

DC 37 Rallies Against Health-Care Cuts It Says Will Shred Safety Net

By DAVID SIMS | Posted: Monday, November 4, 2013 5:30 pm

Members of District Council 37 and other health-care unions Oct. 30 urged Mayor Bloomberg to stop cuts to public-health programs and clinics around the city, saying he was hurting underprivileged families even as he entered the final months of his administration.

The press conference outside City Hall was spurred by a number of cuts, including the Health and Hospitals Corporation's closing of the North Central Bronx Hospital labor and delivery department.

Immunization Cuts

The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene is also planning to reduce hours of operation for STD clinics and close two of its three immunization clinics. It attempted to close the clinics this summer but delayed the decision after protests from community organizations and labor; the two clinics are now slated to be closed Dec. 31.

"We're all concerned that they're making radical changes to the public-health system" just as the Mayor's term in office comes to a close, said Local 436 President Judith Arroyo, who represents Public Health Nurses and Epidemiologists.

"We have to look at citizens, protect their health, and try to make things easier for those of us who are less favored in the world," she said. "For every dollar and penny you're looking at, there's a human being who you're throwing on the street, who isn't going to get immunization."

Service Employees International Union Doctors Council Vice President Frank Proscia said that the incoming administration might well prove more sympathetic to the unions' position.

'De Blasio Understands'

"Bill de Blasio understands what health care really means. He wants to maintain services," he said, referring to the union's endorsed candidate. "Our city needs to change the way it does business. We have to continue to fight for local, state and Federal funding...this policy of death by 1,000 cuts must stop."

Mr. Proscia predicted that the implementation of the Affordable Care Act would make for "an influx of new patients" to the city's health and hospital systems. "We need to require that the safety-net hospital system is viable," he said.

Also at the rally was a North Central Bronx Hospital employee who had just clocked out of a

24-hour shift—Dr. David Eshak, a delegate for the SEIU Committee of Interns and Residents.

He said he had overseen two dozen admissions and suffered the loss of a patient over his last shift, and charged that the officials making decisions to cut were too removed from the front lines of city services.

“We know the needs of our patients,” he said. “Those cutting services are not in touch with what we really need to serve them...instead of top-down eliminations of service, those on the front lines should be working hand-in-hand.”

The Democratic nominee for Public Advocate, Letitia James, said she “would urge Mayor Bloomberg to cease and desist” in the closing weeks of his administration. “Stop these cuts, stop any proposals for cuts...the Mayor has ignored the needs of those suffering in the City of New York,” she said.