



**Written Testimony of
Southern Tier Health Care System**

**New York State Joint Legislative Public Hearing on
2015-16 Executive Health Budget
Monday, February 2nd, 2015
10:00 AM**

Chairs:
Senator Kemp Hannon
Assemblyman Richard Gottfried

Submitted by:
Donna Kahm, President and CEO, and the Board of Directors

Southern Tier Health Care System (STHCS) is a rural health-care network comprised of 14 nonprofit member agencies that provide health-care and community-based services in New York's Allegany, Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties. STHCS members include the region's four hospitals, major medical groups and safety-net providers of mental health care, substance abuse prevention and treatment and emergency care services. Our members represent the continuum of care from prenatal services to aging-in place and hospice care. Our mission is to improve the health and wellness of the rural communities we serve.

The Governor's Budget will Damage Rural Health

The Executive Health Budget threatens rural health by cutting two programs vital to rural health. The Governor's budget would cut the Rural Health Network Development and Rural Health Access programs by 15.1%. These programs provide critical support that allows rural communities to participate in health reform initiatives including the State Health Innovation Plan (SHIP), the Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) program, the Department of Health's Prevention Agenda and the Population Health Improvement Plan (PHIP).

The budget proposal also combines these two unique rural-health programs with seven unrelated Health Workforce Development initiatives. We strongly oppose bundling of the rural health programs with workforce development and respectfully ask that the Legislature return the rural health programs to their own line items and restore their 2014-15 budget amounts of \$6.4 million for Rural Health Network Development and \$9.8 million for Rural Health Care Access.

With the support of funding from the Rural Health Network Development program, we created numerous multi-stakeholder partnerships between state agencies and area hospitals, FQHCs, private practices, community members and multiple Social Service agencies. All our programs have a direct correlation with Prevention agenda, DSRIP, NYSHIP, Medicaid Redesign Team/ ACA, regional health planning and the Triple Aim Initiative's goals.

Our Southern Tier Child Advocacy Center (STCAC) uses a multidisciplinary approach to investigate cases of child physical and sexual abuse and gather evidence to convict abusers. The center has helped more than 2,000 abused children and their non-offending family members since it opened in 2007. A 2009 study by the National Children's Advocacy Center found that CACs reduce the cost of investigating child abuse by an average of \$1,000 per case when compared to traditional investigative methods. We applied for and won a grant from the US Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to develop a program to treat youth with sexual behavior problems to reduce and prevent child-on-child sexual abuse. OJJDP will then use our rural NYS pilot program as a model for the entire country. The STCAC supports the Triple Aim Initiative by improving patients' experience of care, improving population health and reducing the per-capita cost of health care. It also supports the Prevention Agenda Priority Area of promoting healthy women, infants and children.

By forming partnerships with local hospitals, we've created an innovative health initiative that works to prevent HIV and STDs, improve access to care and improve patients' experience of care. The STHCS Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (SAFE) program is a partnership with hospitals in Allegany, Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties. The program treats adult victims of sexual assault while collecting evidence to convict offenders. The New York State Department of Health has certified two of the hospitals we partnered with as SAFE Centers of Excellence and both have a rural designation.

In support of the Triple Aim Initiative and the Medicaid Redesign Team's goals of new care models and regional health planning, we formed a partnership with Universal Primary Care, a federally qualified health center (FQHC) based in Olean. We provide UPC's patients with New York Health Benefit Exchange navigation services to improve access to care. We are also actively working with UPC to promote the patient-centered medical home model and supported UPC's successful \$202,878 grant application to HRSA to expand services to Gowanda and Salamanca and continue implementing the medical home patient-care model throughout the region.

To support Triple Aim, NYSHIP and the Prevention Agenda through our Southern Tier Emergency Medical System (STEMS) program, we've made electronic health record (EHR) systems available to all 92 EMS agencies in our three counties. EHRs can help providers make efficient, effective decisions about patient care which is extremely important in a rural community. This EHR system offers improved analysis and communication of patient information along with built-in safeguards against potential adverse events. We have seen an increase in this safe, effective, patient centered, timely and efficient way to provide emergency care in our rural areas of New York.

These are just a few of the programs we've created with funding from the Charles D Cook Office of Rural Health. We have improved access to care, integrated care, promoted population health, integrated health information technology, integrated care to improve patient satisfaction and assisted rural health care providers in extending and maintaining services in rural communities. Using STHCS as a catalyst for innovation and change, our member agencies and community partners continue to improve the health of the people we serve, increase the quality of care and reduce costs.

We respectfully implore you to unbundle Rural Health Network Development and Rural Health Access from Health Workforce Development and restore level funding for these programs. These programs have proven their value over the years in enhancing rural health and wellness across New York.

If you would like more information about STHCS or would like to further discuss this testimony, please contact STHCS CEO and President Donna Kahm at (716) 372-0614 or via email at dkahm@sthcs.org.

Thank you for your time and consideration.