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March 4, 2022

Eric Adams  
Mayor of New York City  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor Adams,

Few neighborhoods have been hit more disproportionately by COVID-19 than the communities of the eastern Rockaway Peninsula, including Far Rockaway, Arverne and Edgemere. In ZIP Code 11691 alone, we've lost 612 neighbors to COVID-19 as of today, March 4 — the second-highest total in Queens and fourth most in New York City. Meanwhile, despite the best efforts of my office and others, a City-lowest 61 percent of residents in that ZIP code have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. The reasons for Far Rockaway's lower vaccine rate are numerous, and much progress has been made to significantly increase that rate in recent months. But it is abundantly clear that the City's approach to COVID-19 testing, vaccine and outreach equity in these communities have been dubious at best and an abject failure at worst.

The demographics of western Rockaway couldn't be more different than the eastern portion of the peninsula, as the neighborhoods of Belle Harbor, Neponsit and Breezy Point are significantly whiter, more politically conservative, and wealthier with higher rates of home ownership. But the pandemic has at least partially transcended these differences too, as ZIP Code 11697 has recorded more than 1,400 cases — totaling more than 42,000 cases per 100,000 residents, by far the highest such figure in the City.

COVID-19 exposed and exacerbated so many of society's problems, but few have been laid bare more than the gross, unjust health disparities beyond this virus that our Rockaway residents on both halves of the peninsula experience daily. According to the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's [2018 Community Health Profile of Community District 14](#), Rockaway residents experience diabetes, obesity and hypertension at higher rates than mainland Queens and the rest of New York City. Meanwhile, rates of premature death tied to infant mortality, cancer, heart disease and drug-related incidents are higher — in some instances, disturbingly higher — than the rest of The World's Borough and the City as a whole.

With just one already overburdened hospital, St. John's Episcopal, and a smattering of smaller healthcare clinics on the Peninsula, however, Rockaway families have little to no access to the medical care they deserve. The closest Level 1 adult trauma center, Jamaica Hospital Medical Center, is more than 10 miles away, while the nearest Level 1 pediatric trauma center in Queens, Cohen Children's Medical Center, is nearly 13 miles from the Peninsula's eastern end and more than 23 miles from its western tip. Even for families lucky enough to own a vehicle, it can take upwards of an hour or more for Rockaway families to reach these facilities. Meanwhile, the Neponsit Adult Day Health Care Center, which largely caters to individuals with cognitive impairments, has been shuttered for numerous reasons since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving peninsula seniors to suffer from a lack of critical services.

Both as a City Councilmember and now as Queens Borough President, I have been a staunch and tireless advocate for bringing additional healthcare facilities to the Rockaway Peninsula, specifically a NYC Health + Hospitals facility, as have all of our dedicated elected officials representing these communities. Such a proposal has broad

support across the spectrum of Rockaway residents, and significant progress was made under the de Blasio Administration to make this project a reality. My office and NYC Health + Hospitals even conducted tours of COVID-19 Centers of Excellence in Queens and the Bronx last year to further inform what such a facility in Rockaway would look like. However, this plan was seemingly dropped by NYC Health + Hospitals during last fall's mayoral transition — yet another unfortunate example of Rockaway families falling through the cracks of government.

Mr. Mayor, your winning campaign was centered on solving the disparities in our societies, specifically the ones families of color have suffered through during the COVID-19 pandemic. By funding and constructing an NYC Health + Hospitals facility on the Rockaway Peninsula, we can begin to address these inequities and dramatically improve the overall health and well-being of those who call Rockaway home. I would be thrilled to partner with your administration in the site selection and budgetary processes.

The Queens Borough President's Office and The World's Borough has done right by NYC Health + Hospitals throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting our healthcare heroes in every sense of the word and working day and night to ensure as many residents as possible get tested, vaccinated and boosted. As we emerge from the Omicron wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and fuel Queens' comeback, it's now NYC Health + Hospitals and City government's turn to finally do right by the families of Rockaway.

Sincerely,



Donovan Richards  
*President*  
Borough of Queens



Khaleel Anderson  
*NYS Assemblymember*  
Assembly District 31



James Sanders Jr.  
*NYS Senator*  
Senate District 10