



The Public Advocate for the City of New York

Improving Access to City Services

Betsy Gotbaum
Public Advocate

September 25, 2009

Lynda D. Curtis
Senior Vice President/Executive Director
Bellevue Hospital Center
First Avenue and 27th Street
New York, NY 10016

By Fax and U.S. Mail

Dear Ms. Curtis:

As Public Advocate for the City of New York, I am charged with safeguarding the well-being of city residents, and I have made it my priority to improve access to city services, including quality healthcare access for low-income women. I am writing in response to reports that Bellevue Hospital has closed its birthing center as of September 1, 2009. I urge you to reverse this decision and to reopen the birthing center on a full-time basis.

I also request that you provide my office with an official written statement explaining the reasons for the closure of the birthing center, as well as the birthing center's c-section rate—separate from Bellevue's overall published rate—mandated under the Maternity Information Act. I am troubled that there has been no official announcement of the closure and that neither elected officials nor community stake-holders had an opportunity to consider the reasons for the closure or its effect on low-income women's access to childbirth options in Manhattan.

The need for midwifery care among Medicaid-eligible women with low-risk pregnancies is particularly high in some immigrant communities in Manhattan. Closing the last remaining birthing center accepting Medicaid in Manhattan effectively eliminates low-income women's access to a midwifery care in the borough

Moreover, at a time of rising c-section rates, more than 40 percent at some city hospitals, Bellevue Hospital had an overall c-section rate of 27.3 percent in 2007—a reduction from 2006 and the third lowest c-section rate in Manhattan. This achievement is presumably supported by low intervention statistics at the birthing center. Having worked since 2005 to help pregnant women in New York City make safe, informed decisions, I am concerned that one of the city's few success stories in reducing c-section rates has been eliminated.

I look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,

Betsy Gotbaum

cc: Alan Aviles, President, Health and Hospitals Corporation

