November 10, 2020

Dr. Dave A. Chokshi, Commissioner  
NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene  
42-09 28th St, 14th Floor  
Long Island City, New York 11101

Dear Commissioner Chokshi:

We write as the COVID-19 Working Group New York (CWG)* to strongly urge the New York City (NYC) Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) to immediately publish your draft guidance on required depopulation of NYC Department of Homeless Services shelters for single adults, and of NYC jails including the Rikers Island Complex, during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. We understand the draft DOHMH guidance would appropriately require that congregate shelters and jails remain depopulated, at least to the level they are currently, whenever there is a City-wide incidence of SARS-COV-2 infection of 2% or more, or 150 or more daily COVID-19 related hospital admissions.

DOHMH data show that on November 9th, 2020, the NYC-wide SARS-COV-2 infection positivity rate was 2.26% on a seven-day rolling average, and that this rate had been increasing. Based on this data, there is no justification for moving any single adult currently in a de-densified situation such as a hotel room back into a congregate shelter or jail setting.

As the City copes with indicators of a possible fall/winter surge, it is critical for DOHMH to provide clear public guidance on measures to protect NYC’s most vulnerable populations.

Please let us know when you plan to publish the guidance, and if a meeting with members of our working group would be appropriate or helpful. We can be reached by contacting Jeremiah Johnson at jeremiah.johnson@treatmentactiongroup.org.

Yours truly,

COVID-19 Working Group New York

cc: Torian Easterling, First Deputy Commissioner / Chief Equity Officer  
Demetre Daskalakis, Deputy Commissioner, Disease Control

* The CWG is a coalition of doctors, healthcare professionals, scientists, social workers, community workers, activists, and epidemiologists committed to a rapid and community-oriented response to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Current CWG Steering Organizations include Treatment Action Group, PrEP4All, Housing Works, the National Black Leadership Commission on Health, Callen Lorde, Latino Commission on AIDS, Hispanic Health Network and #MEAction.