The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
New York State Governor  
State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224  

Commissioner Howard A. Zucker  
New York State Department of Health  
Corning Tower  
Empire State Plaza,  
Albany, NY 12237  

April 3rd, 2020  

Dear Governor Cuomo and Commissioner Zucker,  

We continue to commend your leadership and the work of your teams in steering New York State through the storm that is the COVID-19 pandemic.  

We are particularly encouraged by the State’s swift action to expand New York’s testing capacity to ensure the safety and treatment of as many New Yorkers as possible. At your initiative, New York has already surpassed California, Washington, China and South Korea in most tests per capita.  

As you are gravely aware, access to COVID-19 testing is a crucial tool for pinpointing hot spots, tracing the spread of the outbreak, and most importantly, identifying patients who need immediate medical treatment. This is exemplified in the success of the satellite testing facility to address the New Rochelle cluster, where the rate of infection has already slowed.  

However, less than four miles away, the City of Mount Vernon is struggling to contain the outbreak. As of April 2nd, there are 428 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Mount Vernon – the third highest case count in all of Westchester county. Due to a lag in reporting, there are assumed to be even more than that. This week, Mayor Shawyn Patterson-Howard received several calls from residents to report upwards of 30 deaths due to the virus, some of whom did not even show up in the confirmed case database before passing away. Unfortunately among the dead were three people from the same family.  

The City of Mount Vernon is suffering greatly without sufficient support to monitor the spread of COVID-19 and test at the rate our community needs – we urgently request that the State implement a satellite testing facility to aid in the City’s efforts to contain the outbreak immediately.  

Mount Vernon is already operating at below average for a city of its size when it comes to offering quality and emergency health services. In October, Montefiore announced the closing of Mount Vernon Hospital, threatening to
remove the only intensive care unit (ICU) facility for the city’s more than 67,000 residents. In the wake of this pandemic, they agreed to only partially reopen with a limited number of staff to conduct screenings and testing. We continue to advocate for the full hospital to immediately come back online, however we know that even this full infrastructure alone will not meet the demand for patients in need of tests. Mount Vernon residents will be forced to travel outside of the city limits, if they haven’t already, to areas like New Rochelle which will place an even greater burden on their testing capacity within the containment area. Additionally, these testing sites are inaccessible for the many Mount Vernon residents who do not own cars, and depend on public transportation to get around, increasing the risk that they may expose others while seeking testing.

The City of Mount Vernon has already identified several potential locations for a satellite facility, including Brush Park, Hutchinson Field, and a city-owned parking lot across from Grace Baptist Church on the south side that is easily walkable.

As one of the only minority-majority cities in Westchester county with the 5th largest population density in the state, and approximately 14% of the population over the age of 65, we have an obligation to ensure that this vulnerable community receives the resources and infrastructure it needs to survive this pandemic.

In the interest of protecting our constituents and slowing the rapid spread of COVID-19, we urge you to act quickly and provide the City of Mount Vernon with a satellite testing facility. We look forward to working with you in bringing this request to fruition.

Sincerely,

Alessandra Biaggi  
New York State Senate, District 34

Jamaal T. Bailey  
New York State Senate, District 36

Shawyn Patterson-Howard  
Mayor of the City of Mount Vernon