

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 23, 2007

Commissioner Thomas R. Frieden
Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
93 Worth Street, Room 100
New York, NY 10013

Dear Dr. Frieden,

I would like to thank the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) for working with the Association of Red Hook Food Vendors to ensure that the 13 stalls serving Central and South American culinary delights at a little park in Brooklyn are fully compliant with the City's food handling and safety regulations. It is critical that this spirit of collaboration continues to ensure that every stall is fully up to code and that New Yorkers will be able to eat excellent food while watching exciting soccer matches can go on for years to come.

As recently as 1992, the Red Hook ball fields were a no-man's land plagued by drug use and gun violence, exemplified by the killing of respected principal Patrick Daly, who was caught by a stray bullet while looking for a student who had left school. Beginning in the mid-1990s, families and onlookers who brought food to enjoy at newly burgeoning weekend soccer games began to organize into commercial vendors. Since that time, the Red Hook ball fields vendors have grown into a cherished community phenomenon that attract hundreds of visitors and families every weekend to enjoy the cuisine and watch or play soccer. The vendors and their customers have been instrumental in Red Hook's revitalization.

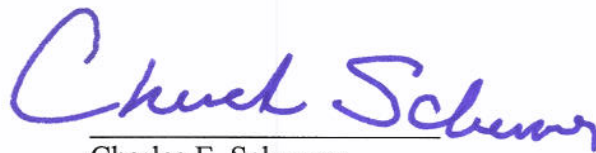
It is my understanding that over the last several weekends DOHMH inspectors have been on site in Red Hook inspecting the vendors' operations. Their approach has been the right one: instead of shuttering stalls that may have a few infractions, they have worked with the families who run these businesses to make on-the-spot corrections and explain to them how to improve their sanitary practices. This commitment to working with the vendors is laudable and I hope it continues.

The food vendors themselves have also been working hard on their end to become fully compliant with all health and safety codes as quickly as possible. In the last week alone, I have been told that over 70 people who run or work at the stalls have taken food safety

and handling classes. The vendors association has also begun to securing equipment such as portable hot-cold water dispensers to help them meet your guidelines.

Certainly, going from a situation where standards were enforced or oversight performed to one of increased scrutiny can be a difficult transition. To that end, I hope that your Department and your capable inspectors will eschew confrontation, and continue your work with a spirit of collaboration. Thank for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chuck Schumer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Charles E. Schumer
U.S. Senator