



NEW YORK STATE SENATE
ALBANY, NY 12247

ALESSANDRA BIAGGI
SENATOR

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of New York City
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Greg Russ
Chair & CEO
New York City Housing Authority
90 Church Street #9
New York, NY 10007

Vito Mustaciuolo
General Manager & COO
New York City Housing Authority
90 Church Street #9
New York, NY 10007

April 1, 2020

Dear Mayor de Blasio, Chairman Russ, and General Manager Mustaciuolo,

First, we want to thank you each for your leadership and proactive response to the COVID-19 crisis unfolding across our city and state. In particular, we want to commend you for your efforts to ensure that those who are most vulnerable in our society are not left behind in this crisis, by providing NYCHA tenants with needed assistance. However, we are deeply concerned about the frequency and accessibility of NYCHA's emergency food distribution program in the Bronx. We urge you to expand the number of locations and add additional dates.

As families in the Bronx, and across New York State, face significant economic hardship in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, emergency food programs, including NYCHA's food distribution efforts, are a lifeline for many. Food banks around New York City are experiencing rapidly increasing demand for food — the Met Council reports that many nonprofits are distributing 30 to 50 percent more food than normal to meet the need.

Even under normal circumstances, the Bronx suffers from high rates of food insecurity. According to Hunger Free America, in 2018, 26 percent of Bronx residents experienced food security, including more than 20 percent of children and 24 percent of seniors. Many Bronxites already rely on emergency food assistance to feed themselves and their families. The current crisis and widespread economic hardship many families are experiencing right now has only heightened that need.

While we are grateful that NYCHA is partnering with City Harvest to provide fresh food and other household products to tenants around New York City, the locations and frequency do not meet the needs of our districts or Bronx

residents as a whole. City Harvest is distributing food at two NYCHA locations in the Bronx: St. Mary's Park and Melrose. These locations do not serve the majority of NYCHA tenants in our districts or the Bronx. To provide two examples from our districts: the Throggs Neck Houses are more than five miles away from both locations; the Pelham Parkway Houses are four and a half, and five miles away, respectively. Consequently, this critical food assistance is inaccessible for many Bronx NYCHA tenants without the use of public transportation. New York City is currently asking New Yorkers to avoid public transportation unless absolutely necessary. It is irresponsible and unfair to ask NYCHA residents — especially seniors and those with underlying illnesses — to choose between traveling to access food and protecting their health and safety.

Additionally, NYCHA is not distributing food at the frequency needed. City Harvest last distributed food at St. Mary's Park on March 24. The next date of distribution in the Bronx is not until April 11, leaving Bronx NYCHA families without access to food for two and a half weeks. While there are a myriad of nonprofit food banks that serve food insecure New Yorkers around the Bronx, these organizations are facing an imminent crisis. As food banks warn that they may have to close without an immediate infusion of funds, NYCHA's food distribution program is critical to ensuring that Bronx families do not go hungry.

While we understand that food assistance is outside of the scope of NYCHA's normal responsibility, we must all go above and beyond now to ensure that all New Yorkers have access to the most basic necessities. We urge NYCHA to expand their food assistance program in the Bronx to ensure that every NYCHA resident has access to food.

Sincerely,



Alessandra Biaggi
New York State Senate, District 34



Nathalia Fernandez
New York State Assembly, District 80



Karines Reyes
New York State Assembly, District 87