

Testimony of the Alliance of New York State YMCAs
Presented to the NYS Joint Budget Committee on Health
January 29, 2020

On behalf of the Alliance of New York State YMCAs, we thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony and respond to the Executive Budget proposal by presenting our budget recommendations.

In your discussions and negotiations over the next few weeks, we ask you to consider the following additions to the Executive's proposals.

Please continue to implement and expand the Y's evidence-based Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) Standards in youth programming to combat childhood obesity - \$500,000. One in every three children in New York State is considered obese or overweight. In response to the rising epidemic, the YMCA implements the HEPA Standards into youth programs to teach children how to make healthy choices that will contribute to their overall social and physical development. The HEPA Standards act as a guide to implementing healthy eating and physical activity habits within Y programs concerning beverages, family engagement, food, screen time, infant feeding and physical activity.

The Alliance of New York State YMCAs is very appreciative of the funding received from the NYS Legislature since 2015. It has enabled 90% of YMCAs to adopt the HEPA Standards, impacting more than 100,000 children and teens in programs such as early childcare, after-school, and summer camp. In last year's enacted budget, the New York State YMCA Foundation received \$400,000. Increasing funding to \$500,000 would allow the Y to expand this initiative to more youth programming sites, while providing a foundation for a healthier future for children and families statewide.

In addition to the resources that the public dollars support at local Ys, it also enables us to partner with key public health partners, like the University at Albany School of Public Health, to continue to find ways to fully integrate the HEPA Standards and build healthy, inclusive spaces for all.

In the United States, 1 in 5 people who die from drowning are children 14 and younger. Factors such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and race all play a role in a child's risk of drowning. Despite these tragic statistics, drowning prevention efforts often receive little attention and few resources. The YMCA is committed to preventing youth drownings in communities across

New York where children are most at risk. We are requesting \$500,000 to expand the Y's Safety Around Water Program, an evidence-based water safety program for children of all ages and backgrounds to learn life-saving water skills that prevent drowning.

As "America's Swim Instructor," the YMCA teaches one million children to swim each year in the United States. Allocating \$500,000 towards the Y's Safety Around Water Program will expand our capacity to serve more children and teach water safety and swimming skills that reduce the risk of drowning and build confidence in and around water.

Teaching children how to be safe around water is not a luxury; it is a necessity. The YMCA is committed to bridging cultural and accessibility gaps that prevent children from learning vital water safety skills and reducing water-related injuries.

Furthermore, Ys are seeking \$1 million to support civic engagement programs, like Youth and Government, that teach middle and high school teens the principles of democratic government.

The Y's suite of civic engagement programs is delivered through partnering YMCAs and local schools districts across New York State, having served 5,000 students over the past 10 years. We now engage over 550 high school youth and 325 middle school youth each year from across the state in experiential learning programs that build, strengthen and encourage life assets and positive character traits.

With an appropriation of \$1 million, the Ys seek to expand civic engagement programs to more under-represented and under-resourced communities throughout New York. Together, we can help youth transition and succeed as servant leaders in society.

Lastly, the YMCA is the largest provider of afterschool programs in the state, and as such we are deeply concerned about the serious under funding of New York's after school system. High quality childcare is prohibitively expensive for nearly all low- and middle-income families. Another year of underinvestment in childcare will not only leave thousands of New York's working families scrambling to find quality, affordable childcare, but it will also jeopardize the very survival of the state's childcare infrastructure.

Remember, afterschool and summer programs provide a vital service in all of our communities. Data shows that:

- they keep kids safe after the traditional school day and school year end

- afterschool and summer programs support working families. A NYC study showed that 73% parents missed less work because of afterschool programs.
- afterschool and summer programs lead to academic success. Regular attendance in a high-quality afterschool program is linked to higher scores on standardized tests.

As a result, Y's recommend continued and additional investments in:

- Advantage Afterschool programs
- Empire State Afterschool programs
- Extended School Day/School Violence Prevention (ESD/SVP) program
- Childcare subsidies

The lack of funding as proposed in the Executive Budget for these programs will be a setback and detrimental to the afterschool programs, staff, students, and families who participate in these programs.

The Alliance of New York State YMCAs appreciates the support of the NYS Legislature and looks forward to continuing to act as a partner in pursuing healthy eating and physical activity, water safety, civic engagement and high-quality afterschool programming. Together we can build upon our past progress and build strong healthy communities.

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