



**“The Voice of Local Public Health in New York State”**

**March 3, 2011**

**Testimony before the Joint Legislative Committees on Health and  
Finance/Ways and Means  
Regarding the 2011-12 Executive Budget Proposal**

**NYSACHO’s MISSION:**

To support local health departments  
in their work to prevent disease, disability and injury  
and promote health and wellness  
throughout New York State.

NYSACHO is incorporated as a not-for-profit, non-partisan  
charitable organization with 501(c)(3) tax exempt status.

**Paula Calkins Lacombe, BSN, MPA**  
**President of the New York State Association of County Health Officials (NYSACHO):**

Good afternoon Senator DeFrancisco, Assemblyman Farrell, Senator Hannon, Assemblyman Gottfried and distinguished committee members of both houses. My name is Paula Calkins Lacombe. I serve as the Public Health Director for Clinton County and as the current President of the New York State Association of County Health Officials (NYSACHO). Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony on behalf of my colleagues at all 58 local health departments in New York State.

Today I will present a brief overview of the current status of local public health in New York State and then review specific requests for consideration by this legislature.

Local health departments provide essential, population-based health services that protect all New Yorkers. Examples include but are not limited to control of communicable disease, immunizations, identification and abatement of lead hazards, maternal child health services, tobacco control efforts, restaurant and camp inspections and chronic disease prevention.

Primary prevention through core public health services can be cost-effective. As an example, a 2009 report by the Pew Charitable Trust found that for every dollar invested in lead poisoning prevention, 17 dollars are saved by preventing costs related to medical care, special education, behavioral problems, crime, loss in IQ and reduced lifetime earnings for the child exposed. Or consider annual influenza vaccination. The cost for an office visit to provide an influenza vaccination averages one hundred fifty-five dollars nationally; the cost for a hospitalization due to influenza illness averages eleven thousand dollars nationally.

Public health is critical to efforts to control the rising costs of medical care and to improve the quality of life in our communities, both of which are cornerstones for economic and job development. But I'm sorry to report that the local public health infrastructure in New York State is becoming increasingly fragile. Combined state and local funding reductions due to the fiscal crisis of recent years have required significant reductions in programs, services and staff.

The current federal budget proposals for public health are likely to result in additional reductions of funding for New York State and its localities. These shrinking resources put our state at risk for serious public health problems, as the public health infrastructure and essential services are curtailed or disappear. What will these problems look like? They could emerge as outbreaks of preventable childhood illnesses that have been under control for decades, or as an increased incidence of foodborne illnesses in communities across the state. One of our state's greatest assets – a plentiful supply of safe, fresh water – may be threatened. These are the types of widespread public health catastrophes that our local health departments strive to prevent.

We fully recognize the challenges before you and respectfully request that, as you consider the many hard choices you must make in this year's state budget, you keep in mind:

- **Stable and timely funding to support core public health services is essential for the protection of our communities.** NYSACHO applauds Governor Cuomo's recognition of this in his executive budget proposals. It is critical that the state maintains core public health services through general public health work appropriations and specific categorical funding for programs such as lead poisoning prevention and immunizations.
- **The State must explore and consider all opportunities to maximize revenue sources.** NYSACHO strongly supports the Governor's proposal to close loopholes that allow commercial insurers to shirk their responsibility for coverage of early intervention

services for children with special needs. This proposal will close loopholes in existing law that have permitted private insurers to shift costs to taxpayers since 1993. To better realign fiscal responsibility for this program so that services are appropriately covered and the program remains fiscally viable, we urge that an additional provision be included that would redefine time of loss for the purposes of Early Intervention insurance claiming to be the date the municipality pays the provider. Although we support many of the additional Early Intervention reforms proposed, we oppose the provision that would require large providers to directly bill insurers prior to submitting claims to municipalities: this provision would increase the administrative burden to municipalities to ensure due diligence on the part of providers in maximizing insurance reimbursement for services. NYSACHO understands the need for the proposed 10% rate reduction, given the importance of reducing state and local expenditures overall. However, we recommend that the implementation of any rate reduction be managed in such a way as to help ensure sufficient provider capacity.

- **Article Six support for the statutorily required administration of local Early Intervention programs must continue.** The elimination of state financial support for this service affects all local health departments. It is not an “optional” service since municipalities are mandated by public health law to administer this program.
- **Local flexibility in meeting the unique public health needs of each community must be maintained and supported.** As noted previously, we are pleased that the Governor’s budget proposal preserves public health funding for services that are defined under the law as “core” mandated services. But we are concerned that the governor proposed to eliminate the section of the statute that currently provides 36% reimbursement for

additional public health services, funding that gives individual localities the flexibility to meet the unique public health priorities of their communities. At some point in the development of regulations for this section of the statute, the misnomer “optional” replaced the term “additional.” Despite this misnomer, the law is clearly intended to provide local health departments with the flexibility and fiscal support necessary to address public health priorities that are particular and essential to different communities. Included in this additional services category that would be cut under the executive budget are Medical Examiners who are instrumental in identifying important public health trends as they investigate unattended deaths, and home health services in counties where the health department is the sole provider of these essential services.

- **The recommendations of the 2007 gubernatorial task force on the pre-K special education program need to be implemented.** In particular, the recommendation that fiscal, administrative and programmatic responsibility for the pre-K program be transferred to school districts should be adopted to ensure fiscal responsibility and greater accountability.

In closing, NYSACHO and its members in local health departments are eager and willing to work with the governor, the legislature, and our local governments to prevent and reduce harm to New York’s citizens through disease control, injury prevention, protection of our food, water and air, and promotion of healthy behaviors. We urge you to keep in mind that by preserving public health, you are meeting one of the central functions of government – that is, providing the infrastructure to keep our citizens healthy and safe. Your local health departments help you meet this obligation through proven, cost-effective methods.