

JAMES SANDERS JR.

SENATOR, 10TH DISTRICT

ALBANY OFFICE:
711 LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12247
(518) 455-3531
FAX (518) 426-6659

DISTRICT OFFICE:
142-01 ROCKAWAY BLVD.
S OZONE PARK, NEW YORK 11436
(718) 523-3069
FAX (718) 523-3670

SATELLITE OFFICE:
1931 MOTT AVE., STE. 305
FAR ROCKAWAY, NY 11091
(718) 327-7017
FAX (718) 327-7970



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STATE OF NEW YORK
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VETERANS, HOMELAND SECURITY AND
MILITARY AFFAIRS

April 1, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
New York State Governor
New York State Capitol Building
Executive Chamber
Albany, NY 12224

RE: COVID-19 Request for Testing Sites and Daily Reporting on Demographics in SE Queens

Dear Governor Cuomo:

On numerous occasions, I have requested testing sites and resources from your office to combat the coronavirus (COVID-19). As you well know, this disease has been heavily affecting Queens. My district—the 10th Senatorial District, Southeast Queens—is high risk or a “hot spot” for COVID-19. Without the tools necessary to address the spread of this infection, we are defenseless. Communities who are primarily black, brown, and Latino normally see a lack of urgency (on the part of those tasked with protecting them) when it comes to certain issues: housing, banking, and most importantly health care. We need to act now before it is too late.

As of today, April 1, there are 47,439 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in NYC. The top three boroughs that have been impacted the most are Queens (32% of confirmed cases), Brooklyn (26% of confirmed cases), and the Bronx (19% of confirmed cases). Together, these three boroughs make up 77% of all confirmed cases in NYC. Yet, there has been very limited to no testing in these communities. Historically, these areas have been predominantly comprised of black, brown, and Latino communities. It is imperative that the NYS Department of Health (DOH), the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), and other relevant agencies start to monitor and address racial disparities in our state’s response to COVID-19.

On Friday, U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren and U.S. Rep Ayanna Pressley sent a letter to Health and Human Services that stated comprehensive demographic data on people who are tested or treated for the virus that causes COVID-19 is nonexistent. This past weekend, cities with large black and nonwhite Hispanic populations emerged as new hotspots for the spread of the virus. Additionally, the letter also mentions that,

“Although COVID-19 does not discriminate along racial or ethnic lines, existing racial disparities and inequities in health outcomes and health care access may mean that the nation’s response to preventing and mitigating its harms will not be felt equally in every community. Low-income people are more likely to have many of the chronic health conditions that experts have identified as risk factors for complications from COVID-19 . . . health care providers have begun to express their concerns that Black and Hispanic people are less likely to have access to testing, which is crucial to tracking and containing the virus within a community. They are also concerned that the CDC’s subjective criteria for which patients should receive a test could result in health care providers directing tests toward more affluent patients.”

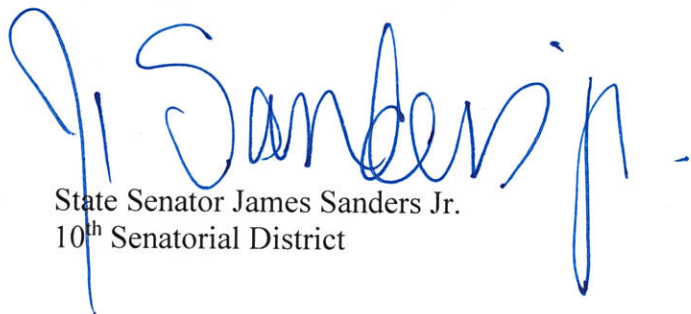
As it stands, in my district, we have zero testing sites, zero satellite facilities, one hospital, and little to no access to any resources to aid constituents. This is a huge breeding ground for coronavirus. As we grow nearer to the peak, I am extremely concerned that this virus will spread even more through my district and wreak the worst kind of havoc throughout this state. We have no shortage of seniors or individuals lacking access to health care.

For the reasons listed above, my office is requesting one drive-through and one non drive-through testing site to be placed in my district—either in the Rockaways or Rochdale Village—and daily reporting on COVID-19 demographics in Southeast Queens.

As the number of COVID-19 cases in New York State and New York City continues to grow exponentially, we urge you not to delay collecting this vital information, and to take the necessary steps to ensure that all NYS residents have the access they need to COVID-19 testing and treatment. Particularly, those in black, brown, and Latino communities.

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent matter. I am available to discuss the above-mentioned locations or alternative sites in my district.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James Sanders Jr.", with a large, stylized initial "J" on the left.

State Senator James Sanders Jr.
10th Senatorial District