



Testimony

of

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**Commissioner**

**New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene**

before the

**New York City Council Committees on Finance, Health,  
and Mental Health, Addiction, and Disabilities**

on

**FY 2020 Executive Budget**

May 16, 2019  
Council Chambers, City Hall  
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Good afternoon Chairs Dromm, Ayala and Levine, and members of the committees. I am Dr. Oxiris Barbot, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. I am joined by Sandy Rozza, Deputy Commissioner for Finance. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on our Executive Budget for fiscal year 2020.

This is my first Executive Budget Hearing as Commissioner, and, Chair Dromm, I look forward to working with you and your staff.

The Department's primary focus since the Preliminary Budget Hearing has been to address the ongoing measles outbreak. The Department's response has been nothing short of epic, with nearly 400 employees mobilized for this Public Health Emergency. To date, the Department has spent \$2.3 million. This includes redeployment of staff to the measles response, and more than \$700,000 in overtime and purchases for vaccines, supplies, and outreach materials and services. As of May 13, there were 498 cases of measles in the City. Though cases continue to rise, we are confident our efforts are working. Since October, 23,814 doses of the Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccine have been administered to people under 19 years old in Williamsburg and Borough Park, nearly double the amount given during the same time period last year. We continue to work with community leaders, local health care providers and other stakeholders to disseminate accurate information on the effectiveness and safety of the MMR vaccine and risks of acquiring measles. This has required a sustained effort because we are faced with a well-funded anti- vaccination movement that is not unique to the Orthodox community, but one that has effectively taken root. Let me be clear, the misinformation spread by anti-vaccination groups is based on non- science and 100 percent false. As a pediatrician, I have administered thousands of MMR vaccines. As I told my patients then and now as the City's doctor, the best way to prevent measles and safeguard your child's health is to get vaccinated. I want to thank Chair Levine, for his leadership and voice on this issue. It is vital that we have the City's leaders speak out about the mistruths that are perpetuating this outbreak.

Before turning to the Executive Budget, I'd like to give an update on the State and Federal budgets.

During our Preliminary Budget Hearing, I raised the very concerning issue of State budget cuts to Article 6 funding, which supports numerous core public health activities in New York City, such as responding to a measles outbreak. I was very disappointed to see that the Governor pushed to keep the reduction in Article 6 match, from 36 to 20 percent in the final budget. As a result, the Department has lost \$59 million annually in state aid. I cannot stress enough the enormity of this cut, which affects only New York City. As you heard from the Mayor and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the City's Executive Budget closes this gap with City Tax Levy dollars for the upcoming fiscal year. I am grateful that Mayor de Blasio has stepped up to cover the state's responsibility, but this is not a sustainable solution. This funding must be restored in next year's State budget.

There was some good news in the State budget. The School-Based Health Center funding cuts were again restored by the State Legislature. We are grateful for this \$3.8 million allocation, which will support the School-Based Health Center sponsors who operate 164 clinics in schools across the city. Additionally, the State authorized Medicaid coverage for the National Diabetes

Prevention Program. This will allow the Department and other healthcare providers to expand access to an evidence-based program that has shown to delay or reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes by as much as 50 percent. Finally, I am pleased that the State budget included a 20 percent statewide tax on e-cigarettes and vapor products. The rise in popularity of these products threatens decades of progress we have made in fighting youth tobacco and nicotine use. Since youth are particularly sensitive to price increases, measures that raise the price of these products are an effective strategy for reducing use among this vulnerable population.

At the federal level, we have healthy skepticism about the Administration's plan to end the HIV epidemic by 2030. New York City is a national leader in the effort to end the HIV epidemic by 2020, and we are closely following the development of the federal plan. With that said, it will be nearly impossible to end the epidemic if other cuts and policy changes proposed by the President are realized. These include cuts to Medicaid and Medicare and the Trump Administration's continued efforts to dismantle the Affordable Care Act, fundamentally change the Title X program and revoke protections for LGBTQ people. We must remain vigilant in order to ensure that all Americans continue to have access to quality, affordable health care.

I will now turn to the fiscal year 2020 Executive Budget, which adds \$60 million annually to the Department's budget. The majority of this new funding is the \$59 million to fill the gap left by the State's cut to the Article 6 program for New York City, which will prevent us from having to reduce the number of cooling towers inspections to prevent the spread of environmental Legionella, decrease operating funds for School-Based Health Centers, distribute fewer naloxone kits and clean syringes and close two of our eight Sexual Health clinics. We thank the Mayor for stepping up for public health during a time when the governor was unwilling to do so. In addition, the Executive Budget baselines \$435,000 to continue the Culture of Health Worksite Wellness program, provided in collaboration with the Office of Labor Relations, that empowers employees to live healthy, active lifestyles through the provision of key services and wellness programs including smoking cessation, diabetes prevention and nutrition programming.

The Executive Budget also reflects over \$8.4 million in savings in fiscal year 2020 and out years to meet the Department's required PEG targets set by OMB. We worked closely with OMB to find ways to achieve these targets, while preserving existing service delivery. The Department's savings were achieved through citywide hiring freeze savings, reductions in administrative and contractual spending, temp and consulting services. In addition, we are reducing our citywide media campaign budget by approximately \$350,000.

I want to thank the Mayor for the resources dedicated to the Department in the Executive Plan. And thank you to the Speaker, Chairs Dromm, Levine and Ayala, and the members of the committees for your partnership and shared commitment to protecting and promoting the health of all New Yorkers. I want to acknowledge my excellent leadership team, who are here with me today, and the more than 6,500 Department employees for continuing to achieve so much on behalf of all New Yorkers. They bring expertise and passion to our work every day. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, I am happy to take questions.