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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

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Hon. Bill de Blasio
Mayor, City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

I am very concerned about the lack of planning and continually inadequate vaccine distribution. We are not new to this pandemic. We know what works and what doesn't. We know what caused inequities and what can address them. And yet, knowing for many months that the vaccine was coming, we did not develop an equitable or effective plan for New York City.

- 1) **OVERALL ORGNIZATION:** Who is the vaccine czar? When we realized that food insecurity was an enormous issue during this pandemic, you appointed a food czar, who developed a series of systems – most importantly, the home delivery system. It involved tapping multiple agencies (DFTA, DSNY, and TLC, and DoITT's 311 operation), speeding up procurement processes, and developing trouble-shooting mechanisms.

There needs to be a **SINGLE** point person (with a staff) who can determine the vaccination strategy in each zip code, particularly those hardest hit by COVID. We need a person who can oversee the development of mechanisms for outreach, tools for appointment-making, logistical arrangements for transportation, and systems for special populations (homeless, congregate care, homebound, etc.).

A **SINGLE** person/office must have knowledge of **ALL** vaccination options – whether city-run, state-run, private, or federally-run, such as the program in which individual buildings can get vaccines.

- 2) **TECHNOLOGY:** The technology you are using is lacking. Despite the numerous offices and individuals in your administration whose job it is to develop efficient and user-friendly public interfaces, you did not tap those resources. Instead, there is a choppy system that is hard to navigate. H + H and DOHMH operate separately, and private sites are somewhat in the mix, but not vetted or brought into a unified appointment system. Users of the system can sometimes get an appointment, if they are lucky, in the same borough. Often they are told there are no appointments, and it is not clear when they should check again – in an hour? The next day? There is no way to register and receive a notification when an appointment opens up. Although we are late, we will be administering vaccines for a long time, so there is still time to develop

a system that can be easily navigated. Even beyond appointments, the system is lacking. Every time I ask a question, I am directed to a different website for answers. Of course, the greatest travesty is that this technology is not available to those who do not have devices, wifi, or computer literacy. We have not only NOT dealt with issues of equity, but have in fact exacerbated those issues. And while we need to remedy them, this will only be partially successful as our vaccine supplies are limited. So each day, our limited supply is only going to those with the means to access technology. I am thankful that the Javits Center, although a New York State entity, is now listed on the NYC website.

I understand that a call center was set up. However, I don't understand why this happened AFTER we started distributing the vaccine, given that we knew for months that the vaccine was coming. We did not use our extensive 311 system, even though it could have been adapted. Rather, a new number was established, with no system in place to let people know what that phone number is. I understand a postcard is now being sent to seniors – again, a little late given our limited vaccine supply. And in a city where more than 100 languages are spoken in our public schools, the call center as of yesterday, only accommodates English and Spanish speakers. In addition, the call center at least at first, was not working with people to help them find appointments at any city, state or private site, but rather only referring people to H + H sites. City employees working from home and even organized volunteers can sit at computers and help people find sites and register for appointments. It just takes organization.

LOCATIONS: We know the zip codes and neighborhoods that have been hardest hit. Why aren't there vaccine sites in EVERY ONE of those locations? I understand that there are requirements for storing and administering the vaccine, but again, we have known these constraints for months. In Manhattan, the 10040 zip code, encompassing a large swath of Washington Heights and Inwood, has had the highest COVID positivity rates for months, and yet not a single site has been available to residents there. Columbia Presbyterian started operating out of the armory on January 14, 2021. This is terrific, but why is this operation being left up to them? Currently they are focused first on their employees (understandable) and their own patients, who may or may not live in that zip code. They are also calling local community-based organizations to give them the opportunity to schedule a vaccination appointment. All electeds are working with them, as is the State of New York. However, they too have their own sign-up web site and soon will have their own call center. There is also a need for a site on Roosevelt Island. This is indeed an island, with a large senior population. Seniors do not have the ability to get off the island to get to a vaccine site – there must be one on the island itself.

- 3) NYCHA: What plans have been made to vaccinate NYCHA residents, and again why wasn't this plan developed PRIOR to the vaccine arriving in NYC? I have heard that private hospitals have been asked to focus on various NYCHA developments? Who is ensuring that there is a plan for EVERY SINGLE development, and when will the plan be implemented, again given our limited supply of the vaccine?

- 4) **TRANSPORTATION:** We know that with few locations and a less-mobile population eligible for the vaccine, we need to work out a transportation system now – not after those with cars or the ability to pay for cabs get vaccinated with our limited supply. When we needed swift and widespread support for food delivery, we enlisted the TLC to drop off meals. Why can't we deploy these same drivers and the same system to help bring seniors to vaccination sites? Lyft drove thousands to polling places during the election. Are we in conversation with them about their ability, volunteer or paid, to bring seniors to vaccination sites? Have we ramped up Access-A-Ride to accommodate the thousands of seniors who need this specialized transportation to get them to vaccine sites?

- 5) **SPECIAL POPULATIONS:** We keep hearing that plans are underway for those in congregate settings – whether group homes, medical facilities, or homeless shelters. Can these plans be shared? What is the timeline for getting people in these settings vaccinated? Is it up to each provider to develop a plan for their facility? If so, who is working with these providers? What is the plan for homebound seniors, and when will it be implemented?

There is clearly a great need for ongoing work and coordination, especially with the State of New York. Briefing meetings, which become more like cheerleading sessions, are not helping. I am putting together a Manhattan Task Force so that we can address some of the issues I have mentioned, and I hope you will have appropriate staff participate. I understand that limited supplies of the vaccine hamper some distribution efforts, but the current system is scattered and certainly inequitable.

Sincerely,



Gale A. Brewer

Manhattan Borough President