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Thank you, Chairpersons Paulin, Rivera, Krueger, and Pretlow, and the members of the Health, Finance, and Ways and Means Committees for the opportunity to submit this testimony on the state of public health and the public health workforce in New York.

The Governor's State of the State proposal and Executive Budget underscore the urgency of addressing the ongoing public health crises in sexual and reproductive health and mental healthcare. These proposals emphasize investing in local solutions to meet these challenges and build a stronger public health and healthcare workforce. Both areas face a significant workforce shortage, as does the field of public health. As public health, social services, universities, and many marginalized communities face new challenges, we need to work together to ensure access to necessary services, research, education, training, and bodily autonomy in all ways for everyone in our state.

Reproductive Healthcare Access

CUNY SPH proudly hosts New York State's first coordinated Sexual and Reproductive Justice Hub, an academic initiative that prioritizes advocacy and scholarship to advance reproductive justice. We celebrate the passage of the ERA/proposal 1 in New York. This work is critical now more than ever. Recent federal actions have attacked gender equity protections, healthcare access, bodily autonomy, and research on population disparities, making New York's legislative efforts, such as the New York State Abortion Clinical Training Program Act and other bills to safeguard reproductive freedoms and data privacy and protect healthcare providers, critical for all. By building on legislative victories, we can continue to strengthen access to reproductive healthcare for all New Yorkers and serve as a national leader in upholding equity and justice in sexual and reproductive healthcare delivery.

Mental Healthcare Access

New York State, like most of the United States, is facing a mental health crisis, with an increasing number of individuals experiencing mental illness across a spectrum of severity. The Governor's executive budget makes significant strides toward bolstering the state's mental hygiene system. However, with proposals to expand criteria for involuntary confinement and increase connections to community-based care for discharged behavioral health patients, the demand for culturally competent mental health services will grow significantly.

CUNY SPH's Center for Innovation in Mental Health (CIMH) is uniquely positioned to help meet this demand by training a diverse community workforce to deliver culturally responsive, community-centered mental health services. Building this capacity will not

only address workforce gaps but also foster community resilience and health equity, ensuring that underserved populations receive the support they need.

Strengthening our Public Health Workforce

A robust public health workforce is essential to protecting the health of New Yorkers. Unfortunately, the public health workforce is shrinking when its role is more critical than ever. While the US population grew by 8% between 2010 and 2019, the [health department workforce across the nation decreased by 17%](#). The most recent surveys (2021 data published in 2023) indicate that we need to hire at least [80,000 new public health department professionals nationally](#) just to meet current needs for basic public health services. Alarming, [1 in 3 health department employees](#) is considering leaving their organization due to job dissatisfaction or retirement within the year. Moreover, [56% report](#) at least one symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder. These factors will create an additional deficit of [129,000 workers by 2025](#), or a cumulative total deficit of 200,000 workers just in state and local health departments. New data from surveys being conducted now will be published in the second half of 2025. New York specific data is equally concerning. According to the New York State Association of County Health Officials (NYSACHO), health departments face an average vacancy rate of nearly 20%, with some counties reporting vacancies as high as one-third of their staff (provided by NYSACHO, November 24, 2023).

[National data](#) also indicate more attrition among younger employees, a lack of public health training among governmental public health workers, and difficulty attaining governmental public health jobs among public health graduates. Our diverse student body reflects the communities we aim to serve: 64.0% are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) and 24% are children of immigrants. Impressively, 37% of our students are the first generation to attend college, and 57% the first to attend graduate schools. As the most affordable school of public health in New York City, CUNY SPH is more accessible than most, yet most of our students work either full-time or part-time while matriculating and need financial assistance to support their studies.

Solutions

These issues are significant, yet there are several practical achievable solutions that can bolster the public health workforce and improve the health of all New Yorkers. The City University of New York overall and CUNY SPH are ready to serve as thought and implementation partners in these efforts.

We ask that you continue and increase support for the CUNY SPH Sexual and Reproductive Justice Hub and Mental Health Task-Sharing Certificate which will allow us to continue to partner with you in these areas (fact sheets attached). We also ask that you consider efforts to expand the overall public health workforce such as “public health across new york” (like “Doctors Across New York”) and inclusion of public health in workforce investment initiatives.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share this testimony with you. CUNY SPH stands ready to collaborate and help build a healthier, more equitable future for New Yorkers.