



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

## Harckham and Over 200 State Municipal Retirees Call for Healthcare Benefit Protections

PETE HARCKHAM April 16, 2024

ISSUE: [SENATOR HARCKHAM. SD40, HEALTHCARE, PUBLIC EMPLOYEE, RETIREMENT BENEFITS](#)



State Sen. Pete Harckham speaking alongside municipal and state retirees at a press conference at the State Capitol in Albany

“This is about a fundamental issue of fairness”

*Albany, NY* – New York State Senator Pete Harckham, along with Assemblymember Ken Zebrowski and over 200 state and municipal retired employees, plus union leaders, rallied at a special press conference held in support new legislation, the Health Equity for Retirees Act,

guaranteeing healthcare benefit protections for retirees.

The press conference, which took place in the State Capitol, included [Marianne Pizzitola](#), president of the NYC Organization of Public Service Retirees; [Edward Farrell](#), executive director of the Retired Public Employees Association of New York State; [Lloyd Archer](#), president of the TWU Local 100 Retirees; and [Bob Valentino](#), president of the NYC Retired Transit Police Officers Association. State legislators participating included Senators Mario R. Mattera, Steven D. Rhoads, Robert Rollison and Assemblymember Edward P. Ra.

Harckham and Zebrowski's legislation ([S.8388](#) / [A.7866](#)) prohibits public employers from diminishing health insurance benefits provided to retirees and their dependents or lessening the contributions those employers make for health insurance coverage.

"This is about a fundamental issue of fairness: our dedicated state and municipal retirees served the people of New York and diligently paid into the Medicare system throughout their careers, trusting it to provide the healthcare security they've earned and deserve," said Harckham. "For municipalities to switch to a lower quality of healthcare is patently unfair. This legislation is about honoring our commitment to these retirees, and I'm proud to stand with them in their fight to protect their healthcare benefits."

"Public service retirees worked hard for the health care benefits they were promised, and we have a moral obligation to ensure those promises are kept," said Zebrowski. "This rally is about sending a clear message that we value the contributions of our state and local government retirees, and we will fight to safeguard the benefits they've rightfully earned."

In some localities, there have been attempts to transfer public employee retirees to health insurance programs that provide diminished benefits. This action may have serious consequences for the health of these individuals and on the state's health care system.

Retirees covered by such diminished programs may see reduced access to medical care, with long pre-authorization procedures and the need to switch from long-term providers. Due to these changes, retirees may be more dependent on urgent care facilities and emergency rooms, putting an even bigger strain on health care providers. The Health Equity for Retirees Act simply protects retired public employees and their eligible family members from being transferred into diminished health care programs and plans.

**Marianne Pizzitola, president of the NYC Organization of Public Service Retirees**, which represents over 250,000 municipal workers who are fighting from being forced out of Medicare and into Medicare Advantage plans that their doctors and hospitals do not accept, said, “After decades of loyal service, these retirees deserve to retire in peace and not worry about their health insurance company preventing them from accessing the care they need because their employer has decided to renege on its promises. We earned our benefits by serving the public and shouldn’t have to be scared for our lives in retirement by forcing us into a privatized plan that has become notorious for denying life-saving treatment and care.”

**Edward Farrell, executive director of the Retired Public Employees Association (RPEA) of New York State**, said, “[Proposals to force Medicare-eligible public sector retirees into Medicare Advantage Plans span from New York City up through the North Country and several localities in between](#), and these efforts must be stopped. RPEA fully supports Senator Harckham and Assemblyman Zebrowski’s bill that ensures retirees, who have dedicated their lives to keeping our communities educated, clean, governed, healthy, and safe, will have their existing benefits protected. Passing this legislation is a necessary action that certainly seems fair and just. We urge the State Legislature to pass this bill and the Governor to sign it into law so that we safeguard the health and well-being of our retirees.”

**Lloyd Archer, president of the TWU Local 100 Retirees**, said, “A cardiologist ordered a battery of tests and I needed pre-authorization for Medicare Advantage, which I did not receive until

four months later! These were important tests critical to my health. If I wasn't forced into Medicare Advantage by the MTA, I could have had the tests the next day. As it was, when the tests were finally conducted, they found a serious health concern that was delayed in getting treated because of the prior authorization."

**Bob Valentino, president of the NYC Retired Transit Police Officers Association**, said, "When I and so many others joined the New York City Transit Police we did so for the medical benefits, pension benefits, and the security that it had to offer. When we were appointed many of us took a pay cut compared to our previous employment. Upon retirement many of our members, including myself, have been on Medicare and GHI Senior Care for years and we are extremely satisfied with it. Just this past week, I went to the Hospital for Special Surgery and I asked a physician assistant if my doctor would accept a Medicare Advantage Plan, and he said they are frowned upon because of the demands for prior authorization and they generate too much red tape. Maintaining Medicare is essential to all New York City Public Service Retirees, as it guarantees that we will retain our doctors, is cost effective, and not for profit. Promises made must be promises kept."

To see a video of Sen. Harckham's remarks at the press conference, click [here](#).

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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### 2023-S8388B

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- Introduced

- ◦ In Committee Assembly
  - In Committee Senate
- ◦ On Floor Calendar Assembly
  - On Floor Calendar Senate
- ◦ Passed Assembly
  - Passed Senate
- Delivered to Governor
- Signed By Governor
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Protects the health insurance benefits of retirees of public employers and contributions of retirees of public employers

January 25, 2024

In Senate Committee **Finance**

Sponsored by **Pete Harckham**

Do you support this bill?