

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**April 13, 2007****HHC Contact: James Saunders****212-788-3339****MOIA Contact: Wil Cruz****212-788-9964****PUBLIC HOSPITALS RENEW VOW TO KEEP PATIENT
IMMIGRANT STATUS CONFIDENTIAL**

“Open Letter” in 12 Languages Promises Privacy,
Will Be Distributed During Immigrant History Week, April 16-22

New York City – April 13, 2007 – New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC) President Alan D. Aviles and Immigrant Affairs Commissioner Guillermo Linares joined together to issue a reassuring message to immigrant New Yorkers who may be avoiding accessing health services for fear of having their immigration status disclosed to federal authorities. The message, to be delivered in an open letter written in 12 different languages to coincide with Immigrant History Week, April 16-22, reassures immigrants of every patient’s right to health care privacy and the public hospitals’ commitment to keep immigrant status completely confidential and serve all New Yorkers regardless of their immigration status. The open letter was also issued last year in the midst of heightened debate concerning immigration laws.

“It is important to remind immigrant New Yorkers that they can get quality health care in our City without fear. I want to reaffirm our promise of confidentiality and assure patients that their private information is secure when visiting any HHC facility for their health care,” said HHC President Alan D. Aviles. “We want to remove any worry of having their status disclosed so they can focus on what is really important - keeping their families healthy.”

The open letter will be distributed to HHC patients and staff, community and immigrant advocacy organizations, and ethnic community papers across the City. The open letter, written in English, Spanish, French, Russian, Chinese, Korean, French Creole, Urdu, Bengali, Polish, Albanian and Arabic urges immigrants not to be afraid to go to an HHC hospital, emergency room or health center, and reconfirms HHC's policy against disclosing patient information.

“The nearly three million foreign born persons living in the City, including an estimated half a million who are undocumented, add to the vibrancy of our economy and diverse cultural life,” said Immigrant Affairs Commissioner Guillermo Linares. “We want to continue in our efforts to build and maintain their trust and I join HHC in letting immigrant New Yorkers know they can rely on the City's public healthcare system not only to stay healthy but also to protect their privacy.”

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The letter from Aviles and Linares states in part “We respect you and want to help you. People who work in a public hospital will not tell the Immigration Service or other law enforcement agencies your immigration status . . . Our public hospitals and health centers have a long and proud history of caring for everyone. That includes people who are not legal immigrants and people who do not have money to pay for care. Our commitment is strong. It has not changed.”

“New York City's great public hospitals and clinics are leading the way to ensure that every New Yorker gets the health care they need by providing financial assistance in health centers, specialty care units, and emergency rooms. HHC is reaching out and renewing its promise to immigrants that its hospitals and health care providers will never share information with immigration authorities,” said Adam Gurvitch, Director of Health Advocacy at the New York Immigration Coalition. “Immigrants need to take this message to heart, and should feel safe getting health care.”

Most children and pregnant women in New York City, regardless of immigration status, are eligible for health insurance. HHC staff helps all uninsured patients apply for the insurance programs they may be eligible for. The public hospitals also help patients who cannot get insurance by providing reduced, affordable rates under the HHC Options program. In order to offer these services, appropriate and authorized HHC employees must ask patients for certain information that may include immigration status, proof of income, home address and date of birth. This information is kept completely confidential. HHC does not compile records or lists of undocumented immigrants nor does it share individual patient information with immigration authorities.

Throughout its history, HHC has had vast experience caring for low income and immigrant communities, and its patients across the city speak more than 100 different languages. HHC's diverse patient population is 43% Latino, 35 % Black, 6% Asian, 6 % White and 10% are a wide mix of ethnicities. HHC also has a very diverse staff -- more than 80% represent communities of color - and many speak multiple languages.

HHC has reduced language barriers and increased access for limited English speakers through its *Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Program* that includes:

- UN-style simultaneous interpretation services;
- Specialized staff training in medical interpretation;
- Translation of health education information and important hospital policies in the top 11 languages spoken by HHC patients; and
- Multi-lingual signage throughout its facilities.

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The New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC), the largest municipal hospital and health care system in the country, is a \$4.9 billion public benefit corporation that serves 1.3 million New Yorkers and nearly 400,000 who are uninsured. HHC provides medical, mental health and substance abuse services through its 11 acute care hospitals, four skilled nursing facilities, six large diagnostic and treatment centers and more than 80 community based health centers. For more information about HHC, visit nyc.gov/hhc.

Building on its Charter mandate of 2001, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) serves as the bridge between immigrant New Yorkers and city agencies. MOIA promotes the full and active participation of immigrant New Yorkers in the civic, economic, and cultural life of the City by fostering connection and mutual understanding between City agencies and immigrant-serving groups. MOIA works with City agencies to promote utilization of government services by immigrant New Yorkers and to identify best policies and practices for reaching immigrant communities. MOIA serves as a key resource on immigrant affairs by advising the Mayor and City agencies on legislative and policy issues and by offering information to the general public about immigrant communities. For more information about the MOIA, visit nyc.gov/immigrants.

For information about immigrants' rights to healthcare and insurance, and the New York Immigration Coalition, visit thenyc.org.