



Testimony

Joint Legislative Public Hearing 2020-2021 Budget Health/Medicaid

January 29, 2020

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Director, NYS Area Health Education Center (AHEC) System

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, Director of the New York State Area Health Education Center System.

I would like to 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.

AHECs are embedded in the communities they serve, positioning them to respond rapidly to emergent training needs of health professionals, health professions students, and interprofessional teams on issues associated with cultural competency, health literacy, health disparities and substance use disorders. Since its inception in 1998, the NYS AHEC System has helped:

- 260,000 students (K-12 and College) receive healthcare career exposure through our pipeline programs
- 38,000 health professions students receive over 3.65 million hours of education and clinical training
- 300,000 healthcare professionals participate in continuing education programs

Currently, the NYS AHEC System was not included in the Governor's Proposed Budget for *FY 2020-2021*. This drastic funding elimination would be detrimental to the NYS AHEC System's ability to support underserved populations across the state. Moreover, the NYS AHEC System relies on state funds to match federal funding. Without state support, federal funding would be significantly jeopardized. As a result, programs would immediately cease, jobs would be lost, and areas with already limited healthcare workforce assistance would go unserved.

Specifically, the loss of state funding would result in years of lost investment, and reduce the state's ability to diversify the healthcare workforce, which is a primary resource to addressing the many health disparities that plague the underserved areas throughout NYS. With healthcare jobs expected to grow by nearly 20% within the next decade, the NYS AHEC System is vital to reducing the healthcare workforce shortages affecting the state.

We urge you to lend your support for the NYS AHEC System by assisting efforts that secure line item funding in the amount of **\$1,662,000** and look to restore previous budget cuts to enhance necessary programs, increase economic viability, and help mitigate the current health professional shortage. While we are grateful for your continued support of level funding in the amount of **\$1,662,000** for *FY20-21*, please note that the ***last 3 years' 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 health professionals were reduced. ***The 20% funding reduction equates to approximately \$515,000 each year since 2017, with a cumulative funding loss of \$1,545,000 for the NYS AHEC System, for the services and expenses falling under the healthcare workforce category, of which NYS AHEC is included.***

Inclusion of the NYS AHEC System in the proposed budget for **\$1,662,000**, with the consideration for restorative level funding in the amount of **\$2.2 Million** in the *FY 2020-2021* state budget will allow for the following:

- Increased programming opportunities in already-limited rural and underserved areas
- Increase the number of 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

It is extremely vital 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 the elimination of our program from the Governors proposed *FY 20-21* budget, along with 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 include line item funding in the amount of **1,662,000** back in the Governors *FY 20-21* budget for the NYS AHEC System, along with seeking the effort to restore our previous level funding back to **\$2.2 Million**. State funds not only help our nine centers, three regional offices and the Statewide Office recruit and train the next generation of health professionals to work in underserved rural and urban communities, these monies 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 roughly 30% while at the same time inflation has risen by approximately 20%. 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, 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 health care 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 2.0 - 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 health care 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 twenty years of health workforce development, AHECs work with students at the 7th & 8th grade Middle School, High School and College 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 (health care employers and communities).

- Roughly 1,000 elementary/middle school students, nearly 7,000 high school students and approximately 2,400 college students participated in health careers programs.
- Over 900 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 70,000 health professionals received continuing education training via 150 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 2018-19 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.

From pipeline to practice, AHEC is the Answer! Connecting students to careers, professionals to communities, and communities to better health.

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.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Leishia Smallwood". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Leishia Smallwood
Director, NYS AHEC System