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NYSACHO Recognizes National Public Health ‘Thank You’ Day

(Albany, New York) The New York State Association of County Health Officials (NYSACHO) today joined with their counterparts across the nation to recognize November 22 as National Public Health “Thank You” Day.

Dr. Indu Gupta, NYSACHO President and Onondaga County Commissioner of Health said: “Today is National Public Health ‘Thank You’ Day, a brief moment when we ask all New Yorkers and Americans to take a moment to recognize the tremendous sacrifice and service of our public health workers.

“This day of recognition is very important because public health service is largely unseen. During the Covid-19 pandemic, virtually every public health worker put themselves and their loved ones at risk to immediately engage in contact tracing, testing and other mitigation efforts. No one knew the danger they might encounter, and still they stepped in without hesitation. Their role only grew from there, and continues today, including coordinating and distributing life-saving vaccine, and acting as responsible and reliable sources of information concerning the pandemic.

“Meanwhile, the same public health staff continued to address a myriad of other public health responsibilities, including safe public drinking water supplies, rabies exposures, child lead poisoning prevention and abatement, tobacco control, childhood immunizations, and many others,” Dr. Gupta said.

Sarah Ravenhall, NYSACHO Executive Director, said: “The service of public health workers does not come without personal sacrifice and cost. New York State has essentially disinvested in public health, cutting the state allocation by more than \$150 million in the last 10 years alone. Those reductions have translated directly into critical public health staff shortages in virtually every one of our 58 local health departments. And that shortage has put additional pressure on the public health staff who remain.

“A recent survey conducted by NYSACHO and academic partners found that public health staff and leadership in nearly every local public health department in our state report that they have been working under extraordinary duress, with many having to seek counseling and, sadly, many reporting being threatened or intimidated by community members. In

fact, 14 of the states 58 local public health leaders recently have left their positions, in part due to these factors.

“Despite these challenges, New York’s public health workforce will continue to protect us by making phone calls to case contacts, reminding us to protect one another by using face coverings and social distancing, and working to vaccinate those who remain unprotected against COVID-19,” Ms. Ravenhall said.

Dr. Gupta concluded: “As we gather with family and friends this week, we ask that you pause to recognize the sacrifice of the public health workers who protect you and your loved ones in both extraordinary and ordinary times.”

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