My name is **Samarth Hegde**, and I am an immigrant scientist and a proud New Yorker. I earned my PhD in Molecular Cell Biology and am currently a senior postdoctoral fellow in Cancer Immunology at Mount Sinai. I am also in the process of transitioning to research independence by starting my own lab in New York state.

I study how our immune system reacts to tumor cells far away in the body, whether it be the lung or the pancreas. Most current therapies only target the cancer cells at the tumor site and frequently lead to cancers returning with a vengeance. Our work revealed that by drugging certain pathways in immune cells we can strengthen our immune response to cancer and make chemo/radiation therapies much more effective and long-lasting. We have initiated multiple clinical studies for patients with cancer at Mount Sinai to test the benefit of investigational drugs targeting these pathways. Notably, we have seen extremely promising early signs upon radically repurposing a drug developed for dermatitis and asthma, that resulted in improved treatment for patients with advanced lung cancer. Work such as this, is at stake now.

Today however, I want to take this time to highlight how the disruptions have severely hampered the career progression of early-stage researchers in this state and nationally. This past year, there has been a 30% reduction in federal grants meant specifically to fund early-stage investigators and scientists on the cusp of independence. I am in the process of starting my own independent laboratory in New York State, and I am particularly impacted by the instability of already competitive federal funding for investigators at my career stage.

My NIH K99 transition to independence award was delayed by 6 months due to a federal funding freeze enacted early in 2025. Such an unprecedented freeze in NIH funds had an immediate chilling effect on faculty recruitment and staff hiring across the US. Three universities I was in talks with for a position, two in NY state, backed out of their initial commitments. I was fortunate enough to land a position, but I know several extremely talented colleagues who had to give up on their job searches or leave New York to find work - a generational loss in research productivity and medical progress.

As a leader in biomedical research, NY State has been disproportionately impacted by recent partisan attacks on science. But this dire situation also presents an opportunity. With BOLD action like expanding science funding at the state level, we can grow the research support ecosystem and enhance our ability to attract talented researchers at a time when most states are still scrambling. For newly-minted research labs such as mine, stabilizing funding in the short-term would allow us to hire staff, train them, ask those high-risk/high-reward questions, and translate our findings into better patient outcomes.

I want to conclude by emphasizing: When science funding is disrupted, it doesn't just slow down discovery, but also cuts short several promising careers, with rippling effects on society and healthcare. Either we can accept that this damage will be deep and widespread for generations of scientists, just like the far-reaching impact of cancer cells on our immune system. Or we can do what we do best as New Yorkers - we can raise the bar for the whole country by proactively funding science research for the nation's and the world's benefit.

We have an opportunity to change the narrative, right here in NY. I do hope you will join us in this endeavor.