



## New York State Public Health Association (NYSPHA)

February 16, 2024

February 15, 2024

The Honorable Pete Harckham  
Chair  
Committee on Environmental Conservation  
New York State Senate  
Legislative Office Building, Room 315  
Albany, NY 12247

The Honorable Deborah Glick  
Chair  
Committee on Environmental Conservation  
New York State Assembly  
Legislative Office Building, Room 621  
Albany, NY 11247

The Honorable Gustavo Rivera  
Chair  
Committee on Health  
New York State Senate  
NYS Capital Building, Room 502C  
Albany, NY 12247

The Honorable Amy Paulin  
Chair  
Committee on Health  
New York State Assembly  
Legislative Office Building, Room 822  
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Chairs Harckham, Glick, Rivera, and Paulin:

The New York State Public Health Association (NYSPHA) urges you to restore critically needed funding for the NYS Children's Environmental Health Centers (NYSCHECK) in your FY25-26 proposed budget. NYSPHA is the New York State affiliate of the American Public Health Association (APHA) and serves as the statewide organization for members from all disciplines across the spectrum of public health professionals, organizations, academia, and students pursuing careers in public health. As such, we recognize the critical role that environmental exposures during childhood play in health and disease. Access to clean water and air and a healthy home environment free of known risks to children like lead and mold are essential to maintaining good health across the lifespan.

In FY23 and FY24, NYSCHECK received \$4 million per year in the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) allocation, yet the Governor proposed a funding cut to \$2 million in her Executive Budget for FY25-26 while preserving full EPF funding at \$400 million. We urge you to reject these cuts and instead increase funding to \$5 million in order to better serve environmentally stressed children and families of New York.

NYSCHECK is a network of seven highly specialized centers in Albany, Buffalo, Syracuse, Rochester, Westchester, New York City, and Long Island staffed with highly trained physicians and other health professionals who provide direct clinical services to diagnose and treat illness due to environmental exposures, as well as provide consultation to other healthcare professionals treating patients.

The NYSCHECK network has proven its value as a sustainable, scalable, and evidence-based model for expanding access to environmental health services and expertise at the state level through the following activities and accomplishments:

- Implemented environmental screening, counseling, and referral statewide in a range of clinical settings (General Pediatrics, Pediatric Pulmonary, Pediatric Allergy and Immunology, School-Based Health, and Pediatric Inpatient Services).

- Provided critical services to **256,000 families** to address mold, pests, pesticides, lead and other environmental hazards in homes, schools, and communities across urban, suburban and rural New York settings.
- Educated **41,000 health care professionals** in children's environmental health.
- Trained **2500 future leaders** in environmental and public health.
- Built partnerships at the local, state, and national level to streamline referral processes, enhance reach, and promote resilient communities.
- Distributed Healthy Homes Kits so that families have access to green cleaning supplies and needed resources for environmental asthma triggers.
- **Increased services 5-fold since 2017**, with 95,000 services provided in FY23.

The important role that NYSCHECK plays in protecting the health of New Yorkers is exemplified by their response to the wildfire smoke that blanketed NYS in June 2023. Within 24 hours, NYSCHECK disseminated air quality health guidance to over 1,000,000 patients across the state. The messages were shared by local, regional and national partners including New York State American Academy of Pediatrics, American Lung Association, and the US Department of Health and Human Services. As threats to public health brought about by a changing climate and environmental contaminants continue to rise, it is more important than ever to bolster the capacity of the healthcare system to respond.

Restoration of NYSCHECK funding to \$5 million in FY2025 is essential to ensure an environmentally competent public health workforce and to further address essential service gaps identified by New York State Department of Health: bringing environmental health services to rural and low-income communities and increasing collaborations with New York State Lead Resource Programs around screening and prevention of childhood lead poisoning.

We urge you to increase the annual NYSCHECK budget to \$5 million to meet the critical and growing needs of children, families, and their health care providers facing the health hazards imposed by environmental contaminants and climate-related emergencies across New York State.

Sincerely,



Sarah Evans, PhD MPH  
Assistant Professor of Environmental Medicine and Public Health  
Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai



Guthrie Birkhead, MD, MPH, Chair  
Professor Emeritus, Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics  
University at Albany School of Public Health  
Chair, NYSPHA Policy and Advocacy Committee