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UWS Open Hearts Initiative Pushes Back on Misinformation About Shelters and Irresponsible Demands to the City

NEW YORK, NY (08/27/2020)

The UWS Open Hearts Initiative is strongly pushing back on assertions made by Randy Mastro on NY1 this morning that the shelters represented “SROs” and that residents were not getting the services they needed, and the dangerous request that the city move them before the COVID pandemic is contained.

“We are in the middle of a pandemic and we all need to do our part. I’m shocked by the recklessness and cruelty of requesting the city move these shelters to satisfy a few loud voices, when the reality is that crime statistics show that crime is down 10% in our area,” said Corinne Low, of the UWS Open Hearts Initiative, a coalition of UWS neighbors that was launched to support the homeless residents of the shelters.

“Mr. Mastro’s mischaracterizations of the shelters reeks of Giuliani-era tactics of spreading fear instead of facts. These shelters are not ‘SROs’—they are providing the complete set of services that homeless shelters provide, including mental health and addiction services. When the shelters moved to our neighborhood, all the staff and services supporting the residents came with them,” added Low.

[Low spoke after Mastro on NY1](#), saying “What was moved was not just the shelter residents, but actually the shelter operations into those hotels—so the staff and the services that they provide all moved with the residents when they moved into the hotels. And, if you move it somewhere else, it’s going to be that same identical care structure that’s going to be in place.”

Note that SROs, or single room occupancy units, are sometimes used for supportive housing structures. Supportive housing has a lower staff to resident ratio than shelter housing, which is the highest level of care provided.

“If de Blasio gives in to this political influence campaign and recklessly moves the shelters without a plan, people will die. Period. Congregate shelters risk becoming ground zero for an uncontrolled COVID outbreak in our city. So, what’s the plan? What are they asking for? Repopulate the shelters? Move them to another neighborhood? We



need to be saying YES to compassion in our backyard, and opening our hearts to help, instead of hiring talking suits.”

The UWS Open Hearts Initiative has launched an open letter to Mayor de Blasio from UWS residents, co-signed by the Coalition for the Homeless, Homelessness Services United, and many other homelessness advocacy organizations to demand that the city make decisions about shelter location based on evidence-based public health, not political, grounds. “We urge the de Blasio administration to stay resolved in its attempt to protect all New Yorkers from the spread of COVID-19, as well as to ensure the rights of all residents of our community to live free of harassment and dehumanization,” says the letter. “We call on the Department of Homeless Services to allow shelter operations to remain in hotels throughout the city—including our neighborhood—until public health experts determine that their use is no longer needed.”

The letter has 645 public signatures, of which 410 are UWS residents, and many more constitute UWS businesses and related organizations. The letter is endorsed by Open New York, Coalition for the Homeless, the Safety Net Project of the Urban Justice Center, helpNYC, Neighbors Together, Human.NYC, Homelessness Services United, and the Mutual Aid NYC Housing Team.

Visit uwsstrong.org for more information.