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Eric Adams welcomes court decision to delay NYC municipal retiree health benefit plan updates

By [Chris Sommerfeldt](#) and [Michael Gartland](#) New York Daily News | Oct 22, 2021

A court decision to temporarily block Mayor de Blasio's controversial new retiree health benefits policy got a warm welcome Friday from Democratic mayoral contender Eric Adams, who promised he wouldn't "traumatize" retired city workers when it comes to their health coverage. A day earlier, Manhattan Supreme Court Judge Lyle Frank issued an order halting the city's self-imposed Oct. 31 deadline for retirees to opt in to the new plan, known as Medicare Advantage Plus.

Under de Blasio's policy which has the support of many of the city's most powerful labor unions retired city workers will either automatically be enrolled in the new Advantage Plus plan or have to opt out to maintain their current coverage, which would cost an additional \$191 a month to hold on to.

Many retirees, including those who won the injunction Thursday, have cried foul over the policy shift, arguing it essentially amounts to the city and the unions going back on what they agreed to provide.

"We need to look at it and make sure it's not a bait and switch. I'm a retiree, I get retiree benefits. Their plan is my plan," said Adams, a former NYPD captain who's covered under the health plan offered through his union. "We want to make sure that it is a fair plan. Nothing is more frightening for a retiree than healthcare.

That is frightening for a retiree, having healthcare be unsure, that's scary."

Retirees have aired fears that opting for the new plan would result in losing their doctors or access to certain hospitals and they've expressed anger over the fact that maintaining their old coverage would cost more in out-of-pocket expenses.

They've also complained that the city's new policy wasn't conveyed clearly and that getting a response to outstanding questions has been a bureaucratic nightmare.

Judge Frank appears, at least in part, to agree. In his Thursday ruling, Frank described the policy's roll out as "irrational, and thus arbitrary and capricious."

"There is little clarity as to which health care providers will be accepting this new Medicare Advantage Plan," his ruling states. "It is simply irrational for retirees to have to make this decision as circumstances currently stand."

Under the ruling, Frank blocked the city from enforcing its Oct. 31 deadline and ordered it to "cure deficiencies" regarding the plan's implementation. Frank does not specify in the ruling when that must be done by, though.

Union leaders have been reassuring retirees for weeks that under Advantage Plus they would be able to keep their doctors. But many retirees have noted that it is not what their doctors are telling them.

The Municipal Labor Committee, an umbrella group for the city's most powerful

unions, backs the shift in coverage, which de Blasio has argued would save the city up to \$600 million a year in health care costs.

On Friday, United Federation of Teachers President Michael Mulgrew conceded that he is “frustrated” with the way the plans provider, known as the Alliance, has conveyed details of the new plan to retirees.

“It could have been done better,” he said.

Mulgrew noted that a big part of the confusion stems from the name of the plan and the provider. The Alliance is a joint venture that’s made up of EmblemHealth and Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield, so, according to Mulgrew, any hospital or doctor who takes either will take Advantage Plus as well. Doctors and their office managers may not be aware of this when they’re talking with their patients, he added.

The fallout surrounding the new plan’s roll out could end up falling to Adams. De Blasio’s term is up on Dec. 31 and how long it’ll take to cure deficiencies with Advantage Plus anyone’s guess.

Labor leaders appear to be trying to reassure more than just retirees they’ve been in contact with Adams as well.

“My conversation with union leaders they stated that ‘This is a good plan, we’re willing to sit down and show you, and then educate retirees,’” he said. “Because they get tidbits, they get little soundbites, we need to really allow people to understand what the plan means, how it’s going to impact your care.”

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