

UNITED UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONS



TESTIMONY

Testimony on
SUNY Downstate Medical Center
Sustainability Plan

Presented to

Senator Kenneth P. LaValle , Chair
Senate Standing Committee on Higher Education
and
Senator Kemp Hannon, Chair
Senate Standing Committee on Health

By

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Chairman LaValle and distinguished members of the Senate Standing Committee on Higher Education, and Chairman Hannon and distinguished members of the Senate Standing Committee on Health, thank you for the opportunity to speak about the health care crisis in Brooklyn and the proposed Sustainability Plan for the State University of New York's Downstate Medical Center (DMC).

My name is Dr. Frederick Kowal, President of United University Professions. UUP is the largest higher education union in the nation, representing more than 35,000 academic and professional faculty and staff. Our members serve hundreds of thousands of students and patients at academic institutions, health science centers, and public teaching hospitals administered directly by SUNY.

This hearing is intended to discuss the State University of New York's sustainability plan for SUNY Downstate Medical Center as required by the 2013-14 state budget. On Friday, May 31, we met with representatives of SUNY to discuss their proposed plan. Therefore, given the short lead-time, we have not been able to fully analyze all aspects of this plan. However, important questions arise after even a cursory reading of the proposal, such as:

- During the proposed downsizing of DMC, how many people would lose their jobs at Downstate? Would the layoffs come solely at the University Hospital of Brooklyn?
- Job cuts will undoubtedly mean cuts in health care service. Which health care services will be cut? How would these cuts impact the community?
- How would Downstate continue to provide quality care to the hundreds of thousands of patients it serves each year?
- How would Downstate's medical college and teaching hospital be affected by the plan? How can the medical school continue to function without a full-service teaching hospital to educate future doctors, nurses and medical staffers?

It is the perspective of UUP that any sustainability plan for the delivery of medical services in Brooklyn must be centered on an enhanced Downstate Medical Center. This will serve to move Brooklyn and New York in the direction of the present national trend

of academic centers becoming the centerpieces of urban health care in the United States, particularly with the future full implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

Despite recent financial difficulties, Downstate Medical Center remains the pre-eminent health care institution in Brooklyn. The hospital provides many unique and nationally recognized medical care, including kidney transplants, dialysis care, and Alzheimer's disease treatment. SUNY Downstate also is the only safety-net hospital in Brooklyn that satisfies the enormous demand for health care services for the indigent and chronically ill. It is the ONLY place where many Brooklynites have access to medical care. The hospital also provides the specialty services that are vital to serving these populations. It houses the regional neonatal intensive care unit and has seven additional special care units, including ones for critical care, coronary care, stroke, epilepsy and diabetes. We firmly believe that the continued operation of this institution is essential in order to meet the future health care needs of Brooklyn's fast growing and diversifying population.

Downstate Medical Center's academic mission is carried out through the College of Medicine, the College of Health Related Professions, the College of Nursing, the School of Graduate Studies, the School of Public Health, and through its university hospital. The University Hospital must remain as a full-service public hospital to provide the medical school's 1,800 students, residents and fellows with a viable teaching hospital to learn the skills necessary for accreditation. DMC is a pipeline for doctors and medical providers. One in every three doctors in Brooklyn is a Downstate graduate, and more New York City doctors graduate from Downstate than from any other medical school. This is especially crucial when one considers that the state of New York is facing a growing shortage of over 2,400 primary care physicians. With the full implementation of the Affordable Care Act, there will be an even greater need for such providers, particularly with the emphasis in the ACA regarding the allocation of federal resources in that area of care. Finally, the economic reality is that for many students, Downstate is the only school they can afford to attend.

For UUP, the combination of the health care needs of Brooklyn's residents and the crucial role the DMC plays in the training of medical professionals to serve these residents requires an enhanced presence for Downstate Medical Center within SUNY. This enhanced

presence requires funding to overcome past shortfalls in budgets and financially questionable decisions by past hospital administrations. Failure to provide requisite funding will lead to severe repercussions for the already weak economy of Brooklyn, where more than a quarter of the residents live in poverty.

SUNY's Restructuring plan, as we understand it, is unclear as to how a proposed Public Benefit Corporation (PBC) would facilitate the provisions of medical services in Brooklyn while also supporting the education of New York's physicians. We are also concerned by what could occur to DMC should the PBC fail to meet its objectives. The plan also calls for downsizing of the university hospital. Such downsizing is anticipated to include the layoff of 600 current workers at the hospital. Such a step would have serious impacts on the community of Brooklyn, forcing people from their homes, shuttering small businesses, and increasing Brooklyn's already high unemployment rate.

SUNY Downstate is Brooklyn's 4th largest employer and contributes more than \$2 billion to the state's economy each year. Every dollar invested returns \$12 to the local economy. A restructuring plan for SUNY Downstate that does not serve the medical, economic, and educational needs of Brooklyn could have a devastating impact on the people who live there.

For UUP, the solution to the crisis facing health care delivery in Brooklyn and the financial difficulties at DMC is to properly fund the hospital, restructure it to bring about an increased emphasis on primary care as called for in the Affordable Care Act, and insure that the training of physicians at DMC's medical school continues to be a hallmark component of the education mission of SUNY.

Thank you for letting me speak on the issue of health care in Brooklyn, and I remain available to provide any further information you may require.