Good afternoon Chairman Johnson and members of the City Council Committee on Health. I am Amr Moursi, the Chairman of the Department of Pediatric Dentistry at the New York University (NYU) College of Dentistry. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today as you consider legislation to improve coordination of health care providers throughout New York City.

The NYU College of Dentistry provides dental care and education to thousands of New Yorkers regardless of their ability to pay. As the number of qualified dentists who accept Medicaid shrinks, NYU provides a crucial service to low-income families and children seeking critical dental care. We are able to provide this care through two popular programs in New York City.

The first is the Smiling Faces, Going Places Mobile Dental Van that has provided oral health care and dental education to over 2,000 children annually through visits to daycares, public schools, and health fairs throughout all five boroughs over the past 15 years. The mobile dental van addresses the lack of quality dental care for low-income children in New York City, providing necessary preventative care such as fluoride treatments and sealants as well as restorative care such as fillings. We thank the City Council for continuing to support the van program and partnering with NYU to ensure crucial dental services are provided to underserved children.

Another way we provide dental services to New Yorkers is through our dental clinics, including our pediatric dental clinic. Located on 1st Avenue, the clinics saw over 300,000 patients visits in 2014, including nearly 10,000 children from all five boroughs. With dental decay being the most common chronic diseases in children, more common than asthma, it is critical to increase both access and utilization of care.

The NYU College of Dentistry supports the legislation being discussed in today's hearing. However, we feel that the legislation would be strengthened by the inclusion of dental services, as they are a vital part of an individual's overall health. Research shows that, for example, children with poor oral health have poor nutrition, poor sleep and perform poorly in school. Adults with poor oral health have a higher risk of diabetes, heart disease and complicated pregnancies.
Due to the important role dental health plays in overall health, it is to the City’s benefit to include dental services in the scope of health care needs examined by the proposed Office of Comprehensive Community Health Planning for inclusion in the proposed Comprehensive Health Care Services Plan and Health Care Assessment Report. Furthermore, it is appropriate for a representative from a dental services provider to serve as a member of the proposed Interagency Coordinating Council on Health. Finally, dental service providers should be consulted by the proposed Interagency Coordinating Council on Health to ensure the current availability of dental services for all NYC residents is accurately captured and addressed pursuant to the objectives of the proposed legislation.

In addition, including dental services in the City Council’s proposed interactive New York City map of health services would allow New Yorkers to easily identify where they can address their oral health needs. Listing city-contracted dental services, such as the ones NYU provides through our clinics and van program, will increase awareness of access to dental services and eliminate one more barrier to equal access of healthcare across the city.

We hope that any legislation being discussed here today take into consideration the services and expertise that the NYU College of Dentistry, and other dental provider across the city, can provide to the people of New York City.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.