



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

David J. Valesky

Senator Valesky, IDC Release Report to Expand 'Doctors Across New York' program

DAVID J. VALESKY May 15, 2012

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State Senator David J. Valesky (D-Oneida) and the Independent Democratic Conference, flanked by hospital executives from around New York State, released a comprehensive report today calling on the Department of Health to implement immediate reforms to the Doctors Across New York program New York currently uses to lure new doctors to underserved areas, particularly in Upstate and rural New York.

“Physician shortages are becoming more prevalent in New York State each year, and this is extremely evident in Central New York,” Senator Valesky (D-Oneida) said. “It’s incumbent upon us as legislators to think of common sense ways to address the problem. By making these reforms to the Doctors Across New York program, we can help turn the tide and get out communities the healthcare that they need.”

The program seeks to attract recent medical school graduates to areas of high need by offering tuition repayment assistance and business expense reimbursements. While the program has been well-intentioned, administrative hurdles have hampered the program’s success. In the current funding cycle, 90% (\$11,950,000) of state funds currently sit idle in government and healthcare facility coffers. A similar amount of funds went undisbursed in 2010. During one of several IDC Thought Raisers, IDC members discovered the problem and collaborated with stakeholders in the medical community to devise an effective reform plan.

The IDC’s Reform Plan Includes:

- Increasing the maximum amount of time that healthcare facilities may hold program funds while actively recruiting new doctors. Currently, this funding expires within six months of disbursement, regardless of how close the healthcare facility may have been to successfully signing a qualifying doctor.
- Expanding the number of physician specialties for which a hospitals may apply for program funds. Many areas of New York suffer physician shortages in multiple specialty areas. However, current program rules only allow hospitals to apply for funding in one specialty group, forcing hospitals to choose between several high need areas and oftentimes jeopardizing effective physician recruitment.
- Providing doctors with a financial commitment “up front,” so that before doctors move to a high need area, they can rest assured that program funds will be disbursed. Currently, funds are not formally disbursed until an employment contract is executed, hampering physician recruitment.

“As one of the largest single health providers of primary care in New York State, serving more than 45,000 different individuals annually, many of which who are rural, urban and homeless, Syracuse Community Health Center can speak emphatically about the voids that exist in the shortage of primary care providers,” Dr. Ruben P. Cowart, President and CEO of Syracuse Community Health Center, Inc., said. “Accordingly, on behalf of Syracuse Community Health Center and Community Health Centers across the State of New York, I applaud Senator Valesky and his colleagues for simplifying this process in a way that addresses the void needed to be filled to ensure primary care access to New York State residents.”

"Doctors Across New York has great promise," said Gary Fitzgerald, President of Iroquois Healthcare. "We're confident that by implementing the reforms proposed by Senator Valesky and his colleagues in the Independent Democratic Conference, we can work with the Department of Health to help improve the program. Iroquois Healthcare is committed to bringing more physicians to areas of need, and today, by proposing these reforms, we're taking a big step towards fulfilling that commitment. I want to thank the members of the IDC for reaching out to the healthcare community and for introducing these common sense solutions."

"The Healthcare Association of New York is committed to seeing Doctors Across New York fulfill its full potential," said Sherry Chorost, Director of the Physician Workforce program at the Health Care Association of New York State. "We believe that by implementing these common sense reforms, we can get more program dollars--and more doctors--to the areas that need them the most. I want to thank Senator Valesky and his colleagues in the IDC for working with HANYS, and the rest of the healthcare community, to help this great program meet its goals. We also look forward to continue our close and productive working relationship with the Legislature and the Department of Health to help DANY realize its full potential. "