



Testimony

**Joint Legislative Public Hearing
2019-2020 Budget
Health/Medicaid**

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Leadership for the New York State AHEC System is provided by community-based centers, the Statewide Office at the University at Buffalo and regional offices at Upstate Medical University, Albany Medical College and The Institute for Family Health.

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My name is Leishia Smallwood. I am the Director of the New York State Area Health Education Center System, commonly referred to as AHEC.

Thank you for your continued support of the New York State Area Health Education Center (NYS AHEC) System, a dedicated healthcare workforce development initiative with the primary mission of improving and enhancing access to diverse and qualified healthcare professionals, particularly from medically disadvantaged communities. Serving the entirety of the state, the NYS AHEC System is comprised of nine local centers, three regional offices, and one statewide office. Since its inception in 1998, your support of the NYS AHEC System has helped:

- 250,000 students (K-12 and College) receive healthcare career exposure through our pipeline programs
- 37,000 health professions students receive over 3.85 million hours of education and clinical training
- 235,000 healthcare professionals participate in continuing education programs
- 1.25+ million patients received care from students in AHEC programs

While we are grateful for your continued support of level funding in the amount of **\$1,662,000** for **FY19-20**, the **prior year's 20% reduction in state funding created significant challenges for the NYS AHEC System**. We made painful cuts by eliminating programs and available resources at the local, regional and statewide levels. As a result, we served fewer members of *your* community – fewer students and job seekers were a part of the AHEC “grow our own” strategy, less clinical rotations were coordinated in underserved areas limiting recruitment opportunities, and education and training opportunities for current health professionals were reduced.

The 2019-2020 State Budget currently proposes level funding for the NYS AHEC System at \$1.6 Million, but fails to provide restorative funding to replace our 20% reduction in state funding since prior years funding allocation of 2.2 million. The 20% funding reduction equates to approximately \$515,000 each year since prior year cuts, with a cumulative funding loss of \$1,030,000 for the NYS AHEC System, for the services and expenses falling under the healthcare workforce category, of which NYS AHEC is included.

Restoration of the **\$2.2 Million** in level funding for the NYS AHEC System in the **FY 2019-2020** state budget will allow for the following:

- Increased programming opportunities in already-limited rural and underserved areas
- Increase in patients receiving quality care and services provided by AHEC Students
- Expand vital connections for pipeline students to post-secondary healthcare education programs across the state
- Significantly support federal funding, as matching funds from the state are required for continued federal dollars

I am sincerely excited and relieved that programming to provide education and training initiatives in the medically underserved and underrepresented communities, of which the NYS AHEC System is structured to provide, will continue to be supported; however, the uncertain stability and viability of the NYS AHEC System due to previous funding reductions is extremely concerning, as fewer students and current healthcare professionals were serviced as a result of the reduced funding. Therefore, I am humbly seeking the support of the Assembly and Senate to restore reduced funding back to the NYS AHEC System in the amount of **\$2.2 Million** in state funding. State funds not only help our nine centers, three regional offices and the Statewide Office recruit and help train the next generation of health professionals to work in underserved rural and urban communities, but state funds also serve as the required match to our federal funding. State funding is an excellent return on investment – our funding consists of approximately one-third State dollars, one-third federal funds and one-third Grants/Other.

While we are grateful for level funding, it would be incorrect to tell you that we have enough funding to reverse New York's shortage of primary care providers. Since 2008, state funding to the NYS AHEC System has decreased by 17% while at the same time inflation has risen by roughly 15%. We realize that the budget process is a tough time when legislators choose priorities from a state full of worthy programs. We believe expanding efforts to “Grow Our Own” professionals to provide

critical health services – professionals like doctors, nurse practitioners and nurses, physician assistants, social workers, dentists and pharmacists – is worthy of additional investment. “Grow Our Own” programs for secondary and post-secondary students are a long-term solution to primary care shortages and increase the diversity of the healthcare sector in New York State.

We are all aware that there is a transformation underway in New York and across the country in the way we expect the health system to deliver patient-centered care with increased efficiency. There is no way to accomplish the goals of DSRIP - Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment Program; PHIP – Population Health Improvement Program and SHIP – State Health Innovation Plan without an adequate supply of well-trained medical and allied health professionals. The workforce is the most important part of the healthcare infrastructure and it needs adequate investment.

The New York State AHEC System is deeply involved in all of the Department of Health initiatives mentioned above and is a consistent voice emphasizing that these programs must include recruiting and training of future health professionals who will carry on health system transformation. As neutral brokers with more than fifteen years of health workforce development, AHECs work with students at all age levels and convene community-based collaborations with health professions schools and health institutions to improve access to care.

Last year, the New York State AHEC System continued our impressive outreach to students and professionals statewide through partnerships between the health workforce supply side (secondary schools and post-secondary academic institutions) and demand side (healthcare employers and communities):

- Roughly 1,300 elementary and middle school students, nearly 5,600 high school students and approximately 3,000 college students participated in health careers programs.
- Over 700 rotations were completed by medical, nursing and health professions students with over 250 preceptors/faculty at AHEC-sponsored community-based sites (e.g., community health centers, hospitals, clinics and private practices) with an emphasis on underserved communities. Faculty were provided professional development opportunities to improve teaching skills.
- Nearly 45,000 health professionals received continuing education training via 190 work-shops, seminars, conferences and distance learning programs/series. Retraining initiatives provided health professions training for adult career-changers, displaced and re-entry workers.

In addition to these numbers, our short-term, intermediate and long-term successes are described our 2017-18 Annual Report, included within your packet. By tracking students into college and beyond to a health career, we have evidence that demonstrates AHEC programs make a difference.

The best way to understand the true impact of AHEC is to talk to our students and hear firsthand how AHEC changed their lives by providing support, mentorship and hands-on experiences that led to or is leading to a health career and a focus on underserved populations. I would be happy to set up an opportunity for you to talk with AHEC participants back in your districts.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about the New York State Area Health Education Center System (AHEC) and thank you for your continued support.

