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Inspector General

## Office of the Inspector General

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July 23, 2019

Patrick J. Foye  
Chairman  
Metropolitan Transportation Authority  
2 Broadway  
New York, NY 10004

**Re: MTA's Homeless Outreach Services  
Programs and Contracts with  
Bowery Residents' Committee  
(BRC)**

Dear Chairman Foye:

Since 2010, the MTA has spent tens of millions of dollars on homeless outreach services contracts, yet the growing homeless population on MTA properties, particularly throughout the NYC Transit subway system, has significantly increased challenges for the MTA. OIG staff has conducted an initial review to observe whether Bowery Residents' Committee (BRC), the primary not-for-profit service provider in this program, is providing effective services to address the growing homeless population on MTA property and transportation lines. OIG conducted surveillance over the past six days and found that BRC appears to be providing, at best, minimal outreach services—often turning away those apparently seeking assistance and, at worst, seemingly ignoring homeless persons seeking assistance. I personally spent several hours inspecting Penn Station and saw individuals seeking food in garbage cans steps away from BRC's office and homeless individuals lying on the ground directly outside BRC's office—the door to which is poorly marked with no signage clearly stating that homeless outreach services are provided within. Based on these initial observations and the troubling findings of a report today released by the New York State Comptroller's Office which found that "BRC was only doing a fraction of the work it is required to do under its contract," the MTA OIG will be undertaking a complete investigation, including an investigation of BRC, to fully understand and help address the long term systemic issues plaguing the implementation of the MTA's homeless outreach services programs.

The OIG's initial review focused on observing what activity BRC currently engages in to meet the expectations of the MTA. OIG investigators conducted surveillance throughout Penn Station and Grand Central Terminal (GCT), with the following observations.

**OIG staff observed the following specifically at Penn Station:**

- Approximately five (5) to twenty (20) homeless individuals were observed per 8-hour surveillance shift by OIG investigators.
- During a majority of our surveillance, investigators reported seeing no interaction with BRC staff and homeless individuals who were present throughout Penn Station.
- OIG staff witnessed at least 20 instances of homeless persons unable to gain access to the BRC office either because no one answered or BRC staff turned them away.
- OIG investigators often witnessed a note on BRC's office door reading:

“The BRC Homeless Outreach Office is temporarily unavailable. Don't worry you can still reach us! Feel free to call us [phone number]. We are here to help.
- On numerous occasions, my staff and I observed the office locked with no note or information posted regarding hours of operation or how a person could receive assistance.
- OIG staff observed homeless individuals lying in front of the BRC office on numerous occasions. In one instance, two BRC staff were seen exiting their office door and walking past a homeless individual lying on the floor, seemingly ignoring him.
- On one occasion when OIG staff observed the above-referenced “temporarily unavailable” note on the office door, OIG staff called the telephone number provided. OIG staff explained that a presumed homeless woman was standing nearby and appeared to need assistance. BRC staff instructed OIG staff to tell the homeless woman to go to the BRC office. The homeless woman was next observed knocking on the office door, to no avail.
- OIG staff observed a homeless individual lying down next to the BRC office. Shortly thereafter, two BRC employees were observed approaching him. OIG staff overheard the BRC staff yelling at the individual by name, saying “get the hell out of here” and added “you can't be here”.

**OIG staff observed the following specifically at GCT:**

- The BRC office is located within the GCT Lost and Found office. The entrance does not have any signage or writing stating that BRC's homeless outreach office is located within. OIG staff also observed BRC workers conduct only one canvass of the station during a six-hour period.
- During a 32-hour period, OIG staff observed over a dozen homeless persons and/or panhandlers inside GCT, and at least 18 homeless persons and/or panhandlers at the perimeter exits on 42nd Street, Vanderbilt Avenue, and Lexington Avenue.

- OIG staff observed few interactions between BRC staff and homeless individuals inside and outside GCT.

### CONCLUSION

OIG will be undertaking a complete investigation, including an investigation of BRC, to fully understand and address the long term systemic issues plaguing the implementation of the MTA's homeless outreach services programs.

As always, we look forward to your courtesy and cooperation. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CPokorny', with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the signature.

Carolyn Pokorny