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CARLINA RIVERA
COUNCIL MEMBER, 2nd DISTRICT
CITY OF NEW YORK

May 4, 2020

Mitchell Katz, MD
President and Chief Executive Officer
New York City Health + Hospitals
125 Worth Street
New York, NY 10013

Kenneth Raske
President and Chief Executive Officer
Greater New York Hospital Association
555 West 57th Street
New York, NY 10019

Dear Dr. Katz and Mr. Raske:

Thank you for your leadership, as well as the commitment that healthcare workers and hospitals staff within your systems have demonstrated during this difficult time. New Yorkers are grateful and lucky to have these heroes among them.

Today, we write in solidarity with New York State Senate and Assembly officials in calling for a "Compassionate Helper" Volunteer Program at New York City hospitals to maintain communication between COVID-19 patients and family members.

Policies prohibiting family or friends from joining patients in the hospital leaves a significant void in a patient's emotional and non-medical needs, and it removes the possibility for a liaison between severely-ill patients and hospital staff. Compassionate Helpers could assist doctors and nurses by filling those gaps in personal attention, advocacy, and care, as well as serve as an additional point of contact for family members seeking to monitor a patient's condition. This would provide significant peace of mind to a patient's loved-ones, who at the moment feel disconnected and powerless in how care is provided, especially in situations where the patient is incapable of using technology to communicate with them.

We suggest that these Compassionate Helpers come from a corps of volunteers that have been verified as carrying COVID-19 anti-bodies and have demonstrably recovered from the virus. This program would be controlled and monitored by the hospitals themselves to ensure proper vetting, training, and precautions. A patient's family member should be eligible to service as a helper if they meet the set criteria. Volunteers would still be provided the necessary protective equipment to maintain their safety and that of hospital workers around them. Additionally, recruitment of

volunteers speaking various languages would be critical to the program's success, as such a high percentage of those hospitalized with COVID-19 hail from immigrant communities.

Our suggestion to initiate this Compassionate Helper program, of course, is predicated on what health professionals and researchers can best determine with regard to short- or long-term immunity, thereby minimizing any danger to such volunteers. We look forward to continuing this important part of this conversation further.

One of the most heartbreaking aspects of this pandemic is the loneliness that results from necessary safety protocols and isolation to contain it. To try to prevent further distress for families of patients who are currently suffering or dying alone, we ask that you implement this type of program as quickly and safely as possible.

Sincerely,



Carlina Rivera
Chair, Committee on Hospitals



Mark Levine
Chair, Committee on Health



Stephen Levin
33rd District




Diana Ayala
8th District



Paul Vallone
19th District



Ben Kallos
5th District



Carlos Menchaca
38th District



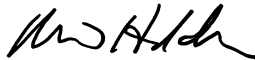
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1st District



Chaim Deutsch
48th District



Deborah Rose
49th District



Robert Holden
30th District



Fernando Cabrera
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Justin Brannan
43rd District



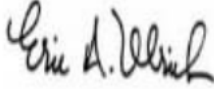
Alan Maisel
46th District



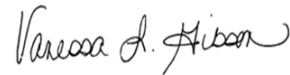
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24th District



Mark Treyger
47th District



Eric Ulrich
32nd District



Vanessa Gibson
16th District



Antonio Reynoso
34th District



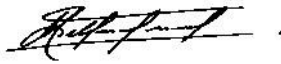
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Costa Constantinides
22nd District

cc: Andrew Cuomo, Governor of the State of New York
Bill de Blasio, Mayor of the City of New York

Enclosures