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Press Release: Community Members Unite to Stop FreshDirect's Exploitation of the South Bronx

BRONX, NY, February 13, 2012: Community residents and activists will rally Tuesday, February 14th at 8:45 AM outside of 110 William Street, to demand that the board of the New York City Industrial Development Agency vote to block FreshDirect's sweetheart deal in the Bronx. The deal was suddenly announced last Tuesday, February 7th. Governor Cuomo, Mayor Bloomberg, and Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. hailed the privately arranged deal as a win for everyone. FreshDirect is expected to receive a \$130 million subsidy package from the city, the state, and the Bronx in exchange for its decision to relocate from Queens to the Harlem River Rail Yards along the waterfront in the Mott Haven neighborhood of the South Bronx.

But local community members are upset about the adverse impact that FreshDirect's relocation will have on the South Bronx. They have organized a group called SOUTH BRONX UNITE! STOP FRESHDIRECT! and find numerous aspects of the deal and how it is being portrayed disturbing, deceptive, and deleterious to the health and welfare of the South Bronx community.

"Fresh Direct has pledged to bring new jobs to the Bronx," said Mychal Johnson of Community Board 1, "But they have no obligation to do so. FreshDirect is not penalized if they fail to reach their job creation targets. There are no mandates or incentives to hire people from the South Bronx, which has one of the highest unemployment rates in all of New York City. Further, there is no guarantee that FreshDirect jobs would even be at a living wage." According to subsidy watchdog group [Good Jobs New York](#), the city is failing to leverage the proposed subsidies for the creation of good jobs for people that need them. In addition, GJNY claims the IDA has failed to provide taxpayers a clear cost/benefit analysis of the benefits expected to be awarded to the company.

"The way this went down was completely undemocratic," said Mychal Johnson. "The Governor, the Mayor, and the Borough President announced this was a done deal before the public hearing, before the official vote, before there was any chance for public input. They decided to give FreshDirect \$130 million dollars in taxpayer support, without any assessment of how this would affect the community. Worst of all, even with millions of dollars of subsidies, tax breaks, and incentives, there is no written guarantee of even one new living wage job for the South Bronx."

The relocation is a "slap in the face to the people of the South Bronx," said Rev. Ruben Austria, a faith leader and resident of Mott Haven. "We are in dire need of fresh food in this community, but FreshDirect won't even deliver in the South Bronx. Yet they have no qualms about driving fleets of trucks in and out of our neighborhood every day, polluting the air our people breathe, while they bring their product to wealthier communities. They say there's no demand in the

South Bronx, but they make no provision to serve families using food stamps, who would gladly purchase affordable fresh food.”

The burden on the South Bronx angers Daniel Wallace, a neighborhood resident. "This project demands that the people of the South Bronx bear an inordinate amount of the costs of a deal from which we are guaranteed no real benefit. People in Manhattan get to eat fresh food; we get to eat more exhaust. As a South Bronx resident, it infuriates me that the people elected to represent our community's interests are instead allowing us to be saddled with another terrible deal. The way FreshDirect and our elected officials flouted the democratic process to complete this deal is a real sign of disrespect to me and the rest of the people who live in the South Bronx. They didn't even pretend like our voices matter."

“It’s unacceptable,” says Ivelyse Andino, a resident of the South Bronx. “We already have the highest rate of asthma in the country, the most concentrated health problems, including infant mortality and childhood obesity – and these things are the direct result of urban planning policies that utterly disregard the rights of poor communities of color. Now FreshDirect is going to bring in another 130 trucks driving through our streets every day, and produce 380 tons of solid waste each month – and there hasn’t even been a legitimate environmental impact study done.”

The worst part of the deal, say environmental activists like Harry Bubbins, is that the space FreshDirect will occupy is misused public land. The proposed site for FreshDirect at the Harlem River Rail Yards in the Bronx was supposed to develop freight service to reduce air pollution from truck traffic, expand the South Bronx Greenway, and give residents access to the waterfront. Instead, 1.9 miles of waterfront space will remain inaccessible to the public. "This gargantuan facility," said Bubbins, "is clearly inappropriate for our waterfront and has sparked keen and widespread interest in the best use of this valuable public land. We look forward to an aggressive inquiry by Attorney General Eric Schneiderman into the original lease between the New York State Department of Transportation and the Harlem River Rail Yards. It seems they are in default, and a new community led public planning process needs to be initiated. A more mixed use and diverse array of activities on the 100 acres foot print will yield more jobs, cleaner air and a better return for the tax payer investment than what is proposed with the lucrative backdoor deals proposed for FreshDirect to abandon Queens."

Despite the anger over the FreshDirect sweetheart deal, community members are optimistic. “We’re going to use every legal tool available to us to fight for our community,” said Corrine Kohut, an attorney and homeowner in the South Bronx. “We’re too well informed and organized to let this happen without a fight. Our elected officials and the public agencies that are supposed to look out for our interests aren’t going to get away with selling out the community anymore. We look forward to a community-led development plan that makes efficient use of nearly 100 acres of public waterfront land and incorporates sustainable development, living wage jobs, clean air and waterfront access for South Bronx residents.”