



**Written Testimony of the
Columbia County Community Healthcare Consortium, Inc.**

**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:
Claire Parde, Executive Director**

I am writing on behalf of the Columbia County Community Healthcare Consortium, Inc. (CCCHC), a not-for-profit corporation established in 1998 to create a formal network of health and human service providers serving the rural community in and around Columbia County. Currently, there are 25 members of this rural health network, representing county government, multiple public agencies, the local community hospital and its network of providers, other healthcare providers and consumers, public and private providers serving the mental health, substance abuse, and disabled populations, the clergy, and business interests. The Healthcare Consortium's central mission is to increase access to quality healthcare through collaboration, education, information and service delivery.

I am writing to respectfully request that you undo the harm that the NYS 2015-2016 Executive Budget will do to two vital rural health programs: the Rural Health Network Development Program and the Rural Health Care Access Development Program. The Executive Budget does harm to these programs in two ways. First, it inappropriately bundles these two programs with seven otherwise unrelated Health Workforce Development initiatives. Secondly, it proposes to cut the whole bundle by just over 15% (the relevant section of the 2015-2016 Executive Budget is found in Aid to Localities, page 490).

The remedies for the ills of the Executive Budget entail, firstly, separating the Rural Health Network Development and Rural Health Care Access Development programs from the Health Workforce Development programs; although all are valuable programs, they are qualitatively different, and should not be combined. Secondly, it entails ensuring that the Rural Health Network Development Program and the Rural Health Care Access Development Program maintain their current levels of funding (\$6.4 million and \$9.8 million, respectively).



Rural Health Network Development Program dollars brought our network to life in 1998, and they continue to be a critical source of support for our organization. Therefore, I would like to give you a sense of what those program funds make possible. Since its inception, our rural health network has worked on behalf of limited-resource individuals and families, the uninsured and underinsured, and vulnerable populations such as the elderly and disabled, to overcome barriers to care that are particular to, or at least particularly acute in, rural areas. For instance, we created the Children and Adults Rural Transportation Service, which provides door-to-door, non-emergency medical transportation for rural residents to access the healthcare services so essential to attaining and maintaining their health and well-being.

Over the years, our network has also demonstrated that it is a trusted, capable, and effective NYS vendor by implementing a number of NYSDOH-funded programs in Columbia and Greene Counties. These currently include the Integrated Cancer Services Program, the In-Person Assistor/Navigator Program, and the Tobacco Free Action Community Partnership.

Additionally, our network has been an essential player, as both partner and lead, in conducting community health assessments and in community health improvement planning to advance the goals of the State Prevention Agenda and the State Health Improvement Plan in our own communities.

Finally, the network is intimately involved in efforts to reform the healthcare delivery system, from small, local projects that aim to integrate physical and behavioral healthcare, to state-led, system-wide reform efforts, such as DSRIP, for which we serve on a Project Advisory Committee, the Columbia-Greene Transformation Subcommittee, and are identified as a key partner in a number of the DSRIP Projects proposed for our region. Like all the rural health networks, we embrace our fundamental charge to experiment, innovate and create the better future for rural New York to which we all aspire.

I hope that by offering the example of our own network, I have convinced you that rural health networks are unique creatures, uniquely situated to do some of the greatest good in our rural communities. Please recognize those contributions by, first, returning the Rural Health Network Development Program and its complement, the Rural Health Care Access Program, to individual budget lines and, secondly, by restoring them to full funding.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

For further information, please contact:

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