youth are actively supported and celebrated.

Aaron Levy

It is with great honor that I seek re-election to the Central Council, having served our community for the past four years. My deep connection to the Sephardic Brotherhood is rooted in my childhood in Co-op City, where I grew up at the Greek & Turkish synagogue, Sha'are Rahamim. The melodies, Ladino phrases, and unique cultural experiences I cherished there stayed with me for many years. As an adult, I found that same sense of home and belonging whenever I visited communities affiliated with the Sephardic Brotherhood. This passion inspired me to get involved on the Central Council, where I have actively worked to foster greater engagement across all demographics and support our events.

Professionally, I have been working in Capital One's Commercial Banking division for almost 15 years, where I currently lead the profitability data analytics group. Personally, my wife Laeeqa and I are now raising our family in Englewood, and we are committed to passing on our traditions to our 3.5-year-old twins, Zakkai and Zimra.

I am dedicated to ensuring the Sephardic Brotherhood continues to thrive and connect our families for generations to come. Thank you for your support.

Ariella Levy

My name is Ariella Levy, and I am an occupational therapy doctorate student entering my final year of graduate school. I am running for a second term on the Central Council, having had the privilege of serving as a Junior Central Council Member for the Brotherhood the past three years. I am committed to honoring the legacy of my grandfather, Sol Niego z"l, who proudly served on the Central Council for many years. In college I was a Sephardi House Fellow, where I hosted Sephardic events on campus and helped build a Sephardic community that continues to thrive. I hope to continue to serve on the Central Council of the Brotherhood to contribute my perspectives as a student and future young professional, along with skills I have learned in occupational therapy school to ensure the Brotherhood's members and the greater Sephardic community have meaningful opportunities to engage in Sephardic life and traditions.

Yosef Lopez

Rabbi Yosef Lopez is an ordained rabbi and educator dedicated to Jewish learning and Sephardic tradition. He has devoted his career to teaching Hebrew and Torah to middle school students and conducting daily classes for college students and adults. His work focuses on preserving and transmitting Sephardic mesora (tradition) and raising awareness of the Maimonidean intellectual tradition. He led the initiative to establish a local Sephardic Bet Midrash, creating a center for Torah study and community learning.

Rabbi Lopez is committed to ensuring that Sephardic customs and philosophical heritage remain vibrant and accessible to contemporary Jewish communities. Rabbi Lopez has been active in the Sephardic Brotherhood since 2020, where he serves on the Central Council and the Religious Affairs Committee.

Rabbi Lopez is married to Sara and is the father of three sons: Avraham, Hizqiya, and Ezra. He balances his professional responsibilities with his dedication to family and community service.

Andrew Marcus

Andrew is a proud lifelong member of the Sephardic Brotherhood. He is passionate about preserving our Sephardic traditions and growing our community. After receiving scholarships from the Brotherhood in college, Andrew has dedicated time to enriching Sephardic life. Since joining the Central Council and Scholarship Committee 10 years ago, he has helped streamline our scholarships awards process and diligently kept meeting records in his role as Secretary. Andrew helped found and continues to lead the Greek Jewish & Sephardic Young Professionals Network, which has reconnected more than 1,000 young adults in their 20s and 30s with their heritage. He organizes frequent young professionals events including Shabbat dinners, cooking classes, holiday celebrations, and Jewish tours to Greece, Turkey, Italy, and the Balkans. Andrew is an active board member of Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum in NYC, helping lead Shabbat services and organizing educational events. Andrew is also the founder and Director of the Greek Jewish Festival, which is the only festival of its kind in the world and welcomes more than 10,000 attendees each year. Andrew is proud to work as an urban planner for the City of New York and has both a BA and MA from Hunter College.

Ethan Marcus

I'm thrilled to run for the Central Council and continue my family's legacy of service to the Sephardic community. As a third-generation Brotherhood member, I've proudly served on the Central Council for eight years, helping lead a revitalization of the organization alongside an incredible team.

Together, we've launched innovative initiatives that created new revenue streams — including our Sephardic Community Gala, High Holiday and End-of-Year campaigns, and expanded donor engagement. I've also worked with other volunteers to develop impactful programs such as La Djente, our magazine now in print and digital formats, Bivas — the Ladino High School Club of America, multilingual Sephardic holiday booklets, young professionals events, and heritage tours of Jewish Greece, Turkey, and Israel.

Previously, I served as the Brotherhood's Director of Communications and as Director of Community Development for the Seattle Sephardic Community. From 2019–2020, I was awarded a Fulbright to Athens, Greece, where I researched Greek Jewish liturgy. I'm a graduate of Princeton University, with roots in Veria, Greece, and Izmir, Turkey. I care deeply about our Ladino language, Torah values, and history — and I want to ensure my future children and grandchildren grow up in a thriving Sephardic community, rich in education, tradition, and connection.

Joel Marcus

I previously served on Central Council and the Legal Advisory Committee to update the Brotherhood Bylaws and Constitution.

I was born in Brooklyn and am married 35 years with two children. I am 100% Sephardic. My paternal grandparents are from Veria and Salonica, Greece and maternal from Kastoria, Greece and Monastir (Bitola) former Yugoslavia (they lived in the same community for 400 years). Three generations of continuous membership in the Brotherhood. All deceased family are interred in Brotherhood cemeteries. My ancestors are from the diaspora of Spanish and Portuguese Jews expelled during the Spanish Inquisition in 1492. Our family languages included Ladino. I am currently an Attorney and Senior Partner of Marcus & Pollack LLP. I am active in the practice of law for over 50 years. I am proud of my ancestors and family history and I support the mission and goals of the Brotherhood.

Charitable and synagogue affiliations: American Sephardi Federation, Center for Jewish History, Jewish Community Relations Council, Sephardic Jewish Center of Canarsie, Shearith Israel, Kehila Kedosha Janina, Cedarhurst Temple, Temple Moses.

My experience stands as my qualification for Central Council. I offer wise, patient service and cohesive leadership to bring consensus and unity to our community.

Marvin Marcus

Marvin is a proud lifelong member of the Sephardic Brotherhood. With roots from Veria, Greece and Izmir, Turkey, Marvin was born and raised in a Ladino-speaking home on the Lower East Side. Following his father's involvement in the Brotherhood, Marvin has dedicated much time and effort to supporting the Brotherhood and our community. Marvin has served on the Central Council and Scholarship Committee for more than 30 years. Marvin worked for 36 years as a high school learning disabilities teacher in NYC public schools, and he has used his experience to help enhance the work of our Scholarship Committee, for which he now serves as Chairman. He has also helped support our needy members by serving as Chairman of the Henry J. Perahia Funds for the Needy. Marvin has also helped with cemetery management by conducting numerous site visits. Since 2006, Marvin has served as President of Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum, which is the only Romaniote synagogue in the Western Hemisphere. He volunteers countless hours for Brotherhood events and activities and is passionate about growing our community.

Jay Matalon

Jay Matalon has been a member of the Central Council since 2018 and has served as Treasurer from 2022 to the present. As Treasurer, Jay developed a more robust and timely budgeting process, was instrumental in developing and implementing a thorough investment policy, and improved the tax return filing process whereby returns have been filed timely for all years that Jay has been Treasurer and overdue returns were completed and submitted in Jay's first year as Treasurer. Jay is a long-standing member of the Brotherhood and has always had a great appreciation of Sephardic heritage and traditions. Jay is a finance professional focusing in the insurance industry with significant experience with both property/casualty and life and annuity insurance companies. Jay's financial expertise includes technical accounting, financial reporting, internal controls, audit, regulatory compliance, and business strategy & budgeting. In his career, Jay has held senior finance roles at AIG, Chubb, and Ernst & Young. In recent years, he has also been a consultant and instructor to the insurance industry. Jay graduated from the Wharton Business School at the University of Pennsylvania and is a CPA.

Michael Mintz

My name is Michael Mintz and I have Romaniote ancestry from Ioannina, Greece. I grew up in Minneapolis, MN as one of 5 children of Marshall and Debbie (Hametz) Mintz. I currently live on the upper west side in NY and run a real estate firm. Over the past 10 years I have learned and become more engaged with my Romaniote heritage and would love to contribute how I can to the growth of the Sephardic brotherhood

Renée Motola

I am an attorney who works for the Office of Court Administration as a Court Attorney Referee, presiding over the Westchester County and Orange County Tax Certiorari Part and the Westchester County and Rockland County Eminent Domain Part. I reside in Pound Ridge where I am the Town Justice. I am honored to be completing my second term on the Central Council and my first term as the Assistant Treasurer on the Executive Board. I have participated in the Scholarship Committee and The Gala Committees. Being a part of the Council and the Executive Committee has allowed me to play a role in furthering our heritage, Paternally, I'm from Spain to Turkey to America and Maternally, Janina to America. My family has a significant history with our Community, which I am very proud of. The Brotherhood's passing on traditions, is a vibrant component of our existence. The Ladino sprinkled around me and the language of our recipes, is pure joy! I am honored by being on the Board of Kehila

Kedosha Janina. I hope to serve again on the Central Council and remain an integral part of such a wonderful organization.

David Pardo

I'm proud to trace my roots to Istanbul and Edirne, descended from a renowned Turkish rabbinic lineage. My path has blended Torah and professionalism: I graduated from UCLA, earned semikha from Yeshiva University, and completed my MBA at Brandeis. I served as a pulpit rabbi for over a decade and spent five years as a senior executive at the Orthodox Union, where I focused on strengthening Jewish communities across the country.

I am the co-founder of a thriving Jewish day school in Boca Raton and currently work in healthtech, leading partnerships and revenue operations, with a background in finance and strategic growth. In every arena – whether in the beit midrash or the boardroom – I've aimed to build institutions and connect people to a shared mission.

I am deeply passionate about Sephardic education, culture, and tradition. I want my children and grandchildren to grow up with pride in their Sephardic identity.

Drawing on both rabbinic leadership and executive experience, I believe I can help move the Brotherhood ever forward – expanding its impact, supporting our elders, and inspiring the next generation with pride in who we are and where we come from. It would be an honor to serve on Central Council.

Joely Pasestsky

My name is Joely Pasestsky. I work as the Associate Merchant at American Eagle over Women's Shirts and AE77. In light of what has been going on in the world today, I am prouder than ever to be a Sephardic Jew. I carry my heritage with me throughout everyday life. To me, my identity is rooted in being a proud Jew. I love being part of the Sephardic Brotherhood Central Council that strengthens the ties of Sephardic Jews around the world. Carrying on traditions passed on for generations is something extremely important to me. Whether it is going to Kehila Kedosha Janina to hear prayers in Ladino or eating my great grandmother's burekas, I always feel connected to my family that came before me. Throughout every generation, Jews have faced adversity, so I look to my ancestors and how they found community to get through the challenges in society. I want to continue to help build and foster a community within the Sephardic Brotherhood so that we have each other through these hard times. It would be an honor and a pleasure to serve on the Central Council for another term.

Berti Pilosof

Berti was born in Istanbul, Turkey, in 1982 and has been deeply active in the Jewish community from a young age. He participated in social youth clubs, including an undercover Betar group, and after high school joined B'nai B'rith, volunteering in various initiatives such as Mizgeret, a security group for synagogues.

During college, Berti worked full-time, including as an El Al security officer. Over time, he realized there was no long-term future for Jews in Turkey and made the decision to move to the United States, where he built a career in business operations and finance, serving for many years as a Finance Director in the apparel industry.

Today, Berti lives in Fair Lawn, NJ with his wife Emma and their three children – Mario, Leo, and Olivia – and remains committed to Jewish life and community service. Berti has served on the Central Council for the past 4 years and he would be honored to continue to serve in this role to support the Sephardic Brotherhood.

Ian Pomerantz

I have served on the Central Council of the Sephardic Brotherhood of America since 2022. It has been one of the greatest honors of my life to serve the Ladino-speaking diaspora and to help extend our reach beyond the New York area. During my term, I helped found a new chapter in Washington, DC, and contributed to the revitalization of La Djente as a member of its editorial board.

A proud Sephardic Jew and fluent Ladino speaker, I am a doctoral candidate in Sephardic Studies at the Sorbonne-Alliance (INALCO) in Paris, where I also teach Ladino language. I was honored to receive the Broome & Allen Fellowship from the American Sephardic Federation for my work.

As a publishing musicologist, I am dedicated to preserving and transmitting our musical and linguistic heritage. This year, I co-produced the 1774 Hebrew oratorio Esther at the Royal Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and am co-directing the musical celebrations for the Portuguese Jewish community's 350th anniversary.

I believe deeply in the Brotherhood's mission of tsedaka and memory, and it would be an honor to continue serving – and expanding – the community I proudly call home. Tsedaka i bienfizensia enaltese a la nasion.

Alexandra Roberts

My name is Alexandra Roberts and I am a student at the Sy Syms School of Business. Sephardic Judaism has always been a value to me and my family. Every year we do the Passover seder in Ladino, and we make sure to sing all the Ladino songs. I have spent four years at SAC (Sephardic Adventure Camp), and have created close connections with many other Sephardic Jews. My brother and I helped create The Ladino High School Club of America. In this club we teach teenagers about our traditions, and inspire them to connect to Judaism through Sephardic customs. I would be honored to be a member of the board of the Sephardic Brotherhood and I feel I could help make a strong impact by sharing our customs and traditions with others.

Judah Roberts

I'm a recent high school graduate who will study this fall at Orayta Yeshiva in the Old City. Thank you for considering me as a candidate for Central Council.

Growing up, being Sephardic, and singing Ladino songs with my family, I took a passive approach to the culture. However, as I got older, I realized how rare my tradition was and how few peers shared it. Many peers and teachers had never heard of Ladino. I wanted to address this knowledge gap in the Jewish community.

In 10th grade (Spring 2022), I started The Ladino High School Club of America (Bivas.org) at Katz Yeshiva High School in Boca Raton, FL. It began as a school club, but interest grew – many students we didn't know were Sephardic joined. That summer, we launched a website and created national chapters.

At that time, my mother met Ethan Marcus, and with Ethan and the Sephardic Brotherhood's help, Bivas came to life. We've had five Shabbatons and many national events, teaching Sephardic life to teens – Ashkenazi, Sephardic, and baalei teshuvah. I've led the club for three years and will pass leadership this fall. I hope to stay involved with both the Sephardic Brotherhood and Bivas.

David Schribman

David Schribman lives in White Plains, NY, married (Elly Soury Schribman) & works as an insurance broker. David was introduced to the Brotherhood by his father-in-law Joseph Soury. Joe was a member of the Central Council for over 60 years & he was also a past President. Elly Schribman is the granddaughter of Henry J. Perahia. David has been a member of the Central Council since 1994. Over the last 31 years, his roles in the Brotherhood have been co-chair of the Scholarship Committee, Assistant Treasurer, current Assistant Financial Secretary & current chair of the Personnel Committee. David has proudly served over 20 years as an Executive Committee member.

Jason Shimshi

I am a third generation member of the Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood, and was a recipient of a high school and four college scholarships. I have Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Aerospace Engineering and have worked for The Aerospace Corporation for nearly 33 years in a variety of jobs. Currently, I am a manager supporting technical studies for the U. S. Space Force. I am also an Intelligence Officer in the Navy Reserve in which I have served for 23 years; I hold the rank of Commander. I am a veteran of the War in Iraq, having been mobilized in 2007 – 2008 in support of the Global War on Terrorism and will be mobilizing to the Southern Command Area of Responsibility in mid-July. As a drilling reservist, I am the Commanding Officer of a 45-billet Navy Reserve unit that supports the Commander, Pacific Fleet. I live in Bethesda, MD with my wife, Donna, and our three daughters, Rina, Celia and Leigh.

Daniel Small

I have been serving on both the Central Council and Executive Committee for many years. I also serve on the Henry J. Perahia Funds for the Needy, House Management Committee, and Finance Committee. My grandfather was a longtime member of the Brotherhood with family that lived in Salonika, Greece before coming to America in the early 1900s.

I work for American Jewish Committee as Senior Associate for the Long Island Regional Office, I live in Forest Hills, Queens, and serve as Vice President of my building's co-op board.

Aaron Soury

I am a third generation member of the Brotherhood. My grandfather, Henry J. Perahia, was a President, founding member, and established the Henry J. Perahia Funds For The Needy committee. My father, Joe Soury, was President and Vice President multiple times and served as Chairman of the Scholarship committee for many years. I served on the Central Council for many years. I was Chairman of the Scholarship Committee for a couple of years, and was a member of the Henry J. Perahia Funds For The Needy Committee for a number of years. I welcome the opportunity to serve on the Central Council.

Marc Joseph Benveniste Tobak

Marc Joseph Benveniste Tobak joined the Sephardic Brotherhood in 2023. Marc's mother and her family came to the United States from Salonica in the 1950s. He was raised with a love of Sephardic traditions, the Ladino language, and Syracuse's small but tight-knit Sephardic community. Marc, his wife Elizabeth, and their three daughters live in the Washington Heights neighborhood of Manhattan. They are active members of their synagogue, the Fort Tryon Jewish Center; Marc served as a Trustee of the synagogue from 2015 to 2021 and has, since 2014, worked to guide the synagogue through the distressed sale of its former building and search for a new permanent home.

Since 2009, Marc has practiced law at Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP, focusing on complex civil and bankruptcy litigation. His recent pro bono work includes defending the rights of Jewish college and graduate students to be free from harassment, intimidation, and exclusion on account of their religion and national origin.

Albert Toledo

I am Albert Toledo, born in Istanbul, Turkey to a Sephardic family. I went to the Austrian High School in Galata. I spent my junior year in high school in Oviedo, the capital of Asturias in Spain. I learned Spanish and learned about the Spanish culture which allowed me to understand Ladino also. After high school I went to the US to study in Hampton University, Virginia. I studied computer science and started a career in software in New York City. Now I split my time between New York and Istanbul.

Esther Toledo

After 40 years on the Executive Comm I believe my record speaks for itself. I was the first and only female President, Chair of the Scholarship Committee, First Vice President for 35 years, and Chair of HJP.

Joseph Toledo

Grandson of Joseph J. Toledo, founder and first President of the Brotherhood of Adrianople, and founder Yehuda Comerchero. Son of Central Council member Jack J. Toledo. I served on the Central Council for 35 years, the Executive Committee for 25 years, as President for 4 years, the Scholarship Committee for 30 years, the Investment Committee, the Constitution and By-Law Committee for 3 terms, the Election Committee, as Chair of the Dinner/ Dance and Journal Committees, as Assistant Recording Secretary, as Recording Secretary, and as Board member and Recording Secretary for the Sephardic Jewish Center of Forest Hills. Fraternally, Joe Toledo

Shir Toledo

I'm honored to be considered for the Junior Representative position on the Central Council. With Ladino-speaking roots tracing back to Toledo, Spain, and later Turkey, my Sephardic heritage is a deep source of pride and identity. I grew up hearing Ladino melodies from my grandfather, and learning family stories shaped by resilience and tradition. Receiving the Brotherhood's scholarship this year was incredibly meaningful – not only for the support, but because it affirmed my connection to this community; I was honored to give a speech and share my roots and passions. At the scholarship lunch, the message of "paying it forward" truly resonated with me, and I hope to do just that by serving on the council.

I'm currently pursuing a degree in neuroscience and chemistry, with a focus on women's health and mental well-being. Passionate about science, storytelling, and community-building, I believe I can bring fresh perspective, creative thinking, and a commitment to strengthening intergenerational ties. I would love to help with outreach, build youth engagement, and find innovative ways to preserve and share Sephardic culture. Serving on the council would be a meaningful way to give back and help our community thrive for generations to come.

Jason Vessal

I was raised in the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue of Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia, where my Sephardic identity and my Jewish identity were one and the same. I didn't think of it as something separate or unique from Ashkenazi Judaism, it was simply the world I knew. It wasn't until I left home, went to college, and began living in other Jewish communities that I realized how fortunate I was to have been raised with a Sephardic worldview. I came to see how much it has to offer the broader Jewish world, from its traditions to its values and perspective.

This realization has inspired me to take an interest in preserving and advancing Sephardic life, to whatever degree I might be able to. I want to contribute to the future of our community and play a role in helping Sephardic Judaism flourish in America. I am also particularly interested in serving on the committee related to burials and cemeteries. It would be an honor to serve on the Central Council of the Sephardic Brotherhood and contribute in any way I can to its important work and mission.

Andrea Werner

My name is Andrea Werner, and I've been honored to serve on the Central Council for the past 4 years. My mother's family is Turkish, from the cities of Kırklareli and Edirne. My mother and grandparents worked hard to try to pass their traditions on to me, and I'm trying to keep them alive and pass them on to my children. During the work day, I run a medical practice. During my free time, I enjoy trying new Sephardic foods and cooking up some of my abuela's classic dishes which were a staple of my childhood. Although I've been fortunate to be a part of many Jewish communities throughout the US, I grew up in the Jewban culture in Miami, FL and now live with my husband and 2 children in West Hartford, CT. I was fortunate to be a part of the Greek Jewish Young Professionals Network while living in NYC and hope to help support those at all stages in life feeling connected to their Sephardic roots. It would be my honor to continue serving on the Sephardic Brotherhood's Central Council for another term.

Natalie Yesil

I was born in the former Soviet republic of Georgia to an Ashkenazi mother and Sephardic father who is of Kavkazi (Azerbaijani) descent. My family emigrated to the United States in 1995. Growing up in Brooklyn, New York, I attended Nefesh Academy for Girls and later, Long Island University. Coming from a secular home but studying in a religious environment, I have learned that tradition and Jewish values are so important for family life. My connection to the Sephardic Brotherhood comes from my Turkish husband who grew up in Istanbul and has a strong family presence in the Istanbul community. We currently live in Tenafly New Jersey with our 2 wonderful girls. Tenafly also is a home to several Turkish Jewish families with whom we are very connected. In the current state of Israeli and Jewish affairs, I would love to contribute to a cause that promotes Jewish values and keeps community together. Thank you for this opportunity. Please let me know if you have any questions.