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**\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

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**COUNCIL INVESTIGATION FINDS EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION  
AVAILABLE IN 94% OF NYC PHARMACIES SURVEYED**

*Increased From Only 55% in 2002*

**City Hall, May 20, 2007** – City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn joined Investigations Committee Chair Eric Gioia, Council Member David Weprin, Council Members Letitia James and Mathieu Eugene, reproductive health advocates, pharmacists and other Council Members today to announce the results of a City Council investigation showing that New York City’s women now have greater access to emergency contraception (EC) than ever before.

Over the course of the last five years, the City Council has conducted four investigations that analyzed consumer access to EC, known commercially as Plan B™. Between 2002 and 2006, when it was available by prescription only, access to EC rose from 55% of pharmacies surveyed to 87%. Six months ago, the FDA made EC available over-the-counter to consumers age 18 and over. After that change in FDA policy, this investigation shows access to emergency contraception in New York City has increased to an unprecedented 94% of pharmacies surveyed.

“In the last five years, our investigations have found emergency contraception going from being available at just over 50% of City pharmacies to near universal accessibility,” said **Speaker Quinn**. “The Council has long been an advocate for increased availability, having previously passed a far-reaching package of legislation to expand access to EC at pharmacies, public health clinics and hospitals citywide. So we are especially proud to celebrate this major victory in the fight to protect the reproductive rights of all women.”

The Council’s survey of 155 pharmacies citywide between March 5<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> revealed:

- **94%** (145) of pharmacies surveyed were aware without prompting that Plan B™ is available over-the-counter (OTC), including 100% of chain pharmacies and 89% of local pharmacies.
- **94%** (146) carried Plan B™ over-the-counter.
- The average cost of OTC Plan B™ was **\$41.84**, only slightly higher than the average prescription price in August 2006 (**\$37.40**).

*(over)*

“Emergency contraception is widely available for the first time in New York City. This is an important day,” said **Investigations Committee Chair Eric Gioia**, “because a woman's reproductive freedoms should never be dependent on which side of the Queensboro or Verrezano Bridge she lives on.”

“I am pleased to discover that most of our pharmacies are aware that emergency contraception is required to be available over-the-counter,” said **Health Committee Chair Joel Rivera**. “I am also happy to hear that prices for the drugs have not skyrocketed as pharmacies recognize the importance of emergency contraception to the citizens of the City of New York. Our next step is to make sure the public is educated about the availability and importance of EC so they can utilize the drug when they must.”

Despite this obvious success, there is still a need to remove the barriers to EC access that still exist, particularly for women under 18, low-income women and undocumented residents. And in spite of availability, only six percent of U.S. women aged 18 to 44 have used EC. Advocates estimate that if EC were easier to obtain and if more women knew how the drug works, unintended pregnancies could be reduced by as much as half, greatly reducing the need for abortions. In fact, a 2002 study found that EC pills probably prevented over 50,000 abortions in 2000 alone.

The Council also issued the following recommendations to address and eliminate any remaining barriers to EC for New York City residents:

- Continue to remove barriers to EC access faced by women under 18, low-income and undocumented NYC residents by ensuring that EC remains accessible and free (or low-cost) at City-run and non-profit clinics.
- Existing EC outreach and education efforts should include educating pharmacists about OTC EC.
- Support the Unintended Pregnancy Prevention Act in New York State, which would allow pharmacists to work in partnership with doctors to dispense EC directly to women under 18 or other women who do not meet the FDA requirements for OTC EC.
- Continue current outreach aimed at educating and informing consumers about the safety, efficacy and availability of Plan B™.

“NARAL Pro-Choice New York would like to thank Speaker Quinn and Councilmember Gioia for their championship of expanded access to EC in New York City,” said **Kelly Conlin, Executive Director of NARAL Pro-Choice New York**. “This report clearly shows how their leadership on this issue has helped remove unnecessary barriers that stand in the way of timely access to EC. We applaud their EC work and look forward to working together to ensure that all women have the access and information they need to prevent an unintended pregnancy.”

“Planned Parenthood of New York City thanks the Council for its ongoing leadership and support in reproductive health and rights,” said **Joan Malin, President and CEO of Planned Parenthood of New York City**. “We are pleased that 94% of pharmacies surveyed stock

Emergency Contraception (EC) and we hope that the number soon becomes 100%. EC is an important and safe method of back up birth control that every woman needs to have on hand - in her purse and in her medicine cabinet. We will not however have achieved full access until every woman - regardless of age - is able to get EC quickly, easily and affordably without a prescription. Planned Parenthood will continue to work to educate all women about EC and increase access to reproductive health care.”

“The wide availability of Emergency Contraception that we've achieved is a positive breakthrough for the women of New York City,” said **Sonia Ossorio, President of NOW-NYC**. “At a time when our reproductive rights are being seriously threatened, New York City can set the national standard for women's comprehensive reproductive healthcare. Especially now, we need to demonstrate here in New York City how offering real healthcare options improves the lives of both women and men.”

“MHRA congratulates the Council on this important study, which helps monitor women's access to a vital method of contraception,” said **Ellen L. Rautenberg, President and CEO of Medical and Health Research Association of NYC, Inc.** “The findings are consistent with our experience working with NYC pharmacies, as one of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's EC Access, Education and Outreach grantees. Through our ADVANCE EC project, MHRA will continue to educate pharmacies about access to EC with the goal of reducing enduring barriers to access for low-income, undocumented, uninsured women and teens. We look forward to working in partnership with pharmacists and the City Council to ensure that all NYC women have access to this safe and effective birth control method.”

“The compliance of NYC pharmacies with new emergency contraception regulations could prove hugely important for victims of sexual assault,” said **Harriet Lessel, Executive Director of New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault**. “The number of sexual assault victims who access emergency healthcare constitute a mere fraction of the estimated 22,000 women who are raped in NYC each year. The availability of emergency contraception over the counter in NYC drugstores has the potential to help prevent thousands more unwanted pregnancies and alleviate a tremendous amount of mental anguish for rape victims. The Alliance applauds the Council's initiatives to increase awareness and access to EC for women of all ages, and we are hopeful this information will reach the tens of thousands of women in NYC who seek emergency contraception because they are experiencing sexual violence.”

It is estimated that over three million American women have unplanned pregnancies each year, and sadly, over half of these end in abortion. The rates of unintended pregnancy and teen pregnancy in the US are among the highest in industrialized nations.

Emergency contraception is a back-up birth control method that can prevent pregnancy after unprotected intercourse, contraceptive failure or sexual assault. EC prevents pregnancy via a course of hormonal contraceptive pills taken in one- or two-dose regimens, and if used within 72 hours of unprotected intercourse, contraceptive failure or sexual assault, EC is 75-89% effective in preventing pregnancy by preventing ovulation or blocking fertilization.

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