To Elected Officials Representing Queens and Candidates Running for Office,

For the last 10 months a growing community of fridge organizers has come together to meet the needs of our neighbors. **We stand on the shoulders of many groups that came before us embodying the values of mutual aid in their own communities.** From the Black Panther Party's free breakfast program to Indigenous anticolonial projects, communities have come together when government resources fail to provide resources in times of crisis.

Rather than waiting for someone to save us - or relying on government response that is often inadequate, means tested, and excludes communities - we have chosen to create the world we want to live in. We're neighbors helping neighbors, taking what we need, and caring for the most vulnerable people in our community.

> *In this context of social isolation and forced dependency on hostile systems, mutual aid -- where we choose to help each other out, share things, and put time and resources into caring for the most vulnerable-- is a radical act" - Dean Spade*

Community fridges are managed by local community organizers, with a focus on what our specific communities need. Decisions are made by neighbors, but to keep the fridges full and fulfill our mission of fighting systemic food inequity and diverting food waste, we collaborate daily because none of us do this work alone. Networking with organizers of fridges city-wide has made it possible to keep doing this community work into 2021 and beyond. Our work prioritizes our core values which are community, transparency, communication, accountability, and compassion.

Mutual aid networks and community fridges are accountable to the community. **Therefore, they do not belong to organizers or hosts, they are not associated with political campaigns, and they are intentionally set up to ensure they are reliable in the long-term to neighbors.** That infrastructure includes: coordinating city-wide food pick-ups and drivers, renting trucks, fundraising and tracking donations, managing social media, connecting with community partners for bulk food purchases, listening and pivoting based on neighbors' needs, organizing dozens of volunteers, managing relationships with host sites/businesses, planning events like school supply, book, and PPE drives, and cleaning and maintaining fridges.

This is all done by groups of multi-generational, multi-racial volunteers outside of full-time work, school, raising children, and general pandemic fatigue. Hence, it is antithetical to the mission of mutual aid to be a part of fleeting campaign cycles and photo-ops. **Over the last few months, we have seen politicians come to mutual aid events and distributions with minimal donations and deflect attention with photo-ops and social media. We have seen politicians include food distribution as a part of their campaign cycle and deliver fresh food and produce on particular days, only for that distribution to dry up as soon as election day has come and gone.** This impacts our neighbors' trust in the mutual aid initiatives and creates anxiety both for

community members who are unsure of the reliability of food available, and for organizers who factor in campaign donations as a part of weekly food donations.

For the last 10 months, we have been in survival mode. We have not had the time nor energy to advocate politically for more legislative action by our government, because we are reacting to failed systems, such as food boxes that provide scrapple. **However, mutual aid is inherently political, and we are not a charity or a non-profit, but an organized, progressive body of constituents that politicians are accountable to.**

We have been led through eras of austerity based on the lie that there is not enough money, time, homes, or food to meet our needs. **Our work has shown that there is enough of all the things required for our communities to thrive - except for one notable thing - political will and courage.** We find this abandonment of duty unconscionable, and the inadequate response by our government officials, even the well meaning ones, immoral.

With a hunger crisis and a looming housing crisis we do not need vanity projects tied to your elections, we need you to step up and advocate for our communities with policy and legislation. **These are just some efforts on a federal, state, and city-wide level you can contribute to:**

1. **USDA boxes** have been sent to pantries across Queens. The quality of food from the USDA is not food that anyone in office would ever feed to their families. Why do you give it to ours? Improve the quality and quantity of the boxes, by including the dietary preferences of our communities and other food restrictions.
2. **GetFoodNYC** provided rotten, unlabeled, and potentially dangerous food to seniors and homebound neighbors this year. These meals were often dumped in the fridges which led to distrust and the city was uncooperative when we tried to address the issues. We need officials to improve quality and be held accountable to our community's needs
3. **Free meal programs** provided at schools across the city frequently had long lines. The "meals" were often sandwiches and apples, not a proper substitute when people need access to healthy food daily. We ask that the city continue these programs but include warm, balanced meals to ensure that nutritional needs are met.
4. **Food pantries** have been shut down due to lack of funds, volunteers, and access to food sources. Elected officials need to provide pantries with the resources necessary to continue their operations while expanding programs so we can avoid blocks-long lines.
5. **Combating food waste is also crucial.** Our fridges rescue good food, often days before it expires from businesses that require their employees to throw it out. This kind of food waste should be illegal. We ask that laws be passed to require these businesses to divert their fresh food to fridges, pantries, and shelters.
6. **Connecting our groups with farmers upstate** is one way to leverage your position. Many farmers' supply chains were cut off as restaurants started to shutter while our fridge organizers have to compare bulk prices of quarts of milk to fill our fridges.

7. **We also need dedicated drivers**, space to hold bulk food, and a plethora of creative ways to ensure our community is fed.

The social contract we have signed onto as citizens means that your jobs as elected officials require you to work to ensure that our needs are met, it's why we pay taxes, share spaces, and exist in community with one another. **You, the people we have elected to represent us, have broken that contract for long enough.** It's time for you to push for comprehensive food justice policies and meet with us as progressive bodies who have been doing the work.

And finally, to our neighbors: your struggles to survive these last 10 months are not because of any failure on your part, but due to our elected officials absolving themselves of the responsibility of caring for its people. We have been here for you and will continue to do our best to show up every day.

Signed,

Astoria Community Fridge
Centro Corona (host, supporter)
Corona Comunidad Fridge
Elmhurst Community Fridge 2
Jackson Heights Community Fridge
Jamaica Community Fridge
Ozone Park Community Fridge
Queens Care Collective
Queens Liberation Project
Queens Village Community Fridge
Ravenswood Community Fridge
Sunnyside & Woodside Mutual Aid

Additional Signatories (updated 1/21/21)
The Connected Chef
St. Albans Community Fridge
The Freedge (ernst@thefreedge.org)
The Love Fridge Chicago (@thelovefridgechicago)
NYC Covid Mutual Aid (@nyc_covid_mutulaid)
Funky Town Fridge (@funkytownfridge)
Cooper Park Fridge (@cooperparkfridge)
Food For Us (@foodforusnj)
The People's Bodega NYC (@thepeoplesbodeganyc)
The People's Fridge (@peoplesfridgewordup)
All/Bright Community Fridges (@allstonbrightoncommunityfridges)

Worcester Free Fridge (@worcester_freefridge)
East Village Mutual Aid (@eastvillagemutualaid)
Astoria Mutual Aid Network

Additional signatures (updated 1/22)
Greenpoint Fridge (@greenpointfridge)
Reclaim Seed NYC (@reclaimseednyc)
The Friendly Fridge (@thefriendlyfridgebx)
Nourish NYC, inc (@nourishnyc)
Clinton Hill Free Store (@chfg_freestore)
One Love Community Fridge (@onelovecommunityfridge)
Clinton Hill Fort Greene Mutual Aid (@chfgaid)
Community Fridge KW (@communityfridgekw)
Feed the People Dallas Mutual Aid (@feedthepeopledallas)
Athens Community Fridge (@athenscommunityfridge)
Boston South End Community Fridge (@bostonsouthendcommunityfridge)
The Bogastow Farm Project (@bogastowfarmproject)
Inglewood Community Fridge (@Inglewoodcommunityfridge)
South Central Farm (@southcentralfarm)
Inland Empire Community Fridges (@iecommunityfridges)
Forest Ave COMEunity Fridge (@forestavecomeunityfridge)

Additional Signatures (updated 1/24)

Woodside Sunnyside Composting (@woodsidesunnysidecomposting)
Rusty Wheelbarrow Farm (@rustywheelbarrowfarm)
Queensbridge Community Fridge
Gowanus Mutual Aid (@gowanusmutualaid)
The Uptown Fridge (@theuptownfridge)
The Barrio Fridge (@thebarriofridge)
Sovereign Earth Fridge (@sovereignearthfridge)
Flatbush Friendly Fridge (@flatbushfriendlyfridge)
Roslindale Community Fridge (Roslindale Community Fridge)
The People's pantry Toronto (@peoplespantryto)
Westside Community Fridge (@westsidecommunityfridge)
Dorchester Community Fridge (@dotcommunityfridge)
The Gowanus Fridge (@thegowanusfridge)
St. Pete Community Fridge (@stpetefreefridge)

Additional Signatures (updated 1/26)

The Fridge Girls (@thefridgegirls)
Fridge in the Square (@cambridgecommunityfridge)

Updated 1/27
Hygiene Kits North Brooklyn (@hygienekitsnbk)
NOT ONE MORE BLOCK (@notonemoreblock)
Worcester Community Fridges (@woofridge)

Updated 1/29
Boston Community Fridges
(@bostoncommunityfridges)
New Orleans Community Fridges
(@nolacommunityfridges)
nycfridge.com
Free Clothing Queens
(@freeclothingqueens)

Updated 1/31
Astoria Food Pantry
(@astoriafoodpantry)

Updated 2/4
Bronx Mutual Aid Network

You may contact the authors of this letter at queensfridges718@gmail.com.