

September 23, 2020

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of New York City
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: Massive Violations of New York's Guidelines for Religious and
Funeral Services Occurring Now

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

This week, we wrote to you in anticipation of the violations of New York's Guidelines for Religious and Funeral Services (Guidelines) that are right now being committed with impunity during the Kaporos animal slaughter ritual. Attached are photographs depicting practitioners at multiple Brooklyn sites standing within six feet of one another; none have face coverings. As you are aware, this ritual is occurring in some of the most densely populated, residential neighborhoods most ravaged by COVID-19, where social distancing and face covering rules have been largely flouted since the beginning of the pandemic. In fact, according to *The New York Times* article, "[N.Y.C. Warns About Rising Virus Cases in Hasidic Neighborhoods](#)," there is now a large uptick in cases in the New York City neighborhoods where the Kaporos animal slaughter ritual is currently taking place. Because Kaporos using chickens cannot be operated in accordance with the Guidelines, we are – again – asking you to issue an emergency order that prohibits it in the interest of public health and safety.

Per the Guidelines, you, Commissioner Chokshi (copied here and quoted in the article above as saying, "We have observed heightened rates of COVID-19 in many neighborhoods with large Orthodox Jewish populations."), Sheriff Fucito (copied here) and the NYPD have the authority. By example, just last week, the *Hudson Valley Post* published the article, "[Photos: 'Thousands' Gather in Hudson Valley Without Masks](#)" which showed thousands of congregants sitting shoulder to shoulder during a religious gathering, without masks, in clear violation of the Guidelines. In the article, Orange County Health Commissioner Dr. Irina Gelman is quoted as saying that these types of incidents have occurred multiple times and that it is within her province "to serve the facility with a cease and desist order." We respectfully ask you to do exactly that where violations are occurring.

This year, more than ever, the slaughter ritual places front-line police officers, emergency responders, hospital and health care workers, the participants themselves and the public at unconscionable risk. With history as guidance, the crowds will grow exponentially as the week progresses towards Yom Kippur. Soon, thousands of practitioners will convene in these tight spaces and it will become a carnival-like atmosphere. Because there is no reason to believe there will be sudden community-wide shifts to mask wearing, it is inevitable that a catastrophic spike will occur if the ritual is permitted to continue.

To allow Kaporos using chickens to go forward at this time would be grossly negligent and a dereliction of duty; it would undermine, discredit, and make moot the very social

distancing and face covering rules specifically issued for religious services – rules that are designed to protect not only those observing religious services but those with whom they subsequently come into contact.

It is worth noting that COVID-19 is a zoonotic disease that originated in a live animal market not much different from the settings where these practitioners will purchase live chickens for Kaporos. One notable difference is that, when using chickens for Kaporos, the customers themselves handle the animals, many of whom show signs of respiratory disease. The crates in which thousands of chickens are stored for up to several days are breeding grounds for infectious disease. These are the very settings that renowned public health officials describe as, “ripe for zoonotic disease transmission.” Kaporos using chickens therefore creates an additional catastrophic risk to New Yorkers who are already overwhelmed by a zoonotic disease pandemic.

Please note that while we are a coalition of animal rights organizations this does not diminish our care and concern for humans previously, currently and potentially affected by this terrible pandemic.

Sincerely,

New Yorkers for Clean, Livable, and Safe Streets
United Poultry Concerns
Slaughter Free NYC
Animal Cruelty Exposure Fund
Interfaith Vegan Coalition
In Defense of Animals

c:	Commissioner Howard A. Zucker, MD	Sheriff Joseph Fucito
	Mark Levine, Council Committee on Health, Chair	
	Dave Evans, ABC7	Danielle Leigh, ABC7
	Meghan Giannotta, Newsday	Jen Peltz, Associated Press
	Henry Goldman, Bloomberg	Hazel Sanchez, CBS2
	Jonathan Lamantia, Crains	Michael Gartland, Daily News
	Jillian Jorgensen, Daily News	Jen Carlson, Gothamist
	Elizabeth Kim, Gothamist	Amy Sara Clark, Jewish Week
	Andrew Siff, NBC4	Melissa Russo, NBC4
	Matthew Schwartz, NPR	Julia Marsh, NY Post
	Lauren Steussy, NY Post	Joseph Goldstein, NY Times
	Dana Rubenstein, NY Times	Vivian Wang, NY Times
	Shane Goldmacher, NY Times	Courtney Gross, NY1
	Erin Billups, NY1	Errol Louis, NY1
	Emily Cegielski, Observer	Allen Levine, PIX 11
	Allison Kaden PIX11	Kala Rama PIX11
	Erin Durkin, Politico	Lincoln Anderson, Village Sun
	Jillian Jonas, WBAI	Brigid Bergin, WNYC
	Ben Chapman, Wall Street Journal	Katie Honan, Wall Street Journal
	Leslie Brody, Wall Street Journal	







