

Written Testimony of the  
St. Lawrence County Health Initiative, 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:  
Ruth Fishbeck, Executive Director

The St. Lawrence County Health Initiative, Inc. (SLCHI) is a non-profit, community based organization that has served the residents of St. Lawrence County and the greater North Country region of New York since 1999. The agency's member organizations include hospitals, universities, and businesses and the St. Lawrence County government and departments. The mission of the SLCHI is to measurably improve the health of the residents in the largest, and one of the poorest counties in the state.

The Governor's proposed budget, if adopted, will cause irreparable harm to rural communities by both bundling the Rural Health Development and Rural Health Access Programs with seven unrelated Health Workforce Development initiatives and cutting funding across the board to these programs or eliminating programs altogether. Bundling rural health programs with a group of programs with a very different focus minimizes the unique contributions of these programs to health in our rural areas and the planned reduction in funding will impair the ability of these programs to continue serving the needs of rural residents.

The SLCHI opposes the bundling of rural health programs with health workforce development and requests that the legislature return them to individual budget lines. Additionally, we strongly urge the legislature to fully fund both the Rural Health Network Development Program and Rural Health Access Program at current levels (6.4 million and 9.8 million respectively).

The 32 Networks funded under the Rural Health Network Development Program are unique in that each one identifies needs specific to their communities and develops local solutions to best serve their constituents. As a Rural Health Network since 2001, the SLCHI has used this funding to incubate innovative programs that have then become ongoing and self-sustaining projects, touching residents well beyond the period of grant funding. The funding has also allowed the SLCHI to build a reputation in the community and leverage funding to provide many more programs, including direct services to the community such as cancer screenings, insurance



Our Member Organizations...  
Canton-Potsdam Hospital - Claxton-Heppburn Medical Center - Gouverneur Hospital, Inc. - Kinney Drugs - Massena Memorial Hospital -  
Clifton-Fine Hospital - St. Lawrence County Community Services - St. Lawrence County Department of Social Services - St. Lawrence  
County Public Health Department - St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center - State University of NY at Potsdam - United Helpers Management  
Company, Inc.

St. Lawrence County Health Initiative, Inc.

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Marketplace enrollment, and chronic disease management projects, as well as technical assistance to schools and communities on policy, systems and environmental changes to support healthier lifestyles.

Since its inception SLCHI has conducted regular community health needs assessments and has been the lead on county-level strategic health planning. Over the past two years the agency has guided development of the county's 2014 Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) that incorporates the State Prevention Agenda goals and objectives. Additionally, the SLCHI has been involved in local and regional healthcare delivery system reform including DSRIP, serving on a Project Advisory Committee and as a partner in the DSRIP projects in our county.

On behalf of the several million rural New Yorkers served by the Rural Health Network Development Program and the Rural Health Access Program, I am asking you to please protect these vital programs by restoring them to individual budget lines and continuing funding at current appropriations.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. I would be happy to provide further information about the impact of these programs on the rural county I serve and can be reached at (315) 261-4760, Ext. 221, or via email at [ruth@gethealthyslc.org](mailto:ruth@gethealthyslc.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ruth Fishbeck".

Ruth Fishbeck  
Executive Director