



**"PUBLIC HEALTH IS THE HEART OF
NEW YORK CITY!"**

January 5, 2011

Dear Councilmember,

The People's Budget Coalition for Public Health (PBC) is a growing coalition of concerned New York City residents, activists, public health advocates, community-based and city-wide organizations, unions, and clergy focused on the health of our communities. We have joined together to protect public health during this economic crisis. We are writing to you regarding the Mayor's proposed budget modification. Specifically we are concerned about additional cuts to HHC, including the privatization of public health care services, and the elimination of two school based health centers that provide nearly 2,000 students with primary care, cuts to mental health programs, and elimination of tuberculosis programs. **We believe that these cuts are simply penny wise, pound foolish.**

When it comes to public health, there are often serious consequences when cuts are made in public health programs. Professor Nick Freudenberg documented one serious example of consequences and costs in the American Journal of Public Health article of March 2006 (Vol. 96, No. 3, 424-434). Dr. Freudenberg writes about the cuts in the city's fiscal crisis of 1975 and the later "syndemic" of TB, HIV, and homicide which cost the city an estimated \$50 billion to deal with.

Cuts in the budget of the Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC) fit into the category of fool-hardy cuts. Critical services are provided by HHC, including providing care for some 450,000 uninsured patients. HHC has a projected budget deficit of \$1.2 billion and has already closed 5 Child Health Clinics and 1 dental clinic, has moved to lay-off workers and is in the process of privatizing services. The Adopted Budget for City Fiscal Year 2011 cut over \$3 million; for Fiscal Year 2012, the cut is slated to be nearly \$5 million.

These cuts will mean reduced funding for and services in Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Services, Child Health Clinics, Outpatient Pharmacy and Rapid HIV Testing and Assessment Service. These services primarily impact low-income communities and, as with Dr. Freudenberg's example above, lead to costlier interventions down the line.

In addition to HHC cuts, listed within the modification plan was the elimination of "supplemental funding for two school-based health centers" in New York City: Thurgood Marshall Academy, operated by NYP/Columbia University in Harlem and Wingate HS, operated by SUNY Downstate in Brooklyn. The rationale for closing these two SBHC's is "low performance." However, closer examination indicates otherwise.

The proposed budget cuts to city funding for these two SBHCs will essentially make inaccessible primary care for nearly 2,000 students. By cutting funds to the SBHC programs, the city is further limiting the number of resources and support for the youth living in these high need communities.



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Wingate HS Campus is located in Crown Heights, Brooklyn and hosts 4 small public high schools. The total population for the campus is 1,749 students. The SBHC reports enrollment of 1,310 students, *which is 75% of the student population* and 6,309 visits were reported for school year 2008-2009. Out of the SBHC enrollees, almost three quarters of the students enrolled, 820, did not specify an outside Primary Care Provider which signals limited access to preventive medical care outside of the SBHC. The visits ranged from first aid, reproductive health, chronic care management, and mental health. The SBHC is staffed and there is a current vacant position for a psychologist.

The second school, Thurgood Marshall Academy is small and located in Harlem. The student population is 570 and 538 students or 94% are enrolled. The SBHC is highly utilized with 3,238 visits reported for school year 2008-2009. The SBHC is staffed by a physician's assistant, a social worker, and a psychologist.

Mental health services for New York City's children are critical. Based on nationally accepted prevalence estimates of mental health disorders for children aged 0-4, Citizens' Committee of New York, Inc. estimates that more than 47,000 children under 5 in New York City have a mental health disorder and about 60,000 children ages 5-17 have a mental health disorder. Studies show that the earlier a child's mental health needs are met; the better a child does socially, academically and ultimately, as an adult. Mental health programs at all ages help avoid the "hidden" costs associated with untreated mental health such as increased family disruption, children struggling in school or dropping out of school, as well as increased crime, abuse, neglect, and domestic violence. Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman estimates that **for every \$1 invested for early childhood, there is a \$7 savings.**

(www.heckmanequation.org/system/files/121410_HeckmanIllinoisDeficitPieceFINAL.pdf)

Finally, the People's Budget Coalition is deeply concerned about the Mayor's proposal to eliminate tuberculosis clinics. **This is a short term budget cut which has the potential to lead to long term increases in disease, suffering, death and even greater expenses than the 1975 cuts created.** The TB case rate surged to a high peak in 1992-3. Since then, despite well established public health measures, the TB rate remains twice the rate in NYC than the state and NYS remains double the national rate. **This is not the place to make a cutback.**

Sincerely,

The People's Budget Coalition



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Growing List of Members: Arab-American Family Support Center; Arab Muslim American Federation; Brooklyn Congregations United; Brooklyn Perinatal Network; Asian-Pacific Islanders Coalition on HIV/AIDS; Campo Missionero Sarepta; Children's Defense Fund of New York; Churches United to Save and Heal; Christ the Rock International; Churches United to Save and Heal (150 churches); Citizens' Committee for Children; Coalition for Asian American Children and Families; Commission on the Public's Health System; Community Development Project of the Urban Justice Center; District Council 37; Doctor's Council; El Centro de Inmigrantes; The Family Health Project; Faith on Fire; Fort Greene SNAP; Grace Episcopal Church; Greater Rugged Baptist Church; Getsamene Garden Baptist Church; Healthy Families-Brooklyn; Housing Works; Freedom Community Center; John Edward Stewart, The Quakers; Indo-China Sino American Community Center; Make The Road-NY; Martin Luther King Center, Inc.; New York Immigration Coalition; New York State Coalition for School Based Health Centers; New York State Nurses Association; Nos Quedamos; Parent to Parent-New York State; Praise Tabernacle; RACCOON; Retail Action Project (RAP); Salam Arabic Lutheran Church; The Bronx Health Link; The Federation of County Networks; The Citywide Coalition to End Infant Mortality; Universal Church of God; Vayl Training and Wellness