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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Gary J. Fitzgerald, President and CEO of Iroquois Healthcare Alliance, Calls on State Leaders to act on the Budget Priorities of Upstate Hospitals

ALBANY, NY –Governor Hochul’s 2023 Executive budget is a great start in addressing the needs of the State’s health care system, however more work is necessary to address the longstanding needs of hospitals in Upstate and rural New York.

Too often the needs of Upstate and Rural hospitals are overshadowed by the needs of our Downstate colleagues.

“IHA is immensely grateful to Governor Hochul for acknowledging IHA’s intense and weeks-long advocacy regarding the devastating effects if the February COVID-19 vaccination booster mandate was not suspended,” said Gary J. Fitzgerald, President and CEO, Iroquois Healthcare Alliance “This is what leadership looks like.”

With one crisis behind us, Upstate Hospitals are still in the throes of an on-going workforce crisis, which has plagued them since long before the pandemic.

According to a recent survey of IHA member hospitals, from January 2021 to March 2022 position vacancies have risen at meteoric rates. Examples include the following positions which have seen dramatic increases in their vacancy rates: Emergency Room Nurses (276.7%), Nurse Practitioner (58.3%), Out Patient Nurse (98.6%). The same survey revealed that there are 17,703 open positions that hospitals desperately need to fill (a vacancy rate of 18.4%, a 29% increase from one year ago), but have not been able to for some time now. The entirety of IHA’s recent published survey can be [found at this link](#). **Please note this press release includes additional data collected through March 8, 2022, after publication of the survey results.*

To make the workforce and financial circumstances of our Upstate and rural hospitals that much worse, needing to ensure safe staffing levels, hospitals utilize staffing agencies. In the past, the use of staffing agencies was the exception to hospital staffing strategy. Due to the lack of candidates to fill these 17,703 vacant positions, it has now become an all to regular and extremely expensive staffing strategy.

In fact, in a survey of IHA members in early March, which compared annual staffing agency expenditures in 2020 and 2021, many hospitals reported a year over year doubling of such expenditures to fill shifts. What is more alarming is that some hospitals have reported expenditures to date in 2022 that are roughly *half of the entire annual amount* spent on staffing agencies in 2021.

Our Upstate and rural hospitals need assistance now.

The current severe challenges faced by Upstate and rural hospitals will not heal without serious investment focused on stabilizing and rebuilding a sustainable workforce.

The Executive Budget is notable for acknowledging many of our needs, however, now is not the time for half-measures. That being said, IHA recommends the following be made priorities in the 2023 budget:

- Significant increase in Medicaid rates.
- Addition of \$100 million in State Supported funding available to Upstate Hospitals.
- Continued \$10 million investment in IHA Workforce Investment Organization (WIO).
- Reinvestment of \$500,000 in the “Take-A-Look” program run by IHA to educate healthcare professionals about the career opportunities available in Upstate and rural New York State.

Without an adequate investment now to ensure a stable and sustained workforce pipeline, scenarios similar to what we experienced with the February booster mandate will continue to play out time and time again. This was not an isolated case.

“IHA is ready to work with Governor Hochul and the Legislature to ensure that the unique needs of Upstate and rural hospitals are fully and adequately addressed continued Fitzgerald. “In order to have a robust healthcare workforce in the post-pandemic era these items must be addressed.”

About the [Iroquois Healthcare Association](#): IHA is a regional healthcare trade organization representing more than 50 hospitals and health systems, spanning over 28,000 square miles, across 32 counties of Upstate New York. IHA is the leading resource for facilities and professionals bringing quality health care to the region. IHA represents the unique needs of rural, small community safety-net providers to large, academic medical centers in Upstate New York’s urban areas through advocacy, education and information, cost-savings initiatives and innovative business solutions.