

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 25, 2021

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
Senate Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Vice Chairman
Senate Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Chair
Senate Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
Senate Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairs DeLauro, Leahy and Murray, Vice Chairman Shelby, and Ranking Members Blunt, Granger, and Cole:

As you consider Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) spending bills, I urge you to provide \$67 million for the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) program. The funding levels of \$47 million for AHEC in the proposed Senate appropriations bill and \$41.25 million in the proposed House appropriations bill is a good start, but I urge you to provide the full level of \$67 million in your final bill. With such funding, each of the over 250 AHECs across the country would receive annual federal funding of approximately \$250,000 which would allow them to expand their

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

efforts to recruit, train, and retain diverse health professionals in the national health care workforce.

The devastating impact of COVID in our communities and within the healthcare delivery system is ever-present. AHECs have been critical in the continuance of access to quality health care in underserved communities, particularly primary and preventive care. Funding the program at \$67 million would improve the ability of AHEC to address health disparities through virtual education and trainings for health profession students entering the workforce in this COVID environment.

AHECs are present in 85% of all counties nationally and support health care workforce development and education by training providers in interdisciplinary settings to respond to the needs of special and underserved populations. AHECs commit to diversifying the health workforce by recruiting a diverse population of youth to health care careers and facilitating the distribution of clinicians, especially in rural and underserved communities. Each AHEC places students in health professions in a variety of real-world settings, such as migrant, urban, and rural community health clinics and health departments, to provide health care to rural and underserved populations. With close to 50 years of operation, AHECs meet the current and emerging needs of the communities they serve through robust community-academic partnerships, with a focus on exposure, education, and training of the current and future health care workforce.

In New York State, there are two regional centers and nine AHECs spread across the state. One example of AHEC programming from 2020 includes the Brooklyn-Queens-Long Island AHEC facilitating virtual and experiential learning activities for high school students that focused on health disparities, including checking in on homebound seniors, updating outreach materials, vaccine outreach, and sharing public health approaches to community-specific health issues.

At a time when the country is facing health provider shortages coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that we increase support to the AHEC program. The AHEC program brings more trained and skilled health providers into the workforce in a way that is responsive to local health needs. AHECs connect academic training programs with community-based outreach programs and, because AHECs are embedded in the communities they serve, they are positioned to recognize and respond to needs of vulnerable and underserved populations as such needs arise. Funding the AHEC program at \$67 million provides critical opportunities to support AHECs as they work in the communities they serve to address the health workforce needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic; strengthen linkages between university health science centers and community health service delivery systems to provide additional training sites for students, faculty, and practitioners; increase the return on federal investment by leveraging state and local resources to meet the required 1:1 funding match in support of health workforce development; and expedite the transformation of the health care system by training the workforce for a value-based, patient-centered, team-based practice environment for innovative models of care.

We greatly appreciate your support for the AHEC program to ensure the health workforce is prepared to meet the country's evolving and emerging health care needs. As such, we urge you to

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

include \$67 million for this important program in the final appropriations package for FY2022.
Thank you for your leadership on this issue and consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kirsten Gillibrand". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator