

**Submitted Testimony of Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson**

**NYC Council – Joint Meeting of the Committees on of Health and Women and Gender Equity**

**June 12, 2023**

Thank you, Chairs Schulman and Cabán and the members of the Health and Women and Gender Equity Committees for holding this important hearing. As LGBTQIA+ people are under attack across our country, it is imperative that New York City take the lead in protecting this community's access to vital and compassionate medical care. We must be the model for the rest of the nation when it comes to defending the rights of LGBTQIA+ people to access and direct their own care, and we must make New York a welcoming and affirming place for all people in the medical setting.

Transgender people, especially transgender children, have been increasingly targeted by legislation across the country that restricts their access to gender-affirming care. We cannot and should not accept this. New York must take swift action to defend the rights of transgender youth to make their own healthcare decisions. Healthcare decisions should be made by individuals themselves with only the involvement of their medical providers and, if the individual is a child, legal guardians. The government should not interfere in such healthcare decisions. However, in too many states, that is exactly what we are seeing – these regressive state governments are substituting their judgment for that of patients, and doctors.

I am pleased to see Mayor Adams issue an executive order today to protect gender-affirming care in our city and prevent the use of city resources to support investigations from other states into individuals who provide or receive this healthcare. I urge the Council to pass Introduction 1074, which would enshrine this order into city law, as well as Resolution 555, calling on the Governor to sign S2475, which would accomplish a similar goal at the state level. We must act now to protect the rights of transgender youth to seek out the care they need.

Protecting the rights of transgender people to access the care they need is a strong step towards ensuring equity for the LGBTQIA+ community in our city. But we must go beyond merely protecting those rights and help transgender people regularly access comprehensive and compassionate care. This is why Introduction 66 is so important. By collecting information about the services that New York City's hospitals offer and posting it on the website of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), transgender New Yorkers will be able to locate where they can go for care and find a welcoming and affirming healthcare setting.

Like all of you, I have been disturbed by reports from our city jails over the past few months about the appalling state of LGBTQIA+ healthcare access, particularly when it comes to transgender-affirming care. I urge the Mayor and DOC Commissioner Molina to ensure that LGBTQIA+ people in Rikers have access to the care they need, are housed according to their gender identity, and have their complaints promptly investigated and responded to.

Beyond gender-affirming care, HIV/AIDS care is also under threat in the United States. A federal judge in Texas ruled last year that the preventive care mandates of the Affordable Care Act were unconstitutional, specifically because providing PrEP – pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV – violated the religious freedom of

employers. This radical and unfounded ruling, if upheld on appeal, would prevent individuals from receiving evidence-based preventative care and is a violation of sexual and reproductive healthcare rights.

My office has worked diligently on issues surrounding HIV/AIDS in The Bronx. We have revitalized our longstanding HIV Roundtable, which is a coalition of over 100 representatives across agencies, healthcare facilities, and nonprofit organizations in The Bronx working towards ending the HIV epidemic in the Bronx and dismantling inequities and stigma around HIV/AIDS. Since its relaunch in September 2022, the Roundtable has become a framework for building partnerships between service providers, creating policy solutions for issues around HIV, and developing borough-wide initiatives to increase care and education around HIV prevention and management. Beyond this, my office actively supports and participates in related efforts by other city and state agencies, including those of the Bronx End the Epidemic (ETE) Steering Committee, Bronx Knows and New York Knows, Bronx Links, the DOHMH Bureau of Hepatitis, HIV, and Sexually Transmitted Infections, and the New York State AIDS Institute. This past fall, in conjunction with the ETE, our office hosted a one-day anti-stigma conference focused on HIV, mpox, and COVID-19 at Lincoln Hospital. Participants were able to hear from expert panelists and discuss how to reduce stigma towards individuals living with HIV and improve access to care. My office also hosted a World AIDS Day event on December 1, 2022, where we collaborated with local health partners to provide free HIV testing at Fordham Plaza. On that day, I also officially proclaimed December 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> as “Bronx AIDS Week,” meant to recognize and promote services and health literacy around HIV/AIDs prevention and management. I will continue to work to end the epidemic once and for all through championing prevention and testing and fighting to ensure that every New Yorker with a diagnosis is able to get the healthcare they deserve.

Thank you again for your leadership in holding this hearing today. I look forward to seeing these bills pass, bringing us closer to a city where all people can access the healthcare that they need and deserve.