



HHC, Unions: New Cuts Would Shred Safety Net

By DAVID SIMS

Health and Hospitals Corporation President Alan Aviles and District Council 37 and other unions representing health-care staff joined at Bellevue Hospital Oct. 26 to warn against possible Federal cuts to Medicaid pushed by Congressional Republicans, saying they would lead to further job losses and devastate the city's thinly-stretched safety net.

They also announced the results of a study by the National Association of Public Hospitals that showed HHC contributed \$11.7 billion to the city's economy and supported 71,600 jobs in the region in Fiscal Year 2009.

Will Hurt Most-Vulnerable

"Federal proposals aim once again to reduce the Medicaid program," Dr. Aviles said. "We've been forced to reduce our workforce by 2,500 full-time employees...it's clear that further cuts will now translate directly into further job losses and hit services to patients."

He continued, "The message is very straightforward. As Congress looks for ways to reduce the Federal budget further, we urge lawmakers to reject further cuts to the programs that low-income children, pregnant women, the elderly and disabled disproportionately rely on."

District Council 37 Executive Director Lillian Roberts said she was happy to set aside her differences with Dr. Aviles to send that message to Congress. "HHC has gone as far as it can go with cuts," she said. "We don't want to be the person that dies because they cut our throat with our own money."

DC 37 Local 1549 Second Vice President Ralph Palladino, who works at Bellevue, pointed out that even the private insurance he uses to get medical care at the hospital will be affected by possible Congressional cuts. "It's not just Medicaid patients," he said.

'Don't Take Easy Way Out'

New York State Nurses Association's Executive Council President Anne Bove said, "Health-care can be an economic engine generating jobs...instead of across-the-board cuts, let's look at innovative means to save money. We need to say to our political leaders: do not take the easy way out."

Committee of Interns and Residents Regional Vice President Rick Gustave, who works at Lincoln Hospital, where he was born, said that hospitals were an important part of their local communities. He also noted that Medicaid dollars "provide funding for graduate medical training," and that cuts would translate into "less availability of funds to train doctors...it compounds the problems they're trying to solve."

Business owners who work near HHC hospitals and rely on employee traffic also spoke at the event to demonstrate the community impact hospitals have on the areas around them.

HHC officials also pointed to a June 2011 report by Families USA that concluded New York's economy would lose \$3.8 billion and 28,830 if Federal Medicaid spending was cut by 5 percent.