

February 2008

The Honorable Joseph Bruno, Majority Leader
New York State Senate
Capitol Building
Albany, New York

Dear Majority Leader Bruno,

We write to urge your support for legislation which creates a mechanism for providing a long overdue funding increase for the New York State Occupational Health Clinic Network and the statewide Occupational Safety and Health Training and Education programs, S 6913 (Maltese). We also urge an increase in the overall funding level of both programs to make up for cuts suffered from past inflation.

Since the mid-1980s, New York State has been a leader in the field of occupational safety and health. The state-funded Occupational Health Clinic Network and the Occupational Safety and Health Training and Education Program are a model for the rest of the country. **However, while the demand for these programs has consistently grown, and continues to grow, both are suffering from the lack of needed funding: the safety and health training program has not received an increase in funding for 17 years, the occupational health clinics for approximately a decade. Inflation has taken its toll on both programs.**

The Occupational Safety and Health Training and Education Program has provided quality safety and health training to tens of thousands of working people – members of unions, safety and health organizations, and businesses. The program trains workers about their rights on the job to safe and healthful workplaces and helps them to make informed decisions about how to deal with hazards they face on the job. It provides employers with a better educated, more productive workforce, resulting in lower workers' compensation costs.

The NYS Occupational Health Clinic Network, created by our State Legislature in 1987, is unique in this country as a statewide publicly supported and public health-based occupational medicine service. Comprising fourteen occupational medicine clinical centers and satellites, the Network is dedicated to the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of occupational disease and injury. Through the efforts of multidisciplinary teams of physicians, nurses, health educators, industrial hygienists, and social workers, the Network assists the industrial, construction, and service trades as well as agricultural workers (that is, the full range of workers across New York). Operating in conjunction with local, state, and federal governmental agencies, unions and employers, the Network has been instrumental in providing expertise guiding critical public health challenges in our state. This includes developing the federal government's national health response to 9/11. More recently, Network leaders served as advisors to several Task Forces created by the Governor to help implement long-needed reforms to the administration of the New York State Workers' Compensation Law.

S.6913-Maltese and its companion bill, A.4508 –A, John, are currently before the legislature. They provide a mechanism for funding both of these valuable programs by indexing the level of funding to the workers' compensation maximum weekly benefit level. Both programs are funded out of a very small assessment on workers' compensation premiums and are off budget. In consideration of the estimated \$1 billion in savings resulting from the recent changes in New York State's Workers' Compensation Law, we believe the increase of funding for these programs is a modest request, but one that can greatly benefit the State of New York and thousands of working families who reside here.

We would appreciate your support of these measures.

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Sincerely,

cc: The Honorable Sheldon Silver, Assembly Speaker
The Honorable Susan V. John