



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR  
Gustavo Rivera

## State Senator Gustavo Rivera and the Montefiore Health System Host a Town Hall Meeting on Ebola

GUSTAVO RIVERA December 2, 2014

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(Bronx, NY) – Today, State Senator Gustavo Rivera, Montefiore Health System, Morris Heights Health Center, the Bronx Borough President's African Advisory Council, The Bronx District Attorney's Office, and the New York Commission on Human Rights gathered at Claremont Neighborhood Center to inform members of the community about Ebola, discourage further violence towards the African community and promote actions the community can take to help fight this global health concern.

"Community events like these help empower members of our community with the facts and discourage acts of hatred and violence that stem from fear and ignorance," said State Senator Gustavo Rivera. "I thank Montefiore Health System, Morris Heights Health Center and the Bronx Borough President's African Advisory Council for working to ensure that the Bronx is prepared to appropriately address any Ebola case and our community is well informed about this serious disease."

The town hall provided Bronxites with key information about the disease and the measures put in place by city and state agencies to thoroughly prepare New York for an Ebola case, such as we saw with Dr. Craig Spencer. Additionally, and in light of the senseless act of violence perpetrated against two intermediate school students of Senegalese background in the Bronx, the town hall aimed to empower the community with facts about the disease to combat the strain and stigma that the Ebola crisis have placed on different African communities throughout our State.

"We are grateful to Senator Rivera for hosting tonight's forum to help inform our community about Ebola. As one of 10 sites in New York State designated by Governor Cuomo

to handle Ebola patients, Montefiore has for many months been preparing our facilities and training our employees under the leadership of Steven M. Safyer, M.D., president and CEO, in coordination with our partners at the federal, state and local levels,” said Andrew Racine, M.D., Ph.D., senior vice president and chief medical officer of Montefiore Medical Center. “Montefiore, with its academic partner, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, has nationally-recognized expertise in Ebola research and treating infectious diseases. We are committed to providing world-class, compassionate care if the need arises, and to protecting the health and well-being of our communities.”

“Healthcare providers caring for Ebola patients in the African nations affected by the current epidemic and people who have been exposed to body fluids from an individual with Ebola are at the highest risk of getting sick,” said Nat Litman, M.D., vice chair of clinical affairs, Pediatrics, The Children’s Hospital at Montefiore. “Although the risk of an outbreak in the United States is extremely remote, we may see patients returning from West Africa with Ebola infection. We are gearing up and we will be able to treat a patient with Ebola with exceptional care and ensure safety to all members of the healthcare team”.

“Although immigration reform has become the topic of the day, we must not allow the conversation around the Ebola epidemic to become evanescence, until it is eradicated. Our youth that are stigmatized at school depend on us as well as our families in West Africa” said Charles Cooper, Chairman of the Bronx Borough President’s African Advisory Council.

“Morris Heights Health Center is pleased to participate in Senator Rivera’s Ebola Town Hall Meeting. Since 1981, Morris Heights Health Center (MHHC) has had a record of distinction as a major provider of health care in the Bronx. Born out of the local need for quality care in the area, MHHC is a non-profit organization providing quality primary healthcare services to all members of the community, including the medically, socially and economically disadvantaged. We are proud to have a sizeable community of West Africans in our patient population, and wish to assure our West African patients that they will be treated with dignity, respect and offered a high level of clinical care at all of our sites. Morris Heights has had a vigorous Ebola preparedness initiative -- our staff is trained and ready to follow all the guidelines from our public health authorities for the identification, isolation and reporting of any patient felt to be at risk for Ebola Virus Disease,” said Katherine Austin, M.D. MPH, Medical Director for Community Based Services, Morris Heights Health Center.

Attendees also donated medical supplies to be sent to hospitals in Sierra Leone in an effort to help combat the disease. Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone have carried the brunt of the disease, with Sierra Leone being the most affected currently reporting 400 to 500 cases per week. Senator Rivera's office will continue to collect donations, including bottles of bleach, hand sanitizers, rubber gloves and band-aids, at his district office until December 15, 2014.