



Southeast Queens in
Support of Health
Services (SQUISH)

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Meghan Sherman, Group Gordon, (202) 427-6387 (Cell)

Community Coalition Applauds the New York State Department of Health in Awarding Over \$8 Million in HEAL NY Funding for Enhancing Health Care in Southeast Queens

Emphasizes that Grants Are Only the First Step in Addressing the Significant Health Needs of Southeast Queens

New York City, September 25, 2009 – **Southeast Queens in Support of Health Services (SQUISH)**, a coalition of community-based organizations in Southeast Queens, commends the New York State Department of Health in awarding grant money under the Health Care Efficiency and Affordability Law for New Yorkers (HEAL NY) to two community health centers and two hospitals in Southeast Queens.

SQUISH congratulates the grant recipients and applauds the Department of Health's choice in funding these initiatives. However, SQUISH also points out that Southeast Queens, the area that has seen a disproportionate share of hospital and clinic closures in the borough, did not receive funding proportionate to the critical need.

"We wish to express our appreciation to Governor Patterson and the New York State Department of Health for directing these HEAL grants to Queens in recognition of the health crisis we are dealing with," **Kevin Forrestal of the SQUISH coalition**, said. "We also are pleased that the emphasis has been placed on expanding and improving primary care services. While we state our appreciation, we must not lose sight that this is a very small first step compared to the massive deficits Queens endures as it relates to providing healthcare to its residents. We call upon the Governor to take the next steps to resolve the crisis."

Judy Wessler of the Commission on the Public's Health System stated, "Thank you to the Governor and the State Health Department for listening to SQUISH and the community. This funding is a good first step in dealing with the health care crisis in Southeast Queens."

"The closure of Mary Immaculate Hospital and St. John's Queens Hospital earlier this year left residents of Southeast Queens with fewer health care options in our area than ever before," said **Eugenia Rudmann, a member of SQUISH**. "I am happy that \$30 million in HEAL dollars was awarded to Queens, but these dollars unfortunately do not address the needs of Southeast Queens."

Linda Mitchell, a member of SQUISH and Chair of the Community Board 12 Health Committee noted, “In an area that severely lacks both primary and emergency care options and has some of the highest rates of health-related problems in the city, this money, although small, is an important first step.”

“The Department of Health has demonstrated an initial willingness to improve health care in Southeast Queens,” said **Seth Cohen of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest**. “It is important to remember, however, that it is an area that still faces tremendous challenges in ensuring equal access to health care. The State government is still responsible for coordinating a master plan for the future of healthcare delivery in Queens. One appropriate next step would be to form a task force of all stakeholders—including and especially community leaders—around health care concerns in Southeast Queens.”

About Southeast Queens United in Support of Health Services (SQUISH)

The mission of the SQUISH is to strengthen existing healthcare services in the community by raising community awareness about issues that affect the delivery of services and advocating against the reduction and removal of critical health services in Southeast Queens. SQUISH is comprised of residents and community-based organizations from Southeast Queens as well as from legal services and advocacy allies from around the city.