

NYS Senate and Assembly Finance, Ways & Means, and Health Committees
Legislative Office Building
181 State Street
Albany, NY, 12247

February 3, 2026

RE: Joint Legislative Budget Hearing: Health and Medicaid

Dear Honorable Chairs and Members of the Senate and Assembly Finance, Ways & Means, and Health Committees,

On behalf of the entire New York State Area Health Education Center (NYS AHEC) System, I would like to thank you for your continued support of the work and programs that we provide. As 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, we are grateful for the ongoing support that the legislature has consistently provided.

Serving the entirety of the state, the NYS AHEC System is comprised of nine local centers, two regional offices, and one statewide office. As such, AHECs are embedded in the communities we serve, positioning us to respond rapidly to emergent training needs of health professionals and students alike on a myriad of health-related issues, such as cultural competency, health literacy, health disparities, substance use disorders, and community health crises. Since our inception in 1998, the NYS AHEC System has helped:

- 312,765 students (K-12 and College) receive healthcare career exposure through our pipeline programs;
- 39,500 health professions students receive over 3.7 million hours of education and clinical training; and
- 603,050 healthcare professionals participate in continuing education programs.

Historically, state funding has supported our network for over 20 years. As healthcare jobs are expected to grow exponentially within the next decade, the NYS AHEC System is vital to reducing the healthcare workforce shortages affecting the state and addressing service gap challenges in underserved communities. With increased staff turnover, growing rates of provider burnout, and an older professional population, our state is in desperate need of programming centered around the growth and diversification of the health workforce. The NYS AHEC System has dedicated itself to ensuring that a representative and qualified health workforce is available to fill open vacancies, particularly in the most underserved communities across the state's urban and rural regions.

We respectfully request similar level funding as that of the prior fiscal year, totaling \$2.7 million for the NYS AHEC System. Of the \$2.7 million, \$2.2 million is provided for in Governor Hochul's Executive Budget, with the remaining \$500,000 supported by a Senate legislative add. It is extremely vital that education and training initiatives in the medically underserved and underrepresented communities, of which the NYS AHEC System is structured to provide, continue to be supported. Inclusion of the NYS AHEC System in the proposed **FY 2026-2027** budget for **\$2.7 Million** will allow for the following:

- Expanded programming opportunities in already-limited underserved rural and urban areas

- Increased community resources, services and collaborations in medically disadvantaged areas throughout the state
- Increased number of patients receiving quality care and services provided by AHEC Students
- Expanded vital connections for pipeline students to post-secondary healthcare education programs across the state
- Expanded job placement support and assistance for health professions students in disadvantaged communities throughout NYS
- Significant support towards federal funding, as funds from the state serve as a match for continued federal dollars

We believe expanding efforts to “Grow Our Own” professionals inclusive of doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, physician assistants, social workers, dentists, pharmacists, behavioral health workers, and numerous other allied health providers is essential to supporting critical health services and thus worthy of continued investment. “Grow Our Own” programs for secondary and post-secondary students are a long-term solution to workforce shortages and increase the diversity of the health care sector in New York State.

The work of the NYS AHEC System is integral to the NYS Department of Health priority areas, including the ongoing provision of student, practitioner and community education, combating the opioid epidemic, and supporting the improvement of maternal healthcare, just to name a few. It is our hope to continue this level of educational programming and community support with the backing of state funding in the FY 2026-2027 budget.

While the above information provides a glimpse of our programmatic aims, the best way to understand the true impact of AHEC is to participate firsthand in our events and speak to our participants to learn how AHEC has changed their lives by providing support, mentorship and hands-on experiences that fostered health career pursuit. We encourage you to reach out to your local AHEC or visit our website at www.nysahec.org, where you will find a link to each of the local AHECs and regional offices, as well as a statewide calendar of events.

Thank you again for your continued support and for the opportunity to submit testimony detailing the need for ongoing level funding to continue the NYS AHEC System’s mission of increasing the supply, distribution, and diversification of a qualified health workforce throughout the state to advance better care, better cost, and better value for all New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

Bridget Forshee

Bridget Forshee
Statewide Director, NYS AHEC System

NYS AHEC System Statewide Office

77 Goodell Street, Suite 220
Buffalo, NY 14203
www.nysahec.org
P| (716) 816-7225



NEW YORK STATE Area Health Education Center System

Connecting students to careers, professionals to communities, and communities to better health!

YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS!

Your support of AHEC is vital for successful statewide recruitment, training and retention of programs throughout the healthcare sector. We are dedicated to serving members of ***your community***—youth are exposed to viable healthcare careers, current matriculated health students are placed in rotations and internships in underserved communities, and education for current healthcare professionals is ongoing to ensure that they are prepared to address the changing needs of the state's population.

We wish to thank Governor Hochul and the NYS Senate for including a combined \$2.7 million for the NYS AHEC System in the FY25-26 State Budget! We respectfully ask for the continued inclusion of this funding in the FY26-27 Budget including the Senate Legislative Add of \$500,000 to support our efforts to provide critical health related programming and education in your community!

Renewed funding will support core programming activities such as:

- **Health Career Exposure/Pathway Education** to elicit interest and pursuit of health careers in youth
- **Rotations and Internship placements** in rural and underserved locations to broaden current students' exposure in a range of settings
- **Continuing Education for current healthcare professionals** to improve overall skill development and quality of care in a transforming healthcare system
- **AHEC Scholars Program** for current interdisciplinary health professional students specifically designed to address priorities of better care, better value, and better cost.

We help REDUCE healthcare shortages and INCREASE access to health care across the state through proven, educational training and community-based programs!

*Since 2000
Your Funding has Supported:*

603,050

Health professionals receive continuing education and training on a wide range of health topics

312,765

students (primarily grades 7-12 and some college) participate in career pipeline programs

39,500

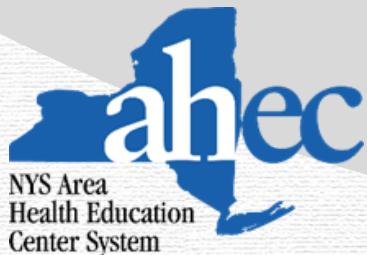
healthcare students (i.e. medical, nursing, behavioral health, etc.) with rotation and internship placements in rural and medically underserved communities

State support for the NYS AHEC System leverages federal and local dollars.



NY's Health Priorities are **OUR** Priorities!





NEW YORK STATE

Area Health Education Center System

Connecting students to careers, professionals to communities, and communities to better health!

Our System

The NYS AHEC System proudly serves the whole state of New York, with nine local centers, two regional offices, and a Statewide Office.

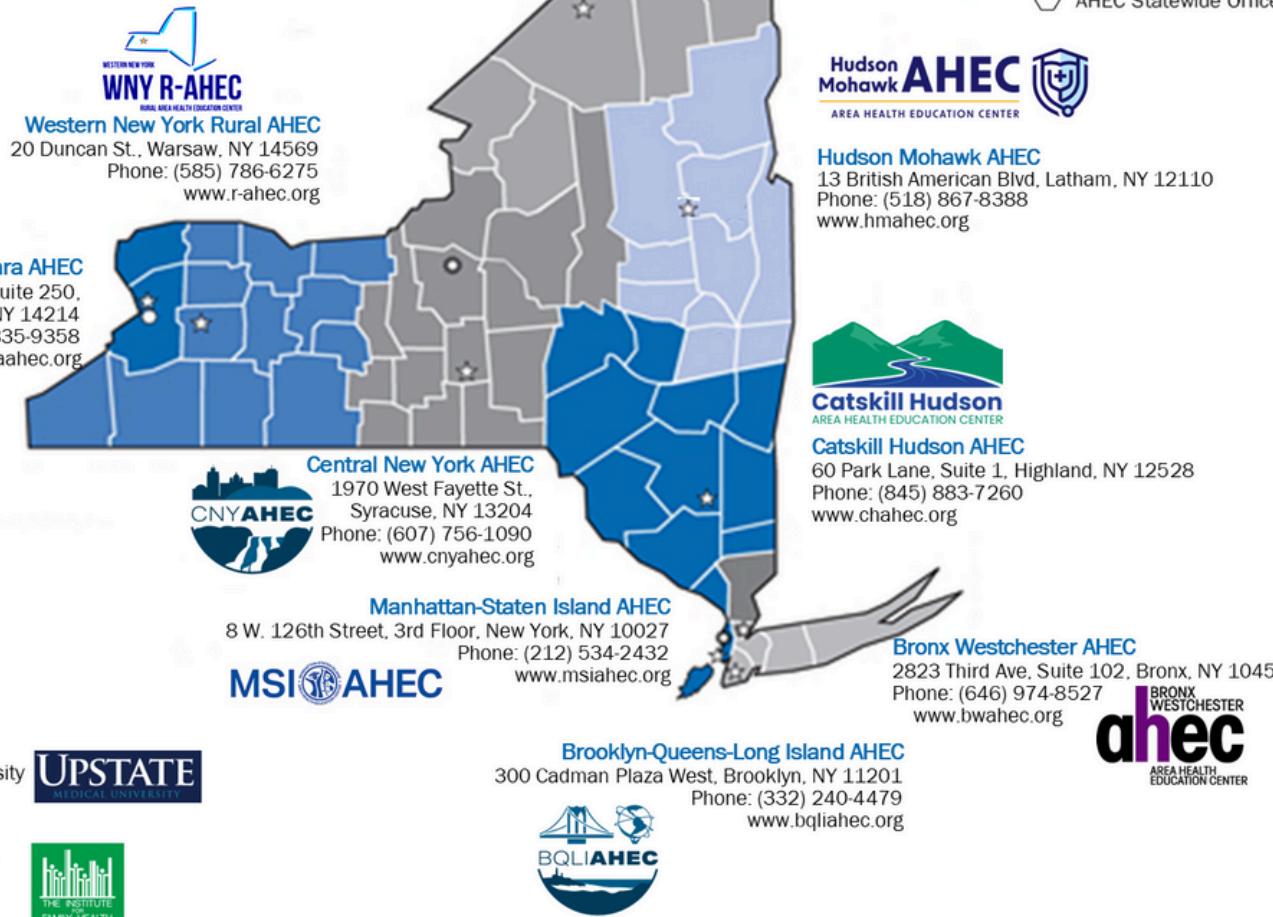


NYS AHEC System Statewide Office
University at Buffalo, Dept. of Family Medicine
www.nysahec.org
Phone: (716) 816-7225



Northern AHEC
1 Main St., Canton, NY 13617
Phone: (315) 379-7701
www.northernahec.org

- ★ AHEC site locations
- ★ AHEC Regional Offices
- AHEC Statewide Office



Regional Offices

Central Regional Office
SUNY Upstate Medical University
www.upstate.edu



NYC Metro Regional Office
Institute for Family Health
<https://institute.org/>

