

# POLITICO NEW YORK

## **Northwell, Health + Hospitals to build \$50M Queens lab**

By Dan Goldberg

Northwell Health has begun construction of a \$50 million lab in Floral Park.

The two-story lab is being built on Little Neck Parkway, not far from the Queens County Farm Museum, and will run microbiology tests for Northwell and Health + Hospitals, an arrangement the city's public hospital system estimates will save \$30 million per year for both Northwell and Health + Hospitals, or roughly 10 percent of what both systems spend on labs.

The lab, which is expected to process 50 million tests per year, is slated to open in mid-2018.

Health + Hospitals will consolidate its four core labs into the new space, which will process roughly half of all the system's lab tests.

Last June, Northwell assumed day-to-day lab operations at Coney Island Hospital's lab after the facility failed state health department inspections. And in 2014, Health + Hospitals began sending reference testing, which had previously gone to outside vendors, to Northwell.

## **City health advisory board worries over Trump effect**

By Addy Baird

Members of New York City's Community Services Board, a panel responsible for advising the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene on mental health and substance abuse, expressed concern on Thursday about the potential economic and mental health effects of President Donald Trump's administration.

"I read that the president is planning on having his budget out on March 14," Gail Nayowitz, the board's chair, said at a meeting Thursday in Queens. "We live in fear." The White House has not confirmed whether the budget will be released the 13th or 14th.

Trump has proposed block-granting Medicaid, which would shift Medicaid costs more fully onto states by allocating a set amount of money, rather than matching funds 50-50 as the federal government currently does.

Members of the board, which is comprised of representatives from both the private and public sector with experience in mental health and substance abuse care, said Thursday that such a move could hurt programs that rely on Medicaid dollars.

“The state’s Medicaid planning and the federal government’s Medicaid planning are not on the same highway,” Nayowith said.

Board members were also concerned that Trump’s policies might negatively affect mental health in the city or cause undocumented people who may need care to avoid seeking help.

“My clinic in the Bronx, we have seen the impact on children and families,” said Rosa Gil, the founder and president of home health care service Comunilife. “The level of depression is unbelievable. This new immigration ban is going to affect us for years to come.”

Nayowith agreed. “People go underground from fear,” she said.

Board members said they remain hopeful that mental health and substance abuse can be addressed in Congress as bipartisan issues.

“One interesting thing — and I don’t want to overblow this — but it’s been interesting to see one of the only bipartisan issues in the last Congress has been mental health and substance abuse,” said Gary Belkin, the health department’s executive deputy to commissioner for mental hygiene. “It’s in everybody’s neighborhood and it affects a lot of white people.”

Still, Nayowith encouraged board members to prepare for what could come.

“I think that people have been very spoiled. We haven’t had a recession in a long time,” she said. “And if you’ve never worked with a Republican administration in Washington. ... That is a very different world.”

## **Amid threat of a weakened EPA, Cuomo seeks greater DEC power**

By Marie J. French

ALBANY — New York is the latest state to take action to combat what many fear will be a stripped down Environmental Protection Agency under President Donald Trump,

proposing increased regulatory authority for the Department of Environmental Conservation to address water contamination that threatens public health and go after polluters.

“Access to clean drinking water is a fundamental right and we are going to continue to do everything in our power to protect the citizens of our state from polluters and contamination,” Gov. Andrew Cuomo said in a statement. “The proposal put forward in this year’s executive budget will ensure that state officials have the tools and resources necessary to effectively respond to water quality issues and ensure clean drinking water for all New Yorkers.”

While the state has been contemplating giving the DEC stronger powers since the water crisis in Hoosick Falls focused renewed attention on drinking water quality, Cuomo's proposal takes on new significance as the Trump administration has promised to curtail the EPA's powers.

The president is reportedly considering steps to roll back a number of Obama-era climate change and environmental rules. Newly confirmed EPA administrator Scott Pruitt is widely viewed by green groups as more concerned with easing regulations on businesses than aggressive public health protection.

New York isn't the only state taking action to fight the expected changes.

In California, regulators have signaled they’ll push forward on air pollution limits for cars, leaders there are pushing to pre-empt Trump on endangered species protections. And lawmakers in Massachusetts, Oregon and Washington are pushing a carbon tax.

DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos said last week the push for increased authority would help his agency address contamination and polluted sites that may not otherwise qualify for Superfund status.

“Landfills, illegal dumping sites, salt storage areas ... those are situations where we’d have to react just as aggressively and as quickly to solve a problem as we would if it were a Superfund site,” he said.

Under Cuomo's plan, the DEC would be able to implement remediation measures at solid waste sites where it determines contamination is affecting water supplies or may threaten public health. It would also dramatically broaden the department’s authority when the state health department determines a public water supply is contaminated.

The DEC could take action if the health department simply makes a request or if a water system violates state contamination levels. No administrative hearing or order on a remediation plan would be required under the measure if a property owner is not cooperative. The department can use court action or agreements to recover costs for a remediation from the owner or operator of a contamination source.

Currently, the DEC can remediate sites with specific contaminants listed under the state's Superfund regulations and developers can remediate sites through the Brownfield program. In Hoosick Falls, after PFOA was found in the local water supply, the agency used its emergency rule-making authority to add the chemical, which has been linked to cancer, to that list.

Cuomo's plan would also enable the DEC to pay for water treatment systems or alternative water sources. A portion of the governor's \$2 billion water infrastructure plan, which is also expected to be used for water and sewer infrastructure, source water protection and other programs, would be put into a new fund for this purpose.

Paul Gallay, executive director at Riverkeeper in New York, said the state's push to protect and clean up drinking water should inspire other states to follow suit.

"When communities restore drinking water quality and eliminate unsafe levels of wastewater pollution, that becomes an example other communities will follow," he said. "If we see it in New York state, there's no reason we won't see it in other states," he said.

But The Business Council of New York State has raised concerns about the proposal, saying the expanded authority goes too far.

Darren Suarez, the council's director of government affairs, said expanding the DEC's authority would create significant uncertainty for property owners. The measure could open up the owner or operator of a site for liability rather than the party that caused the contamination, he said.

"It's overly broad. It creates a new remediation program and [that has] none of the protections under the current remedial programs. [The proposed program] has no due process and it has no standards," Suarez said.

Suarez also cited the broad wording of the measure, which he said would make it impossible for a developer to perform due diligence when purchasing a property to evaluate what clean-up costs could be. That's because, under Cuomo's proposal, determining what rises to the level of contamination requiring a clean-up is left to the discretion of the DEC and health department.

“The issue is we don’t know what contaminant or criteria will be used to determine what the agency will be concerned about,” he said. “It ends up being very subjective.”