RE: COVID-19 Health Campus at Harlem River Yards

Dear Governor Cuomo:

The South Bronx has often been characterized by burned out buildings, is known for having the poorest urban Congressional district in the country, hosts roughly one-third of the Bronx’s NYCHA housing, and is associated with the greatest health disparity in New York State. An April 3, 2020 article published by The City highlighted these disparities and the risks South Bronx residents face from not only contracting COVID-19 but also dying from the disease.

"In The Bronx, which has long grappled with lower-than-average life expectancy and high incidence of chronic health conditions like asthma and diabetes, 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 Hospital – an already overtaxed facility without infrastructure to create additional areas for rapid testing, and a network of federally qualified health clinics. These healthcare facilities are strained and can not accommodate the level of service, or expected fatalities resulting from COVID-19. The activation of the New York EXPO Center site, while important, is still not enough to meet the growing demand and projected strain on our health system. The South Bronx needs an additional site brought online immediately.

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 and patients associated with the aforementioned temporary campus.

If New York State can not accommodate this request, we ask that you request assistance from the federal government to activate this proposal. Mr. Governor, historically the South Bronx has lost hundreds of thousands of residents due to government inaction and systemic disenfranchisement. We fear that a lack of adequate response to COVID-19 in our
community will not only continue that red lining but also lead to a record number of deaths associated with New York City’s most vulnerable.

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. Please join us in protecting the health and lives of our community.

Sincerely,

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

Hon. Gustavo Rivera
NYS Senate, 33rd Senate District

Michael Brady, CEO
Third Avenue Business Improvement District

Hon. Luis R. Sepulveda
NYS Senate, 29th Senate District

Hon. Jose M. Serrano
NYS Senate, 29th Senate District

Hon. Latoya Joyner
NYS Assembly, 77th District

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

Hon. Rafael Salamanca, Jr.
New York City Council, 17th District

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

Hon. Diana Ayala
New York City Council, 8th District