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Dr. Anthony S. Fauci  
BG 31 RM 7A03  
31 Center Drive  
Bethesda, MD 20814

Re: Call to close down wet markets

Dear Dr. Fauci:

I write to you as counsel for Slaughter Free NYC, and as a New Yorker. Your efforts to address the spread of COVID-19 have been masterful, and so many of us are grateful for your leadership. We applaud your recent call to close wet (live animal) markets in "countries where this is commonplace." Your advice, if heeded, will help protect people everywhere from yet another devastating disease outbreak.

But, are you aware that New York City, the city with the highest population density in the United States and number of people infected with the COVID-19 virus, is also home to the largest number of wet markets in the country? Most New Yorkers are shocked to learn that there are more than 80 such wet markets located throughout the five boroughs.

These are storefront wet markets, the majority of which are open to the public. They allow members of the community to enter, purchase live animals, and have an employee slaughter them on the spot. Anyone can enter these live animal markets without protective gear, and walk amongst the tightly confined animals who are kept in unsanitary, bleak conditions. Millions of these animals are slaughtered within city limits each year and comprise more than 10 species, including chickens, lambs, ducks, goats and bulls.

Equally troublesome, these wet markets are predominantly located in densely populated, residential neighborhoods. Blood, body parts, feces and other noxious materials are frequently

spilled onto public sidewalks and streets and into our sewers. Passersby step in and track these materials to subways, buses, into their homes and beyond city limits.

These wet markets are by no means essential; they are not located in food deserts; each is located in neighborhoods with nearby grocery stores and/or bodegas. Nor are they less costly; in fact, purchasing meat at the supermarket is generally less expensive than purchasing meat at these wet markets.

A common misconception is that zoonotic diseases like COVID-19 are only spread from wildlife to humans. However, as you are well aware, many zoonotic diseases originate in farm animals. Avian flu derived from chickens; mad cow disease and anthrax from cows; syphilis from sheep; and H1N1 swine flu from pigs. Salmonella, E.coli and other pathogens have also emerged from farm animals. Simply put, every one of these wet markets is a potentially catastrophic disease vector.

It should be noted that before these animals arrive in New York City - often already very sick - transporters pack them tightly into metal trailers and truck them for upwards of 24 hours, often in extreme heat or below-freezing temperatures. The animals stand in their own urine, feces, and vomit. Many die along the way from illness, dehydration, stress or injuries while remaining amongst the living. Any pathogens present - from toxic factory farms through transport - have the opportunity to spread once they arrive at each of New York City's numerous wet markets.

The NYC Department of Health and other City officials claim to have no regulatory authority of these markets despite their violating dozens of health, zoning and nuisance codes. The City passes the buck to the State, specifically the NY State Department of Agriculture & Markets, which "regulates" and licenses these wet markets. The reality is that absent a complaint made directly to the Department of Agriculture & Markets, these establishments are rarely inspected. Residents have filed numerous complaints, called their local representatives and reported obvious health and safety violations to the police, almost always to no avail. On the rare occasion that an inspection is conducted, fines are rarely issued, licenses are never revoked, and repeat offenders are not adequately punished.

New York City's wet markets are a potential public health hazard. As COVID-19 has taught us, viruses know no boundaries.

If a virus originates in New York City, it is one footstep, one, subway, bus, train, car, truck, or flight from contaminating the rest of New York, the United States, and ultimately, the world.

The failure of the Governor's Office, the NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets, Mayor DeBlasio, and the NYC Department of Health to, at a minimum, suspend the operation of these wet markets during this unprecedented outbreak is incomprehensible. Our pleas to these officials have been ignored. We call upon you, Dr. Fauci, the NAID, the CDC, and the President to demand that the Governor of New York issue an order suspending the operation of these markets immediately. To do nothing is to further endanger tens of millions of Americans locally and nationwide.

Thank you, Dr. Fauci, for all you are doing to save our beautiful state. Will you please take this one additional step? The people of New York are depending on you.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bonnie S. Klapper', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bonnie S. Klapper