

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 7, 2020

Mr. Gregory Russ
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
New York City Housing Authority
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007-2516

Dear Chairman Russ,

We are writing to express our deep concerns about the inadequate response of the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, we have been hearing from NYCHA residents in our districts that the outreach to residents was insufficient, and that the emergency cleaning and sanitation protocols established by NYCHA are not being implemented properly and consistently across NYCHA developments. As you know, NYCHA houses over half a million New Yorkers. NYCHA residents have much higher rates of asthma, diabetes, and other underlying health conditions that place them at greater risk than the general New York City population at large. Moreover, NYCHA residents are uniquely vulnerable to infectious disease due to the high density of residents in NYCHA housing. Avoiding frequent and close contact with each other, with NYCHA staff, and with contractors is virtually impossible. Consequently, it is crucial that NYCHA take, to the fullest extent, every possible precaution to prevent an outbreak of COVID-19 in all of its sites.

Alarming, we have received numerous complaints from NYCHA residents and resident leaders across the city that their buildings are not being cleaned at the frequency that NYCHA officials have determined necessary; five times per week in its 71 senior-only buildings, and three times per week in its other buildings. Despite this policy, residents have reported that the common areas in their buildings are being cleaned only once per week. High-risk common areas such as hallways, lobbies, and elevators, as well as “touch points” such as door handles and elevator buttons, are not being cleaned with the frequency needed to slow the spread of COVID-19.

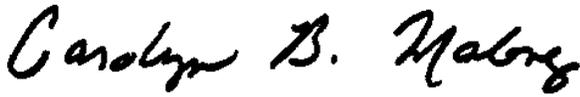
Furthermore, NYCHA has done an inadequate job of communicating with its residents about the extent and severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, or enforcing safety policies in its buildings. Several residents have reported seeing large groups of people congregating in NYCHA residence common spaces as recently as last week, despite New York State and New York City implementing social distancing policies three weeks ago. NYCHA has reported a robust outreach effort including robocalls and the public posting of printed materials. In contradiction to this claim, residents, including resident leaders, tell us they have not received any phone calls from NYCHA about the pandemic. We are disturbed by the lack of information reaching NYCHA residents about the disease, including coronavirus symptoms, city and state

measures in place to combat its spread, and individual behavioral precautions. NYCHA also reports using email and social media to reach residents; however, a large number of NYCHA residents lack reliable internet access or do not have the computer literacy skills necessary to effectively access these materials. Especially during this crisis, effective outreach must be measured by outcomes and not by completing a to-do list.

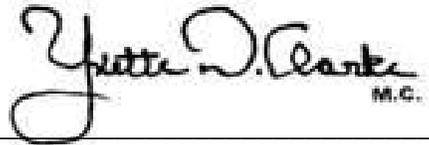
While we recognize the challenges with which NYCHA and its residents have been contending even before this public health crisis, we call on you to ensure that NYCHA buildings are cleaned, disinfected, and sanitized with the diligence and frequency that this pandemic demands. Additionally, we urge you to strengthen your coronavirus information outreach campaign, to make sure that all NYCHA residents have comprehensive, up-to-date, and accurate information about this pandemic and about what they should be doing to protect themselves and their families.

We thank you for your attention to this matter and for your work on behalf of New Yorkers during this crisis.

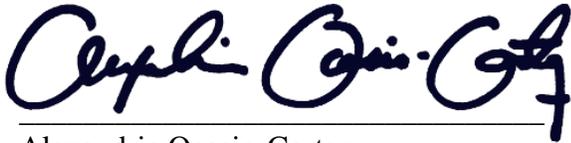
Sincerely,



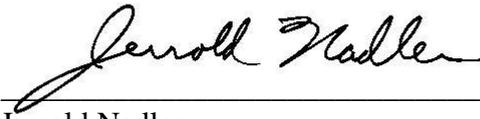
Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress



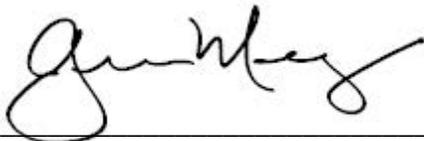
Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



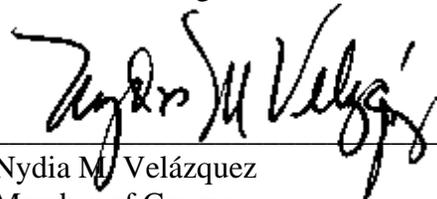
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress



José E. Serrano
Member of Congress



Hakeem Jeffries
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress

cc: Bart M. Schwartz, Federal Monitor
Lynne Patton, HUD Region II Administrator