



CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS, ELDERLY,
YOUTH, HEALTH, HOUSING & DISABILITY ISSUES
DATE: JUNE 17, 2025
TIME: 6: 22 P.M.
PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS NAOMI CARNEY, CHAIR; IAN ABREU
(6:35); DEREK BAPTISTE; SHANE BURGO; MARIA
GIESTA; BRIAN GOMES; JOSEPH LOPES (6:27);
SHAWN OLIVER

ABSENT: COUNCILLORS LEO CHOQUETTE; LINDA MORAD;
RYAN PEREIRA

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Councillor Carney called the Veterans Affairs, Elderly, Youth, Health, Housing & Disability Issues Committee meeting to order, took attendance, and explained that the meeting was being recorded and live-streamed. The Clerk read two Communications into the record: one from Councillor Choquette explaining his absence and one from Councillor Morad explaining her possible tardiness. The Communications were received and placed on file by Councillor Oliver and seconded by Councillor Burgo.

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WRITTEN MOTION, Council President Burgo, requesting, that representatives from Primary Care for All Americans (PC4AA) come before the Committee on Veterans Affairs, Elderly, Youth, Health, Housing & Disability Issues to provide a briefing on their work and discuss how their initiatives could benefit residents of New Bedford. (Matter ID #0319) (Referred – March 13, 2025.)

On motion by Councillor Giesta and seconded by Councillor Burgo, the Committee VOTED: To receive and place on file an informational packet on Primary Care for All Americans, a draft Resolution for New Bedford and Resolutions from Central Falls and Scituate, supporting primary health care.

Cheryl Bartlett, CEO of New Bedford Community Health, was recognized. Ms. Bartlett shared that Primary Care for All Americans is a non-profit organization dedicated to raising public awareness about the importance of securing a primary care physician. The local chapter includes representatives from Southcoast Health, Hawthorn Medical, and New Bedford Community Health. The organization recognizes the necessity for individuals to secure a primary care doctor, particularly considering the current shortage, as this eventually leads to reduced healthcare costs.

Ms. Bartlett further stated that the shortage of primary care doctors has led to an increase in the roles of physician assistants and nurse practitioners. She attributed the main reason being that more doctors are choosing to specialize rather than remain in primary care. Due to a shortage of primary care providers, an increasing number of individuals turn to urgent care facilities and emergency rooms for their medical needs, which leads to higher costs. Some factors leading to this choice include lack of transportation and the limited availability of doctors.

Dr. Michael Rocha, a cardiologist with Southcoast Health, was recognized. Dr. Rocha reiterated that there is a decreased number of primary care doctors, resulting in practitioners having insufficient time to see patients. An important goal is to encourage collaborative efforts to advocate for the development of more primary healthcare providers.

Helena DaSilva Hughes, President of the Immigrants Assistance Center, was recognized. Ms. DaSilva Hughes stated that the Immigrants Assistance Center is a participant in the program. She shared that the shortage of primary care physicians is largely due to retirements, creating waiting lists for patients. Currently, she has 400 individuals awaiting access to primary care, and Hawthorn Medical has stopped accepting new patients. She reiterated previous comments that relying on emergency rooms is not a cost-effective solution.

Dr. Michael Fine from Scituate, Rhode Island, was recognized. Dr. Fine emphasized that this is a national crisis, and unfortunately, immediate assistance is not at hand. Forty states currently participate in this program and are working together to formulate plans for ensuring primary care access for all. He noted that New Bedford is a leader in the response to this national crisis. The local goal is to identify available resources and ongoing needs.

Ms. Bartlett stated that the group is preparing a report addressing the necessity of attracting individuals to the primary care profession. They hope to include grants and scholarships to encourage individuals into the profession. Their goal is to collaborate with the community to ensure that any student aspiring to pursue a career in primary care can do so affordably.

Councillor Burgo inquired about what the Council could do to support the organization. He learned that the process currently being worked on is projected to take five to ten years to resolve. Still, they requested the Council's backing for the initiative and asked for the issuance of a Resolution supporting the use of primary care physicians. The speakers provided the Committee with sample Resolutions from other communities for reference.

Councillor Abreu thanked the speakers for the samples and asked about the cost-effectiveness of increasing the number of primary care providers. Dr. Fine replied that a visit to a primary care physician could cost around \$1,000, in comparison to an emergency room visit that could range from \$5,000 to \$10,000. Ultimately, having a primary care provider would likely reduce insurance costs and benefit consumers.

Councillor Oliver acknowledged that the organization's goal as admirable, sharing his personal experience of the need to find a new primary care doctor when his previous one moved to a specialty. He asked if the organization planned to collaborate with local vocational schools to encourage students to pursue careers in the medical profession. He was informed that they did.

Councillor Oliver noted that while the sample Resolutions provided are useful, they did not encourage communities to engage individuals in the healthcare profession. Ms. Bartlett responded that these were simply samples for the Council's use, and the Council was welcome to draft what they believe their Resolution should be.

Councillor Burgo thanked the group for attending the meeting and stated that the Council would review the information and consider a Resolution.

On motion by Councillor Burgo and seconded by Councillor Oliver, the Committee VOTED: To recommend that the City Council take **"NO FURTHER ACTION"** on the WRITTEN MOTION, Council President Burgo, requesting that representatives from Primary Care for All Americans (PC4AA) come before the Committee to provide a briefing on their work and discuss how their initiatives could benefit residents of New Bedford.

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On motion by Councillor Burgo and seconded by Councillor Oliver, the Committee VOTED: To follow the Chair's recommendation to waive the reading and take **"NO FURTHER ACTION"** on the following items:

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Morad, requesting that the Director of Community Services Cynthia Wallquist, the Acting Director of the Department of Facilities and Fleet Management Jen Vieira and the Chairperson of the Commission for Citizens with Disabilities Dennis DeMarinis be invited to a meeting of the Committee on Veterans Affairs, Elderly, Youth, Health, Housing and Disability Issues to discuss the status of various access issues related to the Hillman Street complex. (Matter ID #0339) (Referred – February 24, 2022.)

RELATED MOTION, Councillor Pereira, requesting that the Housing Authority's Board of Commissioners and the Management Team of Peabody Properties for Melville Towers be invited to appear before the Committee on Appointments & Briefings in order to address the issues that were raised by tenants at the June 28, 2022 Appointments & Briefings Committee Meeting. (Referred to the Committee on Appointments & Briefings from Committee – June 28, 2022.) (November 15, 2022 – tabled) (Referred – February 13, 2023.)

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, that letters of support be sent to our Federal delegation, Senators Markey, Warren and Congressman Keating, requesting that HUD's Senior Citizens Housing Rules be reviewed and reverse the current practice of allowing mix-use in Senior Housing, other than 65 and over, and Citizens with disabilities; this request is on behalf of our local Senior population that have been put into a housing situation that is unsafe and detrimental to their quality of life; and further that a letter be sent to HUD's Boston Regional Office requesting, a meeting with the Council's Committee on Appointments & Briefings to discuss the Senior housing situation along with testimony from New Bedford's Senior Citizen population regarding their quality of life and living standards. (Matter ID #1243) (Referred to the Committee on Appointments & Briefings – July 21, 2022.) (November 15, 2022 – tabled) (Referred – February 13, 2023.)

WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting that the Committee on Appointments and Briefings meet with Chairman George Smith and Members of the Commission for Citizens with Disabilities, the Council on Aging Board, the Director or Representative of the New Bedford Housing Authority and a Representative from Peabody Property for the purpose of discussing issues affecting seniors in public and private senior housing throughout the City. (Matter ID #1389) (Referred to the Committee on Appointments & Briefings – August 18, 2022.) (Referred – February 13, 2023.)

COMMUNICATION, City Clerk/Clerk of the City Council submitting a copy of an email from Rhonda Siciliano, HUD responding to the residents' issues/concerns at Melville Towers. (Matter ID #0018) (Referred to the Committee on Appointments & Briefings – January 12, 2023.) (Referred – February 13, 2023.)

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Councillor Burgo made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Councillor Abreu.

The meeting adjourned at 7:01 p.m.

ATTEST:

Denis Lawrence Jr.
Clerk of Committees