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STATE OF NEW YORK



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LYME AND TICK BORNE DISEASES
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

January 9, 2019

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor, New York State
NYS Capitol Building
Albany, New York 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

Please consider this my formal request to restore critical funding to our rural communities in the 2019-20 New York State Budget. I was honored to serve as Senate Chair of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources during 2017 and 2018, where I led efforts to restore and increase funding for programs that provide vital services to rural communities throughout New York State. With this letter, I invite you to prioritize funding for these programs within the 2019-20 State Budget.

As you know, rural communities across New York State are diverse and have varying needs. It is through the expertise of on-the-ground, local organizations that meaningful assistance and resources are made available to those who need them most. The Commission has worked closely with these organizations to learn more about their strengths, and to also better understand their unique challenges. Importantly, many of these programs focus on our agricultural sector, which is relevant because agriculture is the largest economic driver in our rural communities. Continued funding for these organizations is unbelievably important for our rural communities, and, after reading this letter, I hope that you strongly agree.

Below is a descriptive list of these programs (with FY19 State Budget funding levels indicated in parentheses):

Agriculture

NY FarmNet at Cornell University (\$1.272 million total, on both agricultural and mental health budget lines). I cannot stress enough the importance of continued and

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increased funding for NY FarmNet. The lives of many of our farmers depend on this funding. NY FarmNet was founded in the 1980s in response to the farm crisis that was devastating family farms. The program has grown to be an invaluable source of support for farmers who need assistance with mental health services, as well as a wide range of business concerns such as creating business plans, managing growth, estate planning, and business transfer planning. Unfortunately, the truth is that our family farms—especially dairy—are facing crises right now that are reminding many of the hard times in the 1980s. In the last two years, NY FarmNet has experienced a significant increase in crisis calls, and there has been a real and documentable increase in suicide rates among our dairy farmers. The stress experienced by dairy farmers is now also affecting the supporting agribusiness sector. Continued and increased funding for both the agriculture and mental health funding lines for NY FarmNet is necessary to provide front-line support to our farmers during this extraordinarily difficult time.

- **Cornell University’s Harvest NY (\$600,000).** The Harvest NY program is the regional arm of the Cornell Cooperative Extension network. The program focuses on business expansion projects and workforce development initiatives, to enhance the profitability of the State’s agriculture industry. Harvest NY currently focuses on five sectors in Upstate NY: dairy food processing and marketing; local food distribution and marketing; farm-based beverages; livestock processing and marketing; and farm strategic planning and modernization.
- **American Farmland Trust, Farmland for a New Generation (\$400,000).** Farmland for a New Generation is a newly funded program in the 2018-19 State Budget, which builds on a successful pilot program in the Hudson Valley that established an online database of farmland available for transition and worked to connect 130 new farmers to land over the past three years. FNG has two main components. The first establishes the FNG Resource Center within AFT to provide a land access expert as a first point of contact as well as a central website for farmers searching for land across New York State. This statewide website enables farmers to connect to available resources, as well as find land that is available across New York. The second part, in partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension, land trusts, and other stakeholder groups, creates a network of Regional Navigators to offer one-on-one assistance to farmers and landowners. The program is already well underway and continued funding should be supported.
- **New York Farm Viability Institute (\$1.9 million, and an additional \$220,000 for Dairy Profit Teams).** NYFVI has completed over 250 on-farm agricultural research projects since 2005, and these projects have generated a benefit of nearly \$135 million for New York State’s agriculture industry. Research projects funded by NYFVI are selected by an all-volunteer board of directors consisting of farmers and representatives of the agricultural industry. Funded projects increase profitability on the farm and are replicable across farms throughout the State. The NYFVI program is critical to cutting edge agricultural research in New York State for two reasons: (1) the grant program is noncompetitive, and NYFVI can work with applicants to develop their proposals and find partners in order to maximize the impact of each funded project before a project is awarded, and (2) NYFVI designates limited funds for emergency funding, such as for research related to blight or invasive species, which enables a quick response to environmental issues that could be devastating

to a grow season. This financial flexibility in agricultural research is simply not available elsewhere. Continued and, when possible, increased funding is highly recommended for this program.

- **Research programs at Cornell University’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.** These programs support the prosperity of our farms through research that protects farming operations from blights and disease, ensures successful grow seasons, explores opportunities for increased yield and efficiencies, and supports best practices on the farm. I would not consider this list exhaustive:

Program	2018-19 State Budget Funding
Cornell “Ag in the Classroom” nutrition education	\$300,000
Honeybee research	\$150,000 (\$100,000 increase)
Hops and barley research	\$300,000 (\$100,000 increase)
Cornell vegetable research	\$100,000
Cornell hard cider research	\$200,000 (new funds)
Cornell farm labor specialists	\$200,000
Cornell Small Farms Veterans Program	\$115,000
Cornell Association of Ag Educators	\$416,000
Cornell Maple Research Extension	\$125,000
Cornell onion research	\$50,000
Pro Dairy	\$1.2M
Dairy Profit Teams at Cornell	\$150,000
Cornell Berry Research	\$260,000

Health and Mental Health

- **Critical Access Hospital Reimbursement Rates (\$10 million).** As you know, a Critical Access Hospital (“CAH”) is an acute facility providing outpatient, emergency, and inpatient services. CAHs serve the most rural and geographically isolated areas of the State and are the central health care presence in their communities. Understandably, CAHs face unique and serious operational challenges. They are some of the smallest hospitals in the State, being limited to 25 inpatient beds, and 10 beds each for rehabilitation or psychiatric units. Due to their location, patient population, and size, CAHs must provide outpatient clinic and ancillary services at high, fixed costs, but have low patient volumes across which to spread these costs. Moreover, CAHs’ high costs deter commercial payers from contracting with them. Consequently, CAHs rely heavily on public payers, such as Medicare and Medicaid. These challenges were noted by the New York State Department of Health in a report released in 2016, which recommended “allow[ing] for CAHs to be reimbursed for providing inpatient, outpatient, and potentially other services to the Medicaid patient population at the CAHs’ reasonable cost of providing services plus a

certain percentage ...”¹ The report additionally recommends that CAH participation in the value-based payment model be optional, so that CAHs are not forced to take on risk that is inconsistent with their patient volume. Medicaid reimbursement rates, in the past, have been lower than operational costs for these facilities. Recent funding in the State Budget has complemented new efforts by the Department of Health to work with CAHs in achieving a more appropriate and sustainable rate of reimbursement under Medicaid. I urge that this funding and these efforts continue, as there remains much work to be done.

- **Iroquois Healthcare Association (IHA) Take a Look Tours (\$150,000).** There exists a critical shortage of primary care and specialty physicians and other healthcare professionals in rural and underserved areas across New York State. As an example, in 2016, the Healthcare Association of New York State (“HANYS”) determined that hospitals in rural communities have great difficulty recruiting primary care physicians, and often do not have enough primary care providers to meet the needs of the surrounding community. In order to improve access to healthcare for rural residents, IHA began the “Take a Look” program in 2013. The program aims to expose physician residents and other medical professionals to practice opportunities in Upstate New York communities, through active outreach and multi-day, guided tours of rural hospitals and their surrounding communities.
- **Rural Health Networks (\$14.88 million).** There exist 32 Rural Health Networks (“RHNs”) throughout New York State, each with a mission carefully crafted to the unique needs of their communities. RHNs are essential to improving public health and linking rural counties to regional and statewide initiatives. RHNs represent partnerships among many rural providers and stakeholders including hospitals, municipalities, public health agencies, consumers, professionals serving the mental health, substance abuse, disabled, and aging populations. RHNs work together in identifying community health needs and supporting the improvement of health care at the local level. Their activities range from promoting wellness—such as chronic illness prevention, exercise, and healthy eating—to facilitating compliance with statewide health care initiatives, including the Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment Program (“DSRIP”), the State Health Innovation Plan (“SHIP”), and the Prevention Agenda. These activities are essential to the stability and viability of rural communities, as well as their relevance in relation to modern advancements in efficiencies, health policy, and quality of care.

Transportation

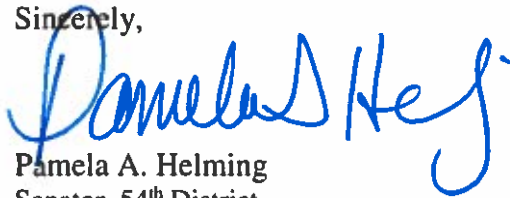
- **Rural Transit Systems (\$4 million).** Rural public transportation is a vital lifeline to the residents they serve, connecting people with medical care and public services, shopping, recreation, education, and employment. Throughout upstate New York, especially in rural areas, public transportation systems have struggled in the past several years to adjust to

¹ NYS Department of Health, *Recommendations to Ensure the Financial Stability of Critical Access Hospitals*, at 8 (December 2015). The report suggests a calculable reimbursement methodology comparable to that of Medicaid, which reimburses services administered at CAHs at 101% of reasonable cost. NB: the report is dated 2015, but was released in 2016.

decreases in their Medicaid revenues associated with the implementation of the Medicaid nonemergency medical transportation (“NEMT”) manager. While federal policy once gave preference to public transportation for nonemergency medical transportation, that model has changed. It is important that rural public transportation systems find new solutions to best serve their communities. In the meantime, I urge that assistance funding be reinstated, which has been vital to continued service while a long term solution is achieved. I would further request that any such allocation should be made based on need, regardless of whether a system currently participates as a provider of NEMT services.

The communities of Upstate New York are counting on your leadership. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this letter. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 518-455-2366 or at helming@nysenate.gov.

Sincerely,



Pamela A. Helming
Senator, 54th District
Ranking Member, Commerce, Economic Development and Small Business
Member, Legislative Commission on Rural Resources

cc:

Joseph A. Griffo, Deputy Minority Leader and Senator, 54th District, NYS Senate

Robert Mujica, Director of the Budget, NYS Division of the Budget

Richard A. Ball, Commissioner, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets

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Ann Marie T. Sullivan, M.D., Commissioner, NYS Office of Mental Health

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