



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

March 18, 2020

Mayor Bill de Blasio
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

We are writing to urgently request that you immediately issue a directive to the NYC Department of Buildings to suspend all non-essential construction in New York City due to the COVID-19 crisis.

We ask that New York City follow the example of other major cities in this regard. Boston has suspended all construction, other than emergency projects for 14 days, and will reassess in two weeks. Similar restrictions have been instituted in San Francisco.

Essential construction includes work on hospitals and health care facilities, transit, utilities, public infrastructure, supportive housing and homeless shelters, as well as emergency repairs such as heat and hot water in existing residential buildings.

Essential construction does not include new construction or rehabilitation for typical residential or commercial construction. We know that delay on development projects incurs additional construction interest, and that economic recovery funds will be needed from the federal, state, and city government to help address this hardship.

This painful step is needed as part of the city's aggressive social distancing policy, to protect the health of construction workers, their families, and the general public. Although some construction is outside, even in those cases workers gather in groups, travel via subway or van, and have to place their kids in childcare. Those are exactly the kinds of contact we must reduce in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by keeping all non-essential workers in their homes.

At the same time, we need to have a short-staffed Department of Buildings able to prioritize essential and urgent projects, including the expansion of health care facilities to meet urgent needs, as well as other emergency issues. Cancelling non-essential construction will make this possible.

We also ask that the City work to ensure that construction workers, and especially day laborers who are particularly vulnerable, receive compensation for work they have already performed. We must also work together to ensure that construction workers who are unable to work due to construction suspension are included in unemployment insurance (UI) relief and other programs. For undocumented workers who are excluded



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from New York State's UI program, the City should establish an emergency fund to help ensure that these workers are able to support their families in this crisis.

Construction is a core component of New York City's economy, and this is a drastic and painful call. At this urgent moment, however, it is necessary as part of our social distancing policy, to slow the spread of the virus, give our health care system a chance to meet the dire need that is growing, and save lives.

Thank you for your rapid attention to this matter. If you have additional questions or concerns, please contact First Deputy Public Advocate of Policy Nick E. Smith at nsmith@advocate.nyc.gov and correspondence@advocate.nyc.gov.

Sincerely,

Jumaane D. Williams
Public Advocate for the City of New York

City Council Member Brad Lander

City Council Member Carlos Menchaca

cc: Melanie La Rocca, Commissioner of the Department of Buildings