

March 12, 2021

Dear Friends of Sentinel Trust,

It has been almost one year since my last open letter to you all and what a year it's been. Together we've weathered volatility in the capital markets, our national election, natural disasters, increased cyber security threats, and a global pandemic, just to name a few. However, thanks to Sentinel Trust's committed team of dedicated and thoughtful professionals, our well-honed business processes, and our steadfast community of clients, I am happy to report that we are emerging stronger than ever.

### **Return to In-Office Work and Business Travel**

Sentinel Trust has been transitioning safely back to in-office work, slowly and methodically, since last summer. With the help of a consulting physician, we created very clear protocols for in-office masking and social distancing, as well as infection response plans. As a result, even though we have had about a half-dozen employee infections, we have had no community spread within the business and we feel very comfortable with in-office work.

Furthermore, in order to optimize vaccine access for qualified clients and employees, we nominated a vaccine czar within the business who educated our employees and Board of Directors with the most up-to-date vaccine access information including vaccine opportunities through late-day open vials, volunteer opportunities, and vaccine trials for otherwise non-qualified candidates. Accordingly, we have been able to help clients, employees, and friends of the firm optimize vaccine access in spite of limited information flow. As I write this letter, almost 70% of our employee base has received at least their first shot, making return to in-office work and normal client service activities an increasing reality. *If you would like help optimizing your family's access to a vaccine, do not hesitate to contact your Senior Relationship Officer.* As such, I expect that, by the end of March, our entire business will be working out of our offices in the River Oaks Bank Building five days per week. I also expect that business travel to see clients will similarly resume. We are accomplishing these goals safely and well ahead of the national timeline. I could not be more pleased.

### **Cyber Security & Natural Disaster Response**

Sentinel Trust's technology infrastructure has indeed been tested over the past year as we transitioned to and from an entirely remote work environment, weathered an ice storm during which most of Houston lost power and water for extended periods of time, and endured sweeping attacks against our national cyber security infrastructure by foreign actors. As a result of our commitment to and investment in technology, information security, system redundancy, planning, and preparation, Sentinel Trust continued to deliver timely and secure service to our client base no matter the unforeseen situation.

As you are likely aware, the United States was hit with two large-scale cyber-attacks: One against Solar Winds, which originated from Russia, and one against Microsoft Exchange Servers, which originated from China. Sentinel Trust was not directly affected by the Solar Winds hack as we do not use them as a service provider but we did go so far as to review all key vendors to ensure they were clear as well. Sentinel Trust does use Microsoft Exchange; however, because of our robust security platform, we were not vulnerable to the attack.

We actively monitor and remain incredibly vigilant with regard to our cyber security and protecting your data privacy.

During the recent ice storm, when even generator power went down at our office building, we transitioned to our remote back-up server in Conroe, Texas – an underground bunker that we share with organizations like United Airlines. Accordingly, core business functions like trading, cash movement, etc., remained uninterrupted.

I remain proud of the dedication shown by our technology and critical teams during these two incidents in particular. Working through the night and over weekends, they activated and ran our incident response plan as practiced, without business interruption, during at times very difficult circumstances including loss of power and water in their own homes.

### **Client Service, Planning, & Investment Management**

It is my greatest hope that throughout this past year, no matter the challenges, you have found our team responsive and thoughtful in our firm's continued efforts to provide you with family office services, sophisticated planning, and investment advice tailored to your family's specific needs. I heard stories of colleagues delivering groceries to doorsteps, executing estate plans while masked on front porches, and assisting clients and the people they care about with finding safe options, such as RVs or home rentals, for respite in 2020. Many of you have shared other deeply personal stories of our employees exceeding your expectations during difficult health and family circumstances; all of us are profoundly grateful for your trust and confidence.

As many of you know, tax filing deadlines have been delayed for most of Texas due to the February ice storms. Your client service team will work with your accountant to ensure all updated deadlines are met. Furthermore, and as an aside, our finance and operations team spent some of their remote work time retooling our K-1 vehicle estimate models to improve the efficiency of determining client tax payments. We look forward to rolling them out to you and the accounting firms that serve your families in the coming tax year.

Todd Burchett, our Chief Investment Officer, enjoyed an incredibly strong 2020. In his first full year leading the team, our investment group outperformed in almost every asset class as he worked to optimize our investment platform in the face of extreme volatility. In the coming year, we hope to provide you with more regular communications from him regarding his thoughts on market opportunities and how he is integrating them into portfolios through videos as well as written pieces.

### **Supporting Our Employees**

Last year, in spite of the uncertain outlook for all businesses, Sentinel Trust and our Board of Directors supported employee families while they worked tirelessly in the face of numerous difficult challenges not limited to childcare and spousal job losses in many cases. To wit, Sentinel Trust vested and paid a portion of bonuses to all staff early in the year, absorbed the entire annual increase in employee health insurance premiums, provided compensated sick days without requiring the use of PTO balances, and significantly increased our employer match of 401K contributions. Said another way, even during the tough times, we actively worked to serve and support our employees. It is important to me that I run a business living our organizational values, *Together Families Prosper*, and I can imagine it is important to you as well.

You will continue to hear from us throughout the coming year as to the strength and well-being of the firm, updated response plans related to the global pandemic or other unforeseen circumstances, planning opportunities given the current market environment, and investment positioning.

All of our initiatives will be guided by the goal of continuing to improve our delivery on issues important to you. I welcome your feedback and suggestions in that regard. Finally, and most importantly, we are grateful and humbled by the privilege you've given us and look forward to serving you and yours now and in the future.



Lissa S. Gangjee, JD, CFP®  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Sentinel Trust Company, LBA

*This material is published solely for the interests of clients and friends of Sentinel Trust Company, LBA. The material is not intended to be used as investment advice, nor should it be construed or relied upon, as an offering of investment advisory services or investment management services, or an offer to sell or solicitation of an offer to buy any securities or related financial instruments. Our Client Service and Investment teams are available to assist our clients and to develop strategies specific to their individual needs and factual circumstances. The opinions expressed are those of the individual author.*