August 21, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

We are writing in support of the Community Counter project, a community-based initiative to promote engagement with COVID-19 contact tracing in the Orthodox Jewish community of Chicago and suburban Cook County.

Contact tracing is crucial to preventing and controlling the spread of COVID-19. It is a multi-step process of identifying, assessing and managing persons exposed to a positive COVID-19 case and connecting exposed persons to resources to assist them during quarantine. Contact tracing will need the full cooperation of residents throughout Cook County in order to have maximum impact. To that end, the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) encourages and supports community-based partnerships in diverse communities throughout the county. By working with faith-based initiatives, we hope to reach people who are at risk of infection but hesitant to talk with health officials.

Orthodox enclaves in Chicago and elsewhere were hotspots early in the COVID-19 pandemic and will be at risk again during resurgence. Community Counter will communicate educational messages framed in culturally and religiously relevant language. The project will heighten readiness of community members who have been in close contact with a confirmed case to take steps to prevent potential spread of the virus to their family, friends, and other community members. This is how we will help prevent outbreaks
and avoid the need to close or otherwise restrict houses of worship, schools, and businesses. The project will also connect exposed persons to resources to assist them during quarantine.

The particular strength of Community Counter is its clear and strong commitment to engaging members of the Orthodox Jewish community with local health departments. Collaboration of religious organizations and rabbinic leaders with civil public health authorities are essential for success in the Orthodox community. These are lessons we have learned from public health campaigns such as measles immunization and cancer screening. The Community Counter project could also be adapted for use by other religious and ethnic enclaves in which religious or spiritual beliefs strongly influence health behaviors.

Another strength of the Community Counter project is that it tabulates the self-reported, completely anonymous cases that arise within the Orthodox community. This information is made available in transparent manner to the community. This feature facilitates recognition of increased transmission within the Orthodox community and allows for early action by institutional leaders.

In conclusion, CCDPH strongly supports this project as a component of culturally competent outreach in the Orthodox Jewish Community.

Sincerely,

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