



February 3, 2022

From: The Board of Trustees and Clergy of Congregation Shearith Israel

To: Congregants of Jeshuat Israel and all worshippers at Touro Synagogue, Newport, Rhode Island

Three years ago, Congregation Shearith Israel was confirmed by the courts to be the owner and steward of the Touro Synagogue. Sadly for all of us, that determination has not put an end to the friction and mistrust borne from that unfortunate litigation. By now, you have likely learned that Shearith Israel is seeking to change the *Board* overseeing day-to-day activities at Touro Synagogue. We want you to know that no congregants are being evicted. **Congregants will never be evicted, ever.** Shearith Israel also hopes that Rabbi Mandel will consider staying, as he is a welcome and trusted minister to the Newport community. Ritual services will remain the same.

We want you to know that for the past three years Shearith Israel has worked tirelessly to find common ground with the Board of CJI in terms of transparency and cooperation. Regrettably, the effort has not been successful. Two mediations *led by friends of CJI* ended in Shearith Israel's being willing to agree to their recommendations while those controlling the CJI Board were not willing to accept the recommendations of their own chosen intermediaries (a third mediation never got off the ground due to Covid-related scheduling conflicts).

Shearith Israel's disagreements are solely with a few members of the CJI Board. We wish to restructure the group overseeing day-to-day activities of Touro Synagogue to include currently sitting CJI members who bear no animosity towards Shearith Israel, Shearith Israel members, and independent trustees of national renown who have the best interests of Touro Synagogue in mind.

We want to restore the trust and confidence that has historically existed, for close to 200 years, between Shearith Israel and Touro Synagogue. We do not wish to disturb the religious services or social activities of Touro Synagogue's long-functioning community. Quite the opposite – we hope that congregants of the Touro Synagogue will experience no disruption of communal life whatsoever. We hope you will see past all the rhetoric and understand that the current legal action is being taken in order to ensure that we will once again have confidence that our tenant will act in a manner that is in the best interests of Touro Synagogue and that is not adversarial. We do not, for example, want to learn, after the fact, about sales of ritual objects or of the erection of gravestones in the historic cemetery. Only in this way will our communities be able to move forward together from the unfortunate disputes of the past several years.

We would be happy to speak with you and answer any questions you may have. Please contact Shearith Israel Executive Director [Barbara Reiss](#) or [Reverend Zachary Edinger](#). We wish you all a Shabbat shalom.