

May 11, 2004

Commissioner Thomas R. Frieden, MD, MPH
NYC Dept of Health and Mental Hygiene
125 Worth Street
New York City, NY 10013

Re: Funding for School Nurses

Dear Commissioner Frieden,

Part of any Health Commissioner's job is to make budgetary decisions, certainly a rough job in New York City's current economic environment. However, Manhattan Community Board No. 4 strongly believes that budget cuts cannot be made in such a way as to jeopardize the health and safety of our youngest and most vulnerable city residents.

It has come to our attention through the media and City Council Health Committee Chairperson Christine Quinn's legislative aide, Jeremy Hoffman, that the Department of Health will not be funding school nurses this summer and that notice to that effect has been sent to the union representing the school nurses.

New Yorkers all know that our public schools will be overflowing during summer session with third graders preparing to retake the mandatory promotion exams. As parents and persons actively involved in visiting our local public schools, Manhattan Community Board No. 4 members know that most of our public schools are not air conditioned and do not have, in many cases, circulating fans. We also know that many of our city's public schools in the five boroughs are located in neighborhoods with high air pollution particulate levels and epidemic levels of asthma.

In that light, Manhattan Community Board No. 4 finds the Dept. of Health's decision to cut school nurses this summer particularly dangerous to the health and well-being of our city's children.

We find the likelihood of a third grade student suffering an asthma attack in one of our public schools, without a trained school nurse equipped with asthma medications and a nebulizer, to be a public health tragedy waiting to happen.

The minutes spent by a school secretary in contacting EMS and waiting with a gasping child for a first responder to appear, in all frankness, is a matter of life and death.

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Therefore, we find the Dept. of Health's decision to cut school nurses this summer to be bad public policy and particularly dangerous to our children.

Commissioner Frieden, please reconsider your budgetary decision and restore funding for our school nurses this summer and as long as we have an asthma emergency in this city.

Sincerely,



Walter Mankoff
Chair
Manhattan Community Board No. 4

This letter was approved by Manhattan Community Board No. 4 at its full board meeting on May 5, 2004.

cc: Local elected officials
City Councilmembers
Community Boards
Media outlets