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STATE FUNDING MUST PRIORITIZE LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE CAPACITY

Statement by NYSACHO Executive Director Sarah Ravenhall

“New York’s Local Health Departments are underfunded and under siege, but they are undeterred. As lawmakers finalize the 2020-2021 state budget, we implore them to reverse the years of state funding reductions to Local Health Departments.

“The public now has a far better understanding of the imperative to properly resource Local Health Departments to ensure we have the capacity to swiftly respond to escalating public health threats, like COVID-19, that are constantly in orbit around our communities.

“Local Health Departments provide life-protecting services during disease outbreaks like COVID-19 that must be enhanced and can be enhanced only if properly funded by the state. These services include:

- Activating and mobilizing emergency preparedness plans during local emergency or outbreak response.
- Serving as communicable disease experts. During disease outbreaks, epidemiological experts conduct investigations, contact tracing, monitor suspected cases, enforce isolation and quarantine protocols and set up mass clinics.
- Assisting and connecting vulnerable or under resourced individuals to life-sustaining resources like housing, nutritious meals, utilities and health and mental health services.
- Supporting community partners and working hand in hand with the New York State Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Local Health Departments serve as a lynchpin for community partnerships with hospitals, clinicians, colleges, schools, businesses, community-based organizations and volunteer groups.
- Upholding state and local laws. Public Health law grants authority to local health officials to respond to disease threats. New York’s Local Health Departments are

the only boots-on-the-ground entities legally responsible for the control of communicable diseases.

- Keeping community members informed by answering questions, providing up-to-date information about the outbreak and the local community impact, and recommendations for how best to protect families from exposure.

“Our message to budget makers is simple and profound: When could the imperative to properly fund Local Health Departments possibly be more clear? When could it be more certain that our state spending priorities must shift to address this habitual shortfall?

“If not right now, when our communities face the most significant public health crisis in our lifetime, then when?”

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