



Legislation Text

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Res. No. 984

Resolution calling upon the Bloomberg Administration to discontinue the use and development of Worker Connect, a shared database that gives workers across health and human services agencies access to personal client information.

By Council Members James, Mendez, Vann, Williams and Jackson

Whereas, Access NYC, a publicly accessible database, gives users the ability to search for health and human services office locations and the capability to start the benefit application process or renew certain benefits including, but not limited to, Medicaid, cash assistance and food stamps; and

Whereas, Access NYC was the first step in a multi-step initiative to computerize health and human services benefits information and a precursor to systems called HHS-Connect and Worker Connect; and

Whereas, The goal of Access NYC is to give clients better access to programs by providing users with online access to 35 city, state, and federal benefit programs; and

Whereas, HHS-Connect was the second step in this initiative; it expanded the online application process for clients by allowing parents to determine their eligibility for, and enroll their children in, the School Meals program administered by the Department of Education (DOE); and

Whereas, HHS-Connect is a more sophisticated tool than Access NYC; it permits clients to access City services and shares client information between Access NYC and the DOE in order to determine a client's eligibility for and successfully enroll a client in the School Meals program; and

Whereas, In December 2008 HHS-Connect launched a portal called Worker Connect; and

Whereas, Worker Connect is an online database that enables workers at New York City health and human services agencies to share client data; it gives workers access to client documents stored in HRA's repository including, but not limited to, applications for public benefits and birth certificates; and

Whereas, In January 2011 at the Emerging Technology- Challenges and Benefits Conference at Harvard University (the "Conference"), Robert Doar, the Commissioner of the Human Resources Administration (HRA), explained that the development of HHS-Connect and Worker Connect was driven from the top down and that only the commissioners of the participating agencies have been trained and are considered Project Managers; and

Whereas, At the Conference, Commissioner Doar stated that, "the DOE was a reluctant partner in HHS-Connect;" and

Whereas, HHS-Connect created a common client index (CCI), which is used in Worker Connect and is the master registry of client information shared across health and human services programs such as Medicaid, Head Start, homeless services, food stamps, and services addressing housing and the aging; and

Whereas, According to Commissioner Doar at the Conference, "CCI is a way in which mildly conflicting data can be reconciled and presented to a worker in a coherent fashion"; and

Whereas, However, Commissioner Doar did not explain how conflicting data is reconciled; indeed, if a worker finds a mistake in Worker Connect and the mistake originated at another agency, the worker who found the mistake does not have the ability to correct or reconcile it; and

Whereas, A worker who finds a mistake only has the ability to send the originating agency an alert; the originating agency does not need to respond to the alert or correct the mistake, however; and

Whereas, Agency counsel had final approval over what data could be shared among user groups; there

does not appear to be a requirement for client approval prior to sharing the personal information among user groups that agency counsels deemed appropriate for such dissemination, however; and

Whereas, There is also the potential for workers to violate client privacy and unnecessarily search for personal information, which could pose a threat to clients seeking public assistance from the city government; and

Whereas, There are approximately 7,000 user groups in Worker Connect from the following agencies: the Administration for Children's Services including the Division of Child Protection, Family Court Legal Services, Child Care, and Youth and Family Justice; the Department of Homeless Services; the Health and Hospitals Corporation; the Department of Correction; the Human Resources Administration; the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; the Department of the Aging; the Department of Probation; and the Department of Finance; and

Whereas, Laws such as Title II of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, the Federal Privacy Act, the Substance Abuse Confidentiality Statutes, and the Gramm-Leach- Bliley Act are meant to ensure that individuals have control over their own confidential information, yet Worker Connect does not allow clients to control the spread or accuracy of their personal data; now, therefore be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the Bloomberg Administration to discontinue the use and development of Worker Connect, a shared database that gives workers across health and human services agencies access to personal client information.

EH
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8/9/11