

Dear Mayor De Blasio:

On behalf of our community throughout Long Island City (LIC) and the LIC/Dutch Kills area, we are writing to express our deep concern with the increase in homelessness in LIC without sufficient supportive services and the related quality-of-life issues, which are at levels unseen for many years.

As you well know, our city is still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, straining the existing safety net even as new sources of need are created. We do understand that extraordinary times require extraordinary measures, such as the increased housing of homeless New Yorkers in hotels, including in many of our area's large number of establishments. But we also have learned through hard example, that this approach to housing homeless only works when there are sufficient services and an appropriate security plan for each site. Unfortunately, our recent experience has shown that these necessary steps – for the benefit of both the homeless themselves and the surrounding community – are not being taken.

As New Yorkers continue to do their best to slow and prevent the spread of the coronavirus and recover economically, we feel that it is paramount to help create and maintain a sense of safety in the communities that they live in. Since the beginning of this pandemic, our neighborhood has seen an unprecedented increase in homeless activity and hotel-converted homeless shelters. Within the past few months, we have personally witnessed and heard from our neighbors that many LIC residents, employees, businesses and patrons have been subject to solicitation, aggressive panhandling and harassment that threaten the safety of our community. In addition to creating hardship for our local residents, including our disproportionately stressed NYCHA tenants and their families, this is challenging for our local small business owners who are desperately trying to take advantage of the NYC Open Restaurants outdoor dining initiative.

We also worry that the homeless population is not being properly supported. As more hotels are turned into shelters, we have not seen a coordinated and necessary increase in the crucial services, especially now when we are still in the ongoing fight to slow the pandemic, that support these vulnerable New Yorkers.

Furthermore, because LIC is home to one of the highest, if not the highest concentrations of hotels in the city, the sheer numbers of people, many of them with severe challenges and significant needs, is causing a correspondingly large impact. Our neighborhood is already home to the largest public housing development in the country, Queensbridge Houses, as well as Ravenswood and Astoria Houses, which together have some of the highest rates of poverty and disproportionate health and economic impact from COVID-19. Yet we also have a sophisticated network of nonprofits who have worked together to develop strategies to break the cycle of poverty. If the city is not able to provide sufficient services on

site at the hotels, then we ask that you support these groups, many of which are signatories to this letter, with additional resources to help this added population.

In short, LIC needs help from the City to address increasingly dire circumstances surrounding this added hotel based homelessness. If left unresolved, they will have a significant impact on our neighborhood's residents and businesses, as we all strive to make it through what will be a very long path to recovery.

We represent, across two Community Boards, NYCHA residents, small businesses and large employers, nonprofits and schools, tenants, seniors, and homeowners, and are collectively committed to help LIC be an inclusive and vibrant mixed-use neighborhood for all to enjoy. We are hopeful that you will allocate the appropriate resources to help support our efforts by ensuring that all homeless housing sites have appropriate security plans and supportive services in place, and that the local nonprofits which will inevitably be tasked with helping these individuals receive the support they need to do so.

Sincerely,

April Simpson, Queensbridge Tenant Association
Claudia Coger, Astoria Tenant Association
Carol Wilkins, Ravenswood Resident Association, Inc.
Bishop Mitchell Taylor, Center of Hope International and Urban Upbound
Sister Tesa Fitzgerald, Hour Children
Chris Hanway, Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement
Judy Zangwill, Sunnyside Community Services
Antonios Benetatos, Dutch Kills Civic Association
Toni Ceaser, Friends Group of the LIC Queens Public Library
Marie Torniali, Central Astoria LDC and Steinway Astoria Partnership
Victor Nair, Lucky Pizza
Alvarez Symonette, Lady M Confections
Elizabeth Lusskin, President, LIC Partnership and Executive Director, LIC BID

CC:

- New York State Assemblywoman Cathy Nolan
- New York City Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer
- Florence Koulouris, Community Board 1
- Debra Markell Kleinart, Community Board 2
- Commissioner Joslyn Carter, New York City Department of Homeless Services
- Commissioner Jonnel Doris, New York City Department of Small Business Services