

Dear Attorney General Letitia James,

I am writing to draw your attention to a situation that is currently threatening the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children in Harlem. Each day, Harlem children of all ages observe people in extreme distress whose behaviors include: self-harm, erratic outbursts, public defecation, and violence. They often walk in very close proximity to people who appear to be unconscious or semi-conscious and who are clearly experiencing a state of crisis. This is occurring as a direct result of the extreme concentration of methadone clinics and related services that have all been sited within a few blocks of each other. These sites are often right next to preschools, day cares and elementary schools, making it impossible for children and families to avoid these disturbing scenes.

I am not sure whether you are aware of the literature on vicarious traumatization, but it has been well documented that people who are exposed to other people's trauma often experience the same psychological symptoms, including neurological effects (changes to brain function), as those who are direct trauma victims. Professionals working with trauma victims such as social workers, police officers, teachers and doctors have all been shown to suffer from secondary or vicarious trauma over time. Those exposed to the trauma of close family members/friends have also been found to trigger secondary trauma.

Children are even more susceptible to vicarious traumatization than adults due to their development. Children are not cognitively able to clearly separate their own experiences from others or to make sense of disturbing situations. A recent study of 4046 children from 2-17 years of age found extensive vicarious traumatization in children exposed to the trauma of close friends and family members and to that of community trauma (Howard, 2021). Although both factors were significant, the community-based trauma accounted for the most significant effect after controlling for all other variables (race, SES, family support, gender, direct trauma). This was true for both young children and adolescents. The measure of traumatization used in the study had been strongly associated with trauma symptomology in prior studies and is therefore a valid indicator of trauma. In addition, there is research to suggest that when children are exposed to the trauma of those who share a racial or ethnic identity with themselves this can negatively impact the children's own racial/ethnic identity development.

I offer the above evidence that the over-saturation of methadone clinics and related services in Harlem is creating a mental health crisis for children that is potentially as severe as the crisis of substance abuse in the adult population of New York City. The children of Harlem are now being forced to experience a form of traumatization that can be as powerful as being the direct victim of a traumatic event. The mental health impact of this cannot be mitigated by supportive families, schools or other factors. By allowing the siting of such facilities so close to schools OASAS is ensuring that children will experience the pain of vicarious traumatization with effects that can last a life-time. Harlem's predominantly BIPOC children are also making connections about race and wondering why themselves and the people of similar racial backgrounds who are wandering around in their neighborhoods are not being helped. This can have a negative impact on their sense of self and racial identity. For children who already have additional vulnerabilities the extensive community trauma that they are exposed to every day can be psychologically devastating and hard to recover from. I urge you to research the issue of vicarious/secondary traumatization with the resources I'm providing below and draw your own conclusions as to whether the children of Harlem should continue to pay the price of their mental health and wellbeing.

Howard, S. (2021). A causal model of children's vicarious traumatization. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma*, P 1-12 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-020-00331-z>

Horowitz, K., Weine, S., & Jekel, J. (1995). PTSD symptoms in urban adolescent girls: Compounded community trauma. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 34(10), 1353–1361.

Jenkins, S. R., & Baird, S. (2002). Secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma: A validation study. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 15(5), 423–432

Zahn-Waxler, C., Radke-Yarrow, M., & King, R. A. (1977). The impact of the affective environment on young children. New Orleans: Paper presented at the Society for Research in Child Development

Wohl, M. J. A., & Van Bavel, J. J. (2011). Is identifying with a historically victimized group good or bad for your health? Transgenerational post-traumatic stress and collective victimization. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 41(7), 818–824.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Garte, Phd. Developmental Psychologist and Teacher Educator; mom of 2 boys living in Harlem
Writing on Behalf of:

AAPI for Change

Advocates 4 The Community

ATAPE Group, LLC

CIVITAS

Ephesus SDA Church

Friendly Hands Ministry

Friends of the Harriett Tubman Monument

Future Giants Organization

Greater Calvary Baptist Church

Harlem Arts Foundation

Harlem Business Alliance

Harlem Lacrosse

Harlem Park to Park

MXB United

New York Council for Housing Development Fund Companies, Inc.

Open Hands Legal Services

Progressives Educating New Yorkers, Inc.

Parents Raising Harlem

Sayers and Doers

Silent Procession Nyc4pr

Silicon Harlem

StreetSquash

Union Settlement House

United New Church of Christ
Uptown Democratic Club

314 - Pizza, Pasta & Wine Bar

Asberry and Associates, LLC

AskAscend Virtual Assistance

Carthage Advisors

CentralCasting Solutions LLC

Chaiwali

Chocolat Restaurant & Bar

Clay

Columbus Distributors

Compass Realty

Covington Realty Services

D and D Enterprise

DR3J Consultants

Edward Jones

Elaine Perry Associates

Experience Harlem

Eye Cycle

Freeland Liquor

Gastiaburo + Stella Real Estate

Ginjan Cafe

Gold Appraisal

H M Art And Home Decor

Hakimian Organization

Halstead Manhattan

Harlem American

Harlem Lofts

Harlem Properties Inc.

Harlem Shake

Harlem Wine Gallery

HarlemHome

HarlemHoopz

Il Cafe Latte 1

Il Cafe Latte 2

Indian Summer Harlem

Jacqueline Allmond Cuisine INC

L.A. Sweets NY

Le Petit Parisien

Lido

Malcolm Pharmacy

MoHo Dance

Nouvelle Home Improvements

Paris Blues Jazz Club

Pativity, LLC
R. Kenyatta Punter and Associates
Rubys Vintage
SottoCasa Pizzeria
Space Management Design
Super Nice Coffee and Bakery
T.H.E. Works
The Monkey Cup
Upholstery Lab
Uptown Townhouse
USA Deli & Grocery
Valeries Signature Salon
Virgo Hardware
Wynn Optics

100-168 West 121st Street Resident Block Association
118 Street Block Association
120th Street Block Association
124 East 117th Street Tenants Association
128th Street Block Association
1775 Houses Tenants Association
97-98 Lexington & Park Ave. Neighbors
A. Philip Randolph Square Neighborhood Alliance
A.K. Houses Tenants Association
Dorrence Brooks Property Owners & Residents Association
Graham Court Renters Association
Hamilton Terrace Block Association
Harlem East Block Association
Harlem Neighborhood Block Association
Lenox to 5th 124th Street Block Association
LenoxFive 127th Street Block Association
Mirada Home Owners Association
Mount Morris Park Community Improvement Association
Neighbors United of West 132nd Street Block Association
New 123rd Street Block Association (Lenox - 7th)
Sugar Hill Concerned Neighbors Group
The Melrose Committee for Change
West 119th Block Association
West 121st Street Block Association
West 126th Street Block Association
West 130th Street Homeowners Association
West 132nd Street Block Association
West 135th Street Block Association
West 136th Street Block Association

