



Testimony of:

Jo Wiederhorn,  President & CEO

Associated Medical Schools of New York (AMSNY)

At a Joint Budget Hearing of

The New York State Assembly/Senate Committees on Health

&

The New York State Senate Committee on Finance &

The New York State Assembly Committee on Ways and Means

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Good afternoon Chairwomen Kruger and Weinstein, Chairmen Rivera and Gottfried and other distinguished members of the State Legislature. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on the Executive proposed budget for fiscal year 2021-2022.

My name is Jo Wiederhorn, President & CEO of the Associated Medical Schools of New York (AMSNY), a consortium of the seventeen public and private medical schools in New York State. AMSNY works in partnership with its members to promote high quality and cost-efficient health care by assuring that New York State's medical schools provide outstanding medical education, patient care and biomedical research.

AMSNY, like many of the organizations coming before you today, is facing dramatic cuts in our funding due to the impact of COVID-19. And yet, because our mission is focused on training a diverse physician workforce and supporting innovative research to find the root causes of many diseases, now is absolutely the wrong time to cut our funding.

The Need for a More Diverse Physician Workforce

COVID-19 has ravaged Black and Brown communities throughout New York State. Older people, poorer people, men, and African-American and Latino New Yorkers, have been diagnosed, hospitalized, and died at much higher rates than other groups

Thirteen percent of the deaths in New York State—not including New York City—have been Black/African American individuals—although they comprise only 9% of the population. In New York City, the figures are even more discrepant: Black/African Americans totaled 28% of the deaths, whereas they are only 22% of the population.

Hispanics fair no better: In NYS (not including NYC), they comprise 10% of the deaths and 12% of the populations. However, in New York City Hispanics have been 34% of the deaths and only 29% of the population.

In addition, it is commonly known that individuals with underlying co-morbidities are more likely to die if they develop COVID-19. In New York State, the top 3 co-morbidities for COVID-19 are hypertension, diabetes and hyperlipidemia (associated with obesity). In the Bronx, the county with the highest fatality rate from COVID-19, hypertension, diabetes and obesity are 2.5x-8x more prevalent than in lower Manhattan (Diana Hernandez, PhD, presentation February 11, 2021).

Increasing the diversity of the physician workforce is one means to tackle the acute disparities mentioned above. There have been many studies that have shown that a diverse workforce will improve the nation's health disparities and as such, the nation's health (Jackson, 2014). Other studies demonstrate that physicians from racial or ethnic backgrounds underrepresented in medicine are more likely to practice primary care and practice in underserved areas while treating a larger number of minority patients...Furthermore, when given a choice, racial and ethnic minority patients are more likely to select physicians who share their racial/ethnic background and report greater satisfaction with reports of receiving higher quality care (Kington, 2001).

AMSNY strongly believes in the importance of a multi-faceted strategy to meet the growing demand for primary care and specialty physicians, while simultaneously tackling the current need to decrease access issues in underserved areas. AMSNY's Diversity in Medicine programs, in large part funded through the NYS Department of Health, was developed with these two visions in mind.

AMSNY's Diversity in Medicine Program

While underrepresented¹ in medicine populations (URIM) make up 36% of the New York State population, they account for approximately 17% of the State's medical students and approximately 12% of New York State's practicing physicians.

Since 1985, AMSNY has supported an array of pipeline programs across the state with the intent of expanding the pool of students choosing careers in health and medicine. The goal of these programs is to provide academic enrichment and support to students from educationally and/or economically underserved backgrounds. These programs provide an opportunity that a majority of participants would not have had due to cultural and financial barriers.

Diversity in Medicine Program Threatened

The New York State Senate and Assembly have been very supportive of these programs. When necessary, the Legislature decoupled the Executive's Workforce Pools and provided a line item allocation for the programs. When possible, the Legislature restored the cuts that have been in the Executive Budget, and in 2018 the Legislature provided scholarship funds for 10 students who have successfully completed one of AMSNY's other programs. However, due to COVID-19 the viability of the Diversity in Medicine program is in question.

Core Diversity Programs

AMSNY oversees six core programs as part of its *Diversity in Medicine* grant that ultimately leads students into medical school, including a post baccalaureate program at the Jacobs School of

¹ "Underrepresented in medicine means those racial and ethnic populations that are underrepresented in the medical profession relative to their numbers in the general population." AAMC's Executive Council, June 2003

Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, University at Buffalo; and three Masters degree post baccalaureate programs at SUNY Upstate, the Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University and New York Medical College. These programs are unique: Students must apply to a New York State medical school and be interviewed by the schools' admissions' committees. If the admissions' committees believe the student would be a good addition to the school, they will recommend him/her to one of the four post bac programs. If, upon completion of the post baccalaureate program, the student meets the program and the referring school's requirements, he/she will automatically be accepted into the referring medical school. As you will see in the attachment, 93% of students that participate in AMSNY's UB post baccalaureate program enter medical school, and 85% graduate. 94% of the students in our Master's degree post baccalaureate programs enter medical school.

The other core programs are offered along the educational continuum: support of an academic learning center at CUNY College of Medicine (CUNY)-- a seven-year BS/MD program that students enter directly from high school; and a program at the City College of New York that links junior and senior baccalaureate students with NIH-funded researchers to prepare them for careers in medical school or the basic sciences.

Attached to this testimony are charts/graphs that demonstrate the success of our programs.

State Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Funding

The Executive budget that has been proposed for SFY 2021-2022 reduces funding for our core programs by 20%. The funds provided by the state support students who receive monthly stipends so they do not have to work. The funds also support programmatic costs such as mentoring, academic learning, tutoring etc. With a 20% cut in funding we will have to decrease the number of students in the program and perhaps eliminate one program due to our inability to provide enough support for the mentoring, tutoring components of the programs etc, that contribute to the success of the students.

Now is absolutely not the time to reduce funding to a program that expands the number of underrepresented students who successfully enter and complete medical school. We understand these are very tight fiscal times, but the return on the investment will be seen many times over by better healthcare outcomes throughout the State.

For FY 2021-2022, we are requesting \$1.2 million for these programs.

DOH Scholarship in Medicine Program

Paying for medical school is a daunting challenge. A majority of medical school graduates complete their education with the assistance of student loan financing.]The median level of principal debt for students graduating in 2020 was \$191,000. If one were to add in accrued interest, the median student debt level is over \$220,000

In SFY 2017-2018, AMSNY received a \$500,000 investment from the State to start a Diversity in Medicine scholarship program to help address the gap in physician diversity. The scholarship— indexed to the average cost of SUNY medical school tuition— helps students from backgrounds underrepresented in medicine by eliminating the financial barrier to medical school enrollment.

Since 2017 AMSNY has awarded 10 scholarships annually to students who have completed one of the Diversity in Medicine post-baccalaureate programs. Students In return, the scholarship awardees commit to working for at least two years in an underserved area in New York. The program, which is patterned after the National Health Service Corp, is very competitive. There are always more students applying for the positions than number of slots. For the SFY 2020-2021 over 25 students applied for 10 positions. Scholarship students are entering all fields of medicine: Primary Care, Internal Medicine, Emergency Medicine, Anesthesiology, Urology to name a few. These students are highly committed to practicing in underserved areas of New York State...areas where all of these specialties are needed.

The Diversity in Medicine Scholarship Program is a legislative add-on. As such, we ask that you continue to fund this important program. It is very well received by the students and will continue to provide physicians within the specialties and localities where they are most needed.

We urge the legislature to provide \$500,000 in order to maintain our current number of scholarship students.

Other DOH Programs

New York State Stem Cell Program (NYSTEM)

AMSNY is deeply concerned about the proposed termination of the New York State Stem Cell Science (NYSTEM) program in this year's executive budget proposal. NYSTEM was established to position New York State as a global leader in stem cell research by driving new therapies for New Yorkers and spurring growth in our life sciences sector. It has funded significant and groundbreaking discoveries throughout New York State.

Since the start of the program NYSTEM has funded \$393 million in stem cell research, training, infrastructure and education at dozens of institutions in New York State. However, even though the Legislature has appropriated \$44.8 million/year for the program nearly half of the funds

appropriated have remained unspent due to the failure of the Executive Branch to consistently issue Requests for Applications (RFAs) for the purpose of awarding grants over the past five years.

NYSTEM-funded researchers have developed promising new clinical therapies for diseases that disproportionately impact communities of color and the economically disadvantaged in New York. Many of the researchers who have been studying these diseases have been able to take their work and pivot towards putting this basic knowledge towards treating COVID-19. Unfortunately, now, without funding, projects with years of research behind them have no future. Entire lines of research are threatened

Presently, dozens of applications in response to an RFA released by NYSDOH in January 2020 are waiting to be reviewed and awarded funding. If New York State terminates the program awards will never be made. These applications required hundreds of hours of preparation by the researchers. To have those applications simply discarded by NYSDOH is unconscionable and, most importantly, prevents promising research seeking progress on such diseases as Alzheimer's, diabetes, glioblastoma and colorectal cancer.

NYSTEM is also a program that creates jobs, boosts the life sciences sector and makes a substantial contribution to the medical research workforce in New York State. It is a vital source of funding for laboratories in New York. NYSTEM funding has helped leverage funding from other sources, including the National Institutes of Health and venture capital funding, in ways that no other program has been able to.

Research funded by the NYSTEM program has had many accomplishments since the program was launched. Though NYSDOH has chosen not to issue RFAs and award program funding at the levels appropriated in the state budget, the accomplishments are substantial and would rapidly expand with a renewed commitment to the program. The health and economic impacts of New York State's investment in stem cell research are clear and progress in these areas will be exponentially more important as the state attempts to emerge from the most devastating public health emergency in a century.

In conclusion, we ask you and your colleagues in New York State government to consider the following questions related to NYSTEM as you proceed with forming a budget for the upcoming fiscal year:

- Should New York State terminate its flagship extramural medical research program during the most challenging pandemic in a century at a time when medical research is arguably more important than it has been in generations?
- Should New York State stop the progress that stem cell research has made towards developing clinical therapies for diseases that impact the most economically

disadvantaged of our population when treating these diseases will prove even more difficult in survivors of COVID-19?

- Should New York State cut off a proven source of scientific innovation that is bringing hundreds of millions of dollars in federal research and private venture capital life sciences investment to New York State at the same time it seeks to expand the life sciences sector as a strategy for economic recovery post-COVID?
- Should New York State seek to end a program that trains the scientific workforce and has generated hundreds of jobs at a time when we begin to pursue the economic and public health recovery from the pandemic?

We believe the answer to these questions is “no” but, at the very least, we think it’s essential for you and your colleagues in New York State government to discuss them.

Again, we applaud the Legislature and the Governor for having invested in this initiative by consistently appropriating \$44.8 million annually for this program since 2007, and

we urge the legislature to provide full funding for the New York State Stem Cell Program (NYSTEM) at \$44.8 million in FY 2021-2022. In addition, we urge the State to maintain its commitment to fully funding the remainder of the \$600 million program.

Closing

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your continued support of medical education. I welcome any questions you may have.

Respectively Submitted:

Jo Wiederhorn

The Associated Medical Schools of New York (AMSNY) is the consortium of the sixteen public and private medical schools in the state. The organization’s mission is to promote high quality and cost-efficient health care by ensuring that the NYS medical schools can provide outstanding medical education, care and research.

AMSNY Member Institutions

- Albany Medical College
- Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University
- CUNY School of Medicine
- Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians & Surgeons
- Icahn School of Medicine at Mt. Sinai Medical Center
- Jacobs School of Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, University at Buffalo, SUNY
- New York Institute of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine

- New York Medical College
- New York University School of Medicine
- SUNY Downstate Medical Center
- SUNY Upstate Medical University
- Stony Brook University School of Medicine
- Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine
- University of Rochester School of Medicine & Dentistry
- Weill Cornell Medicine
- Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell

These are essential considerations as New York State attempts to recover economically from the COVID-19 pandemic