



**THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS**

City Hall
New York, NY 10007
(212) 788-7116

****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

August 12, 2016

Contact: (212) 788-7116
Release #:002-2016

SPEAKER MELISSA MARK-VIVERITO, IMMIGRATION CHAIR CARLOS MENCHACA, COUNCIL MEMBER RAFAEL SALAMANCA AND IMMIGRANT HEALTH ADVOCATES CELEBRATE \$1.5 MILLION IN FUNDING FOR IMMIGRANT HEALTH SERVICES

South Bronx, NY- Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Finance Chair Julissa Ferreras-Copeland, Immigration Chair Carlos Menchaca, and community health organizations, today gathered at Terra Firma, a joint program of the Children's Health Fund and Montefiore, to announce the City Council's \$1.5 million investment for the Immigrant Health Initiative. This \$1.5 million in funding will help support programs to decrease health disparities among foreign born and native New Yorkers by focusing on improving access to healthcare; addressing cultural and language barriers; and targeting resources and interventions.

"The Immigrant Health Initiative is part of the Council's on-going efforts to support our immigrant communities," said **Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito**. "Our \$1.5 million dollar initiative will go a long way in ensuring undocumented immigrants, unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable populations have access to the comprehensive and legal services they deserve. While Congress fails to act, the New York City Council is proud to serve as a model on immigrant issues for the rest of the country."

"An investment on the health of the approximately 250,000 undocumented and uninsured New Yorkers is an investment on the health and wellbeing of this entire City," said **Council Member Carlos Menchaca, Chair of the Committee on Immigration**. "When a segment of our population is without access to health care, the entire City suffers. I am proud to stand with Speaker Mark-Viverito and with my fellow Council Members and together represent one of the most progressive government bodies in regards to immigration and health. May we continue setting the model on these important issues."

"The Immigrant Health Initiative has helped hundreds of low-income, immigrant New Yorkers receive the vital medical attention they need," said **Council Member Julissa Ferreras-Copeland, Chair of the Committee on Finance**. "Through addressing cultural and language barriers and partnering with community-based providers, we are able to reach more immigrants earlier, improving their health and that of their families. This Council is very proud to fund this initiative and care for New York City's immigrants."

“The funding announced today should send a message to immigrant families that your health issues are a priority to the New York City Council,” said **Councilman Rafael Salamanca, Jr.** “If we can help to alleviate even the simplest obstacle - like a language barrier - we can provide dozens throughout our communities with happier and healthier lives, and I’m proud to be a part of this progress.”

“Children’s Health Fund is committed to ensuring every child in the United States has the tools they need to succeed,” said **Dennis Walto, Executive Director, Children’s Health Fund.** “We are proud to support Terra Firma, a program that manifests our vision, and applaud Speaker Mark-Viverito’s leadership in the City Council’s Immigrant Healthcare Initiative. This is a clear demonstration of the New York values we all hold dear – that every child is equally important.”

“As a pediatrician caring for some of the most vulnerable children in NYC, I am proud of the enormous effort the NYC Council has made to address the complex needs of unaccompanied immigrant children seeking safe haven in our great country” said **Alan Shapiro, MD, co-founder of Terra Firma.** “The Council has greeted these children with open arms and made city dollars available to programs like ours. Terra Firma is a medical-legal partnership, between Montefiore, The Children’s Health Fund and Catholic Charities, providing co-located, integrated medical, mental health and legal services to children who have fled unspeakable violence and trauma in their home countries. I have had the indescribable privilege of seeing frightened, despondent children transformed into those who are joyous and see all the potential the world has to offer.”

“I want to thank Speaker Mark-Viverito, Councilmembers Carlos Menchaca, Rafael Salamanca and Julissa Ferreras-Copeland and the entire City Council for their leadership and commitment to helping one of our City’s most vulnerable populations -- low-income, undocumented immigrants facing serious health problems. These residents confront an overwhelming array of challenges: illness, poverty, anxiety about their immigration status, and misconceptions about their rights and how to access health care. The Immigrant Health Initiative has enabled NYLAG’s LegalHealth division to expand its partnership with NYC Health + Hospitals and help more vulnerable patients access the immigration, health care and related legal services they need,” said **Beth Goldman, NYLAG’s President and Attorney-in-Charge.**

“We are extremely excited and want to extend our immense gratitude to the City Council for its support through the Immigrant Health Initiative, which will enhance our efforts for health equity in NYC,” said **the Team at Immigrant Health and Cancer Disparities at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.** This generous support will help us expand our work towards ensuring quality health care for all New Yorkers, including the immigrant community and its many non-English speakers. We are excited to be able to continue our work with interpreters, health literacy, access and navigation, and patient and provider communication.”

“Thanks to the City Council's support through the Immigrant Health Initiative, NYLPI has expanded our program aiming to connect uninsured, undocumented New Yorkers with State-funded Medicaid,” said **Laura F. Redman, Director, Health Justice Program.** These are New Yorkers who need lifesaving treatment for curable illnesses and have been eligible for health

coverage, but never knew of their eligibility. Our work through the Immigrant Health Initiative provides key outreach and legal interventions to such individuals through trusted community health centers throughout New York City.”

According to the New York Lawyers for Public Interest, 250,000 New York City residents are undocumented and uninsured. For these immigrant New Yorkers, access to healthcare is deeply limited, and even the most vulnerable and very sick often go without medical care.

Launched in Fiscal Year 2016, the Immigrant Health Initiative has helped undocumented New Yorkers across the city with access to health care and legal access. For example:

- Legal Health (NYLAG/H+H) provided **800** New York City Health + Hospitals Corporation patients with services to obtain assistance on immigration matters. In addition, given the barriers faced by many undocumented patients to timely and appropriate discharge and access to community-based resources may be mitigated, Council funding supports training of discharge planners across the city’s public health system.
- The Immigrant Health and Cancer Disparities (IHCD) at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center is funded to train **100** individuals in health interpreting. IHCD is working to provide education about health care access and navigation into care for underserved immigrant communities, including taxi drivers, and to ensure, through its Language Initiatives Program, that meaningful access is provided in a manner that is responsive to the linguistic and cultural needs of individuals with limited English proficiency in the New York City area

About Terra Firma Clinic and the Children’s Health Fund:

As a nationally-recognized medical-legal partnership, Terra Firma works to facilitate access to medical care and enhance the role of medicine and mental health in legal services. By promoting the well-being of immigrant children through direct services and advocacy, Terra Firma seeks to strengthen local communities and inform public policy. Terra Firma aspires to empower immigrant children to develop resilience, attain stability, and reach their full potential.

Terra Firma is a project of Catholic Charities New York, The Children's Health Fund, and The Children's Hospital at Montefiore, and is a recognized Medical-Legal Partnership by the National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership. The co-founders of Terra Firma are Alan Shapiro, MD, FAAP, Brett Stark, Esq., and Cristina Muniz, PhD.

###