

NYC labor boss threatens to pull endorsements for Council members resisting Mayor Adams' Medicare Advantage plan





1 / 2

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In this article:

-
- **Charles Barron**
American politician

New York City's top labor union boss is considering pulling endorsements from City Council members who throw their weight behind a bill that would derail [Mayor Adams' effort](#) to eliminate traditional Medicare coverage for retired municipal workers, the Daily News has learned.

Henry Garrido, executive director of DC37, the city's largest municipal workers' union, floated the political retribution proposal during a private DC37 executive board meeting on June 15.

The virtual meet, a recording of which was obtained by The News, was held in the wake of word that socialist Brooklyn Councilman Charles Barron planned to introduce a bill codifying into law that the city must offer its retired workforce premium-free traditional Medicare coverage.

Garrido told fellow labor honchos on the call that Barron's legislation would effectively upend [Adams' attempt to abolish traditional Medicare](#) for municipal retirees in favor of enrolling them in a privatized Medicare Advantage Plan that stands to save the city some \$600 million in annual health care costs.

Though many of their retired members are concerned Adams' Advantage plan would destroy their health benefits, most municipal labor leaders support it — and Garrido said on the call that he thereby stands ready to penalize any Council members who back Barron's bill.

"I think we're gonna have to draw the line in the sand, and I'm prepared to do that," said Garrido, whose union ranks as one of the city's most politically influential. "I'm prepared to withdraw support."

Garrido — who called Barron's bill the "worst and most irresponsible bill that I have ever seen" — said Council members won't only risk losing his union's endorsement if they back the legislation, according to the recording.

"Money, endorsements — everything," he said. "Field ops, what we do, phone banks, all the stuff that we do for all the electeds is going to have to be questioned."

All 51 members of the City Council are [up for reelection in this coming Tuesday's primaries](#), and many face competitive races in which [DC37's endorsement](#) and field operations can be pivotal.

According to a source directly familiar with the matter, Garrido has since last week's meeting reached out to some members telling them that his union is inclined to rescind support for them before the primary should they publicly come out for the Barron legislation.

On last week's call, Garrido said he'll pay especially close attention to what members do between "the 22nd and the 27th" of June — the first date

being the Council stated meeting where Barron planned to introduce the bill and the second being Primary Day.

Carmen Charles, a DC37 vice president, agreed with Garrido and said on the call in reference to Council members: “At what point do we say, ‘Enough is enough?’”

In the face of the hardline stance from DC37, Barron — who does not hold the union’s endorsement — introduced the bill in question at Thursday’s Council meeting together with four co-sponsors: Lynn Schulman, Democrat of Queens, Linda Lee, Democrat of Queens, Alexa Aviles, Democrat of Brooklyn, and Inna Vernikov, Republican of Brooklyn.

Schulman and Lee have both been endorsed by DC37 and are [facing credible primary challenges next week](#). They are also among a handful of Council members who earlier this year [secured a monetary support pledge](#) from a coalition of unions that includes DC37.

Lee and Schulman did not return requests for comment Thursday afternoon.

Several more members have confirmed they expect to sign on as co-sponsors of Barron’s bill in coming days, including Brooklyn’s Shahana Hanif, a Democrat who co-chairs the Council’s Progressive Caucus.

Hanif’s caucus co-chair, Brooklyn Councilman Lincoln Restler, who was endorsed for reelection by DC37, has not ruled out signing on to the bill, either.

In a letter to Adams this week with fellow DC37-endorsed Manhattan Councilman Erik Bottcher, Restler urged the mayor to back off his Medicare effort, citing [concerns about retirees being stripped](#) of access to their regular doctors if they end up in an Advantage plan.

“It is unconscionable to unilaterally force city retirees into a new healthcare plan,” Restler [tweeted Thursday](#) along with a copy of the letter to Adams. “Retired city workers deserve to keep their doctors and we are doing everything in our power to avoid problematic and costly disruptions to current healthcare coverage.”

Another DC37-backed member who expects to sign on as a co-sponsor of Barron’s bill is Manhattan Councilwoman Gale Brewer, her spokesman

confirmed. The Council's Common Sense Caucus, which is mostly made up of Republicans, is also likely to sign on, according to a source.

The mounting support for the Barron bill comes in spite of the fact that Council Speaker Adrienne Adams has not offered her support for it.

The speaker, whose chief of staff, Jeremy John, used to be DC37's political director, told reporters before Thursday's stated meeting that she does not support Barron's measure because she does not "want to unilaterally intervene in a process that intersects with collective bargaining."

It's unusual for Council legislation to be introduced without the speaker's blessing. But Speaker Adams said, "This is a democracy in this Council, and we are going through the process with this introduction, as it is wanted by this Council member."

A spokesman for Mayor Adams, who's not related to the speaker, would not comment on Garrido's behind-the-scenes machinations, but voiced vehement opposition to Barron's bill, arguing it would "create significant fiscal impacts for the city that would need to be addressed."

"We urge the Council in the strongest possible terms to reject this bill," spokesman Jonah Allon said.

A representative for DC37 did not return a request for comment.

The mayor has tried to enroll the city's municipal retirees in an Advantage plan since he took office. Courts last year [blocked his first attempt](#) due to a provision in that plan that violated a local law. Adams has since devised a new plan that his administration maintains passes legal muster.

In addition to the budget savings inherent in the Advantage plan — which would be generated by federal subsidies — Adams maintains that health care benefits would remain as robust as the ones retirees currently benefit from under the traditional Medicare structure, which consists of a city-subsidized supplement on top of the universal federal program. Garrido and other city labor leaders agree with Adams and have joined him in pushing Advantage.

But the NYC Organization of Public Service Retirees, a grassroots group whose lawsuit prompted the courts to block Adams' first plan last year, has countered that Advantage shortchanges its beneficiaries.

The group's leaders have pointed to studies showing that the private insurance providers that administer Advantage plans sometimes deny ["medically necessary care."](#) in many cases due to their requirements for certain medical procedures to be preauthorized.

The retiree group has [filed another lawsuit](#) seeking to block Adams' latest plan. That suit remains pending.

Asked about Garrido's threat to punish Council members who oppose Advantage, Marianne Pizzitola, a retired FDNY EMT who runs the retiree group, accused him of engaging in "mafia" tactics.

"This is thuggery," she said. "This isn't labor."