

Dr. Mary T Bassett,

I have been living in Harlem on 124th Street across Marcus Garvey Park for the past 23 years and witnessed the degradation of our neighborhood, with the steady increase of drugs users and dealers. Our street is the corridor traveled by many clients of the methadone centers and where the drug dealers commute to every day to prey on them.

I am the grandmother of a 17-year-old who when attending grade school had to make a detour on her way back home to avoid the drug dealers on our block. I have also watched young children in the playground across the street subjected to the spectacle of intoxicated individuals and drugs openly sold in front of them. The children of Harlem deserve better!

We have a community garden on West 124th Street near Lenox avenue and across a school, which is constantly littered with used needles and all kind of trash, blocked by drug dealers and users and befouled with urine and fecal matters. It is not safe and a disgrace rather than a refuge for the community.

The vulnerable and distressed people in need of treatment for mental health and social services are clearly not benefiting from the programs offered at the detox centers and nearly 75% of them travel to Harlem for treatments. As a result, Harlem is oversaturated with methadone clinics and drug dealers in a vicious circle of addiction, treatment and dependance, and all of this is driven by the concentration of methadone centers in the community.

Our blocks are filled with trash, human waste and rats, and our sidewalks clogged at times with people loitering or camping there. Our community is increasingly alarmed and fed up with the indifference met when we complain about these issues, and we have organized to demand change and an end to policies that reflect the systemic racism embedded in the agencies responsible to administer these programs.

Your office is crucial in deciding how the money from the opioid settlement will be allocated, and several priorities have emerged through our meetings:

First of all, there should be a moratorium in the creation of new clinics, and a relocation of some of them to neighborhoods which are not shouldering their fair share. In order to ensure a fair distribution of the clinics an analysis of needs should be conducted city-wide.

In addition, social services and alternative drug treatments should be offered in smaller community-based programs where people in need actually live. Reimbursement for methadone treatment is more profitable for the clinics but not the patients. To that end, there should be measurable bench marks for the well-being of patients and established accountability standards for the treatment providers.

I hope that your office will take these remarks into consideration.

Thank you,

Marie-Cecile Charlier