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## **Statement from Sarah Ravenhall, Executive Director, New York State Association of County Health Officials (NYSACHO) on the Need for a Sustained Commitment to Addressing Racial Disparities**

(Albany, New York) Our nation is captivated with conversations stemming from the recent deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and Ahmaud Arbery. These and many similarly horrifying incidences throughout history demand our utmost attention and an uninterrupted commitment to change.

Another element that must be included in any discussion concerning racial inequity is the disparity in the overall health status and disease-linked mortality that disproportionately impacts non-white populations. Black communities have been severely impacted by disparities in health outcomes, which can be seen across nearly all the major health priority areas in New York State. These disparities have persisted over generations, and are the result of many factors, including the systemic racism underpinning the lack of investments necessary to support the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of Black populations in the United States, including in New York State.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented just the latest instance where the health of racial and ethnic minority groups has been disproportionately impacted. Although more data are needed, current data indicate a disproportionate COVID-19 mortality and burden of illness among minority groups. Furthermore, according to New York State Department of Health's Health Equity Report, minority populations experience higher rates of infant mortality, HIV/AIDS and cardiovascular disease as compared to whites. Data also reveal much higher mortality rates for black populations as compared to other racial and ethnic groups. Equally alarming is the maternal mortality rate for Black, American Indian, and Alaska Native women, which is two to three times higher than for white women.

Our society must aggressively pursue a comprehensive understanding of the causes of these health disparities, which are complex and multifactorial, by actively engaging all stakeholders and advocating for policy changes. And then we must sustain our focus to prevent this crisis from being displaced by another.

Representing all 58 local health departments across New York State, NYSACHO will continue to engage, collaborate with, and support all partners across the government, health and public health spectrums to address the social determinants of health and to overcome these health disparities.

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