

September 5, 2018

Dr. Oxiris Barbot, MD
Acting Health Commissioner
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
42-09 28th Street
Queens, NY 11101

Acting Health Commissioner Barbot:

We write to you as elected officials deeply concerned with the lack of consistent and up-to-date communication from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (“DOHMH”) concerning recent reports of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) residents — our constituents — that have been diagnosed with Legionnaires disease.¹

Please accept this letter as a formal invitation to a Community Town Hall on Friday, September 7th, 2018 at the Saint Nicholas Houses beginning at 6:30 p.m. I will be joined at the event by the undersigned New York elected officials and representatives from the relevant New York City health, safety, and housing agencies.

Earlier this summer, DOHMH informed elected officials and residents in the neighborhoods of Washington Heights and Sugar Hill of positive Legionnaires diagnoses. In addition, NYCHA informed my office that it discovered Legionella bacteria in water cooling towers at the Saint Nicholas Houses in Central Harlem.² NYCHA assured us that they were working actively to remove the bacteria, would treat those suspected of infection, and would continue to monitor the cooling tower until confident that bacteria were no longer present.

Despite these assurances, we recently received reports that six water cooling towers tested 100 percent positive for Legionella bacteria and an additional four water cooling towers registered dangerously high levels of the bacteria at the Saint Nicholas Houses. On top of that, three additional residents of Saint Nicholas Houses recently contracted Legionnaires disease.³ These new cases follow reports late last week that two residents of the Fort Independence Houses Complex in the Bronx also contracted Legionnaires disease.⁴

¹ <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/Legionnaires-Disease-Bronx-Fort-Independence-Houses-Kingsbridge--492272041.html>

² <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/about/press/pr2018/pr065-18.page>

³ <http://www.nyl.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2018/09/02/legionnaires-disease-three-nycha-residents-harlem>

⁴ <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/Legionnaires-Disease-Bronx-Fort-Independence-Houses-Kingsbridge--492272041.html>

It is clear from these circumstances that compliance with and enforcement of Local Law 77 of 2015 is not enough.⁵ This law should serve as a minimum standard of surveillance, while more robust and proactive interventions are necessary to ensure the health and safety of our constituents when Legionella bacteria threats are particularly acute – as they are here.

To properly address this issue, we respectfully request immediate and comprehensive Legionella testing in ALL NYCHA water cooling units and ALL sources of potable water for residents.

We appreciate the hard-work and commitment of the DOHMH to protect the health and well-being of all New Yorkers and trust that your agency appreciates the urgency of this issue and the need to begin this process immediately.

My office is ready, willing, and committed to provide all assistance. Please contact Ms. Aneiry Batista, Chief of Staff for Congressman Adriano Espaillat at Aneiry.Batista@mail.house.gov or (212) 663-3900 with any further questions. I look forward to your presence and participation at our Community Town Hall on September 7th, 2018.

Respectfully,

Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress
New York 13th District

Gale A. Brewer
Manhattan Borough President
City of New York

Rubén Díaz Jr.
Bronx Borough President
City of New York

Scott M. Stringer
Comptroller
City of New York

Letitia James
Public Advocate
City of New York

Brian A. Benjamin
New York State Senate
New York Senate District 30

Jamaal T. Bailey
New York State Senate
New York Senate District 36

Victor M. Pichardo
New York State Assembly
Assembly District 86

Jeffrey Dinowitz
New York State Assembly
Assembly District 81

⁵ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/buildings/pdf/1177of2015.pdf>

Carmen De La Rosa

Carmen N. De La Rosa
New York State Assembly
Assembly District 72

Al Taylor

Al Taylor
New York State Assembly
Assembly District 71

Inez E. Dickens

Inez E. Dickens
New York State Assembly
Assembly District 70

Robert J. Rodriguez

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New York State Assembly
Assembly District 68

Fernando Cabrera

Fernando Cabrera
New York City Council
New York City District 14

Bill Perkins

Bill Perkins
New York City Council
New York City District 9

Diana Ayala

Diana Ayala
New York City Council
New York City District 8

Mark D. Levine

Mark D. Levine
New York City Council
New York City District 7

CC:

Bill de Blasio, Mayor of New York City
Stanley Brezenoff, Interim Chair, New York City Housing Authority
Arden Sokolow, Chief of Staff, New York City Housing Authority