



Project Pandemic Shield Press Statement

The Essential Community Houses of Worship in the SARS-COVID-19 Pandemic Public Health Emergency

When the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, shut down New York City in early 2020 it wasn't just business and the economy which grinded to a halt and suffered. Houses of Worship and private medical offices throughout New York City and State were shuttered, and all of society suffered, spiritually, psychologically and in our bodies. But hospitals remained open, because that's where everyone was going. Hospitalization was overcapacity and death seemed to knock on everyone's door. We were all very afraid of the unseen threat killing congregants, family and neighbors, and we huddled behind locked doors. But what made the pandemic crisis even more daunting was that a critical piece of our formidable healthcare service delivery infrastructure was sidelined. Primary care physicians and neighborhood medical clinics were closed because they didn't have the PPEs or the tools and knowledge base needed to fight SARS-COVID-19. And let's not forget that clinicians have comorbidity's as well and were fearful to contract this deadly disease.

Our hospitals, including NYC Health & Hospitals Corporation, were the only game in town. The City was economically crippled, but our hospitals continued the normal practice of billing on a per patient basis throughout the pandemic public health emergency. With the reimbursement provided



to the City's healthcare institutions under *the CARES Act of 2020*, hospitals in New York City were paid billions of dollars, including NYC Health & Hospitals Corporation, which made almost \$820M.

During the peak of the pandemic public health emergency in 2020, from March 10th through May 1st, the City of New York had the opportunity to help local private clinicians and medical offices to get the PPEs and SARS-COVID-19 testing equipment they needed at the grassroots level to support clinical efforts to fight the virus and the disease COVID-19. Instead, the City of New York siloed all resources within NYC Health and Hospitals, and the State of New York focused on supplying state and private hospitals. A critical resource and element of the our healthcare infrastructure that all of us depend on for our health and well-being was left without support. By the summer local primary care physicians could open up again, but they were on their own to figure out how to get by to provide vital services to patients. The government engaged this same alienation with Houses of Worship.

Houses of Worship that had been shuttered under State executive order were now being used as pop-up testing sites. However, the essential power of our grassroots communities of faith and worship that people trust throughout the City of New York was not effectively or appropriately utilized. The fundamental question that we must now ask is, WHY were Houses of Worship used to begin with?



Houses of Worship were used because of their location in ***proximity to the people of community that they serve***. They were used because they are ***trusted institutions of hope, solace, peace and mental health*** by the people of community. They were used because they deliver vital ***social services*** like food pantries and soup kitchens to the people of community, providing nutritious food and other desperately needed services that sustain the lives of the people of our communities. They were being used and are now being used because Houses of Worship are ***ESSENTIAL***, and it is a strong possibility that more lives could have been saved during this pandemic public health emergency had our Houses of Worship and the faith communities within them been more effectively and appropriately utilized, ***under existing FEDERAL LAW***.

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2010, recognized this fact, that Houses of Worship and communities of faith are essential, mandating in federal law that local not-for-profit hospitals prove that they are serving the interests and needs of the people of the communities that they claim to serve by conducting a ***Community Health Needs Assessment***, and they are mandated by law to include communities of faith in constructing that assessment. Our local not-for-profit hospitals, including NYC Health & Hospitals Corporation, are required by federal mandate to make resource allocations to the communities that they serve directly from their balance sheets. These resource allocations are mandated under federal law because the federal



government recognizes that Houses of Worship are **essential** to combating '**social determinants**' that impact public health and dictate both the degree and scope to which dynamic community health outcomes can be achieved. Further, by mandate of **the ACA**, the programs of social services delivery engaged daily by our Houses of Worship are to be funded under this framework '**TO SUPPORT INNOVATIVE MEDICAL CARE DELIVERY METHODS DESIGNED TO LOWER THE COST OF HEALTHCARE GENERALLY**'. To this end, millions of dollars have been set aside by the federal government under **the ACA** to fund these initiatives.

Under the **Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act, (the CARES Act)**, signed into law in 2020, \$10 billion dollars went to religious organizations as part of the economic recovery through PPP Loans, but that's simply through PPP money that the government makes Houses of Worship jump through hoops to qualify for. No, we are talking about \$178 billion dollars the federal government set aside in payments to be distributed through the **Provider Relief Fund**, provisioned under the **Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act**. Qualified providers of health care, services, and support may receive *Provider Relief Fund* payments for healthcare-related services and expenses due to SARS-COVID-19. Separately, the COVID-19 Uninsured Program reimburses providers for testing and treating uninsured individuals with COVID-19. So, had the GOVERNOR of the State of New York, and the MAYOR of the City of New York, stopped their bickering, and partnered with Houses of Worship



and communities of faith under the provisions of **the Affordable Care Act** in 2020, millions of dollars could have been made available to our Houses of Worship to fight this pandemic in our communities, **LAST YEAR.**

Under the \$1.9 trillion *American Rescue Plan*, signed into law by President Joseph R. Biden, just this past March of 2021, \$50B went to the State of New York, and \$6.1B went to the City. That's almost \$100B to the State of New York, and over \$12B to the City, total, not including over \$2B in funds received just by the NYC Health & Hospitals Corporation. Funds that can be used to respond to the COVID-19 emergency and address its economic effects, including aid to households, small businesses and *non-profits*, and **specifically allowing for state and local governments to transfer money to private non-profits, and public benefit corporations involved in passenger or cargo transportation. Which means, that if the GOVERNOR and the MAYOR, had stopped their bickering and organized with us under the Affordable Care Act, our Houses of Worship and communities of faith could have received millions of dollars for vital social services delivery programs. THIS YEAR ...**

And we gave the MAYOR of the City of New York the tools to work with us. When Mayor de Blasio became Mayor in 2013, we caused him to sign a pledge to work with communities of faith in his governance, which led to the creation of the **Office of Faith and Community Partnership** in the City of New York. But that Office never contacted us for this, or has ever truly



worked with communities of faith to provide meaningful financial resources that would permit our communities to thrive. Communities of faith got breakfast with the Mayor. Now we get pop-ups, from which NYC Health & Hospitals, and other HCIs receive hundreds of millions of dollars in reimbursements after utilizing our Houses of Worship giving us nothing in return. Then they leave offering us a thank you and a waive.

I REMIND YOU THAT POWER CONCEDES NOTHING WITHOUT A DEMAND ... We will NO LONGER ALLOW OUR HOUSES OF WORSHIP TO BE EXPLOITED by either the City or the State of New York. WE ARE ESSENTIAL, AND ESSENTIAL UNDER FEDERAL LAW. AND WE DEMAND THAT BOTH THE CITY AND STATE OF NEW YORK ENGAGE US AS FULL PARTNERS UNDER THE EXISTING PROVISIONS OF ***THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT***, AND SHOW US THE MONEY, TO SAVE OUR COMMUNITIES NOW AND WELL INTO THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, AS WE OVERCOME THIS PANDEMIC CRISIS TO SERVE THE PEOPLE OF OUR COMMUNITIES ...

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