

**Annual Minority & Multicultural Health Fair
Remarks East Orange General Hospital
Saturday, September 18th**

Thank you President Slavin, and thank you everyone for being here today to help us celebrate Minority and Multicultural Health Month and this fantastic health fair being run today by East Orange General Hospital.

East Orange General Hospital is the perfect example of a facility that is the life blood of a community. It not only provides quality health care for the residents of East Orange, it also excels in a specialized and extremely important area of our health care system - the treatment of behavioral health conditions.

David Satcher, the former Surgeon General under President Bill Clinton once said “Everyone in need must have access to high-quality, effective and affordable mental health services ... Too often, our mental health problems are left to play themselves out in the nation's streets, homeless centers ... and prisons.”

And unfortunately Surgeon General Satcher is mostly correct.

However, earlier this year I had the opportunity to tour East Orange hospital with President Slavin and I saw first hand the very difficult behavioral health cases that the staff is treating and the truly wonderful facilities that allow this population to receive high quality care.

East Orange Hospital has stepped up and filled an important void in care for this population and I congratulate everyone at East Orange for their remarkable work and progress in the area of behavioral health.

East Orange’s treatment of this population goes hand-in-hand with improving the overall health of this community; and my Department’s effort to highlight the need for the entire State of New Jersey to do more to reduce health disparities that exist in minority populations.

This month 50 community based-organizations and healthcare agencies are holding events across the state to educate and inform New Jerseyans about why health disparities exist and why they need to be eliminated.

With education we will empower our residents, our families and our neighbors to take steps to help us in this cause.

And much work needs to be done to reduce health disparities. Consider these statistics:

- African Americans have the highest death rates from heart disease and from stroke.

- Hospitalization rates for asthma are 3 times higher for blacks & asthma death rates are 4 times higher among blacks than whites.
- And for too long, the black infant mortality rate has remained nearly 3 times that of whites.

And while some improvements have been made in breaking down barriers to care and providing culturally sensitive health care, again much more needs to be done.

Minority health is an issue very close to my heart. I am a founding member of SATHI, the South Asian Total Health Initiative, which was created in 2009 to develop a research-based data resource on South Asian health, to improve the delivery of culturally competent care, and to address health disparities and empower the South Asian community.

New Jersey is the 3rd most diverse state in the nation. But with diversity come challenges which all of us must continue to work on everyday so that we break down language and other barriers with culturally sensitive care.

Gov. Chris Christie and I are committed to helping New Jersey's diverse communities remain healthy and vibrant members of our state's rich tapestry of cultures.

And that is why events like this one and other events that are taking place on almost a daily basis across New Jersey this month are so important. Everyone here today will have the chance to have their cholesterol levels checked, their blood pressure tested and even their eyes examined for Glaucoma. These tests, along with many others will be provided free of charge and will prove to be a true public health service.

I will guarantee to everyone listening to me that there will be people here today - who - possibly for the first time in their lives will be told they have a health problem, and possibly a serious one.

To put it simply, health fairs save lives.

When I first started as Commissioner and spoke to Governor Chris Christie he assured me that he would do all that he could to help those most in need in our State.

And urban hospitals like East Orange that see a tremendous number of uninsured patients need to be supported and given every opportunity to succeed.

Governor Chris Christie understands this and increased charity care funding to East Orange hospital by nearly \$1.3 million dollars. It's a significant increase considering the tremendous financial difficulties New Jersey is facing.

And it's funding that will improve the health of this community and save lives. I know the President Slavin attended the 2011 budget signing and can attest to the Governor's support of East Orange Hospital.

And it is support that is well deserved.

Before I close my remarks, I wanted to point out that the theme for this year's minority and multicultural health month is "Healthy Me, Healthy Us," and it is a very good reminder that by taking care of yourself, you take better care of your family and those whom you love.

By keeping yourself healthy, you help keep your community healthy and I urge everyone to avail themselves of the medical screening being performed today and to start living a healthy lifestyle right now. Together we can make New Jersey a healthier and stronger State.