TESTIMONY OF CONSTANCE ROBINSON-TURNER, PROGRAM MANAGER, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF DENTISTRY’S SMILING FACES, GOING PLACES MOBILE DENTAL VAN

BEFORE

THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON FINANCE EXECUTIVE BUDGET HEARING

May 24, 2016

Chairperson Ferreras-Copeland, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today on the topic of crucial funding for the NYU College of Dentistry’s Smiling Faces, Going Places Mobile Dental Van.

My name is Constance Robinson-Turner and I am the Program Manager for the NYU Mobile Dental Van. I am here to discuss the NYU Mobile Dental Van’s essential role in addressing the oral health care needs of low-income children in New York City, and how our current discretionary funding request of $300,000 for the program is incredibly important to ensure the program continues to fulfill its mission.

For 16 years, the Dental Van has provided oral health care and dental education to over 2,000 children annually by visiting public schools, day care centers and health fairs citywide. The City Council has provided annual discretionary funding to support the dental van for the past 11 years. Last year, the City Council was critical in helping the van secure funding after the previous year’s funding was baselined and slated to be used for purposes within DOHMH. We are incredibly thankful for the Council continuing to be a champion for the program, and we hope that you can help ensure that the program continues its work by providing $300,000 in discretionary funding.

As many of you are aware, the mobile dental van program addresses the crisis many low income children face in accessing quality dental care and, often times, is the first dentist a child experiences. The van provides oral health instruction in addition to direct care, such as fluoride treatments and restorations. We work with local elected officials and schools to identify high-needs areas throughout the five boroughs to schedule the van at those locations. Low-income children have 60 percent more untreated cavities than their peers at higher socioeconomic levels, making the need for bringing dental care into these communities through the van program especially vital. And with recent studies showing a strong correlation between good oral health and overall health, it is more important than ever to ensure that New York City children are not missing out on vital dental services. We are also looking forward to starting this year a pilot program to expand our services to older adults at some locations.
The program is just as valuable to students at the NYU College of Dentistry as well. Students who treat children on the van experience not only hands-on training, but also get an opportunity to interact with the community, learn the needs of their local populations, and bring smiles to children who are in need of dental care. Such experience makes our students much more likely to continue this type of community service when they are in practice on their own either by working in a community clinic or volunteering their free time to help the underserved.

In order to ensure the continued provision of crucial services for medically underserved children, NYUCD is requesting discretionary funding of $300,000 in new City Council funds in FY17. The Council has previously awarded $268,000 annually for the van. The increase of $32,000 in our request will result in 200 additional children being treated aboard the van in coming year; an increase the program is capable of meeting. We have also recently signed a contract with the city for a new dental van to replace the old one, meaning that continued discretionary funding can ensure that the program continues to make an impact for years to come.

The dental van program has always enjoyed wide support among Council Members, and we now ask you to support our funding request, which is critical to the program’s survival. Teachers, principals, practitioners and parents can all attest to the tremendous impact this van has on the communities it visits.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, and for continuing to support the Dental Van.