



**New York State Association for Rural Health
2022-2023 Executive Budget Testimony
Joint Health Committee Hearings
February 8, 2022**

TO:

**Senator Gustavo Rivera, Chair, Health Committee
Senator Liz Krueger, Chair, Finance Committee
Senator Samra Brouk, Chair, Mental Health Committee
Senator Pete Harckham, Chair, Committee on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse
Senator Roxanne J. Persaud, Chair, Social Services Committee
Senator Rachel May, Chair, Committee on Aging & Commission on Rural Resources
Senator Diane Savino, Chair, Committee on Internet and Technology**

**Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried, Chair, Health Committee
Assembly Member Helene Weinstein, Chair, Ways and Means Committee
Assembly Member Aileen M. Gunther, Chair, Mental Health Committee
Assembly Member Linda Rosenthal, Chair, Committee on Social Services
Assembly Member Harry Bronson, Chair, Committee on Economic Development
Assembly Member Ron Kim, Chair, Committee on Aging
Assembly Member Carrie Woerner, Chair, Committee on Career Education
Assembly Member Angelo Santabarbara, Chair, Commission on Rural Resources**

The New York State Association for Rural Health (NYSARH) appreciates the opportunity to present testimony to the Joint Committees on the Governor's proposed 2022-2023 NYS Budget. Our testimony recognizes the areas where the Governor has made significant positive investments in the infrastructure and programs that promote and support rural health. We also identify those program cuts and policy initiatives that place the health and economies of rural communities at risk. Programs we reference are primarily administered by the NYS Department of Health.

We urge the New York State Senate and Assembly to protect these critical programs that provide major positive impacts in New York State's rural communities.

The New York State Association for Rural Health strongly supports the following Rural Health Programs and funding levels:

- **Rural Health Network Development & Rural Health Care Access Development** **RESTORE \$6,240,000 \$9,410,000 to \$16,200,000**
There are Rural Health Networks throughout the State, each with a mission and partner organizations carefully crafted to meet the unique needs of their communities. Rural Health Networks are essential to improving public health and linking rural communities to regional and statewide initiatives such as the NYS Prevention Agenda and NYS Health

Innovation Plan. Rural Health Care Access Hospitals are small rural hospitals. Funds may be used flexibly for capital, equipment, software, recruitment and/or community outreach. This funding is especially relevant given the increased need caused by the pandemic. Funding for Rural Health Networks and Rural Health Care Access Hospitals has been reduced by 42% since 2017. The pandemic has increased the need and exposed limitations of the rural health networks and rural hospitals. Funding restoration will help support resilience for future health emergencies and reduce overall health spending through preventative healthcare and wellness programs.

- **Area Health Education Centers** **RESTORE \$2,200,000**
\$0 to \$2,200,000

Area Health Education Centers are committed to expanding the health care workforce, while maximizing diversity and facilitating distribution, especially in rural and underserved communities. Area Health Education Centers also offer creative, firsthand and innovative health career curricula for high school and college students as well as continuing education for professionals. Elimination of State funding will result in a corresponding reduction in Federal funding, severely impairing the ability of these organizations to meet critical needs for Workforce Development.

- **Increase the Medicaid Rate for Ambulance/EMT Services** **ADD \$31,410,926**
This is the 2017 estimate

The Department of Health's own rate adequacy study in 2017 found that Medicaid pays less than the actual cost of providing ambulance and EMT services. It is time for NYS to increase Medicaid rates to equal the Medicare reimbursement rate.
S8189, S1580A, A231

- **Increase the Volunteer Tax Credit for EMTs**
Increase property and income tax credits for ambulance/EMT volunteers as an incentive for volunteers to practice regularly.

- **Increase Article 6 Public Health Funding**
NYSARH appreciates the increase in Article 6 funding in the Executive Budget. Please ensure that these funds are sufficient to address the increased need to address screening for lead as well as pathology and toxicology services.

- **Promote Healthcare Workforce Recruitment, Training & Retention Programs**
NYSARH appreciates the Governor's recognition of the crisis in the Healthcare Workforce and supports the cost-of-living and retention bonus plan outlined in the Executive Budget. We urge the Legislature to agree to create Nurses Across New York, and to fully fund the other workforce support programs such as Diversity in Medicine and Rural Residency.

The New York State Association for Rural Health strongly supports the following Policy Initiatives that Support the Health of Rural Communities :

- Rural Health Council**
 NYS approved the Rural Health Council in December 2017, but it has never been empaneled. We urge the Speaker and Temporary President of the Senate to nominate members to serve on this Council.
- Rural Emergency Services Task Force**
 NYSARH appreciates the creation of a Task Force to study the unique challenges of rural EMS. We urge the Governor and Legislature to appoint members to this Task Force.
- Repeal the 340B Pharmacy Benefit Carve-Out**
 The Pharmacy Carve-Out MRT II initiative was designed to move the pharmacy benefit for over 5 million Medicaid managed care members back to fee-for-service. Repealing the carveout will return these critical 340B funds to under-resourced healthcare providers serving our most vulnerable residents.
- Expand Rural Broadband & Telehealth**
 NYSARH appreciates the inclusion of funding to expand Broadband service in the Executive Budget. We ask the Legislature to ensure that there is payment parity for audio-visual and audio-only telehealth visits under the Medicaid program.
- Implement the 5.4% cost-of-living increases for Human Services**
 NYSARH appreciates the inclusion of the 5.4% COLA in the Executive Budget.
- Develop the 9-8-8 Behavioral Health Crisis Response Line**
 NYSARH appreciates the inclusion of the 9-8-8 service in the Executive Budget.
- Build more Accessible, Affordable and Supportive Housing**
 NYSARH appreciates the Housing Initiatives in the Executive Budget.
- Support Aging and Disability Services**
 Medicaid is the primary funder for long-term care services. It is essential that the state Medicaid rate methodology increase funding for wages for nursing home, home health and disability service workers. These services, both residential and community-based, have been especially hard hit by the COVID Pandemic.

The NYS Association for Rural Health was founded in 2001 as a not-for-profit, non-partisan, grassroots organization working to preserve and improve the health of the residents of rural New York State. NYSARH members include rural hospitals, rural health networks, federally qualified health centers, health education centers, county public health departments, behavioral health providers, emergency medical service providers, long-term care organizations, businesses, universities, students, as well as individual rural health professionals.

**For further information or follow-up please contact
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