



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## Senator Avella and Idc Leader Klein Stand WITH Elected Officials and Community Activists to Urge Rejection of Samaritan Village Contract

JEFFREY D. KLEIN July 7, 2015

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*Call on the Assembly to Pass Companion Legislation to Senator Klein's Bill Requiring a Public Forum Prior to Shelter Siting*

(QUEENS, NY) Today, State Senator Tony Avella and Independent Democratic Conference Leader Jeff Klein joined elected officials and community activists to call for the rejection of the Samaritan Village proposal to convert the illegal Pan Am shelter into a permanent

shelter. They urged the Assembly to pass companion legislation to Senator Klein's bill that would require that a public community forum is held prior to the approval of a shelter site.

Converted to a homeless shelter under a six month emergency contract, the Pan Am Hotel emergency homeless shelter was initially intended to close on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014. However, an application submitted in November sought to convert the Pan Am Hotel from an emergency to permanent shelter under a 5-year, \$42 million contract with the Department of Homeless Services. The conversion application raised serious questions about quality of life issues at the shelter, in addition to concerns about Samaritan Village's ability to function as an organization.

The proposal was rejected by the Office of the Comptroller in May, due to health and safety concerns, including fire code violations and a lack of kitchen facilities in the units, as well as concerns about how Samaritan Village has managed funds during previous projects.

However, the proposal was resubmitted on June 12<sup>th</sup>, and the Comptroller's office has until next week to accept or reject it.

"This entire process has been one outrage after another. To use an abandoned hotel to warehouse homeless families, ignore health and safety violations, all the while wasting an exorbitant amount of taxpayer dollars is deplorable. However, to then propose awarding a \$42 million contract to make the entire situation permanent is shameful. We cannot address the growing homeless population at the expense of homeless families and children, or the community as a whole. We must look to fix this broken system. I urge the Office of the Comptroller to reject this illegal contract. In addition, I urge the Assembly to hear our community's voices and pass companion legislation to Senator Klein's bill that would protect all of New York City's neighborhoods from what is occurring here," **said Senator Avella (D-Northeast Queens).**

Pan Am is just one of numerous locations throughout New York City where emergency temporary housing has been opened, only to be converted to a permanent shelter months later. This practice has become commonplace among City shelters, with local communities receiving no notice of the shelter placement until after it has already been opened. With the Pan Am shelter, the only public hearing was held months after the shelter was already in operation.

In order to address the City's failure to incorporate each community's voice in its planning, Senator Klein's bill (**S. 4542-A**) would require that the New York City Planning Commission hold a public community forum prior to the approval, modification or denial of a shelter site or lease renewal. The bill would provide local community members, neighborhood associations, and community groups an opportunity to learn about and provide comment on a proposed shelter before it has been established. The bill would require the New York City Planning Commission to hold a public community forum prior to the approval, modification or denial of a shelter site or lease renewal.

"This situation is playing out across the city. An emergency homeless shelter moves into a neighborhood without community input and then the city seeks to make it permanent. This is simply unacceptable. The residents of this community deserve to be heard, and the residents in this family shelter who live with rat infestations, improper garbage disposal and other serious health violations, deserve better. The State Senate already passed my legislation which would require community input and the City Planning Commission to decide whether a social service provider has found a proper location. It's now incumbent upon the Assembly to act so that we can protect our neighborhoods. I'm urging New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer to listen to the voices of this community and reject a \$42 million contract that will make this unfit site a permanent shelter. It's unwanted by the neighborhood and the families it houses," **said State Senator Jeff Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester).**

“The shelter at the site of the former Pan Am Hotel has been plagued with problems ever since it opened: Issues with plumbing and heat; lack of kitchens and reports of bugs and vermin, among other things. And the lack of notification and transparency surrounding its opening was a total snub to the community. This site and the poor conditions that exist there are a huge disservice to residents of the neighborhood, and those who are housed at the facility. The city should reject this contract!” **said U.S. Rep. Grace Meng (D-Queens), who has written to Mayor de Blasio and city and state officials about problems with the facility.**

“Time and time again, the city has forced unwanted shelters into neighborhoods that have serious concerns about them, without providing any notice or giving any opportunity for the public to weigh in. While there is obviously a need for more shelters to combat the ever-increasing issue of homelessness in New York City, this is not the way that city agencies should operate. We need to work together to allow those who know these neighborhoods best to provide constructive feedback that will ensure these facilities are placed in communities where they can be most effective. This bill would allow for residents, civic associations, community boards and other groups to provide crucial input and force the city once and for all to stop deliberately leaving residents in the dark,” **said Senator Addabbo.**

“Involving communities is fundamental on any plans to open new homeless shelters or expand existing ones. Neighborhoods must know what happens in their own backyard. We have all seen what happened when facilities were converted into social service provides overnight. I am also calling City Comptroller Scott Stringer to reject the proposed contract to have a permanent shelter at the Pan Am, especially amid reports of rat infestation,” **state Senator Jose Peralta (D-East Elmhurst) said.**

“I want to thank Sen. Avella for joining our efforts concerning safety issues at the Pam America homeless shelter. On November 13th, 2014, I testified at the public hearing in lower Manhattan urging the Comptroller to reject the contract between Samaritan Village and the

City. I followed up with a letter on May 7th and again on June 20th, 2015 outlining the reasons why the contract should be rejected. Among the issues I raised were lack of kitchens, plumbing and fire code violations, as well as sanitation issues. This is a \$42 million contract for a facility that violates numerous statutes, including the NYC Administrative Code 21-124. It would be foolish for the City to provide such a substantial amount of money for an extended period of time to a provider who is unable to provide suitable living conditions for the inhabitants of this facility. I ask the Comptroller to reject this contract for a permanent shelter at this location,” **stated Senator Toby Ann Stavisky (D-Flushing).**

“It is our solemn duty to house the homeless with dignity and care. That can only be accomplished if the facilities we use to shelter the homeless are clean and safe.

Unfortunately, Samaritan Village has a history of failing to provide adequate facilities for the residents of the Boulevard Family Center (the former Pan American Hotel). Reports of vermin infestation and health violations make clear that a permanent contract should not be granted. Health and safety violations at the shelter cause a hazardous situation for both the residents of the shelter itself and the community immediately surrounding it.

Additionally, the hotel was hastily converted into a shelter without so much as informing the residents of the local area. Community voices must always be heard before new shelters are introduced,” **said Assemblyman Francisco Moya (D-Jackson Heights).**

“Without the installation of cooking facilities in each unit, as required by law, the Pan Am contract as it stands is still illegal. By trade Commissioner Gilbert Taylor is a lawyer, so he is fully aware that this contract is a complete contradiction to the Request For Proposal (RFP) advertised on DHS's website and also to New York City Administrative Code (NYC ADC) 21-124(b). Yet he still proceeds. Mr. Stringer, as an elected official, as a civil servant and as the Comptroller of NYC, we demand that you permanently reject the Pan Am contract. It is time for you to restore the people's faith in our system of government and remind everyone that

no one is above the law, regardless of their wealth, title or position of power,” **said Anna Orjuela, Member of Elmhurst United.**

“A family homeless shelter requires child care facilities. It is the law. A child care facility would allow parents to get their life in order without worrying about their young children. A family homeless shelter requires a cooking facility in every unit. It is the law. The Pan Am does not have this, so often times, families would bring in a hot plate to heat their food. Sadly, on May 6, there was a fire at the Pan Am Shelter. I spoke with one of the residents in the Pan Am the next day, and they told me it was caused by a hot plate being left on overnight. They said that many people use hot plates in their rooms and were also told to keep quiet about the cause of the fire,” **said George O., Elmhurst resident.**