



TESTIMONY

Regarding: Health Access in New York City, and the Roll Out of NYC Care October 31, 2019

Introduction:

Good morning, my name is Dr. Juan Tapia. I want to thank today's Committee Chairs, Councilmember Mark Levine and Councilmember Carlina Rivera, along with all other members of the Council for having today's important hearing. I am grateful for the opportunity to address you all today.

I am here today to submit a testimony on behalf of SOMOS, a network of over 2,500 multilingual physicians in the Bronx, Queens, Manhattan, and Brooklyn who have unified to ensure Medicaid recipients receive high-quality, culturally competent healthcare.

SOMOS' primary mission is to reduce healthcare disparities and promote wellness in lower-income, underserved Hispanic, Asian, and African-American immigrant communities. SOMOS truly is a pioneer in healthcare reform because we are committed to offering the most economically challenged Medicaid recipients comprehensive medical care at a manageable cost.

Our community providers employ proactive, preventive care, allowing patients to focus on symptom management and self-care rather than resort to reactive, emergency room medical care. Here at SOMOS, we strive to eliminate cultural barriers to healthcare by connecting patients with doctors who live in their neighborhoods, speak their language and are integrated into their community.

That is why we are here to voice our support for the legislation and resolution before you today.

On the Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, concerning establishing a health access program, we at SOMOS wholeheartedly support the local initiative Int. No. 1668 because it creates an opportunity to develop critical public-private partnerships so that we can maximize the resources and infrastructure that already exist in our communities – like community health centers – to bring health care to our community members. We believe it will provide greater access to culturally responsive healthcare for many New Yorkers who remain uninsured. This law is vital for immigrants because it not only prohibits discrimination based on immigrant status, but it also offers participants a medical home and assigns them a patient navigator that will properly guide them through the program.

We are confident that this law will yield positive outcomes and higher patient satisfaction because individualized assistance will ensure they receive clear and adequate information about treatment plans and options, decrease no-show rates, and reduce readmissions.

Furthermore, this law requires providing a medical home in each community district, at least one participating acute care hospital with specialty services in each borough, and telemedicine services available 24/7. This is imperative because it alleviates patients of the burden of traveling far to receive sufficient care. Moreover, The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene will maintain a public website with information about enrollment, covered services, and applicable costs to inform people of the services available.

This bill aligns with our new and innovative MiSOMOS app, which works to integrate Hispanic culture into health and wellness. We launched the app to improve access for the communities we serve. The goal is to ensure that we are continually sharing healthy diet and lifestyle pointers in conjunction with their routine doctors' appointments.

SOMOS also encourages the Council to pass Resolution No. 918 –A, and amend the social services law, extending coverage for healthcare services under the Basic Health Program to those whose immigrant status renders them ineligible for federal financial participation. This program has been instrumental in providing affordable health care insurance for many New Yorkers and generating \$1 billion in State savings in only three years.

Currently, only U.S. citizens, permanent residents, lawfully present residents, or those with valid, nonimmigrant status are eligible for the State's Essential Plan. As a result, only 42 percent or 235,000 immigrants in New York are insured compared to 324,800 without health insurance. The most common barrier for many immigrant's eligibility is that they have been in the country for less than five years.

SOMOS hopes the Council will expand the Essential Plan's services for all New Yorkers, regardless of immigrant status. Expanding healthcare is beneficial because it improves public health, reduces overall healthcare spending, and boosts economic productivity.

This resolution is a necessary measure to protect our immigrant community whose status is in jeopardy with federal policies that equate securing healthcare with being a public charge. This policy restricts immigrant's access to healthcare because they fear using public government services such as Medicaid will prohibit them from obtaining a green card. New York must stand in solidarity with our immigrant community and solidify our promise as a supportive, sanctuary city by signing this resolution into law.

Healthcare is a human right, regardless of citizenship status. We urge the city to consider these recommendations and expand healthcare access to create a stronger, healthier immigrant community here in New York City. We would be honored to partner with the city on this mission. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify before you today.