



Despite resistance, municipal retirees continue to push Council to halt healthcare shift

- **April 13, 2023**
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- **LaborPress**

Municipal retirees gathered outside the City Hall chambers during the City Council's first stated meeting of April on Tuesday to demand that the Speaker introduce a bill aimed at counteracting the mayor's shift to a privately run Medicare plan by preserving retiree benefits in the city code.

The emphasis on the City Council legislation comes a few weeks after New York City Mayor Eric Adams officially signed the contract that will end up enrolling 250,000 municipal retirees to a privately run Medicare plan, called Medicare Advantage.

During the Tuesday rally, the retiree's ire was directed at Council Speaker Adrienne Adams, whom the retirees say has sided with the mayor to prevent the introduction of a bill that would require the City to "preserve retiree health care choice" and to "offer Medicare-eligible City retirees and their Medicare-eligible dependents at least one Medigap plan with benefits equivalent to or better than those available to City retirees and their dependents as of December 31, 2021."

"So it's just sitting there. It's not a bill, it's just a legislative hopefulness. But they're not moving it," said Marianne Pizzitola, president of The New York City Organization of Public Service Retirees during the rally.

Around the start of the new year, Councilmember Amanda Farías worked with the group to submit language for the bill to the Council's legislative division for review, but encountered legal roadblocks during the process. The retirees subsequently amended the language, but the Council's legislative office has continued to maintain that it conflicts with portions of the Taylor Law, the section of state law that defines the rights and limitations of public sector unions.

When asked about the bill in a press conference, Speaker Adams said that she did not want to move forward with it to avoid interfering in separate retiree lawsuits related to the shift.

“The Council is being deliberate to avoid unilaterally intervening in a process that intersects with collective bargaining in an unprecedented way, which could undermine organized labor. When a legislature interferes with a collectively bargained agreement of organized labor, it borders into dangerous territory,” wrote a City Council spokesperson in a statement about the legislation.

The retirees have disagreed with the idea that the legislation would be preempted by Taylor Law because of their status as retirees.

“We call bullshit on that because we’re not subject to Taylor,” Pizzitola told protesters.

Pizzitola added that she believes the reason the Council Speaker has less to do with legal issues and more of a lack of political will.

“The speaker’s office is telling the legislative office to not issue it a bill number so it won’t be introduced,” said Pizzitola.

The event was the latest in a series of rallies that have brought angry retirees to City Hall to protest the healthcare savings plan. The animated crowd was so large that it overflowed into Broadway prompting police complaints. The elderly retirees powered through the heat of a warm Spring day, which caused two of them to collapse during the event.

“Standing in the heat arguing for something that we won years ago. This is not human. This is not protection of your retirees,” Pizzitola shouted into the blow horn.

City officials have pushed for the shift to a Medicare Advantage health plan in hopes to save \$600 million in annual city spending. Retirees say that the Medicare Advantage plan will be more likely to deny coverage for certain medical services, a fear that is backed up by a [recent federal](#) report that documented instances where such plans denied coverage requests that met traditional Medicare coverage rules.

Though the legislation may have sidelined the Council Speaker, it didn’t stop two Councilmembers of diverse ideological stripes from coming out to the rally. Former Black Panther Charles Barron and a recent Republican convert Ari Kagan both showed up to criticize the health plan to cheers and applause.

“Any city council member that comes out here and talks all the things you want to hear at the rally and then goes inside and votes for a budget that doesn’t have your \$600 million in it. They are betraying our cause,” said Council-member Charles Baron.

But the legislative push is not the only way forward for the Public Service Retirees group. Pizzitola announced that another lawsuit against the healthcare shift was

imminent — marking the fourth the group has launched. Council-member Farías, who had initially attempted to carry the legislative effort, told LaborPress that she thought at this point, the lawsuit might be the more viable option.

“I think ultimately the retirees filing the suit that they requested time from the city council to do is the option that they should take,” Farías said.

