



WHITTIER STREET
HEALTH CENTER
Comprehensive. Compassionate. Community.

A CEO update from **Frederica M. Williams** President and CEO



June 30th, 2018

As you know, on June 20, 2018, a group of professional employees at Whittier Street Health Center (approximately 50 of our 300 employees overall) voted to join the 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. Now that the whirlwind of the election is behind us, and as Whittier gets set to begin the next challenging phase of collective bargaining, I felt it was important to write to you all.

To begin, I want to thank you for your interest in the Whittier Street Health Center and the well-being of its staff and patients. Our mission, as always, is to provide vitally important health care services to a very disadvantaged population. These are financially challenging times not just for Whittier Street but for community health centers throughout the Commonwealth. Thank you for supporting our mission as we foster wellness and prevention, address racial and ethnic disparities in health and health care, and serve as champions of health equity for the most vulnerable of our citizens.

Unfortunately, in the last few weeks Whittier Street Health Center has been portrayed very negatively and inaccurately in the media. This has been profoundly disappointing to me, and I am concerned about the lasting impact on our staff and patients. Regardless of what you may have read, I want to personally emphasize and affirm the following:

- We value and respect the rights of all employees
- We have always done our best to pay competitive wages and benefits to our dedicated staff. In fact, our pay is near the 75th percentile according to industry compensation surveys. Our vacation, holidays, sick days and other benefits are very competitive as well. In addition, we pay incentives quarterly and we reduced health insurance costs this year. We also provide retirement, CMEs, and internal trainings.
- Yet fiscal responsibility is critically important as these are very, very challenging times for non-profit community health centers. Great uncertainty lies ahead with federal funding, fundraising, etc. We need to ensure that we can continue to provide the highest quality of care to

our marginalized and vulnerable citizens of Boston.

- Each year, the health center serves 30,000 patients and experiences 140,000 patient visits (plus 20,000 community outreach visits). No patient is denied care because of their inability to pay, even though 40% of our young patients are uninsured and 35% of our adult patients are uninsured. To meet our obligations we must use our limited resources wisely.
- A few more facts about our patients and operations:
 - 50% of our funding is from grants and donations
 - We serve a large immigrant/refugee population
 - Approximately 80% of our patients have social or behavioral issues; we experience high rates of chronic illnesses and opioid disorders
 - The life expectancy in Roxbury is 59.5 years compared to 92 years for residents in the Back Bay
 - 91% of our patients live below the Federal Poverty Line
 - 45% of our patients need to be served in a language other than English.
 - 70% of our employees live in the communities we serve
- Whittier was already projecting a significant financial loss for the current fiscal year which closed at the end of June, when we were notified on June 13 that our applications for two large grants were denied, resulting in a widening our financial loss. As of June 30, 2018, the end of our FY 2018, we are projecting a \$1.2m loss. As a result, the next day, June 14, I made the difficult decision to eliminate 20 positions and to reduce my own salary for the remainder of the calendar year. These moves together yielded a necessary cost savings of \$1M for the health center. The layoffs were erroneously labelled “anti-union” in the media but that’s absolutely not true.
- Most of our staff have been aware for a long time of the financial challenges faced by the health center. We began experiencing financial challenges in **January 2017** due to low provider productivity and cuts in some grant funding, and we have been working hard to improve provider productivity and to enhance fundraising. I am confident that we will meet the significant challenges that lay ahead, but it will require a concerted effort.

The road ahead is challenging and we will have to make proactive decisions that will ensure we continue to serve as a high performing organization focused on promoting wellness and prevention, and addressing racial and ethnic disparities in health and health care and health equity for our vulnerable patients.

I felt it was important to address recent mischaracterizations and to emphasize that Whittier Street Health Center will continue working diligently to preserve the viability of our health center so we can continue our important mission of healing, saving and transforming lives. We will continue to serve as a beacon of hope for our marginalized citizens and an economic engine in the communities we serve.

Thank you for your continued support.

Frederica M. Williams
President and CEO



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