



July 10, 2020

President Lee Bollinger
Columbia University
202 Low Library
535 West 116th Street, MC 4309
New York, N.Y. 10027

Dear President Bollinger:

The Morningside Heights Community Coalition (MHCC) would like to thank you for informing us about Columbia University's response to the COVID-19 virus and your emerging plans for reopening the campus for in-person classes and 60% residence hall occupancy in September. Our June 9 letter to you and six other academic institutions in Morningside Heights on this matter is attached.

Because we are robustly connected to and reflective of our diverse community and understand local views and concerns, we recently took it upon ourselves to conduct a survey on issues related to COVID-19. Our [survey](#) of over 300 residents of Morningside Heights revealed more than nine out of ten respondents are concerned about ongoing threats from the virus. A preponderance does not favor institutions having students in residence this fall.

Although we are heartened that in the University's Resource Guide it is "strongly recommended that all affiliates follow these guidelines when engaged in social or other activities off campus," we need to know what specific steps you and your colleagues will take to ensure affiliates follow these guidelines and how their adherence will be monitored. Our health and safety depend upon the answers to these questions.

Your Resource Guide further states "We (Columbia) are required to submit to the State our own detailed reopening plan, demonstrating how we will operate and ensure the health and safety of our campus community and neighborhood." It notes that Columbia expects to receive clearance from the State for its plan on August 10.

How will the "campus community and neighborhood" be involved in the planning and implementation of this plan? Thousands of local residents have been infected by COVID-19 and several hundred of our neighbors and friends have died. Given the importance of the safety of our neighborhood in the required State plan, MHCC expects to be substantively involved in preparing and reviewing the plan, as it affects our community members directly. Logically, this must occur before the plan is submitted for Governor Cuomo's approval.

We will be in touch with you and your colleagues about joining in an inclusive, productive, and mutually beneficial process for developing the plan.

Sincerely,

Laura Friedman, President

Andrea Brecker

Kwesi McDavid

David Robinson

Harry Schwartz

Robert Stern

Barry Weinberg

MHCC Executive Committee

cc: Governor Andrew Cuomo
Mayor Bill de Blasio
Senator Brian Benjamin
Assembly Member Daniel O'Donnell
Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer
New York City Council Member Mark Levine
Manhattan Community Board 9 Chair Barry Weinberg
Presidents of Other Educational Institutions on Morningside Heights



Re: Pandemic-Related Safety Concerns on the Re-Opening of Institutions in Morningside Heights

June 9, 2020

Dear President Bollinger and Members of the Columbia University Administration and Senate:

We hope this finds you and your colleagues safe and healthy during these challenging times. The Morningside Heights Community Coalition (MHCC) is deeply committed to protecting the integrity and welfare of the neighborhood we share with your institution. This commitment is especially important during the continuing public health crisis which has devastated our community, leading to 2,335 cases of the COVID-19 virus and 262 deaths in the two zip codes of Morningside Heights and West Harlem, 10025 and 10027, respectively.

As you know, older residents of our neighborhood and low-income people of color in nearby public housing continue to be particularly vulnerable to the virus. Our community is still in an urgent situation and we have lost neighbors.

Thanks to the great work of our health care workers and the practice of social distancing by our neighbors, the crisis has not reached the levels it otherwise would have. Moving forward, however, we fear the influx into the neighborhood of thousands of students and employees could seriously threaten the progress we have collectively achieved. Consequently, we are eager to learn about your plans for reopening your campus and for mitigating any potentially harmful effects on the Morningside Heights and West Harlem communities.

Of particular interest to us is your responsiveness to New York State's Forward Safety Plan Template, which covers on-campus employees. Because your institution educates and houses students, we also want to learn about your plans for on-campus instruction and managing student residences. Both of these activities may affect our shared neighborhood, and we would like to understand your expectations for how students will interact with the community in ways that best protect all of us.

In this time of crisis, MHCC seeks to protect our mutual interest in a healthy and thriving Morningside Heights. We appreciate recent announcements by institutions which acknowledge the broader community as an important consideration in decision-making during this challenging period. We look forward to an ongoing dialogue with your team regarding how these challenges are addressed.

You can learn about MHCC's work to improve our community at www.mhccnyc.org. We will contact you soon to schedule a conversation about these issues.

Sincerely,

Andrea Brecker
Harry Schwartz
Laura Friedman
Robert Stern
Kwesi McDavid
Barry Weinberg
David Robinson

MHCC Executive Committee

cc: Governor Andrew Cuomo
Mayor Bill de Blasio
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