

As members of New Yorkers to Cure Paralysis (NYTCP), we appreciate the opportunity to submit budget testimony to the Senate and Assembly regarding the Executive Budget proposal for FY2025. New Yorkers to Cure Paralysis (NYTCP) is a non-profit organization formed by patients, doctors, scientists, and families across NY to advocate for a fully funded Spinal Cord Injury Research Program (SCIRP).

The SCIRP was established in 1998 through the advocacy of New York State Police Sergeant Paul Richter, who was partially paralyzed from the neck down and actor Christopher Reeve. Since most spinal cord injuries result from vehicle accidents, they conceived the idea of funding the research program through a surcharge on moving traffic violation fines. The surcharge generates an estimated \$200m for the state, of which \$8.5 million per year (<5%) is devoted to the Spinal Cord Injury Research Trust Fund, which seeks to catalyze research for spinal cord injury. This fund has established New York State as the leader in research into Spinal Cord Injury. The balance of the surcharge collected annually goes to the state's General Fund.

The SCIRP has not seen an increase in funding since 1998, which equates to over 2 decades of flat funding. NYTCP respectfully requests that the final budget include \$19m to fully fund the SCIRP in FY25, which would reflect the cost of medical inflation since the program's inception. NYTCP also requests that moving forward, the increase in funding be indexed to the rate of medical inflation. The funding will be used to improve the lives of people with spinal cord injuries through research into new breakthroughs to treat spinal cord injuries. Given that the field has advanced significantly since the SCIRP was created, more of this funding will now be going towards clinical trials which are increasingly more expensive.

Funding the SCIRP investment in the state's educational institutions where researchers have already developed effective treatments today and are working for tomorrow's cure for spinal cord injury and other neurological diseases. Just a decade ago, paralysis after a spinal cord injury was considered incurable and a distant hope. Today, because of work from labs around New York State, supported by the Spinal Cord Injury Research Program fund, independent eating, drinking, and even walking years after a spinal injury is possible.

On top of developing life altering treatments for individuals with spinal cord injuries, the program is good for New York's economy. It creates high-tech jobs and has been responsible for attracting leading scientists and driving additional federal and private sector research investments to the state including from the National Institute of Health (NIH) and private foundations. The SCIRP has enhanced regional economic development and high-tech job creation by providing funds to universities, academic medical centers, and hospitals throughout the state. The SCIRP has also helped to develop New York's biotechnology industry. Several states have followed New York's lead, including California and New Jersey.

Increased funding for the SCIRP is even more important as New York's population continues to age, and the percentage of elderly New Yorkers increases. Prevalence of neurological diseases, including stroke, spinal cord injury and Alzheimer's disease, is escalating rapidly because of our aging population and our ability to keep those with brain and spinal injury alive longer. This emerging epidemic extends to include Parkinson's disease, ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease), schizophrenia, depression and autism. Current estimates are that by 2050, Alzheimer's disease alone will cost the US \$1.4 trillion a year in health care costs and lost productivity. With this looming crisis of disability due to brain diseases, now is the time to enhance investment in spinal cord injury and other neurological research.

New Yorkers to Cure Paralysis



Increased funding for the SCRIP, which is paid for by funding received through the surcharge, will be budget neutral and allow these exciting and effective new therapies be available to all impacted individuals throughout the state independent of their socioeconomic status or proximity to academic medical centers. This funding will allow New York to address the growing costs associated with brain and spinal cord diseases and continue to be a leader in research and high-tech job creation.

We thank you again for your time and ask that you fund the Spinal Cord Injury Research Program at \$19m in the final FY24-25 budget.