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450+ Rabbis Support Governor Cuomo’s And Mayor De Blasio’s Efforts To Contain COVID-19 In New York “Hotspots”



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact Information:

New York Jewish Agenda
Gene Goldstein-Plesser
press@nyja.org
(646) 470-3510

450+ Rabbis Support Governor Cuomo’s And Mayor De Blasio’s Efforts To Contain COVID-19

In New York “Hotspots”

Rabbis Condemn Incidents Of Violence And Non-Compliance With Public Health Directives

(NEW YORK, NY, October 7, 2020) – The New York Jewish Agenda (NYJA) today releases the following statement signed by a growing list of 450+ Rabbis and other Jewish religious leaders – including more than 160 from New York – to support data-driven, life-saving measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in New York. The list includes religious leaders from all major Jewish denominations, including Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Reform, and others. The full statement with signatories appears below.

“We support the governor’s and mayor’s efforts to stem the spread of COVID-19 by using a data-driven, geographically based approach,” said NYJA President Matt Nosanchuk. “Today, more than 450 Rabbis and other Jewish religious leaders came together to make clear there is no higher Jewish value than saving a human life.”

NYJA was founded in February 2020 as a network of leaders working to elevate the voice of Jewish community leaders whose shared values motivate them to promote social justice, combat antisemitism, and support a democratic vision of Israel. NYJA engages on critical issues across New York City and State through advocacy, education, and collaboration.

Throughout the COVID crisis, NYJA has called upon state and local leaders to base their public health and enforcement strategies in sound public health strategies and science, and to avoid any response that feeds into antisemitic narratives or discriminatory targeting of Orthodox Jewish or other communities. We did so in [NYJA’s sign-on letter to Mayor Bill de Blasio in April](#) and again in an [NYJA statement on October 5](#) when COVID cases began to rise in the Orthodox Jewish community.

The full statement appears below. (The list of signatories is in formation and the institutional affiliation is for identification purposes only.)

—

“We are rabbis and other Jewish religious leaders representing every movement of Judaism, who stand in support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio for using data-driven, geographically-based efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19. We condemn the lack of compliance with public health directives and recent violent reactions from some individuals within the Orthodox Jewish community to enforcement of those mandates.

During the cholera epidemic in the 1840's, Reb Yisroel Salanter ate in shul on Yom Kippur to encourage his congregants to eat and protect their health. He did this because the highest value in Judaism is pikuach nefesh, the saving of human life.

Judaism and Jewish texts are filled with vociferous debates and disagreements, however nothing is more universally accepted and agreed upon than the need to protect and preserve human life and dignity. The Code of Jewish Law (Orach Chayim 328:2) teaches that one who even asks if it is permissible to save a life, by doing work on the shabbat, is a murderer. The Talmud, Jerusalem Yoma 41b, expresses disgust that this question could even be asked and places the blame on the local rabbi for not having made this teaching clear to everyone.

We are also deeply disturbed by what we have witnessed in the form of mask burnings and large, unsafe, and even violent protests against sensible precautions and regulations. We are embarrassed and disappointed that after thousands of years of clear tradition, and common sense, this letter needs to be written.

The posturing of religious freedom in opposition to the wellbeing of individuals and communities is blasphemy (Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Sabbath 2:3). As rabbinic leaders, we feel a religious responsibility for the safety of all people and the fidelity of our tradition. While our individual spiritual practices may differ widely, our commitment to observing them in safe ways is unified.

We therefore support thoughtful efforts by the governor and mayor to protect health and safety, including limiting religious gatherings in known "hot spots," and using enforcement for any gatherings which violate size restrictions, or where people are not masked or socially distanced. We condemn the violence in Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) communities last night against mask-use and other safety measures, including violence and threats against members of the community who support safety measures.

Antisemitism against Orthodox Jews is serious and widespread, and we must ensure that the implementation of public health policies is both culturally appropriate (e.g., more Yiddish speaking contact tracers) and does not promote antisemitism either in its language or in its actions. But to be clear, requiring masking and social distancing for all gatherings, including religious gatherings, is not antisemitism."

Signed,

Rabbi Rachel Timoner, NYJA Board and Congregation Beth Elohim, Brooklyn

Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, NYJA Board and Congregation Beit Simchat Torah, Manhattan

New York Rabbis and Other Jewish Religious Leaders:

Rabbi David Adelson, Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, Brooklyn

Rabbi Renni Altman, Vassar Temple, Poughkeepsie

Cantor Irena Altshul, Temple Israel of the City of NY, Manhattan

Rabba Wendy Amsellem, Yeshivat Maharat, Manhattan
Cantor Dana Anesi, Temple of Universal Judaism, Manhattan
Rabbi Marc Angel, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, Manhattan
Rabbi Nicole Auerbach, Manhattan
Rabbi Vicki Axe, Congregation Shir Ami / Temple Beth Am, Fishkill
Rabbi Sharon Ballan, Temple Beth Sholom of Flushing, Queens
Rabbi Daniel Bar-Nahum, Temple B'nai Torah – A Reform Congregation, Wantagh
Cantor Chanin Becker, Scarsdale Synagogue-Temples Tremont and Emanu-El, Scarsdale
Rabbi Debra Bennet, Temple Chaverim, Plainview
Rabbi Sarah Berman, Central Synagogue, Manhattan
Cantor Alan Brava, Free Synagogue of Flushing, Queens
Rabbi Deborah Bravo, MakomNY, Woodbury
Cantor Joshua Breitzer, Congregation Beth Elohim, Brooklyn
Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor, Shirat HaYam Nantucket, Manhattan
Rabbi Rabbi Lester Bronstein, Bet Am Shalom Synagogue, White Plains
Rabbi Jeffrey Brown, Scarsdale Synagogue Temples Tremont and Emanu-El, Scarsdale
Rabbi Yechiel Buchband, Temple Gates of Zion, Valley Stream
Rabbi Angela Buchdahl, Central Synagogue, Manhattan
Rabbi Melissa Buyer-Witman, Temple Israel of the City of New York, Manhattan
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Rabbi Emily Cohen, West End Synagogue, Brooklyn
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Cantor Shayna De Lowe, Rodeph Sholom, Manhattan
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Rabbi Brian Denker, International Federation of Rabbis, Brooklyn
Rabbi William Dreskin, Woodlands Community Temple, White Plains
Rabbi Dr. Andy Dubin, Manhattan
Rabbi Amy Ehrlich, Temple Emanu-El NYC, Manhattan
Rabbi Susan Elkodsi, Malverne Jewish Center, Malverne
Rabbi Jacqueline Ellenson, Congregation Rodeph Sholom, Manhattan
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Rabbi Rebecca Epstein, Congregation Beth Elohim, Brooklyn
Rabbi Shira Koch Epstein, CRI, Brooklyn
Rabbi Susan Falk, Brooklyn
Rabbi Michael Feinberg, Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition, Manhattan

Rabbi Marla Feldman, Women of Reform Judaism, Manhattan
Rabbi Michael Fessler, Reconstructing Judaism, Poughkeepsie
Cantor Claire Franco, The American Conference of Cantors , Port Washington
Rabbi Josh Franklin, Jewish Center of the Hamptons, East Hampton
Rabbi Jonathan Freirich, Temple Beth Zion, Buffalo
Cantor Rebecca Garfein, Rodeph Sholom, Manhattan
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Rabbi Kim Geringer, HUC-JIR, Manhattan
Rabbi Erica Gerson, Manhattan
Rabbi Joan Glazer Farber, Derekh: A Pathway into Adult Jewish Learning, Tarrytown
Rabbi Bob Gluck, University at Albany, Albany
Rabbi Shira Gluck, Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, Manhattan
Rabbi Nadia Gold, Manhattan
Rabbi Rachel Goldenberg, Malkhut, Jackson Heights
Rabbi Barbara Goldman-Wartell, Temple Concord, Binghamton, Binghamton
Rabbi Howard Goldsmith, Congregation Emanu-El of Westchester, Rye
Rabbi Lisa Goldstein, Manhattan
Rabbi Linda Henry Goodman, Union Temple of Brooklyn, Brooklyn
Rabbi Lauren Grabelle Herrmann, SAJ, Manhattan
Rabbi Lisa Grant, Hebrew Union College, Manhattan
Rabbi Rachel Grant Meyer, Brooklyn
Rabbi Matt Green, Congregation Beth Elohim, Brooklyn
Rabbi Gary Greene, Marathon Jewish Community Center, Queens
Rabbi Reuven Greenvald, Rabbinical Assembly, Manhattan
Rabbi Daniel Gropper, Community Synagogue of Rye (NY)
Rabbi Rachel Gross-Prinz, Hebrew Union College, Manhattan
Rabbi Miriam Grossman, Congregation Kolot Chayeinu, Brooklyn
Rabbi Igael Gurin Malous, T'Shuvah Center, Manhattan
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Kohenet Judith Hollander, CBST, Manhattan
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Cantor Bradley Hyman, Temple Chaverim of Plainview, Plainview
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Rabbi Jill Jacobs, T'ruah, Manhattan
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Rabbi Juliana Karol, Congregation Rodeph Sholom, Manhattan

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Rabbi Valerie Lieber, Kane Street Synagogue, Brooklyn
Rabbi Maura Linzer, Temple Beth El of Northern Westchester, Chappaqua
Rabbi Ellen Lippmann, Kolot Chayeinu/Voices of Our Lives, Brooklyn
Rabbi Ariel Lorge, Manhattan
Rabbi Sara Luria, Beloved Brooklyn, Brooklyn
Rabbi Marc Margolius, Institute for Jewish Spirituality, Manhattan
Rabbi José Rolando Matalon, B'nai Jeshurun, Manhattan
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Rabbi Daniel Medwin, CCAR, Manhattan
Rabbi Shira Milgrom, Congregation Kol Ami, White Plains
Rabbi Bethie Miller, Sanctuary, Larchmont
Rabbi Avram Mlotek, Base, Manhattan
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Rabbi Steven Moskowitz, Congregation L'Dor V'Dor, Oyster Bay
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Rabbi Abby Stein, Sacred Space, Manhattan
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Rabbi Rochelle Tulik, Temple B'rith Kodesh, Rochester
Rabbi Art Vernon, Congregation Shaaray Shalom, West Hempstead
Rabbi Pamela Wax, WJCS, Bronx
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Rabbi Elchanan Jay Weinbach, Congregation Shaarey Israel, Montebello
Rabbi Josh Weinberg, URJ / ARZA, Brooklyn
Rabbi Jay Weinstein, Congregation Simchat HaLev, Syosset

Rabbi Samuel Weintraub, Kane Street Synagogue, Brooklyn
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Rabbi Elizabeth Zeller, Temple Chaverim, Plainview
Rabbi Lina Zerbarini, Kehillath Shalom Synagogue, Cold Spring Harbor

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Rabbi Michael Adam Latz, Shir Tikvah (MN)
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Rabbi Emily Segal, Aspen Jewish Congregation (CO)
Rabbi Ron Segal, Temple Sinai (GA)
Rabbi Larry Sernovitz, Kol Emeth (GA)
Rabbi Gerald Serotta (MD)
Rabbi Susan Shankman, Washington Hebrew Congregation (DC)
Rabbi Jeremy Sher, Kanfot Ha'aretz (CA)
Rabbi David Shneyer, Am Kolel (MD)
Cantor Michael Shochet, Temple Rodef Shalom (VA)
Rabbi A. Shuval Weiner, Congregation Beth Tikvah (GA)
Rabbi Jonathan Siger, C.C.A.R. (TX)
Rabbi Lisa Silverstein, Positive Jewish Living (CA)
Rabbi Melissa Simon, North Carolina Hillel (NC)
Rabbi Suzanne Singer, Temple Beth El (CA)
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Rabbi Myra Soifer, Temple Sinai (NV)
Rabbi Eric Solomon, Beth Meyer Synagogue (NC)
Rabbi Toba Spitzer, Congregation Dorshei Tzedek (MA)
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Rabbi Erica Steelman, Chaplaincy/T'ruah (PA)
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Rabbi David Steinberg, Temple Israel (MN)
Rabbi Andrea Steinberger, Hillel at the University of Wisconsin (WI)
Rabbi Rachel Steiner, Barnert Temple (NJ)
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Rabbi Elliott Tepperman, Bnai Keshet (NJ)
Rabbi David Teutsch, Reconstructing Judaism (PA)
Hazzan Hillel Tigay, IKAR (CA)
Rabbi Shoshanah Tornberg, Old York Road Temple – Beth Am (PA)
Rabbi Ronit Tsadok, IKAR (CA)
Rabbi Lisa Vinikoor, Beth Israel Congregation and Bowdoin Hillel (ME)
Rabbi Carrie Vogel, Kehillat Israel (CA)
Rabbi Susan Warshaw, Temple Bat Yam (VA)
Rabbi Deborah Waxman, Reconstructing Judaism (PA)
Rabbi Elyse Wechterman, Executive Director, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (PA)
Rabbi Sheila Weinberg (PA)
Rabbi Jennifer Weiner, HSOSC (MD)

Rabbi Stephen Weisman, Temple Solel (MD)
Rabbi Rachel Weiss, Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation (IL)
Rabbi Ora Weiss, Restorative Judaism (MA)
Rabbi Alex Weissman, Congregation Agudas Achim (RI)
Rabbi Lauren Werber, Temple B'nai Abraham (OH)
Rabbi Paula Winnig, Congregation Rodef Sholom (OH)
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Rabbi David Wirtschafter, Temple Adath Israel (KY)
Rabbi Stephen Wise, Shaarei Beth El Synagogue (Canada)
Rabbi Julie Wolkoff (MA)
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Rabbi Nora Woods, Reconstructing Judaism (PA)
Rabbi Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz, Uri L'Tzedek (Orthodox Social Justice) (AZ)
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Rabbi Mary Zamore, Women's Rabbinic Network (NJ)
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CONTACT INFO

We welcome any inquiry.

Phone number
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Email
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