



**TESTIMONY OF ROBERT LEDERER,
RESEARCHER AND POLICY ANALYST FOR
THE BRONX HEALTH LINK, INC.**

**Public Hearing by the City Council Finance Committee on
The Mayor's Budget for FY 2013
June 6, 2012**

My name is Robert Lederer, and I am the Researcher and Policy Analyst for the Bronx Health Link, Inc., a health education and policy organization for Bronx consumers and health and human service providers. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I am here to impress on you the urgency of providing adequate funding for the Infant Mortality Reduction Initiative (IMRI), and specifically the need to restore last year's level of \$3 million. The Mayor has consistently excluded this vital Council initiative from his proposed budgets. We understand the very difficult economic situation that the city is facing – but cost savings cannot be borne by mothers and infants. The City has heralded the decline of infant mortality citywide, which is indeed good news, but the rate in the Bronx remains persistently higher than that of any other borough.

The Bronx Health Link works with the community and with IMRI-funded health care providers to improve birth outcomes, prenatal care, and the reproductive health of Bronx women. Citywide, the 30 IMRI agencies provide culturally competent, multilingual health education and case management that especially draw in hard-to-reach women and their families. These programs help at-risk moms to manage life stress and overcome barriers to obtaining needed services. Research on the high costs of care for low-birth-weight babies suggests that preventing each low birth weight birth frees up at least \$90,000 in funding, allowing 25 pregnant women to receive health promotion services that can reduce their risk of bearing low-birth-weight infants.

This year, the Bronx IMRI program is run by 9 community-based organizations that will provide:

- Workshops that teach health and parenting skills to 2800 people, mainly women.
- Outreach, screening and service referrals to 500 people
- Case management to help 180 pregnant women through difficult health issues, and
- The latest health information on pregnancy and child care through conferences, trainings, and newsletters, to hundreds of consumers and providers.

One quote from a Bronx new mother trained through the IMRI in breastfeeding speaks volumes. She wrote: *“Thank you so much for coming to my house to help me do this. There should be more people like you and the agency you work for. Many women would be happier and feel more accomplished because breastfeeding is not as easy as it sounds.”*

These programs are a highly cost-effective contribution to improving maternal and child health in our city.

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Funding levels for the IMRI – which currently totals less than 0.01% of the overall City budget – have been cut for the past three years, at the same time the state’s matching grants have also decreased. Each year Council members and community-based organizations fight to restore the already inadequate level of funding to the budget. We are living in a difficult time for non-profits and government agencies that provide services to the poor, and we cannot afford to further limit the programs supported by this Initiative.

Finally, the Bronx Health Link is part of the People’s Budget Coalition for Public Health, and we strongly support their call for full funding of all the crucial public health programs that the Mayor has constantly proposed be cut or eliminated. They include (besides IMRI) such Council initiatives as asthma control, HIV/AIDS Communities of Color and Faith-Based Initiatives, HIV supportive housing, Children Under 5 Mental Health Initiative, Autism Awareness Initiative, Mental Health and Alcohol/Substance Abuse outpatient treatment, and obesity prevention programs. In addition, the Mayor has proposed cuts to the Health and Hospitals Corporation’s Child Health Clinics, as well as its overall operating subsidy. HHC is vital as a safety net for uninsured people, including undocumented immigrants, and people on Medicaid. All of these programs must also be protected against further damaging cuts.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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