



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Adriano Espaillat

## COMMUNITY ACTION RESCUES BELOVED SUPERMARKET UNDER THREAT OF EVICTION

ADRIANO ESPAILLAT June 19, 2016



New York, NY – On Sunday, June 19, 2016, over 100 residents from Washington Heights gathered outside their local supermarket in celebration of pulling it back from the brink. Earlier this year, the Associated Supermarket on 187th Street and Fort Washington was informed that their lease would not be renewed and the storefront would instead become a chain pharmacy.

The community leapt into action, led by local Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez and State Senator Adriano Espaillat, with major support from Manhattan Community Board 12 and the Hudson Heights Owners Coalition. A huge rally was organized, attended by Public Advocate Letitia James, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, Council Member Mark Levine, Assembly Member Denny Farrell, reps from NYC Comptroller Scott Stringer's office, and nearly 300 local residents flooding the streets, determined to keep the only affordable supermarket in the area in place. Over 1,000 people signed a petition in support of the store and meetings began over how to keep Associated open. In a community with a large aging population, highly rent burdened, it was imperative to prevent this area from becoming a food desert.

On Friday, June 17th, the elected officials received word that the lease holder signed a sublease with Associated, ensuring the supermarket will remain for years to come. Upon hearing the news, the jubilant community rallied to celebrate their victory, with an outpouring of support and a sense of accomplishment, showing that concerted community action makes a real impact.

Washington Heights and Inwood have seen countless stores go out of business when new landlords take over and raise lease prices. This has a destabilizing impact on the neighborhoods, where mom and pop shops have long contributed to the local economy and social fabric of the community. Efforts such as the one put forward by residents and community leaders to save Associated, speak volumes about what is needed to keep these local businesses in place, but it also shows that uptown is prepared to fight and has the strength to stand up for its stores.

"In upper Manhattan and across our city, small businesses that families built and residents rely on are being forced out due to skyrocketing rents. These businesses are the backbone of our communities, and we must fight to protect them," said State Senator Adriano Espaillat

(D-Manhattan/Bronx). "Hundreds of Washington Heights residents fought to save this store, and ensure access to affordable food for this neighborhood. I was proud to stand with you then, and I am proud to stand with you now to announce that this supermarket will stay here for years to come."

"There has been an Associated Supermarket on Fort Washington Avenue for over 30 years, and thanks to our community coming together, there will continue to be," said Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez. "This store is important to our local residents who rely on it as a source of fresh, affordable produce, and we were not going to let its doors close. I am proud of all who contributed to this effort, showing the true power of a united and engaged community, speaking as one."

"Livable neighborhoods need access to quality, affordable food, and I'm thrilled by our community's successful effort to save this supermarket," said Council Member Mark Levine. "This victory for upper Manhattan is an example of how neighbors can join together to preserve essential services and strengthen quality of life for all. I'm proud of the broad coalition of local residents, community advocates and elected officials who stood up, spoke out and demanded action."

"Throughout New York City, too many small businesses are being forced to close their doors," said Public Advocate Letitia James. "But through organizing and community activism, the residents of Washington Heights were able to save the Associated Supermarket that has played such a vital role in this community. We need to do more throughout the New York City to protect all of the small businesses that are the lifelines of our communities."

"The Associated Supermarket has served this community for nearly sixty years, and when we heard it was going to close down, we did what Washington Heights residents always do:

we organized, we fought, and we won," New York City Comptroller Scott M.

Stringer said. "New Yorkers of all backgrounds live, work, and raise their families here, and keeping the Associated open will help this neighborhood remain affordable for them. Today we are sending a strong message to the landlords of this City that we will not stand by and watch critical resources for middle class families disappear."

"Local, affordable, accessible supermarkets anchor our communities and are essential," said Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer. "I'm thrilled that through all our efforts this neighborhood's supermarket has been saved, and I look forward to working together to strengthen supermarkets across Manhattan and ensure no neighborhood is at risk of becoming a food desert."

"This is the people's victory," said Shah Ally, President of Manhattan Community Board 12. "The community identified a problem and a solution. We made history. Now residents of NYC will tell the story of how Washington Heights fought to save a store!"

"Strong neighborhoods stick together, stay informed and speak with one voice when threatened and that is just what we did uptown," said Hudson Heights Owners Coalition President Elizabeth Ritter. "This victory is a clear view of what we can do to support our struggling mom and pop shops against the tide of rising rents and I hope we can translate it into many more in the future."