



3/17/20

Mayor Bill de Blasio
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dr. Oxiris Barbot, Commissioner, NYC DOHMH
42-09 28th St, 14th Floor
Long Island City, NY 11101

Steven Banks, Commissioner, HRA
150 Greenwich St, 42nd Floor (4WTC)
New York, NY 10007

Re: Homeless Persons and COVID-19

Dear Mayor de Blasio, and Commissioners Barbot and Banks,

We write to express our outrage that the guidance provided for treatment of shelter residents and those staying on the streets who are symptomatic for COVID-19 does not conform to the guidance provided to DOHMH for those with symptoms, much to the detriment of the New York City public health system, shelter residents, shelter staff, and outreach workers.

Currently, the DHS guidance instructs that a homeless person with flu-like symptoms be transported by EMS to a Health and Hospitals Emergency Room to be tested for COVID-19. Under DOHMH guidelines, one should not be tested for COVID-19 unless needing a hospital admission, and persons with *non-acute symptoms* should not be going to emergency rooms, much less using valuable EMS capacity. Rather, they should be transported, masked, to a medical shelter where they can be monitored, treated for fever and other symptoms, and provided bed rest, food, and fluids. **Only if they show more acute symptoms should they be transported to the emergency room for possible admission.**

At the crux of this is failure of the Department of Homeless Services to set up adequate medical beds, notwithstanding weeks of advance notice, to be able to shelter and care for every homeless New Yorker who develops COVID-19. If even 10% of homeless adults develop COVID-19, DHS must be ready with several thousand medical beds that are physically separate from other shelter beds.

Further, homeless people staying on the streets or in transit facilities lack access to toilets, food (many soup kitchens are closing), hand sanitizer, clothing, and toiletries. All homeless people need appropriate screening, and when symptomatic for COVID-19, access to safe transport to hotel rooms, a separate safe haven for those with symptoms, or medical shelters that are physically separate from other shelters.

We urge that appropriate beds and staffing be arranged immediately and that the guidance be rewritten to transfer shelter residents and other homeless people with COVID-19 symptoms to these facilities for a minimum of seven days' stay and/or three days after symptoms have resolved without medication.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Shelly Nortz".

Shelly Nortz
Deputy Executive Director for Policy
Coalition for the Homeless

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Charles King".

Charles King
CEO, Housing Works

Cc: Corey Johnson, Speaker, NYC Council
Mark Levine, NYC Counsel
Stephen Levin, NYC Counsel