

## **Testimony of Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum for City Council Hearing on Health and Hospitals Corporation Budget for Fiscal Year 2008**

Thank you, Chair Rivera, for holding this important hearing. The budget process represents a critical opportunity to strengthen services for the city's underserved populations. Today, I urge the Council to make funding available to HHC to reduce mammogram wait times at HHC facilities and to provide easy mammogram access to Staten Island residents.

Breast cancer is the second most common cancer affecting American women and is the second leading cause of cancer-related death among women. Between 1999 and 2003, more than 5,000 New York City women were diagnosed with breast cancer annually and more than 1,200 women died each year from the disease. Women who live in Manhattan or Staten Island have the highest annual breast cancer rates, as well as the highest mortality rates.

The American Cancer Society and physicians agree that annual mammogram screenings for women age 40 and older are the most effective method of detecting breast cancer in its early stages, when treatment is most likely to be successful. An average of 55,354 New York City women will turn 40 every year for the next 20 years. It is estimated that 23 percent of New York City women age 40 and older have not obtained a recent mammogram. If this trend continues, each year there will be an additional 12,731 women in New York City in need of a mammogram who will not obtain one.

For low-income, uninsured women, the cost of obtaining a mammogram can be prohibitive. The free and low-cost screenings offered by the city's Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC) are thus an invaluable resource for many women in New York City. Yet some women may find accessing this potentially life-saving service difficult. An August 2006 report by my office found that the average wait for a mammogram at a HHC facility was 24 days. At the time of my report, Mayor Bloomberg had set seven days as the target maximum wait time for obtaining a mammography screening appointment at HHC facilities. Now according to the 2007 PMMR, Mayor Bloomberg changed the target maximum wait time to fourteen days.

The wait times for a mammogram can be reduced if HHC employs more mammogram technicians, reduces mammogram machine downtime, and offers mammogram appointments outside of regular business hours. These reforms will require additional resources.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to address the lack of HHC mammogram facilities in Staten Island. Although Staten Island has the second highest annual breast cancer incidence rate and highest annual breast cancer mortality rates in New York City, there are no HHC facilities or HHC-funded mobile mammography vans that offer mammograms in the borough. The women of Staten Island should not be marginalized and deserve easy access to this potentially life-saving service. At the very least, as an interim measure, HHC should make mammograms available to the residents of Staten Island via a mobile mammography van.

I look forward to working with the Council to ensure that this year's budget reflects the need to promote the health and well-being of New York City women.

Thank you.