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COVID-19 FUNDING UNDERSCORES IMPERATIVE FOR RESPONSIVE AND PROPERLY RESOURCED PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCIES

Statement by NYSACHO Executive Director Sarah Ravenhall

“We applaud the Governor and the Legislature for their action to appropriate \$40 million for COVID-19 preparedness. The funding will be critical to mount our best defense against the virus, and Governor Cuomo, state elected officials, and state agencies are working hand in hand with local health departments to respond. More broadly, however, the onset of the virus should give us pause to consider the imperative of appropriately resourced and fully responsive public health agencies. We ask the Governor and Legislature to further invest in our state’s core public health infrastructure by increasing base grant funding for general public health work by \$13 million.

“The COVID-19 virus is a significant threat, but it is only one of many. For many years, local health departments have been subject to stagnant state aid and categorical funding reductions, even as their mission has grown substantially with each passing year. In fact, many local health departments have come to a point where they are being compelled to make very difficult decisions about what public health threats can and cannot be adequately combatted with available resources.

“Not only do local health departments contend with being at the epicenter of disease outbreaks and epidemics such as COVID-19, they are also on the front lines of public drinking water supply safety, tobacco control, child lead exposure prevention and a host of other critically necessary public health initiatives — each a threat that can evolve into a regional or even broader public health emergency without proper monitoring and management.

“A strong public health response is our best protection against both existing and emerging public health threats. Making sure that public health agencies are well-funded for their everyday work assures that local public health can act quickly and effectively to mitigate the risks posed by new diseases such as COVID-19. Local health departments are the first line of defense that protect our communities from catastrophe. That line is dangerously strained due to chronic underfunding. We are asking our state leaders to pass a budget that increases local health department funding to bolster that line and ensure that we are ready to respond to any public health threat.”

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