

ISRAEL: Rabbi Linked to Campaign Inquiry Is Questioned in Israeli Bribe Case

Written by Alison Leigh Cowan
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A prominent rabbi who is a figure in the federal inquiry into the campaign of Representative Michael G. Grimm of Staten Island has been put under house arrest in Israel in a bribery and money-laundering investigation there, the Israeli police said on Friday.

The rabbi, Yoshiyahu Pinto, an Israeli citizen, also has a following in New York.

A spokesman for the Israeli police, Micky Rosenfeld, said in a statement, “The rabbi and his wife were questioned by police officers yesterday for several hours on suspicion of attempting to bribe a high-ranked officer from the investigations department and get hold of sensitive documents.”

Rabbi Pinto, who has not been charged with a crime, will be under house arrest for two weeks; he surrendered his passport.

His lawyer in Israel, Yaron Lipshes, said he was confident the rabbi would be cleared.

Mr. Grimm, a first-term Republican, met the rabbi during the run-up to his successful 2010 campaign. Rabbi Pinto’s followers subsequently donated more than \$500,000 to Mr. Grimm’s campaign, according to interviews and campaign records.

Some of the rabbi’s followers later said that Mr. Grimm and a campaign fund-raiser, Ofer Biton, told them that the campaign would accept donations over the legal limit, given in cash or made by foreigners without green cards. The United States attorney’s office in Brooklyn is looking into the improper donations.

Mr. Biton was arrested in August on immigration charges and may face others. He had been an aide to Rabbi Pinto for much of the Grimm campaign.

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Robert Nardoza, a spokesman for the United States attorney's office, declined to comment on the effects the Israeli investigation might have on his efforts.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/13/nyregion/rabbi-pinto-fund-raiser-for-grimm-under-house-arrest-in-israel.html>