



seven
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HEALTH
COALITION

**Written Testimony of
Seven Valleys Health Coalition**

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

Chairs:
Senator Kemp Hannon
Assemblyman Richard Gottfried

Submitted by:
Jackie Carlton Leaf, Executive Director

Seven Valleys Health Coalition (SVHC) is the rural health network serving all of Cortland County and contiguous rural areas of Onondaga, Madison, Cayuga, and Tompkins Counties. SVHC is comprised of more than 30 non-profit and municipal member agencies providing health and human services in central New York. SVHC envisions a community in which all individuals are empowered to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. The mission of SVHC is “to cultivate local solutions and collaborative actions that advance the health and well-being of the Cortland Community.” We accomplish this by promoting, sponsoring and fostering programs and activities aimed at improving the health and well-being of both consumers and the coalition's participating agencies. SVHC’s role in the community has grown and evolved from a small network focused organization to a compelling force in shaping the landscape of the health and well-being in the Cortland community.

This year the Governor’s Executive Budget bundles the Rural Health Network Development program and the Rural Health Care Access Development program together with seven otherwise unrelated health workforce development programs and collectively these programs are to be cut more than 15%. SVHC is seeking to have the RHND and Rural Access programs un-bundled from workforce development and restored to their current levels of \$6.4 million for RHND and \$9.8 million for Rural Access.

As the leader in the development and implementation of a collaborative, comprehensive community assessment process, Cortland Counts: an Assessment of the Health and Well- Being in Cortland County, SVHC has established itself as an integral part of the health care system in the Cortland County service area. Referred to as Cortland Counts, the assessment process has brought together key stakeholders from health, economic development, government, youth, education, and faith organizations and has clearly demonstrated the interdependence of each sector in determining the quality of life for our community. Through the community assessment process, individuals and organizations in Cortland County have a voice in determining local needs, priorities, and solutions. Our Cortland Counts Community Assessment process has leveraged more than \$5 million for our community’s future.

SVHC serves as the coordinating body to ensure that priority issues and areas of need are identified and plans to address those needs are developed. SVHC facilitates the

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implementation of projects and initiatives that address local health needs identified through Cortland Counts, including the following priority health areas of the New York State 2013-2017 Health Improvement Plan:

- **Preventing chronic disease:** In 2014 alone SVHC guided 40 people affected by diabetes, heart disease and other chronic illnesses through a self-management program; we created the Car-Free Challenge and as a community logged enough miles to do a relay from Cortland to Brazil; and we helped establish an Urban Farm Market in a low-income neighborhood and introduced the neighbors to kale and kohlrabi, among other local produce. These low cost prevention efforts represent a significant return on invest and are crucial to reducing emergency and long-term medical expenses in the future of these individuals.
- **Promoting a safe and healthy environment:** We evaluated city intersections and funded the improvement of their safety, accessibility, and ease of use; we built and fostered healthy opportunities for people to eat, hike, bike, and walk; through our Mobility Management program we coordinated efforts to sustain and expand public transportation in our community.
- **Promoting mental health and preventing substance abuse:** We shared the stories of six local teens fighting the stigma surrounding mental illness; we facilitated the development of an Emotional Disturbed Persons Response Team, comprised of trained law enforcement officers and first responders. The EDPR Team de-escalates volatile situations before they become true crises. Since inception of the program use of force and injuries have decreased dramatically due to increased officer training and learning empathy. Furthermore there have been no injuries to an officer or consumer on EDPRT calls
- **Promoting Healthy Women, Infants, and Children:** Our Mighty Molar program educates nearly 1000 local students annually on healthy oral hygiene. Such efforts teach children and their parents about the value of life-long healthy habits to prevent costly medical issues.

The Rural Health Network Development Program provides base funding for SVHC to address local health issues at the local level. With the \$205,282 SVHC receives annually for the RHND program the agency is able to secure another \$400,000 for the organization to conduct a broad array of prevention programs and services aimed at improving the health of our community. It is of vital importance to the rural communities in NYS that the RHND and Rural Access programs are restored to their current levels of funding. The proposed reductions will significantly reduce the ability of SVHC to implement cost-saving prevention programming.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to discuss this further and provide more information on this important issue. My phone number is 607.756.4198. I can also be reached by email at jackie@sevenvalleyshealth.org.

Sincerely,



Jackie Carlton Leaf, Executive Director