



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

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Brooklyn Borough President

**Testimony to the New York City Council
Committee on Hospitals
Preliminary Budget Hearing, March 21, 2022**

Good afternoon, and thank you to Chair Mercedes Narcisse and the Committee on Hospitals for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. I'm here to address an issue that is my top priority as Brooklyn Borough President: ending maternal mortality and morbidity.

As you may know, I have two children, Alejandro is four years old and Andres is two. My wife Iliana delivered both of them at an NYC Health + Hospitals facility: Woodhull in Brooklyn. I believe that because we were very lucky to have excellent midwifery care, my wife and both my children were healthy throughout and after the births. However, many people who give birth in Brooklyn are not so lucky.

In fact, Black mothers in New York City are on average 9.4 times more likely to die due to childbirth than white mothers. Many factors contribute to this issue. Studies show that doctors are less likely to listen to Black mothers. Behavioral health conditions are the top cause of pregnancy-associated deaths, specifically from post-partum overdose and suicide. Social determinants of health such as lack of access to healthy food and safe and healthy housing, overexposure to harmful environmental conditions, and chronic stress are major factors. And most relevant to this hearing, the conditions at our hospitals and the resources they have to dedicate to this issue make a meaningful difference.

That is why, as Borough President, I am working with H&H to upgrade birthing facilities at our public hospitals. They have presented me with a capital proposal for all three of their Brooklyn facilities: Woodhull, Coney Island, and Kings County. If fully funded, the capital upgrades will allow them to utilize state-of-the-art technology to improve patient safety, expand birthing options, provide new opportunities for patient education, improve continuity of care, and prioritize privacy and infection control. Making this happen is my number one priority for my capital allocations, and I hope that the Council and the administration will be willing partners with me to fully fund their proposal.

But tackling this issue goes beyond capital. As my advisors on this issue have made clear to me, improving facilities only goes so far. We must also improve the practices that take place in those facilities. I applaud the baselined funding of \$3 million for Maternal Medical Home and Obstetric Simulation Trainings. The Maternal Medical Home program provides referrals and services to help address many of the issues I mentioned before, particularly behavioral health and socioeconomic challenges. The simulation trainings help practitioners learn to identify and address the major contributors to mortality and morbidity during the birthing process. I support H+H's asks for continued



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funding to expand the Maternal Medical Home program, invest in more mental health resources, and integrate care with pediatrics.

Additionally, the City should deepen its support to help H+H realize its vision of expanding midwifery services to all 11 of its maternity care hospitals. Increasing midwifery access promotes a shared decision-making model for birthing care and decreases unnecessary medical intervention of people in labor. This can lead to decreased cesarean rates, decreased maternal mortality and morbidity, and increased client satisfaction.

I would also appreciate the City's partnership in expanding these upgrades beyond our public hospitals. Being new to this office, I learned quickly that our partners in the borough's non-profit hospitals may find the CapGrants application process and eligibility requirements overly complex, impacting our ability to move forward with much-needed funding upgrades. I hope the Mayor and the Office of Management and Budget will work with my office and these hospitals to ensure that they too can receive the funding they desperately need.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today about this incredibly important issue. I look forward to working together with the Council and the administration to make Brooklyn the safest place to give birth in New York City in the next four years, and the safest place in the country in eight. Working together, we can save lives.