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FDNY Retirees: ‘It’s A Disgrace What The City Is Doing To Us’

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JAN 10



FDNY retirees Ken Dolan [l] and Hugh Doherty [r] were among the hundreds of retired municipal workers who attended this week’s City Council hearing on a bill aimed at changing section 12-126 of the Administrative Code — and upending their healthcare coverage.

By Joe Maniscalco

FDNY retiree Ken Dolan's wife suffers from Parkinson's and the 80-year-old knew he really should be at home looking after her — but here he was standing outside City Hall on Jan. 9 with hundreds of other senior citizens trying to convince members of the New York City Council not to touch their traditional Medicare health insurance plan.

"I really shouldn't be here; I should be home taking care of my wife. Thank god my son lives near by and he has a job that allows him to stop in. But none of these people should be here," he told Work-Bites. "We did our time."

Corporate-owned legacy media outlets like to portray municipal retirees like Ken Dolan as a small bunch of elderly cranks standing in the way of the city saving money on healthcare. But the City of New York didn't have enough room for all the retirees who wanted to get inside the hearing on Civil Service and Labor Committee Chair Carmen De Le Rosa's bill to change section 12-126.

They understand just how [bad for-profit, privatized Medicare Advantage health insurance plans](#) — with their delays, denials and reauthorizations — really are for working class people.

"It's a travesty," Ken continued. "They promised to pay us the Medicare Part B reimbursement supplement — now they want to eliminate the supplement in favor of this Medicare Advantage plan which is a private plan that can change overnight."

Ken, who came on the job in 1968, has heard all the claims about how great Medicare Advantage is supposed to be for New York City municipal retirees and he isn't buying it.

"They promise you one thing when they sign you up — and the next year they can change everything around," he said. "You have no control over that."

One day last month, FDNY Retired Supervising Fire Marshal Robert Thomson, opened up the door only to have his dogs come bolting out behind him.

"I wasn't paying attention," the 70-year-old said. "They knocked me down the stairs and I broke three ribs, punctured my lung. I had to go to the hospital with asthma; I couldn't really breathe. If this new plan goes through, I have to get pre-authorization. I could be dead by the time I get pre-authorization."

Work-Bites has already reported how [Delaware municipal retirees discovered the Medicare Advantage contract](#) their state signed last fall, actually contained 2,030 pre-authorizations — 1,690 for procedures and 340 for medications.

“With the old plan, I could just go to the hospital right away and get taken care of,” Thomson continued. “They’re trying to take that away from us. People are gonna die — that’s what’s gonna happen.”

Hugh Doherty is 82, and Ken Dolan’s neighbor in Smithtown. He’s also an FDNY retiree.

“Every time [we win a court case](#), they come up with another, and another, and another — there’s no end to it,” Doherty said. “It’s a disgrace what the city is doing to us.”

On Dec. 15, 2022, an arbitrator named Martin Scheinman issued a report that Mayor Eric Adams’ administration and the heads of the Municipal Labor Committee are trying to use to compel City Council members to change 12-126 and usher in a Medicare Advantage plan for municipal retirees.

Retiree groups formed in opposition to the Medicare Advantage push dismiss Scheinman’s findings as “[paid propaganda](#).”

“The whole thing’s a scam,” Thomson said. “Arbitration means two sides, give and take. It was one-sided. It was a complete scam.”

Work-Bites reached out to Congress Member Jamaal Bowman [D-NY16], vice chair of the House Committee on Education and Labor, for his take on the City of New York’s drive to push 250,000 municipal retirees — and all those retirees-in-training right behind them — into a for-profit, privatized Medicare Advantage health insurance plan.

“Mayor Adams’ and the New York City Council’s attempt to force municipal retirees into Medicare Advantage plans is a horrific attempt to save money on the backs of our city’s former teachers, nurses, and first responders who deserve access to the high quality health care they were promised,” Congress Member Bowman said in an email. “These workers have given their lives in service of our communities and our children. We cannot roll back their access to high quality health care. The movement towards privatization of our health systems only harms our most vulnerable communities and prioritizes profits over people.”

Should Medicare Advantage be instituted in New York City — a program Congress Member Bowman also jeers as “for-profit, privatized versions of Medicare that have a history of lining the pockets of private insurance companies while over-billing and offering worse coverage and worse access to care” — retirees like Ken Dolan, Hugh Doherty and Robert Thomson would be expected to pay a nearly \$200 monthly premium.

“If someone wants to go into a Medicare Advantage Part C Medicare Advantage plan — well, let them go,” Ken said. “But if we stay in the [current] plan why charge us \$191 a month? It’s ludicrous.”

Part of the problem, of course, is that despite their years of civil service and trade unionism, municipal retirees never get a seat at the bargaining table.

“The unions can’t represent us,” Dolan said. “Every time they negotiate something we are not at the table.”

It’s not a good feeling.

“We’re like the oldest in the herd,” Robert said, “they pick off the weakest. We have no representation. We have to represent ourselves — show up and come here.”