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Congress of the United States
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Hon. Bill de Blasio
Mayor
City of New York
New York City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Gregory Russ
Chair and CEO
New York City Housing Authority
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

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Mayor De Blasio and Chairman Russ,

I write to urge you to consider allowing currently unused community spaces in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) properties to be used as sites for Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) to provide primary care for public housing residents. Public housing residents face a myriad of health challenges, from environmental risk factors manifest in their housing to those tied to socioeconomic opportunity, challenges that have been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. Allowing FQHC providers to use these spaces will make healthcare resources more accessible for public housing residents, address risk factors associated with coronavirus, and ultimately help improve the overall wellbeing of these communities.

As you know, FQHCs are authorized under Section 330 of the Public Health Services Act to provide health services to underserved areas or populations such as public housing residents on a sliding fee scale. FQHC providers receive grants from the federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and can receive enhanced reimbursements from Medicare and Medicaid. New York has already benefitted from the FQHC system, with organizations operating in my district alone attracting over \$25 million in federal investment to our health network. Across the state, more than 70 FQHCs with 800+ sites serve over 2 million patients annually.

Public housing residents have consistently been found to have some of the worst health of any population in the United States. One study has found that public housing residents are more than twice as likely to be diagnosed with chronic health conditions than an otherwise representative sample. While the causal link between public housing residency and poor health outcomes is debated, evidence from the National Institute of Health indicates that the majority of public housing residents are already sick when they enter public housing and that public housing provides a safety net for already unhealthy lower-income communities. Furthermore, given the limited transportation options and work requirements associated with lower-income communities, the proximity of healthcare is a key factor in its practical availability to patients. It is clear that the direst need, and therefore the biggest opportunity for improvement, is in healthcare providers that are affordable and immediately accessible to public housing residents.

Allowing unused NYCHA community spaces to be used by healthcare providers will allow services to be present in the communities most in need. NYCHA can offer these spaces at competitive rents or even rent-free in order to attract more providers. Especially during the current pandemic, when social distancing precludes the large-scale gathering of people in community spaces, as well as the increased demand for medical care, there is a clear opportunity to utilize these spaces for the benefit of the community. Furthermore, these providers can reduce the burden on emergency rooms and hospitals by providing primary and preventative care before patients need more serious treatment. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit public housing residents and communities of color most severely, and the Center for Disease Control has cited the disease's top risk factors as being socioeconomic status, access to healthcare, and increased exposure to the virus, all of which are disproportionately present in public housing communities.

In March, Congress passed H.R. 6074 to allocate \$100 million to FQHCs nationwide, and in April, the *CARES Act* provided an additional \$1.3 billion. Congress has directed significant resources to help buttress the nation's strained health system, and it is only right that as the city hardest hit by the pandemic to date, New York City use these resources to better our infrastructure now and into the future.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to working with you in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Max Rose', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Max Rose
Member of Congress