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COUNTY HEALTH OFFICIALS STATEMENT ON FY24 NEW YORK STATE BUDGET

By Sarah Ravenhall, NYSACHO Executive Director

“The final state budget sends mixed signals concerning the state’s commitment to protecting the public’s health. While it includes several meaningful public health initiatives, it leaves other health and safety priorities unaddressed.

“NYSACHO commends the Governor and State Legislature for passing provisions allowing the Office of Cannabis Management (OCM) to enforce illicit adult use cannabis markets. We are seeing a proliferation of illegal shops across the state that offer unregulated products that may contain dangerous impurities, including pesticides and heavy metals. Enforcement power will give the OCM the authority needed to protect our communities from unlicensed sources of cannabis product.

“We are also pleased to see provisions requiring screening for HCV during pregnancy and syphilis testing during third trimester. Standardizing this testing will ultimately prevent perinatal syphilis and reduce HCV rates in New York State.

“Another sound public health initiative contained in the final budget is a \$1 per pack cigarette tax increase. This policy will help reduce smoking rates, improve health outcomes and prevent a new generation of young New Yorkers from getting hooked on nicotine.

“Notwithstanding these significant steps forward, however, many public health priorities remain unaddressed. We worked with a broad consortium of interests to support the removal of menthol tobacco products from the market, which disproportionately target and harm black communities and those who identify LGBTQ+. Unfortunately, those products remain legal and available. We also worked with leaders to change Article 36 provisions that unduly create barriers for local health departments (LHDs) when providing certain home care related activities. Those provisions were not included in the budget. We will continue to work with leaders to address both of these important priorities post-budget.

“Also, despite our diligent advocacy efforts, the final state budget also lacked additional resources necessary to implement activities addressing the state’s existing blood lead level standard for children. The lead rental registry program will be nearly impossible to implement without robust resources. While some additional funding was provided in the budget, it is not clear how much of that will be designated for local health departments, and our projections show that far more will be needed to ensure LHDs can effectively oversee this program. Further, state law requires specific interventions for any child with a blood lead level of 5 ug/dL or more. However, the current levels of funding do not support these activities, rendering the law ineffective. As a result, our children remain at risk of serious illnesses caused by lead poisoning. This issue will remain a top priority for NYSACHO.

“While we understand that state funding and policy must address a great many priorities, we can think of no higher priority than the health and safety of our communities. With that mission in mind, we will continue to work with state lawmakers to establish equitable and responsive state public health policy that is both effective and adequately funded.”