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Statement from Executive Director Sarah Ravenhall on NYSACHO's Testimony at Today's Legislative Hearing on the Executive Budget

Albany, New York, January 29, 2020 — "NYSACHO understands the imperative of closing the State's budget gap. Nevertheless, we must continue to sound the alarm. Public health work is rapidly moving from prevention to triage. That is a troubling evolution.

"With each new state mandated public health policy, we grapple with legal, fiscal and ethical choices. Do we cut back on restaurant inspections to monitor cooling towers for legionella? Will we have to delay lead remediation interventions for a child with elevated blood lead levels because the mandated costs of the Early Intervention program have forced us to eliminate or leave public health positions unfilled? Will we reduce or eliminate our maternal-child health home visits because we need our public health nurses to address communicable disease outbreaks? These are real life decisions that can have long-term, life-altering, and potentially deadly consequences.

"While we have many priorities articulated in our formal submitted testimony, we used our limited time at today's oral testimony to discuss two policies: regulated adult use cannabis, and elevated blood lead levels requiring local health department (LHD) intervention."

ADULT USE CANNABIS

"We anticipate that regulated adult use cannabis will dramatically impact local health departments in the following ways:

- "There will be an increased need for community surveillance and education with an emphasis on protecting at-risk populations including pregnant women, adolescents and those living with a history of mental health or substance abuse;
- "While the State may decide to create an educational campaign, local health department staff are best positioned to reach the communities they know so well and provide targeted messaging to vulnerable populations;

- “Other states with legal adult use programs have seen unintentional exposures in children resulting in increased hospital visits and calls to poison control centers; adverse respiratory and cardiovascular effects; increased risk of motor vehicle accidents; association with future high-risk use of tobacco and other drugs.

“We continue to strongly oppose a regulated adult use cannabis program because the science and the experiences in other states make clear that it will adversely impact public health and generate casualties.

“If the state proceeds with a program, local health departments will need additional resources for localized educational campaigns targeting the most vulnerable populations in their respective communities. This local effort should supplement the State DOH’S educational campaigns around the risks and dangers associated with adult recreational cannabis use.

“As a longtime partner of the State department of Health, LHD’s are best equipped to provide education around such a program. We believe there are powerful policy, ethical and moral obligations to do so. We also ask that you ensure local public health officials have a concrete role in steering any cannabis policy. Our perspective will add great value.”

ELEVATED BLOOD LEAD LEVELS

"NYSACHO supported the State’s decision to lower the elevated blood lead level to 5 ug/dL. To ensure effective implementation of the lifesaving work we must conduct to combat childhood exposure to lead, we strongly recommend that the state allocate \$46 million, which will cover the full cost of implementation. Any funding allocated to this work should be moved from Article 6 to the Department of Financial Services for the lead poisoning prevention and assistance program. **The lowering of the elevated blood level threshold creates a significant increase in workload for local health departments. In order to be effective, local health departments will need additional funding.**”

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