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January 12, 2022

Dear fellow congregants:

Our COVID-19 Task Force/Re-Entry Committee continues to meet frequently to discuss and respond to the surge of the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 in Connecticut and surrounding areas. The committee met most recently on January 12, 2022.

In Connecticut, we currently have a case rate of 270 new cases per 100,000 people every day, up from 109 just two weeks ago and 71 two weeks before that. There are approximately 9628 additional Connecticut residents testing positive for COVID-19 per day, and our hospitalizations have increased to 1939 people hospitalized with the illness, up from 1,113 people two weeks ago, and 716 hospitalizations two weeks before that. Our statewide positivity rate today is over 21%, which indicates that the true number of cases are still being under-counted.

L&M Hospital currently has 56 COVID-19 patients (up from 29 two weeks ago and 16 two weeks before that), Westerly has 13, and Backus has 36. L&M Hospital currently has only 2 open ICU beds and Backus has none. While it is believed that we are near the peak in Connecticut and that numbers will be improving soon, we are not there yet. Critical infrastructure around us, including our hospitals, schools, public transportation, and essential government services, are struggling to function due to the overwhelming number of people who are sick simultaneously.

There has been a significant amount of work done in this committee to make decisions that are based in science and Jewish values. I attended a Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) COVID-19 webinar on January 5, 2022, attended an L&M webinar regarding COVID-19 trends in the local area, and also remain in constant contact with the leadership of the other Reform congregations, who also have committees comprised of medical professionals struggling with these issues.

Based on the above factors, we have made the decision to suspend all in-person services and adult activities through the end of January. Eleven out of twelve of our fellow Reform congregations have made the same decision, including those in Chester, Madison, and throughout the rest of the state. While most of these other congregations have also decided to suspend in-person Religious School for the same period, we have decided to prioritize the in-person learning of our youth, with additional safety measures in place. **We have a goal of resuming in person services and activities beginning on February 5, 2022** and will be meeting once again several days prior to this for a final determination. We hope to see all of you virtually over the next few weeks and look forward to the day when we can safely gather in-person again.

Respectfully,

Joel Fernandez

COVID-19 Task Force/re-Entry Committee chair and Immediate Past President