

POLITICS-AN

Barron, city retirees temporarily win big in legal battle over Medicare coverage



by **ARIAMA C. LONG** Report for America Corps
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Omowle Clay photo

A judge **granted** city retirees a temporary restraining order (TRO) last Friday, in their ongoing fight against

Mayor Eric Adams' new city Medicare contract. The city council has also introduced legislation in support of city retirees. Judge Lyle Frank of the New York County Supreme Court issued the TRO July 7, ruling that enough evidence was available to prove the new Medicare plan would violate city retiree rights.

“I urge you to support the municipal retirees just as this judge has by supporting/signing on to the retiree bill that was introduced at the last stated meeting. These retirees deserve the support of the legislators who they have put into office in good faith expecting that they would act in their best interest,” said Council member Charles Barron in a statement.

Barron said the greatest reward for people who have served this city is the support needed to not make this about dollars and cents but about common sense healthcare coverage.

City and Municipal Labor Committee shouldn't cut retirees' health care



The struggle to stop the City from betraying its retirees, and its current and future workers, is ongoing.



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In April, Adams decided to ink a five-year plus contract with Aetna to provide a Medicare Advantage plan for the city's roughly 250,000 retirees, despite immense pushback from city retirees that wanted to keep their established healthcare benefits. The city claimed the new plan would save about \$600 million.

The New York City Organization of Public Service Retirees (OPSR) and others then **filed a lawsuit** against the city to get the right to opt out of the plan. The group feared potential high co-pays for elderly and disabled retirees and out-of-pocket costs with the new plan.

“This is now the third time in the last two years that courts have had to step in and stop the City from violating retirees’ healthcare rights,” **stated** Marianne Pizzitola, president of the NYC OPSR. “We call on the City and the Municipal Labor Committee to end their ruthless and unlawful campaign to deprive retired municipal workers of the healthcare benefits they earned.”

Barron has also sponsored **a city council bill**, Int. No. 1099, which will amend the city’s administrative code to offer Medicare-eligible city retirees and their

dependents a different option than Adams' Medicare Advantage plan. His bill has at least 12 co-sponsors and the backing of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP).

AARP New York State Director Beth Finkel said usually when someone retires, they are eligible for Medicare and then if they want supplemental coverage they can get a Medigap policy. But, city employees were promised a benefits package that would change under the new "forced" Medicare Advantage plan, she said.

Time to Stand Up and Go Tell It on the Mountain!

It's time for us — Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) — to stop staying back and to stand up joining our white allies in opposing Mayor Adams and his administration's efforts to transfer 260,000 municipal retirees (and our dependents) to a privately administered Medicare Advantage Plus program that have been in the works for more than two years now.

“When they plan their retirement and career,” said Finkel, “when they plan to stay with the city all through the years, part of what was on their minds is that they would get this package when they retired, and they would not have to worry about what their healthcare benefits might be. It was a promise to them.”

Finkel said that the new plan threatens people's established relationships with doctors currently covered, provides them with far too little information about many other essential plan specifics, and doesn't account for inflationary pressures for people on fixed incomes. She strongly agreed with the judge's decision to temporarily halt the mayor's plan.

“AARP New York applauds Judge Frank’s decision as a victory for New York City retirees,” said Finkel. “We are encouraged by the ruling to halt the City’s flawed attempt at diminishing care for retirees as the court considers the Mayor’s ill-advised effort—which would risk retirees’ long-term health and retirement security.”

As imagined, City Hall is unhappy with the judge's ruling.

“We are extremely disappointed by this misguided ruling,” said a City Hall spokesperson in response to Amsterdam News’ inquiry. “The city’s Medicare Advantage plan, which was negotiated in close partnership with the Municipal Labor Committee, improves upon retirees’ current plans, including offering a lower deductible, a cap on out-of-pocket expenses, and new benefits, like transportation, fitness programs, and wellness incentives.”

The spokesperson said that delaying the implementation of the Medicare Advantage plan will only cause “greater uncertainty” for city retirees and have a “detrimental” impact on the adopted city budget. The city is currently exploring appellate options.

Ariama C. Long is a Report for America corps member and writes about politics for the Amsterdam News.

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Kathy

July 13, 2023 at 11:36 am

First, retirees are no longer in their respective unions and are not represented by the unions or MLC. Second, under the retirees' current healthcare, there are no deductibles or out-of-pocket expenses, so how is the Medicare "Advantage" plan an improvement? Third, elderly retirees don't care about a fitness plan; they want the medical coverage they were promised under the own retirement terms. Fourth, all insurance plans have their so-called "wellness" incentives. Fifth, Michael Mulgrew and company raided \$1 billion out the Stabilization Fund for pay increases for active

employees—that's why the money is gone (please investigate that).
Thank you for shining a light on this nightmare.



Jerry Weinberger

July 14, 2023 at 11:19 am

Medicare Advantage = Early Death