



December 6, 2018

The Honorable Mark Levine
Chair, Health Committee
New York City Council
250 Broadway, Room 1816
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chair Levine:

On behalf of Mayor de Blasio, thank you for the opportunity to submit comments in support of the New York Health Act.

In order to have thriving, healthy communities, every person must have access to health care. Lack of health insurance impedes one's ability to get the critical health care services they may need, and the uninsured tend to bear a higher financial burden from medical bills and suffer from worse health outcomes. Studies have shown that being uninsured is associated with increased prevalence of disease and death. Not having insurance also increases health disparities across race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Health insurance plays a major role in access to primary care and preventive health screenings, allowing individuals to manage their mental health needs, substance use disorders and chronic health conditions like diabetes and cancer. Insurance coverage also facilitates access to contraceptives and prenatal care.

Health insurance coverage is also important for the City's economy and job markets, both by protecting individuals from unaffordable medical bills and by enabling health care providers, including hospitals, community health centers and nursing facilities to provide the care their patients need. Expanding access to health insurance coverage and implementing a single payer system would support New York City Health + Hospitals' mission to provide high quality health care services to all New Yorkers regardless of their ability to pay. New York City Health + Hospitals – the largest municipal health care system in the nation – is the safety net provider for over one million New Yorkers each year, and the largest provider of care to the uninsured in New York City.

The insurance reforms enacted by the Affordable Care Act, including the subsequent creation of the New York State of Health Marketplace in 2013, have significantly expanded health insurance coverage to millions of New Yorkers. Between 2013 and 2016, almost 16 million New York State residents gained coverage, and the uninsured rate among adults in New York City declined from 16.8 percent to 9.8 percent. New Yorkers have come to rely on the protections afforded by the Affordable Care Act such as preventive services like immunizations and cancer screenings, annual wellness visits and prescription drug coverage for Medicare recipients. Despite this progress, coverage gaps remain; over 1.1 million New York State residents, including 663,731 New York City residents (7.8%), remain uninsured.

A single-payer health system would provide coverage to these uninsured New Yorkers. The New York Health Act would create a comprehensive system of access to health insurance to provide a health plan available to every New York State resident. The program does not require its participants to pay any



premium or out-of-pocket costs and provides all benefits currently included in Medicaid, Medicare, Child Health Plus and other state programs. This new system will ensure access to critical care to those who need it most and increase positive health care outcomes for all New Yorkers.

A single payer system would also make major strides to decrease segregation of care based on insurance type and decrease needless administrative costs of our current health care system. Research has shown that many private practices do not accept Medicaid; other studies suggest that Medicaid is accepted at hospital clinics, but not necessarily in the faculty practices of the same hospitals. The difference in rates paid by Medicaid when compared to private insurance is a contributor to this inequity, which would be addressed with a single payer system. In addition, health insurance companies and health care providers – including New York City Health + Hospitals – spend far too much time and money in the administrative processes of billing for, denying, appealing and collecting payment for health care services. A single payer system would allow health care providers to devote their time and money to caring for the needs of their patients.

The removal of the Affordable Care Act individual mandate penalty, the pending lawsuit filed by Texas to strike down the Affordable Care Act and the chilling effect of the recently proposed “public charge” rule create significant uncertainty as to whether New York City can sustain its recent gains in health insurance coverage. A recent study found that the number of uninsured children in the United States increased in 2017, for the first time in nearly a decade, and projected that the decline in coverage would likely continue if the proposed public charge rule goes into effect. As the Trump Administration continues its assault on the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid, it is our job to ensure that everyone, regardless of their age, employment status, household income, immigration status or health status, has access to health care. The New York Health Act would support this access for every New York State resident.

The City of New York supports the New York Health Act and we call upon the State Legislature and Governor to pass a single-payer health system in New York State.

Thank you for the opportunity to join the growing chorus of voices in support of a single-payer health system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Oxiris Barbot, MD".

Oxiris Barbot, MD
Acting Commissioner
Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mitchell Katz, MD".

Mitchell Katz, MD
President and Chief Executive Officer
NYC Health + Hospitals