



May 5, 2020

Dear Speaker Johnson and Members of the New York City Council,

We write to you as representatives of four of NYC's largest emergency food relief organizations: Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen, New York Common Pantry, St. John's Bread & Life, and West Side Campaign Against Hunger. Together, in 2019, our food pantry and soup kitchen programs served 8.8 million meals to over 314,000 New Yorkers in need. Our organizations work on the front lines of food insecurity in New York, directly providing meals to those we serve. We know our customers well - we know their families, their struggles, and their needs. These days, as the economic impact of the coronavirus escalates, leaving more and more New Yorkers without employment, we are seeing many more new faces. Our organizations are seeing pantry visits increase each week, and new household enrollment as high as 5-8 times what is typical. In the month of April, we served over 750,000 meals, an increase of 60% over April of last year. We play a critical role in New York City's community response to food insecurity, and the coronavirus crisis has only intensified the importance of that role.

We were thus disappointed and concerned to see the [April 21 Politico reporting](#) naming the organizations that would receive the \$25 million slated by City Hall for emergency food response, and that none of us were among those organizations. Not only are we concerned to not be included in the initial distribution of these much-needed resources, but also for the lack of transparency in the process. These funding allocations were made without broad front line community input and without recognition of the critical role that direct service organizations like ours play in nourishing food insecure New Yorkers.

While we acknowledge the need for rapid response, this urgency does not obviate the need for transparency and a more coordinated, strategic approach to the city's allocation of resources. Specifically, we urge City Hall to do the following:

- Gather the input of key emergency food stakeholders like ourselves to guide future funding strategies;
- Include representatives of front line, direct service organizations in key committees and task forces that will guide the re-opening of NYC and build plans for the future;
- Prioritize funding for direct service organizations like ours and other best practice organizations, in acknowledgment of the important role we play in feeding New Yorkers.

COVID-19 and its economic fallout have shone a bright light on the failings and inequities of our food system. We mustn't, as they say, let this crisis go to waste. Now is the time to envision and start building the food system we want, and the one all New Yorkers deserve. Our organizations have a critical role to play in realizing that vision, and we ask the city's leaders for their support and inclusion in that effort.

Signed,

Michael Ottley  
Chief Operating Officer  
**Holy Apostles Soup  
Kitchen**

Stephen Grimaldi  
Executive Director  
**New York Common  
Pantry**

Sister Caroline Tweedy  
Executive Director  
**St. John's Bread &  
Life**

Greg Silverman  
Executive Director  
**West Side Campaign  
Against Hunger**