

**New York City Council - Committee on Civil Service and Labor
T2021-0837 Oversight - Changes to Municipal Retirees' Healthcare Plan
October 28, 2021, 1 pm, Council Chambers, City Hall,
Testimony by Veronika Conant, M.L.S.**

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am unable to be present in person and am sending this testimony to you digitally. I am Veronika Conant, a retired (2003) CUNY faculty member, who worked for 18 1/2 years at Hunter College Libraries (about 7 years, Science Librarian, the rest, Head, Health Professions Library at the Brookdale Campus).

I am currently enrolled in the City's Medicare Senior Plan (Medicare + Emblem Health), and am against NYC's legislative efforts to privatize our healthcare by forcing all retirees to join NYC's new Medicare Advantage Plus Plan, an Alliance between Blue Cross-Blue Shield and Emblem Health.

This massive privatization of our healthcare by our employer was obviously started during the Trump era and is against NYS legislative efforts to pass the NYS Health Act, an incomparably better single payer health plan. Medicare Advantage plans profit the health insurers at the expense of their clients. No wonder two other private health insurance companies are suing the City.

Normally, contract negotiations happen between the City and individual municipal unions. However, in this case, over 130 unions were lumped together, and members of the Municipal Labor Committee, representing all unions, used weighted votes, according to the size of their membership. The early deciders, UFT and DC37, voted for the plans.

My PSC-CUNY union (about 20,000 members), and all the healthcare related unions voted against the plans. Final votes led to yes votes winning in mid-July.

I was not officially informed about any of this until mid-August when I received an undated letter from the Office of Labor Relations with minimum details. I am sure thousands of other retirees too have been kept in the dark until after the fact. There was major lack of transparency and fairness all through the process.

I will get automatically enrolled in the new Alliance Plan, which starts Jan 1, 2022. If I choose to opt out, it has to happen by the deadline of Oct 31, 2021, a very short time for such a big decision, also then I will have to pay for an until now free insurance, \$191.57 per month, about \$2,299 a year in new expenses.

I am in my early eighties, widowed, live alone, have high blood pressure and cardiac problems, also have other health problems.

The pandemic was a major trauma in our lives, but to spring this major change on us, City retirees, without even a written, signed contract in place, and not knowing which of

our physicians will accept this plan, is most stressful. This is not what we should have to face as payment after our many years of service.

I plan to opt out of this privatized new plan which is sure to have lots of glitches during the change.

Thank you for calling this hearing.

Please help, do not allow the privatization of our health care, stop this plan immediately.

Instead, we need what every other industrial country already has, a single payer national health care system, independent of one's employers.

By the way, I lived in two other countries before, Hungary and the UK. Both offered national health care, worked extremely well, and were much cheaper. As a refugee, I filled out a simple form in the UK and after that received excellent care. Preventive care is economically significant, and will result in a healthier population at less expense.

Thank you.

Veronika Conant M.L.S., retired from Hunter College Libraries
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