

Hon. Andrew Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, New York 12224

April 6, 2020

RE: COVID-19 Health Campus at Harlem River Yards

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We write to express an urgent need for additional testing and hospital services in our communities in the South Bronx. We represent communities with some of the highest levels of positive COVID-19 diagnoses, and residents who are twice as likely to die as a result of contracting the virus. An April 3, 2020 article published by *The City* highlighted deep underlying health, housing, and income inequalities that have elevated these risks for Bronxites and we ask you for help needed for our constituents.

The South Bronx has too often been characterized by its past, but today, it is known as one of the densely populated and culturally mixed urban areas in the state of New York. The South Bronx is called home by almost every demographic in the world. We also host roughly one-third of the Bronx's NYCHA housing stock and are associated with the greatest health disparity in New York State.

As the article said last week, "**In The Bronx**, which has long grappled with lower-than-average life expectancy and high incidence of chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes, cancer and heart disease, **those infected with coronavirus die at a rate three times higher** than those who live just a river away in Manhattan." This article was further supported by data from the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development (ANHD), a 100+ organizational community-based coalition currently led by one of your former Assistant Housing Secretaries.

"In the Bronx, **Highbridge/Morrisania** has one of the highest rates of positive COVID-19 diagnoses, and ranks second highest in the city for threats to affordable housing. It also has the **largest share of residents working in frontline service sector occupations, and the second largest share of people of color in New York City**. The adjacent neighborhood of **Crotona/Tremont - also part of the South Bronx - has a high rate of COVID-19 diagnoses, and it is also the most rent-burdened in New York City**. It has the second highest density of service workers; and it has the **fourth highest density of people of color across New York City**. Together, these neighborhoods highlight a clear relationship between pre-existing inequity and where the virus is hitting hardest."

The South Bronx is serviced by HHC / Lincoln Medical and Mental Health Center – an already overtaxed facility without sufficient infrastructure to create additional areas for hospital bed capacity nor rapid testing at scale. This reality exists for the other Federally Qualified Health Centers, which are strained and can not accommodate the level of service, or expected fatalities resulting from COVID-19.

To help our constituents, we ask that you exercise your Executive Authority in the following areas:

1. Activate Harlem River Yard, a state-owned, waterfront site currently leased to the Galesi Group and create

- a rapid testing facility;
- COVID-19 field hospital; and
- temporary barracks for medical personnel.

The Harlem River Yard site has at least 8 acres of unused property and is accessible by water, rail, and automobile.

2. Furthermore, we ask that you contract with local food distributors such as local restaurants or catering companies to provide food for medical staff, patients and first responders associated with the aforementioned temporary campus.

If New York State can not accommodate this request, we ask that you convey the rationale as to why and that you request assistance from the federal government to activate this proposal. We fear that a lack of adequate response to COVID-19 in our community will lead to a record number of deaths associated with New York City's most vulnerable and even further health disparities.

It is our sincere hope that this recommendation would allow thousands of the South Bronx's most vulnerable to live while alleviating pressure on our local health system. We look forward to working with you on this endeavor and in continuing to protect the health and lives of our communities.

Sincerely,



Hon. Michael A. Blake
NYS Assembly, 79th District



Hon. Gustavo Rivera
New York State Senate, 33rd District



Michael Brady, CEO
Third Avenue Business Improvement District



Hon. Latoya Joyner
NYS Assembly, 77th District



Hon. José M. Serrano
New York State Senate, 29th District



Hon. Luis R. Sepúlveda
New York State Senate, 32nd District



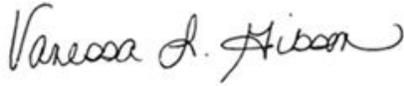
Assembly Member Karines Reyes, R.N.
NYS Assembly, 87th District



Rafael Salamanca
New York City Council, 17th District



Diana Ayala
New York City Council, 8th District



Vanessa L. Gibson
New York City Council, 16th District



José E. Serrano
Member of Congress