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THE SENATE
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ALBANY

SECRETARY, SENATE DEMOCRATIC CONFERENCE
COMMITTEES:
CHILDREN & FAMILIES, RANKING MINORITY MEMBER
AGRICULTURE
CRIME VICTIMS, CRIME & CORRECTION
EDUCATION
FINANCE
HEALTH
RULES

February 26, 2013

Honorable Andrew Cuomo
Governor of New York State
Executive Chamber, Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

I am deeply concerned over your proposal to eliminate independent funding lines for eighty-nine public health programs and consolidate the appropriations into six "Outcome Based Health Planning" block grants, with an overall funding reduction of 10 percent or \$40 million. The impact of this proposal will prove to be particularly devastating for providers of School-Based Health Centers (SBHC), their student patients and, by extension, their families.

School-Based Health Centers (SBHC) are part of the proposed Maternal, Child Health & Nutrition block grant along with 25 other programs. The total funding for programs in this block grant has been reduced by 10 percent, from \$127,735,000 to \$114,800,000.

The Health and Mental Hygiene Article VII bill amends the Public Health Law to allow the Commissioner of Health broad authority to allocate funds to individual programs on a competitive basis "as he deems appropriate...for any grant, award, contract, disbursement, transfer or payment expenditures."

Funding in the Maternal, Child Health & Nutrition block grant is designed to implement evidence-based and best practices for maternal and child health and nutrition that emphasize the importance of preventive care and reducing health disparities.

Given the proven value of SBHCs, I believe it is unfair to subject them to a process of competing for funds in a diminished pool of money. Moreover, SBHCs currently compete among themselves every five years for grant funding. The current Request for Application (RFA) process is already based on preventive care models, reducing health disparities and improving health outcomes. Unfortunately, current funding is not adequate to sustain or expand SBHCs in the State, and requiring them to compete against non-SBHC programs will further jeopardize their financial stability.

The elimination of the discrete appropriations for SBHCs, which totaled \$21,738,317 last year, is very concerning. SBHCs need more money, not less. Since 2008, SBHCs have lost \$2.65 million annually in state aid. Cuts have left the centers fragile – in the past two years, fifteen SBHCs throughout the state were forced to close their doors.

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School-Based Health Centers are the best example of what we do well in the health care system. They are a proven model of care that reduces healthcare disparities. According to the Department of Health, 33 percent of students served by SBHCs are identified as Black or African American and 44 percent are determined to be Hispanic or Latino. In addition, numerous peer-reviewed studies support the value of SBHCs in these areas, including one conducted in Rochester, New York that showed that SBHCs reduced absenteeism and another in the Bronx that demonstrated that SBHCs reduce ER use and hospitalizations by half for asthmatic students.

SBHCs also promote healthier lifestyles, increase access to health, dental, and mental healthcare, improve school performance, avoid lost work days for parents, and save the State money by preventing unnecessary hospitalizations and reducing emergency room visits.

For many children and families, SBHCs are their only source for counseling, health screening, dental care, reproductive care, physical exams, and immunizations. If these centers lose funding, children in underserved rural, urban, and suburban areas of the State will have reduced access to care. **At a minimum, I respectfully request that these critical safety-net providers be funded at last year's level of \$21,738,317.**

Thank you for your consideration and support.

Sincerely,


Senator Velmanette Montgomery, 28th District
Ranking Democrat
NYS Senate Committee on Children and Families