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**NEW YORK STATE ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES**

# Press Release

## “Make It Happen” Say Counties in 2004

*State Leaders Heed Call from Local Taxpayers; Indicate Medicaid Relief to be a Priority*

New York’s county leaders convened in Albany following the opening of the 2004 Legislative Session to bring their grassroots campaign to Albany and launch their capitol-based effort to ensure Medicaid relief for local taxpayers happens this year. The press conference, organized by the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC), capped a week-long, statewide bi-partisan effort by county officials to call for a limit on the most onerous of state mandates: Medicaid.

“The momentum is with us. Today, more than ever before, the issue of Medicaid resonates with local taxpayers and their need for relief is finally getting the attention it deserves,” said NYSAC President Virginia O. Amico of Livingston County.

According to NYSAC, county taxpayers in New York pay, on average, 34 percent of the state’s share of the Medicaid program. Medicaid is a joint federal/state program that provides health care to the needy. New York, however, is one of only a handful of states to pass along a significant share of its costs to county taxpayers. It passes on the highest percentage of Medicaid costs in the nation.

“Medicaid is the backbone of New York’s health care system,” said Clifford R. Donaldson, Essex County Manager and NYSAC President Elect. “We agree that without Medicaid, millions of needy residents would not have access to the quality health care we all deserve. However, New York’s method of shifting the growth of the program on real property taxpayers is unacceptable and must be reversed.”

NYSAC, which represents all 62 counties in the state of New York, has been seeking a cap on the local share of Medicaid to address the annual, double-digit rate increases in county payments to the program. In 1995, the local share of Medicaid was \$3.5 billion. In 2003, the total costs borne by local taxpayers was estimated to be \$6 billion. NYSAC projects the local share will be a staggering \$7.5 billion in 2005, using current rates of growth.

“Representing a rural, western New York county, I would have appreciated all 76 minutes of the Governor’s address to have targeted ways to relieve local taxpayers of the burden of

Medicaid growth,” said Chautauqua County Executive Mark Thomas, President of the New York State County Executives Association. “Still, the commitment he referenced yesterday, combined with vows by the leaders of the Senate and Assembly to address the local share of Medicaid, gives me great hope we will see real tax relief for the county residents we strive to serve.”

***“Let’s work together to reduce state and local Medicaid expenses this year and begin to reverse the costs that have squeezed the finances of so many county governments,” -- Governor George E. Pataki, January 7, 2004***

***“Health care, especially Medicaid reform, will be a Senate priority. ....We have to reform Medicaid to provide fiscal relief to local governments, to reduce property taxes and to make it more effective for consumers.”  
– Senate Majority Leader Joseph L. Bruno, January 7, 2004***

***“We agree, and we also embrace the call for Medicaid relief.”  
-- Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, January 7, 2004***

“Given this level of commitment by the leadership, they can make it happen,” added County Executive Thomas.

“The leaders in Albany have acknowledged the crisis facing counties,” said NYSAC Executive Director Robert R. Gregory. “County officials are optimistic that moving forward, the state and counties can come together as partners in health care reform in the same way they have for decades as partners in health care financing. If the rhetoric of this week is any indication, county taxpayers will be counting on relief from Medicaid in 2004.”

**The following county officials are scheduled to participate:**

- Mark Thomas, County Executive, Chautauqua County
- Kathy Jimino, County Executive, Rensselaer County
- William Jones, Deputy Commissioner of Social Services, Suffolk County
- Bob Hagemann, County Administrator, Jefferson County
- Barbara Brown, Chair, County Legislature, Oswego County
- Andrew Spano, County Executive, Westchester County
- Thomas Suozzi, County Executive, Nassau County
- Michael Breslin, County Executive, Albany County
- Joel Giambra, County Executive, Erie County
- Clifford Donaldson, County Manager, Essex County
- Rocco DiVeronica, Chair, Board of Supervisors Madison County
- Jim Wallace, County Administrator Herkimer County
- Nick Pirro, County Executive, Onondaga County
- Dominic Mazza, County Administrator Livingston County
- Sarah Purdy, County Administrator, Yates County
- Virginia Amico, Clerk, Board of Supervisors, Livingston County
- Bill Steinhaus County Executive, Dutchess County
- Ed Diana, County Executive, Orange County
- Tom Santulli, County Executive, Chemung County
- Jay Gsell, County Manager, Genesee County
- Kevin Hayes, County Administrator, Washington County
- Michael Gendron, Vice Chair, Board of Supervisors, Fulton County
- William Farber, Chair, Board of Supervisors, Hamilton County
- Jon Stead, Administrative Officer, Board of Supervisors, Fulton County
- James Feeley, County Manager, Franklin County
- George Canon, Chair, Board of Supervisors, Essex County
- William Thomas, Chair, Board of Supervisors, Warren County
- Leonard Hendrix, Chair, County Legislature, Herkimer County