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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COUNTY EXECUTIVE HONORS
BLUE RIBBON TASK FORCE ON HEALTH DISPARITIES AMONG BLACKS
Grant Recipients Announced

One year ago, County Executive Andy Spano appointed a Blue Ribbon Task Force on Health Disparities Among Blacks in Westchester to come up with ways to begin to deal with health disparities in Westchester. Today, at a 9:30 a.m. press conference at the Doral Arrowwood Conference Center, the County Executive recognized the culmination of the work of the Task Force by presenting three community based organizations with \$20,000 each in grant funds to start projects identified by Task Force members as key to the efforts to begin to address health disparities.

“When I recruited this select group of community and medical leaders in the Black community a year ago, I asked them to share their unique knowledge and valuable insight into the problem of health disparities among Blacks in Westchester County. I charged them with the task of helping us develop innovative, short term projects that could begin to address some of the problems” said Spano. “Within the year, the Task Force not only released a detailed report describing the health disparities among Westchester’s Black population, but provided action steps that have allowed us to be here this morning. We are pleased to fund the innovative projects of three organizations that will begin to address some of these issues.”

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The *Blue Ribbon Task Force* determined that the following priorities were paramount to addressing health disparities among Blacks in Westchester County:

1. Link more Black residents to needed health care through education, outreach, and referral;
2. Provide residents with assistance and information to navigate the health care system more effectively; and
3. Increase the number of Black physicians working in Westchester County.

GRANT AWARD RECIPIENTS

To address the priorities set by the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Health Disparities Among Blacks, the County has allocated \$20,000 to each of the following agencies who were selected through a review process involving members of the *Blue Ribbon Task Force on Health Disparities Among Blacks in Westchester County* and members of the Westchester County African American Advisory Board:

To address priorities #1 and #2:

Hudson River HealthCare, a not-for-profit community health center that provides innovative programs and comprehensive services to medically underserved populations will be addressing ways to improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities among Peekskill's Black population.

Mount Vernon Neighborhood Health Center, Inc. operates a network of health centers servicing three of the highest need, minority-concentrated, low-income areas in Westchester – the city of Mount Vernon, Southwest Yonkers and targeted high-need areas in Greenburgh/White Plains -- will be educating and identifying patients at risk for diabetes in these areas.

The Union Baptist Church Nurses Ministry, involved in such activities as weekly feedings of local homeless, Narcotics Anonymous meetings, providing counseling services, and supporting facilities for battered women, will be working to improve the quality of life for Blacks who are disproportionately afflicted with nutrition-related illnesses in the Greenburgh Community.

To address priority #3:

An independent contractor ,Cheryl Brannan, Brannan Solutions Group, has been retained to develop a unique mentoring program that will work toward increasing the number of Black physicians in Westchester. Partnering with local school districts, the mentoring program will expose Black school-aged students to medical

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careers and will work with local hospitals to foster more Black physicians.

Task Force Background: The Problem

As is the case nationwide, health disparities adversely affect Black people in Westchester County:

- In Westchester, the average age at death for Blacks is 66 years, for Whites it is 70 years.
- The overall mortality rate from cardiovascular disease is 1.2 times greater for Blacks than for Whites in Westchester, with Blacks having higher death rates from both stroke and heart disease.
- The overall mortality from diabetes is 2.3 times greater for Blacks than for Whites.
- Infant mortality is greater for Blacks than for Whites in Westchester. There are 11.3 deaths per 1,000 live births for Blacks and 2.2 deaths per 1,000 live births for Whites.
- Blacks have higher rates of prostate cancer and esophageal cancer than Whites and early deaths from prostate cancer are 2.3 times greater among Black men than among White men.
- Black women have higher rates of pancreatic and cervical cancer than White women and early deaths from breast cancer are 1.4 times greater among Black women.
- More than half (52 %) of the people living with AIDS in Westchester are non-Hispanic Blacks while only 22 % are non-Hispanic Whites.
- More than 52 % of the people living with HIV in Westchester are Black while 20 % of HIV cases are White.

Task Force Background: The Process

The *Blue Ribbon Task Force on Health Disparities Among Blacks in Westchester County* met four times in a span of seven months

- At the first meeting, the preliminary findings of the group's report were presented; comments were sought.
- At the second meeting, a draft report was presented with the survey results; comments were sought.
- At the third meeting, a second draft report was presented with updated survey results; comments were sought and priority areas to address the disparities highlighted in the report were developed.
- At the fourth meeting, a final draft report was presented and accepted by the group; priority areas were ranked and the three action steps to be implemented were agreed upon.

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The following is a full listing of members currently serving on the County Executive's Blue Ribbon Task Force for the Elimination of Health Disparities Among Blacks in Westchester County:

Aisha Abdul-Hakim, R.N., Director, Westchester Black Nurses Association

Valiere Alcena, M.D., Professor of Medicine, Albert Einstein Medical College

Rosa Barksdale, CEO, Barksdale Health Care Services

Hon. Lois Bronz, Chair of Housing, Westchester County Board of Legislators

Valentine Burroughs, M.D., Chief Medical Officer, National Medical Association/Policy Committee

Jacqueline Dunbar, M.D., President and Founder, Women's Health Tell Us to Well Us

Barbara Edwards, Chair, African American Advisory Committee

Reverend Barbara Evans, Nurse Practitioner and Minister of Health & Wholeness, Grace Baptist Church;

James Foy, President and CEO, St. John's Riverside Hospital

Harold Freeman M.D., Past President, American Cancer Society

Desta Lakew, Director of Patient Marketing, Ossining Open Door

Joshua Lipsman, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., Commissioner, Westchester County Department of Health

Merville Marshall, M.D., Founder and President, the Endocrine Institute

Carole Morris, Director, Mount Vernon Neighborhood Health Center

Dorothy J. Orr, Retired VP Equitable, Orr Associates

Shawyn Patterson Howard, Executive Director, Mount Vernon YMCA of Central & Northern Westchester

Lynne Perry-Bottinger, M.D., Interventional Cardiologist

Jeanette Phillips, Founder and Board Member, Hudson River Health Care

Thomas Price M.D., Cardiologist, Mount Vernon Hospital

Jon B. Schandler, President and CEO, White Plains Hospital

Meredith Sirmans, M.D., President, The Society of Black Physicians of Westchester and New York

John R. Spicer, President and CEO, Sound Shore Medical Center

Hon. Andrea Stewart Cousins, Health Committee Chair, Westchester County Board of Legislators

Carol Webber, President and CEO, Visiting Nurse Services in Westchester

