December 23, 2021

Dr. Mary T. Bassett, M.D., M.P.H.
Acting Commissioner, New York State Department of Health
Corning Tower, Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12237

Dr. Dave A. Chokshi, M.D., MSc
Commissioner, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
42-09 28th Street
Long Island City, NY 11101

Dr. Ted Long, M.D., MHS
Executive Director
NYC COVID-19 Test & Trace Corps
125 Worth St.
New York, NY 10013

RE: Need for more COVID-19 testing sites in “Testing Deserts”

Dear Drs. Bassett, Chokshi, and Long:

We are writing to ask your respective departments to dramatically increase the number of COVID-19 testing sites across the borough, and especially in traditionally underserved neighborhoods in Queens.

As you know, the recent arrival of the highly transmissible Omicron variant of COVID-19 in the U.S. has prompted a large increase in the number of Queens residents looking to get tested for COVID-19. In seeking testing, these residents are following the advice of public health officials who are rightfully promoting frequent testing as an important tool in our multi-pronged strategy for fighting COVID-19.

It is therefore disheartening to see individuals in our borough encounter long wait times at COVID-19 testing sites in recent days. A shortage of sites has forced people to line up for hours in the cold as they wait to be seen at the limited number of public sites in operation. We believe that these long lines have deterred many people from getting tested and have potentially exacerbated the COVID-19 pandemic by allowing many individuals who may be infected with COVID-19 to go undiagnosed.

We refer to this problem across the borough, as “Testing Deserts,” due to the lack of public testing access in those communities. “Testing Deserts” are also located in neighborhoods home to many minority communities, who as we know, have borne the brunt of this pandemic and are reluctant to begin with when it comes to reinforcing the need to get tested and vaccinated against COVID-19.
To rectify this testing shortage, and to prevent Queens from once again becoming the “epicenter of the epicenter” of the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to swiftly and significantly increase the number of COVID-19 testing sites in Testing Desert neighborhoods throughout the borough.

Queens residents, especially those living in underserved communities, have already suffered an incalculable number of hardships due to this seemingly never-ending pandemic. We cannot allow a lack of adequate testing opportunities to further add to their suffering, or to get in the way of our effort to combat COVID-19 and eventually put an end to this pandemic once and for all.

We thank you in advance for your attention to this matter and await your reply.

Sincerely,

Donovan Richards Jr.
President
Borough of Queens

Michael Gianaris
Senator and Deputy Majority Leader
New York State Senate, 12th District

Edward C. Braunstein
Member
New York State Assembly, 26th District

Jessica Ramos
Senator
New York State Senate, 13th District

Catalina Cruz
Member
New York State Assembly, 39th District

Jessica González-Rojas
Member
New York State Assembly, 34th District

Catherine Nolan
Member
New York State Assembly, 37th District

Adrienne E. Adams
Member
New York City Council, 28th District
Robert F. Holden  
*Member*  
*New York City Council, 30th District*

Shekar Krishnan  
*Member-elect*  
*New York City Council, 25th District*

Linda Lee  
*Member-elect*  
*New York City Council, 23rd District*

Lynn Schulman  
*Member-elect*  
*New York City Council, 29th District*

Sandra Ung  
*Member-elect*  
*New York City Council, 20th District*

Nantasha Williams  
*Member-elect*  
*New York City Council, 27th District*

Julie Won  
*Member-elect*  
*New York City Council, 26th District*