

In the Streets

Mohammed Shirajul Islam, Vendor Canned for Bathroom Break, Speaks at Rally

By Roy Edroso, Tuesday, Feb. 23 2010 @ 11:03AM

The poor peanut vendor who [got his license yanked for taking a bathroom break](#), Mohammed Shirajul Islam of Astoria Boulevard, appeared with a few dozen advocates of the Street Vendor Project to make his case to the media today across from City Hall.

"I was feeling really bad that day," he told us before the press conference. He says he has a tumor in his colon, for which his doctor recommends emergency surgery, which he expects next week -- "Sometimes I feel faint." When he goes to the bathroom, he says, it takes a while "to get everything clear."

He's not sure if his health insurance covers the procedure.



On the day in question, about a month back, Mohammed had to go, and the vendors he knows "who sell chicken rice," who normally cover for him, "that day, I didn't see them." He was between Broadway and Nassau Street, a slightly different location than usual for him, and "over there, I don't know the bathroom at all."

He tried to get his "delivery guy" to come relieve him, but he said he was midtown and it would take 45 minutes to get downtown; Mohammed, suffering greatly, couldn't wait. He went in search of a usable toilet, finally found one and was in it about 15-20 minutes; "I come back," he says, "and I saw they took the pushcart decal."

Mohammed's license was pulled under a new Health Department ordinance, passed on January 1, that "any mobile food vending unit which is found to be unattended or which a vendor has abandoned shall be considered an imminent health hazard subject to the provisions of 89.29 of this Article" -- that is, "immediate cessation of operations."

The affected vendor is supposed to have a hearing ten days later, but Mohammed says he hasn't been to the Health Department. "I have no idea about this," he says. "So I spoke with him --" gesturing to Sean Basinski, Project Director of the Street Vendor Project, on hand for the press conference -- "he know everything about this."

He made sure to tell us that "my family love America, it's a very nice country. I love America, I am an American citizen."

What's he doing now? "Now I am doing nothing," he says. He has four children, rent and other expenses. The stress is harming all of them; his 14-year-old son "fell down" at school, he said. "The school say he is thinking too much, why is he thinking so much," said Mohammed. He attributes it to his job crisis.



Basinski took a turn at the lectern, backed by a number of street vendors (some carrying signs, including one that said HEY HEALTH DEPARTMENT, PISS OFF). He called for the Health Department to immediately reinstate Mohammed's license, and for the city to reverse the "cruel policy."

"We ask the city to make public bathrooms available for street vendors," he said, so they don't have to lose their jobs if they take a bathroom break. "It's going to lead to serious public health problems," said Basinski, "and if anybody should know this it's the Department of Health. We're getting a whole team of doctors to come out against this policy, and talk about how this is a public issue for vendors..."

He also said it was a "small-business issue," as vendors are "the smallest of small businesses... Bloomberg talks about how we need a plan for small business, we need to incentivize small businesses. Well, all these people behind me are small businesses, and this man is out of his job for a month now... let the vendors use the bathroom."