

THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** February 24, 2021, 1:00 PM

**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT GOTHAM HEALTH,  
ROOSEVELT COVID-19 CENTER OF EXCELLENCE IN QUEENS**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Carmen, thank you so much. I'm always impressed by anybody who would go from one language to the other language instantly and say it powerfully in both languages. Thank you. Thank you for what you do. Thank you for what Make the Road does. We've worked with Make the Road over many years. Thank you for fighting for the community. And one of the most essential concepts of that work is fairness, equality, making sure resources go to the communities that need it the most, because we all know, everyone here knows that has not been the history. The history has been, too often, the rich got richer, and communities of working people got left behind and this crisis – it's kind of amazing, kind of extraordinary, but definitely painful to acknowledge, not just the disparities in this crisis, which we saw. The City of New York was blunt and honest from the beginning that the disparities in the COVID crisis were shocking and overwhelming. People of color bore the brunt. Where people were hurting before they ended up hurting a lot more. But during that, Wall Street was booming, and I always cite this statistic – there are 120 billionaires in New York State, who, during the COVID crisis, added to their net worth by \$77 billion while everyone else was suffering.

So, we have to do the work of changing where the resources go every single day. I use the word – I like to call it the "r-word" – redistribution. It's something we weren't supposed to say once upon a time, but I think we have to say it out loud. We have to redistribute resources to the communities hardest hit, and not just in the middle of the crisis, but after the worst is over, that does not mean the crisis doesn't continue to live in the community, in people's homes and people's families. And this is what we've learned about COVID. We all know we'll be feeling the economic effect for years, but what about the health effect itself? What about the fact that we now know COVID, doesn't just walk away, leave your body. For some people, it lingers in very painful, challenging ways. That's why we have these centers of excellence. To do the work, to do the research, to work with the community, to identify the trends, to provide the support, to not leave people behind, and where did we choose to put these centers? Not in Midtown Manhattan. Here in Jackson Heights, in Tremont in the Bronx, soon in Bushwick in Brooklyn. Where the people are who need the help and support. The folks who fought their way through.

So, that's what this is about today. This concept of equity of taking resources here and now and redistributing them where the need is greatest, it has been led by our extraordinary Task Force for Racial Inclusion and Equity – leaders of all city government agencies, leaders of color, from the communities hardest hit, representing their communities and ensuring that resources get to where the need is greatest. This is something that has never existed before in the history of New York City, that the leaders of color in the administration have gathered together as one unit to make sure that the government responds to the needs of the people right now, and we're making it a permanent part of our city government, because that voice, that representation must be

permanent, must be felt. Special thanks to the executive director of the Task Force, who's done amazing work to Sideya Sherman. Thank you so much, Sideya. You can clap for her.

[Applause]

So, here at Roosevelt, right here in the core of where Queens was hit so hard, we create the solutions, and we move us forward. One thing that's true about New Yorkers is that sometimes we get knocked down, but we get back up and I'm going to – I want everyone to say that with me, we get knocked down, but we get back up. That's who we are, and it means being open and honest about the problem and listening to the community, and that's why you need a center like this in the community. Not far away, not in some ivory tower, but here with the people in the community. It's going to make a world of difference.

I want to thank everybody who has helped to make this center a reality. You're going to hear from a Dr. Ted Long in a moment, a special thanks to everyone at Health + Hospitals, Michelle Lewis, the CEO of Gotham Health, thank you, and Helen Arteaga Landaverde, I love this name, CEO of Elmhurst. Thank you for your incredible work, and also from my administration, our Commissioner for Community Affairs Roberto Perez, thank you. Everyone has been part of creating this kind of initiative and building it out, and it's going to make a big difference in speaking of building Jamie Torres Springer from Department of Design and Construction. Thank you for building things, and this is exactly where we need things built.

Let's say a few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

This city has to lead the way back for our whole country. We also need to become the public health capital of the world, because we have learned the greatest lessons anywhere on how to fight COVID, because we have to stop the next pandemic from ever happening, because we have to create a vision of public health that's about the grassroots and reaching people. Whether they have money or not, whether they're documented or not, getting healthcare to everyone, that's what we need to do in this city and show our whole country, our whole world that that's the way it needs to be done. With that, turn to someone who has done extraordinary work leading our Test and Trace Corps. One of the reasons we're fighting back so successfully this pandemic, my pleasure to introduce Dr. Ted Long.

[Applause]

**Director Ted Long, NYC Test and Trace Corps.:** Thank you, sir. Just have to adjust the microphone, I'm not quite as tall as you are. So, I'm excited to be here today. Right now, as a city, we're very focused on the coronavirus pandemic. Today, though, here, we have a moment to take a look forward at what the future and what our recovery after coronavirus can look like this first of its kind COVID Center of Excellence is equipped to handle any of the issues that you might develop if you've had the coronavirus, to help you to recover. Now, I'm a primary care doctor myself. I've seen my patients throughout the COVID pandemic. At first, I was diagnosing them with COVID. Now, over time, I'm starting to help my patients to recover, but my patients are still having problems. They're still telling me – Dr. Long, I'm having difficulty breathing; I'm having heart issues; I'm having neurologic complications. In fact, one out of every three, people

that has had COVID with symptom, will go on to have a chronic condition. These are the people that we refer to as long-haulers. They need this center, which is equipped to give them all of the care that they need for whatever they're experiencing after having COVID. In this center, here we will have on-site cardiology, on-site pulmonology, and a variety of other specialty services, and importantly, all of these services will be provided in the context of comprehensive primary care. Or you can come bring your family and get age-appropriate cancer screenings, on-site radiology, optometry, dentistry, help with your chronic diseases, all under one roof as you recover from COVID. This COVID Center of Excellence gives us a glimpse of the future about how we're going to have a recovery after COVID, and I wanted to say that your community here was hit the hardest of anywhere back last spring from COVID, and given everything that you've been through, you deserve this clinic. Thank you.

[Applause]

As I conclude, I have the honor today to give us some special thank you's, and this really has been from the bottom of my heart, an incredible experience, incredibly hard work we did. Jamie and I were talking about earlier, what would normally take six years in six months, and we did it to be able to give this to our community here.

[Applause]

So, I want to say a special thank you to, first off, the Health + Hospitals facilities team led by Christine Flaherty, Oscar Gonzalez, Starlene Scott, Jenelle Philip and [inaudible].

[Applause]

And then I wanted to say a special thank you to my Gotham team, starting with the world's greatest CEO, Michelle Lewis, Elsa [inaudible], David John, [inaudible], Celine Chowdry, Justin List, and David Sullivan. And then I wanted to finally say thank you to our DDC colleagues and friends, especially Commissioner Grillo, who couldn't be with us today, Jamie Torres Springer, and Site Lead Jade Bailey. With that, thank you. This is an incredible opportunity for our community here and thank you for having us.

[Applause]

And now, it is my pleasure to –

**Mayor:** No, I'm doing that. You don't get to have that pleasure.

[Laughter]

How dare you? How dare you? She's my friend.

[Laughter]

Jessica Ramos is someone who worked with us in City Hall and did amazing work for all the people in New York City. But now, the folks of Central Queens have her as their representative. And this is someone who is very close to the people, very close to the grassroots. I can't tell you

how many times in this crisis, Senator Ramos has called me and said, we need more food, we need more PPE, we need things that will reach people right now – in the best sense, letting me know exactly what needs to be done immediately to help people in Central Queens who have been through so much. And she also believes in equality. She also believes in a recovery for all of us, that we are not going to do things the way they were before. This is really important. We are sad for what we went through, but we also know that this crisis creates a transformational moment, and we're not going to forget that we're going to do something about it, and one of the people who's going to lead that effort on the State level, State Senator Jessica Ramos.

[Applause]

[...]

**Mayor:** *Gracias, mi profesora.* Jessica is one of the people who told me to speak more Spanish and trained me. So, thank you. Thank you very much.

Everyone, we are ready now for the great moment where we start this up. So, we're going to cut the ribbon and we want everyone to be a part of this special moment. Let's go start this thing.

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