TESTIMONY OF CONSTANCE ROBINSON-TURNER, PROGRAM MANAGER FOR THE NEW YORK UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF DENTISTRY MOBILE DENTAL VAN

Chairperson Johnson, 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 joined by Dr. Andrew Schenkel, Director of Community Dental Care Programs for NYU as well as Jennifer Cuervo, Guidance Counselor at New Heights Middle School to discuss NYU's request for discretionary funding of $300,000 for the dental van program.

For 15 years, the Dental Van has provided oral health care and dental education to over 2,000 children annually through visiting public schools, day cares and health fairs citywide. The City Council has provided annual discretionary funding to support the dental van for the past 10 years. However, in November 2013, the Bloomberg Administration funded certain City Council initiatives by "baselining" them in the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene’s budget, including the dental van. We have learned that for FY16, DOHMH intends to use the dental van funds for other purposes within the agency, and not to provide dental services through a van program. In short, the funding that the City had provided in the past is no longer there, and the program stands at risk.

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.

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 FY16. The Council has previously awarded annually $268,000 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.
The dental van program has always enjoyed wide support among Council Members, and we now ask your support for 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. My colleagues will also discuss the importance of the program for schools and NYU dental students. Thank you.

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TESTIMONY OF JENNIFER CUERVO, GUIDANCE COUNSELOR AT NEW HEIGHTS MIDDLE SCHOOL

Good afternoon, my name is Jennifer Cuervo and I am a Guidance Counselor at New Heights Middle School in Brooklyn. I get to see first-hand the invaluable and irreplaceable work that the NYU Dental Van does in our community. The dental van has been visiting New Heights Middle School for the last two years, and each year, over 70 of our scholars received dental care aboard the van. Our scholars always return from the van with large smiles and only wonderful things to say about their experience, making a visit to the dentist something the children look forward to.

I speak for our counselors when I say that without this program, many children in our communities would not have access to quality dental care, as often times the mobile dental van is a students first trip to the dentist. On top of the excellent care they receive from the Dental School’s skilled, friendly and enthusiastic practitioners, the children also receive essential oral health instruction that will serve to benefit them, and their entire family, for years to come.

This treatment and education would have been difficult to obtain for the medically underserved children in our school. Many teachers, parents and school administrators would certainly feel the dental van’s absence if it were to cease its operations. I hope that the City Council will continue to fund this important program, and urge you to continue support of the program in the FY 16 budget.

Thank you again chance to talk about the community’s positive experience with this incredible program.

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TESTIMONY OF ANDREW SCHENKEL, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY DENTAL CARE PROGRAMS AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF DENTISTRY

Good afternoon, my name is Dr. Schenkel and I am the Director of Community Dental Care Programs at NYU College of Dentistry.
The Mobile Dental Van program is a focus of the school’s education, service and patient care mission. The children we see on the van will not access care any other way if they lose the opportunity to access care through the van. Not because of lack of other opportunities (we are always available on First Avenue) but simply because Access to Care is a very complicated issue and for whatever reasons, these children access care through our van program. We know from our experience in the community that expecting them to access care some other way is unfortunately not realistic.

One final note about the van program is that the experience gives our students 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.

We hope that the City Council continues the crucial funding for this program in the FY16 budget. I thank you for your time and attention today.