

# Threat of med plan protest puts kibosh on teachers' event

BY CHRIS SOMMERFELDT  
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

The city's teachers union boss has abruptly canceled a meet-and-greet with current and former members after a group of retirees threatened to turn the event into a protest over the Adams administration's effort to shift them onto a controversial new Medicare plan, the Daily News has learned.

Michael Mulgrew, president of the United Federation of Teachers, was supposed to host the sitdown at the Towers At Water's Edge in Bayside, Queens, this coming Monday, according to an online invitation that promised "light refreshments and conversation."

But on Wednesday, a UFT official sent out an email to members who signed up for the event saying the union would have to cancel and reschedule the confab at a different location due to "circumstances beyond our control."

"The building is requiring formal security. This has not been a practice of the UFT at any of our meetings," the official, Mary Vaccaro, wrote in the email, a copy of which was obtained by The News.

The cancellation notice was issued one day after the NYC Organization of Public Service Retirees began spreading word on social media that it planned to stage a protest at Mulgrew's event over May 15. The effort to switch retired municipal workers off traditional Medicare and onto Medicare Advantage Plan.

Like many organized labor leaders, Mulgrew has been supportive of the Advantage plan, which Adams' administration argues would provide municipal retirees with good health benefits while saving city taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars every year thanks to a larger chunk of federal funding.

But more than 64,000 retirees have opted out of the new plan over concerns that it would downgrade their health coverage by requiring preauthorization clearance for certain medical procedures. They've also raised concern about the Advantage plan being administered by a private health insurance company, arguing that its profit motives could result in inferior benefits in the long run, among other issues.

Retirees planning to show up at Mulgrew's

confab had some colorful protest methods in mind.

"Bring rotten tomatoes! Lol," Joseph Gloss, a retired NYPD sergeant, wrote in response to a Facebook post asking people to show up for the demonstration.

Marianne Pizzitola, an ex-FDNY emergency medical specialist and president of the NYC Organization of Public Service Retirees, said she had dished out nearly \$1,500 to rent a billboard truck for the Mulgrew protest.

"We probably would have had a really good turnout," she said. "I wanted Mr. Mulgrew to know how we all felt. I wanted him to hear how people feel about all this."

A UFT spokeswoman declined to specify Thursday why Mulgrew's meet-and-greet was canceled, but promised it would be rescheduled. A rep for the Bayside event space did not return a request for comment.

In addition to vocal opposition from Pizzitola's group, the Adams administration has run into legal complications in rolling out the Advantage plan.

A Manhattan Supreme Court judge ruled

earlier this month that the administration could not slap a \$191 monthly penalty on retirees who want to keep their current coverage — a decision jeopardizing Adams' promise that the plan would generate sizable taxpayer savings.

The administration is appealing the ruling, but calls for Adams to scrap the Advantage plan altogether have mounted in the interim.

Comptroller Brad Lander took the unusual step of refusing to register the contract for the Advantage plan. In a statement issued by Lander, he said, "our office cannot currently assess the total cost to the city and fulfill our mandate to confirm that the contract is fully funded" due to the ongoing litigation.

In the meantime, six City Council members and eight members of the state Assembly have signed on to an open letter to Adams urging him to drop his appeal of the court ruling and allow retirees to keep their traditional Medicare without the \$191 fee.

"There is no excuse for this attack on the well being of retirees," reads the letter. "The city can find other ways to save money on health care."

LUIZ C. RIBEIRO/FOR NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

# Boy, 12, sitting in car in Brooklyn is shot & killed; woman hurt

BY KERRY BURKE

violence broke out just before County Hospital

"There was a lady and a little and wounded a 3-year-old girl as