

Testimony to the

NYS Division of the Budget

at the

Public Hearings in Preparation for the 2008-09 Budget

Submitted by:

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On Behalf of the Member Clinics of the

NYS Occupational Health Clinic Network

www.health.state.ny.us/environmental/workplace/clinic_network.htm

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Good Afternoon. My name is David Shafer and I am the Senior Director of the Center for Occupational and Environmental Medicine at Arnot Ogden Medical Center in Elmira, New York.

My colleague, Antoinette Longo, Administrative Director of the Syracuse Clinic and I are here to speak today on behalf of the member clinics and supporters of the **New York State Occupational Health Clinic Network**, including the labor and business leaders, health and worker-safety advocates; occupational medicine physicians, specialists and other representatives of New York's workforce statewide that comprise our community advisory boards. I also represent the interests of thousands of patients statewide who have a critical need for the specialized clinical and preventive medicine services that each Center in the Network routinely provides.

For those who may not be familiar with the history of the **New York State Occupational Health Clinic Network**, it was created at the behest of labor in 1987 by the New York State Legislature and in response to widespread concern about the high incidence of work-related illness and injury in our state. To this day, the Network remains unique in the United States as a public health-based consortium specializing in the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of occupational injury and illness. As such, we play a critical role in ensuring the health and economic viability of New York's working families and the organizations that employ them. Our multidisciplinary teams of physicians, nurses, industrial hygienists, health educators, and social workers operate from the locus of 14 clinical facilities situated statewide. In this effort, we work closely with government agencies, unions and employers. And, we've been called upon to provide our expertise aiding the public health response to a host of new public health challenges, such as disaster preparedness and bio-terrorism.

For example, in response to the World Trade Center disaster, the Mount Sinai Center for Occupational and Environmental Medicine was instrumental in developing the national response and medical model which has now provided over 22,000 medical screening exams and ongoing medical monitoring and treatment for workers and volunteer responders at risk for serious health affects as a result of their efforts in rescue and recovery process, essential restoration work and removal and clean up of debris. Though much of this initiative is now appropriately funded by the federal government, it was the expertise of the Mount Sinai Center that developed an appropriate public health response and continues to work with other Network members today to offer these services statewide for responders in need.

Unfortunately, the **Occupational Health Clinic Network** has struggled in recent years to provide the services that are desperately needed across New York State. The difficulty arises solely from a lack of sufficient financial resources to meet the ever increasing needs and demands of the State's workforce. Network funding to Clinic sites has remained flat at \$5.8 million over the last 10 years, while patient visits have nearly doubled over this same time period. In particular, *the lack of a long overdue inflation adjustment* has forced the closure of satellite locations and resulted in staff layoffs and cuts in patient services to workers in need. For example, the Syracuse Clinical Center closed its Utica location and was forced to shelve plans to open a North Country satellite office. In the Buffalo region, the Buffalo-Sheehan and Jamestown satellites closed. The Albany Clinic, which serves 21 counties, closed its Glens Falls satellite office and discontinued plans to open a North Country satellite office. The Mount Sinai Center, serving New York City, the Hudson Valley Region and beyond, had to close its Brooklyn satellite office, and it struggles to maintain its Queens satellite only through the generosity of independent member item support. Also in New York City, the Bellevue Clinic had to discontinue services provided at Gouverneur Hospital. And, the Long Island Clinical Center has closed its Port Jefferson satellite and has discontinued plans to open a satellite office in Nassau County. These troubling events derive solely from a lack of sufficient financial resources to meet the ever increasing needs and demands of the workforce. At a time when our services are most needed, we are not expanding but closing down critical services for workers in need. Consequently, major portions of the state continue to be underserved. In an effort to address this deficit, the NYS Department of Health has implemented a redistricting plan that will add two new regional sites to the Network in 2008. This goal of this plan is to bring network resources closer to underserved areas of the state. Without additional funding, however, this will cause some established sites to lose funding and severely threaten their ability to meet basic service expectations for participation in the Network.

For these reasons, I am here today seeking your help in securing a minimum 7 million dollar increase in the annual funding stream to the New York State Occupational Health Clinic Network.

Please note that an increase to the Network could easily be funded using monies already generated by the surcharge mechanism that funds the Clinic Network, the Hazard Abatement Board, and the Department of Labor's occupational safety and health program (collectively

referred to as “Interdepartmental Programs”). Funding to support the operation of the Network and these other interdepartmental programs is derived from a small surcharge on Workers’ Compensation indemnity benefits paid by employers throughout the State. These funds are collected by the Workers’ Compensation Board and the portion that supports the Occupational Health Clinic Network is then transferred to the Health Department’s Center for Environmental Health. For my own institution, an employer of over 2,000 health care workers, the total assessment amounts to less than \$6,500 per year. Over the past few years the proceeds from this surcharge have significantly exceeded the amount of funding disbursed to the Network from the Special Revenue accounts that receive these funds. And, on more than one occasion, these resources have then been allocated to other State programs that are unrelated to the purposes for which they were collected.

For the past five years we have traveled to Albany regularly to meet with government representatives and seek their help in correcting this devastating problem. Please help us to help our many deserving constituents by supporting a long-overdue and urgently needed request for a funding increase for the **New York State Occupational Health Clinic Network**. This increase will enable us to *restore much of critical medical treatment and preventive services that have been lost by New York State workers over the past decade and would, in turn, clearly benefit a Department that is tasked with ensuring adequate availability and access to specialized health care services for residents of our state*. In addition, an investment in the **Occupational Health Clinic Network** is an investment that can save money - for the state, employers and its workforce - helping us as it would to provide highly specialized medical services and prevention education to more workers and employers across the state. Because our Centers provide preventative education, training and outreach to a broad cross section of the working population of New York and because we provide services that help individuals who have experienced a work-related injury and are able to return to the work force do so as safely and expeditiously as possible, there is no doubt that the State’s Workers’ Compensation costs would be higher if not for our efforts.

On behalf of our state-supported Centers of Excellence in occupational and environmental medicine that comprise the Occupational Health Clinic Network, workers, patients and other Network supporters from across New York State, I thank you for your time, and urge you to please do all you can to help support our efforts and funding needs.

Thank You.