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## **COUNTY HEALTH OFFICIALS PRESENT STATE BUDGET PRIORITIES**

### **Leaders Appeal to Legislature to Reverse Public Health Cuts Proposed by Executive Amid Ongoing Pandemic**

#### **Public Health Funding Has Been Held Flat or Cut for Six Straight Years**

#### **New, Flexible Funding is Essential to Bolster Public Health Infrastructure to Protect New Yorkers From Multiple Health Threats**

(Albany, New York) Amid a continuing public health catastrophe that has claimed the lives of thousands of New Yorkers and decimated the state's economy, New York State Association of County Health Officials (NYSACHO) Executive Director Sarah Ravenhall today pled with state lawmakers to reverse millions of dollars in public health funding cuts proposed by Governor Cuomo in his 2021-2022 Executive Budget submission.

New York's local health departments (LHDs) have been fighting the pandemic on the front lines since its inception. A survey\* of NYSACHO's local health department members enumerates the staggering commitment of LHDs throughout the pandemic. Highlights of the survey include:

- LHDs have traced more than 1.7 million contacts
- LHDs effectively and without local delays have administered more than 143,000 first doses and 78,000 second doses of vaccines, adding more every day
- Notwithstanding numerous obstacles beyond their local control, LHDs have administered an estimated 94% of first dose vaccines they have received and 95% of second dose vaccines since vaccine distribution began
- LHD staff have worked more than 390,000 hours of overtime to keep pace with pandemic demands.

On behalf of the state's 58 LHDs (New York City and the remaining 57 counties), Ravenhall's budget testimony documented the multiple years of State public health funding stagnation and

cuts that threaten the ability of the public health system to respond to numerous threats to the health and safety of New Yorkers.

Ravenhall testified: “Year after year, we see decreasing appropriations proposed within the Article 6 funding line for local health departments, due to administrative actions, the local property tax cap, and in some cases, cuts in reimbursement such as the one proposed for New York City. Local health departments have not received an increase in core public health aid in more than six years. Instead, State Budget appropriations for public health spending have been either flat-funded or reduced.

Ravenhall asked the empaneled lawmakers: “Why has the Executive proposed new and profound cuts to public health in the midst of a public health crisis? We are experiencing the greatest public health disaster in a century. If we fail now to recognize that public health support must be increased, then we are already surrendering to the next public health crisis.”

Specifically, Ravenhall requested the following actions in response to the Executive’s proposed budget:

- Restoration of nearly \$70 million in proposed cuts to public health funding.
- Incorporation of health-positive revenue producing proposals with revenue earmarked for public health.
- An opportunity to provide input into the regulated adult-use cannabis policy being proposed by the state and legislature. If enacted, LHDs will be tasked with provision of community education and dedicated funding will be needed.

“New York State continues to confront a growing number of monumental public health challenges,” Ravenhall testified. “In 2018, vaping related lung illness; in 2019, a massive measles outbreak; and in 2020 the first global pandemic in recent history. All of these events coincide with ongoing public health issues, such as an increase in rates of sexually transmitted infection; Hepatitis A outbreaks; opioid overdose and deaths; suicide fatalities; children with elevated blood lead levels and others.

Ravenhall’s testimony also lauded New York’s local public health teams: “I know you share my pride in the thousands of public health professionals who have continuously put themselves in harm’s way to respond to the pandemic. They have met this challenge with profound courage, inexhaustible commitment and unrivaled expertise. They are now fully engaged in vaccine administration, even as they fulfill innumerable other public health responsibilities.”

(Note: the excerpts quoted above were taken from Ms. Ravenhall’s oral testimony, presented at today’s joint legislative budget hearing. NYSACHO’s complete written testimony submission can be found here: <https://www.nysacho.org/topic/testimony/>)

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\* Thirty-six counties responded to the NYSACHO member survey. Data totals do not include New York City.

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