



Oral Testimony Presented by
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to the

Senate Finance Committee
and the Assembly Ways & Means Committee

Regarding economic development provisions included in the FY 2026
Executive Budget

February 26, 2025

Good afternoon, Chairpersons Krueger and Pretlow, my name is Dr. Richard Terry, and I am the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs of the Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine (LECOM) at Elmira. I would like to take this time to ask for your support in helping LECOM continue to address the critical healthcare workforce shortage crisis in New York State by **providing \$250,000 in the final budget to establish a new Center of Excellence for Rural Health and Underserved Areas at LECOM Elmira.**

LECOM was founded in Erie, Pennsylvania in 1992 and we are currently the largest medical school in the United States. We have consistently achieved high rankings on U.S. News and World Report lists including lowest tuition among private medical colleges, most financial aid, and most graduates practicing in primary care.

LECOM's introduction to the Elmira community and New York State came in 2012 when the college began sending its third- and fourth-year medical students to Arnot Health and other Southern Tier hospitals for clinical education. Those affiliations opened the door for LECOM's further expansion into the region, including the opportunity to establish a LECOM medical campus adjacent to Elmira College. In September 2018, the Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation (COCA) approved LECOM's application to expand its Doctor of Osteopathic

Medicine program to Elmira. *LECOM at Elmira is the first and only medical school in the Southern Tier of NYS.* The first Elmira-based medical students started in July 2020. Historically, medical school graduates often continue their post-graduate training within the same area in which they attended medical school. Should that trend continue, the Southern Tier and western New York will see an influx of health-care practitioners in the coming decades, ensuring highly trained physicians will fill a void for the region's medically underserved residents. The inaugural class at Elmira will be graduating this year.

LECOM supports and sustains 106 jobs in New York (95 in Chemung County). This total employment includes 48 direct jobs added to the state because of the operations of LECOM at Elmira Campus and 55 additional jobs indirectly.

The total economic impact of LECOM in the state of New York in 2022 was \$26.2 million. This business volume includes the direct operational effects of \$14.6 million and the indirect impact of \$11.6 million. As the campus continues to grow, the effect on the state of New York will also increase.

Items that set LECOM apart from other medical schools I would like to highlight include:

- LECOM is among the most affordable non-for-profit private medical schools in the country. In addition to offering record low tuition, LECOM provides millions of dollars annually to students through scholarships and awards.
- LECOM produces more primary care physicians than any other U.S. medical school, with approximately 70% of students entering primary care residences upon graduation. LECOM graduates help to combat the nation's growing need for primary care physicians by becoming physicians who practice family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, or obstetrics/gynecology.
- LECOM prioritizing finding best-fit candidates by offering an early acceptance program that allows for facilitated admission with an MCAT exemption for students with a high SAT/ACT and a high college grade point average. In this program, we grant provisional early acceptance to qualified applicants through select colleges and universities.

Since its founding, LECOM has graduated more than 9,000 doctors, 4,000 pharmacists, and over 800 dentists. We pride ourselves on adding to the critical healthcare workforce, especially when it comes to rural and underserved areas. As such, LECOM is well positioned to continue to help New York address the critical healthcare workforce shortage crisis we are facing, and that is expected to continue to grow in the upcoming years.

PROPOSAL

The establishment of a Center of Excellence for Rural Health and Underserved Areas at LECOM would significantly benefit the residents of New York State by fostering collaboration between the academic research to contribute to the advancement of healthcare in rural and underserved areas statewide. The center would serve as a hub for students, researchers and healthcare professionals to collaborate, conduct research, and develop innovative solutions to improve the health outcomes of rural and underserved communities.

LECOM's long history of investment in communities underserved by physicians and medical professionals presents the organization as a perfect candidate for this program. LECOM's unique approach includes an innovative Early Acceptance Program, problem-based learning curriculum, and early clinical exposure, all of which has led to decades of data and outcomes addressing healthcare shortages in areas across the country. LECOM's multiple programs across the healthcare disciplines, and campus locations across three different states accentuate the depth of offerings and profound reach that LECOM has established to stem physician shortages. LECOM has distinguished itself solidly at the top of diversity rankings for markedly advancing minority doctoral degrees.

Through the Center of Excellence, LECOM will identify specific healthcare workforce shortages in the Southern Tier, recruit best-fit candidates through our Early Acceptance Program and admissions process, utilize and expand our successful academic model and early clinical exposure to successfully graduate students, and finalize the pipeline by placing graduates in shortage areas within the Southern Tier. LECOM will have a team of dedicated faculty and staff who will work with prospective and current students pursuing careers in healthcare by offering wrap around services and support with the goal of increasing the number of healthcare professionals in the Southern Tier.

LECOM will develop residencies and clinical rotations in rural and underserved settings, focusing on collaborations with local hospitals and federally qualified health centers to provide training, increasing the likelihood that graduates practice in the Southern Tier, helping to improve the identified healthcare shortages in the region.

Additional components of the Center would build off years of experience and success of LECOM and will include:

- Recruitment
 - Developing a targeted rural health initiative starting at the middle school level through high school by orienting students in rural and underserved areas towards a medical career.
 - Helping recruitment of these students to LECOM at Elmira, expanding the successful early acceptance programs.
- Education/Training
 - Once at LECOM, providing a structured rural health curriculum, including training for rural and underserved settings while students obtain a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine Degree.
 - LECOM will also provide financial assistance to limit student debt load.
- Placement
 - Encouraging residencies and clinical rotations in rural and underserved settings, focusing on collaboration with local hospitals and federally qualified health centers to provide training in rural health delivery.
 - Helping assist in job placement and retention efforts.

LECOM is requesting \$250,000 in the final FY 2026 to begin the development of important curriculum, staffing needs, and ramping up recruitment efforts and we need your support in securing this critical funding.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. LECOM would love the opportunity to continue to educate successful medical students in New York and expand our experience to help thousands of communities across the state. I am happy to answer any questions you have and would offer LECOM as a resource as you continue the dialogue as to how to best address the healthcare workforce shortage in NYS.

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