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Res. No. 1231

A resolution calling on the appropriate committee of the Council to hold hearings on the causes of the high rate of infant mortality in central Brooklyn.

By Council Members Boyland, Carrion, Clarke, Malave-Dilan, Espada, Fisher, Freed, Koslowitz, Lasher, Leffler, Linares, Lopez, Marshall, Perkins, Pinkett, Reed, Rodriguez, Warden, Wooten, Golden; also Council Members DiBrienza, Foster, Harrison, Nelson, Quinn, Rivera and Robinson

Whereas, According to an article in The New York Times, while the infant mortality rate in New York City has fallen steadily in the last decade, it has fallen much more slowly in neighborhoods like Bedford-Stuyvesant and Brownsville, areas in central Brooklyn that have large communities made up of new immigrants; and

Whereas, According to Department of Health figures, in New York City in 1998, babies less than a year old died at a rate of 6.8 per 1,000, which is slightly better than the national average of 7.2; and

Whereas, The Bedford-Stuyvesant and Brownsville communities in central Brooklyn, however, have some of the highest infant mortality rates in the country, 14 per 1,000, which represents a 20 percent increase over the 1997 rates; and

Whereas, The last time the average rate of infant mortality was that high in the City as a whole was in 1983; and

Whereas, Experts agree that even when resources exist--cost prenatal care, hospitals willing to deliver babies, government subsidized infant formula and food--it is still difficult to get many pregnant women to access them; and

Whereas, Many of the women who are not accessing these resources are HIV positive, unemployed or living in the City as undocumented immigrants; and

Whereas, Women who fit these descriptions often avoid visiting doctors before they give birth out of fear that their babies will be taken away from them or that they will be deported, and some are discouraged by family members, who do not believe in prenatal care or are suspicious of the entire medical system; and

Whereas, There are also other women who want prenatal care but cannot obtain it because they live too far from a health clinic or a hospital, or have small children and no one at home to care for them while they are at the doctor; and

Whereas, According to the Times article, a lack of access to housing, nutritious food and adult support may contribute to infant mortality as much as poor medical care; and

Whereas, When Bedford-Stuyvesant lost a majority of its financing for Healthy Start, a federal program intended to help poor women have healthy babies, its infant mortality rate rose sharply; and

Whereas, In Brownsville, the Healthy Start program does not even exist, although the March of Dimes has earmarked the neighborhood for a \$152,000 program in an attempt to provide more services to women; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the appropriate committee of the Council to hold hearings on the causes of the high rate of infant mortality in central Brooklyn.

