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**UWS OPEN HEARTS INITIATIVE FIGHTS BACK AGAINST MONEY AND MASTRO TO
SUPPORT HOMELESS NEIGHBORS**

**PA JUMAANE WILLIAMS, AM LINDA ROSENTHAL, AND CM HELEN ROSENTHAL SPEAK
OUT AGAINST DHS DECISION TO MOVE SHELTER RESIDENTS OUT OF UWS HOTEL**

NEW YORK CITY: SEPTEMBER 9, 2020: The UWS Open Hearts Initiative together with PA Jumaane Williams, AM Linda Rosenthal, and CM Helen Rosenthal today held a joint news conference with Legal Aid and the Coalition for the Homeless in response to the Department of Homeless Services' decision to move Project Renewal operations and over 200 shelter residents out of the Upper West Side. This decision follows the threat of a lawsuit by the West Side Community Organization (WSCO). The WSCO raised over \$135,000 in three weeks to hire Attorney Randy Mastro, a former Guiliani official with long standing connections to City government, to petition NYC to remove Project Renewal, along with two other care providers (Help USA and CUCS) from the Upper West Side. By allowing private money and private interests to dictate public policy, the City is effectively conceding that wealthy residents may override the democratic, public policy decision making process in order to impose their will on those with less money and power.

While the WSCO declared victory in the press, shelter residents learned from the media that they were being displaced. One, who goes by "**da homeless hero**," wrote to the UWS Open Hearts Initiative: "How do we process this? The reality of our situation as homeless people is beginning to set in. We have been portrayed in such a horrific way unjustly and this only makes it seem as though those have shown their disdain for us were right... Already the news is spreading among us residents and people are distraught. It's traumatizing to be treated as we have been and then to be moved under these circumstances."

Over 930 Upper West Side residents and businesses--along with another 200 New Yorkers--signed an Open Letter to Bill de Blasio in support of keeping Project Renewal, Help USA, and CUCS on the Upper West Side until the pandemic is over.

“Unfortunately, an influx of private money has been able to determine what happens to New York’s most vulnerable population,” said **UWS Open Hearts member Melissa Sanchez**. “We do not know where most of this money is coming from. As of last night, when the City announced its decision to move the shelters, 584 of the 833 donations (70%) that the WSCO Go Fund Me page received were made anonymously. We are shocked that New York City is allowing a handful of unnamed donors to dictate public policy, thereby disenfranchising voters who expect governmental transparency and disrupting the lives of hundreds of struggling human beings.”

Public Advocate Jumaane Williams spoke out strongly against the decision by DHS to replace homeless residents based on pressure from an interest group formed to lobby the city. Williams said “Affordable housing is a citywide crisis. Homelessness is a citywide issue. Moving a shelter off a block or out of a neighborhood isn’t solving the issue, it’s hiding and ignoring it. Uprooting people in need isn’t a solution, it’s a major problem, and this decision should be reversed.”

The public efforts to drive out non-profit care providers to the homeless have been based on false claims that the shelters are harming “quality of life” on the Upper West Side and that services are not being provided in the shelters and that.

“They keep repeating the same two lies,” said **UWS Open Hearts co-founder Corinne Low**. “Crime is not up in our area--it’s down--and the services shelter residents receive here are identical to what they would receive in a standard shelter, and will be identical if they are moved, except that Project Renewal will need to start from scratch again, with a new location, a new community. Meanwhile the families already in those shelters are getting pushed out. How is this disruption a ‘win-win’?”

Low added, “Randy Mastro has called the city’s decision to displace these vulnerable New Yorkers a ‘testament to community organizing,’ when it really is a testament to the selfishness of those with money and power. We’re in a pandemic and we need to be willing to do our part. Those resources could have directly helped shelter residents, rather than going to Randy’s yacht fund.”

Numerous other advocates for New York’s homeless expressed shock and outrage at this decision.

State Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal (D/WF--Manhattan) noted, “Spiriting these men experiencing homelessness away, in haste and under threat in the middle of a public health pandemic, simply keeps them out of sight, and perhaps out of mind. Tragically they, and tens of thousands of other New Yorkers, will be homeless tomorrow, just as they are today, simply in another community. As a society, we have a responsibility to lift each other up, and to use our privilege and power to sustain this City. Homelessness is not a crime. Addiction is a disease. Public health must always trump political pressure.”

City Councilmember Helen Rosenthal said, “It’s a sad day when the mere threat of a lawsuit can get City Hall to reverse a decision it thought through and made. If the mayor thinks he made a mistake, he should say so. If the mayor thinks the original decision was correct, he should have the courage of his convictions and fight. What message does this send --- that groups who can afford to hire high powered lawyers are the ones who will get their way? While the first few weeks were difficult, local elected officials, community members, and shelter providers have been working together to address any resident concerns. We have not seen any problems over the past three weeks, which I can verify firsthand from my walks along Broadway at night.”

“Less than two weeks after stating that the homeless would not be moved from the Upper West Side, Mayor De Blasio has now contradicted himself by saying that he will be moving people out of the Lucerne Hotel on September 20th,” said **Roberto Mangual, a homeless advocate with the #HomelessCantStayHome campaign and current resident of the Belleclaire**. “With no signs of the COVID pandemic ending any time soon, who is Mayor de Blasio to pay God with the lives of 300 homeless men? Is he thinking this through or is he bending to the will of a group of wealthy residents of the Upper West Side and their lawyer?”

David Giffen, Executive Director of the Coalition for the Homeless laments that, “The Mayor’s decision to capitulate to the NIMBYist voices on the Upper West Side by further displacing homeless New Yorkers is a sad victory for the well-heeled and well-connected whose fear-mongering and intolerance disgrace our city.”

Judith Goldiner, Attorney-in-Charge of the Civil Law Reform Unit at The Legal Aid Society, stated that “We are ... concerned with the dangerous precedent this decision sets to the great detriment of our clients going forward, prejudicing the City’s ability to fully advocate for the homeless in these situations. Lastly, it is particularly egregious that the City will have to uproot other homeless New Yorkers from their current shelter, disrupting their lives during a pandemic, in order to make room for these clients, who did not have to be moved in the first place.”

SAJ Rabbi Lauren Grabbelle Herrmann, who started a counter petition soon after resistance to the shelters emerged, cautioned that “Homelessness is a systemic problem in our society fueled by many social and economic factors and exacerbated by a pandemic causing unprecedented unemployment. Homelessness does not go away when we no longer see it.”

UWS Open Hearts Initiative co-Founder Corinne Low spoke about how the community had mobilized to support the individuals who were moved to the shelter to protect them, and all New Yorkers, from a COVID outbreak. “We were glad to support our new neighbors in need. We dug into our pockets to mobilize support for the residents--from toiletries and metro cards to resume writing workshops-- hoping to alleviate poverty, instead of simply displacing it to someone else’s neighborhood. I am devastated to see the city government treat these shelter residents as chess pieces who can be moved around the board based on the whims of the rich and powerful. This was never an issue of the community versus the shelters, because we are the community, and we have mobilized a groundswell of support for shelter residents on the Upper West Side.

We demand transparency into how this decision happened when the Mayor had reassured the community that he didn't care who sues him, he was going to make this decision based on public health. The city owes that to the shelter residents and the large community here on the UWS that stands with them."

Aaron Carr, Founder and Executive Director of the Housing Rights Initiative warned that "New York City's decision to remove 300 homeless people from the Upper West Side amidst an economic collapse and global pandemic is a humanitarian disgrace. The message to the public is clear: if you are wealthy, powerful, and well-connected, we will cater to your every whim."

William Thomas: Board Member, Open New York: "This decision is an absolute outrage. At a time when the President has made 'not in my backyard' the rallying cry for anti-affordable housing segregationists, NYC elected officials should be standing as champions of our shared values of compassion and inclusivity. Instead they pandered to some of City's richest and most privileged residents and in doing so made themselves and all of us New Yorkers into hypocrites."

Janos Marton, civil lawyer and candidate for Manhattan DA: "Providing people with stable housing and supportive services is fundamental to public safety. Sending people away from the Lucerne into shelters does not further our public safety. As a born and raised Upper West Sider, I stand with my neighbors who want this community to do its part in helping New York's most vulnerable weather this challenging pandemic. As a candidate for District Attorney, I am disappointed at the city's capitulation to fear-mongering" -

Margo Schintacker, Stand up for Racial Justice NYC: "Racial justice is about impact, not intent. NYC's homeless population is disproportionately Black and brown, as are the residents of the temporary shelters on the UWS, while those complaining about their presence are majority white. Whether it is their intention or not, the fact is that the group of Upper West Siders represented by Randy Mastro is pushing the city to endanger and disrupt the lives of largely Black and brown shelter residents, and the city has now granted their wish. The group's unwillingness to accept any alternative other than the complete removal of all temporary shelter residents from our community gives the lie to their claims of concern for safety and public health."

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