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PUBLIC HEALTH FIRST RESPONDERS FACING THREATS AND HARASSMENT WHILE COMBATTING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Statement by NYSACHO Executive Director Sarah Ravenhall

“New York’s ongoing efforts to combat COVID-19 have dramatically reduced illness, saved countless lives and allowed our state to begin reopening.

“Public health first responders (most of whom are local health department staff) are on the front lines of these efforts, working as partners with the public and businesses to ensure we make every effort to continue to reduce the current outbreak, and to prevent future outbreaks. Their responsibilities are enormous, ranging from masking and social distancing compliance to contact tracing, isolation and quarantine, and public education — all critical elements necessary to protect our communities.”

“With strong support from local elected officials, New York’s 58 local public health departments have been essential in turning the tide against COVID-19.

“In too many cases, however, public health professionals have been subject to harassment and threats of violence simply for doing their jobs. This behavior is unacceptable, and illogical.

“We are calling on all New Yorkers, including our state leaders, to protect New York’s diligent and valuable public health workforce. The threat of exposure to the virus puts these responders in harms way. They should not face the additional threat of irrational behavior from members of their own communities.”

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