

**Written Testimony of  
North Country Healthcare Providers Educational and Research Fund, Inc.**

**New York State Joint Legislative Public Hearing on  
2015-16 Executive Health Budget  
Monday, February 2nd, 2014  
10:00 AM**

Chairs:  
Senator Kemp Hannon  
Assemblyman Richard Gottfried

Submitted by:  
Tracy Leonard, on behalf of Doug DiVello, NCHP Board Chairman

The North Country Healthcare Providers Educational and Research Fund, Inc. (NCHPERF) was incorporated in 2003 as a not-for-profit corporation for the purpose of collaborating with the member hospitals. NCHPERF has grown to serve seven members in a five county region of Northern New York, which includes Jefferson, St. Lawrence, Franklin, Clinton and Essex counties. The mission of NCHPERF has transformed to a single focus of improving access to care across rural Northern New York through telemedicine and telehealth solutions.

In the Governor's Executive Budget this year, rural health was bundled with healthcare workforce initiatives and identified for a 15% total cut and/or contract cancellations for eight programs critical to rural health. Among these is the Rural Health Network Development program funding which supports our regional initiatives. In partnership with the Association of Rural Health Networks, we are asking you separate rural health from the workforce programs and prevent cuts to the rural health programming. By restoring Rural Health Network Development dollars to \$6.4 million and Rural Access to \$9.8 million, we, as NYS Rural Health Networks, can collaboratively work to transform our regional, rural healthcare system.

As a receipt of Rural Health Network Development grant dollars, the NCHPERF is working to build strength and momentum in the advancement of telehealth solutions in NNY with a vision of becoming a center of excellence for telehealth in NYS. By leveraging telehealth to achieve the CMS triple aim, our initiatives bring together multiple organizations designed to address health planning, focusing on telemedicine expansion and sustainability, health information technology infrastructure and clinical connectivity, as well as the integration or reconfiguration of services.

Our rural region ranks among the most sparsely populated but geographically largest in NYS. Access to care is further exacerbated by transportation limitations, distance to travel to specialists, and winter weather. Our rural communities using telehealth technologies for specialty services, support for local intensive care units, and home monitoring programs are helping to reduce readmissions rates in our hospitals and emergency departments.

Evidence shows that telemedicine is playing an important role in the provision of healthcare services, particularly in rural and remote locations. By restoring Rural Health Network Development and Rural Access dollars, our network can focus on areas such as telehealth, which require long-term planning and a strategic mindset to address and advance statewide initiatives such as the Delivery System Repayment Incentive Program and the State Health Innovation Plan.

Thank you in advance for your time and attention.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (315) 755-2020 ext. 13 or at [tleonard@fdrhpo.org](mailto:tleonard@fdrhpo.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tracy Leonard". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Tracy Leonard