BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE FINANCE
AND ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

JOINT LEGISLATIVE HEARING

In the Matter of the
2020-2021 EXECUTIVE BUDGET ON
HUMAN SERVICES

Hearing Room B
Legislative Office Building
Albany, New York

January 30, 2020
9:34 a.m.

PRESIDING:

Senator Liz Krueger
Chair, Senate Finance Committee

Assemblywoman Helene E. Weinstein
Chair, Assembly Ways & Means Committee

PRESENT:

Senator Patrick M. Gallivan
Senate Finance Committee (Acting RM)

Assemblyman Edward P. Ra
Assembly Ways & Means Committee (RM)

Assemblywoman Ellen Jaffee
Chair, Assembly Children and Families
Committee

Senator Velmanette Montgomery
Chair, Senate Committee on Children
and Families

Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi
Chair, Assembly Committee on Social Services

2020-2021 Executive Budget
Human Services
1-30-20

PRESENT: (Continued)

Senator Roxanne Persaud
Chair, Senate Committee on Social Services

Assemblyman Harry B. Bronson
Chair, Assembly Committee on Aging

Senator Rachel May
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging

Assemblywoman Didi Barrett
Chair, Assembly Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Senator John E. Brooks
Chair, Senate Committee on Veterans,
Homeland Security and Military Affairs

Assemblyman Jake Ashby

Senator Diane J. Savino

Assemblyman Clyde Vanel

Senator Sue Serino

Assemblyman Mark Walczyk

Senator Brian Kavanagh

Assemblywoman Patricia Fahy

Senator James Tedisco

Assemblywoman Tremaine Wright

Senator Gustavo Rivera

Assemblywoman Inez E. Dickens

Assemblyman Al Taylor

2020-2021 Executive Budget
Human Services
1-30-20

LIST OF SPEAKERS

	STATEMENT	QUESTIONS
Sheila J. Poole Commissioner NYS Office of Children and Family Services	9	15
Michael P. Hein Commissioner NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance	101	107
Greg Olsen Acting Director NYS Office for the Aging	178	185
Jim McDonough Director NYS Division of Veterans' Services	239	244
Gail Myers Deputy Director New York StateWide Senior Action Council	292	299
Ariel Savransky Advocacy and Policy Advisor UJA-Federation of New York	306	
Rebecca Preve Executive Director Association on Aging in New York	312	318
Dede Hill Director of Policy Crystal Charles Policy Analyst Schuyler Center for Analysis & Advocacy	326	331

2020-2021 Executive Budget
Human Services
1-30-20

LIST OF SPEAKERS, Continued

	STATEMENT	QUESTIONS
Kathleen Brady-Stepien Assoc. Executive Director Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies	334	340
Meredith Chimento Executive Director Early Care & Learning Council	349	354
Trudy Morgan Policy Coordinator NYS Network for Youth Success	356	361
Melissa Sklarz Senior Government Relations Strategist SAGE	363	
Melinda Mack Executive Director NY Association of Training and Employment Professionals	369	375
Lt. Col. (Retired) Roy Diehl Deputy Director New York State Defenders Assn. Veterans Defense Program	379	382
Kirby Hannan VFW Legislative Advocate -for- NYS Veterans Council	385	
Timothy Hathaway Executive Director Prevent Child Abuse New York	390	

2020-2021 Executive Budget
Human Services
1-30-20

LIST OF SPEAKERS, Continued

	STATEMENT	QUESTIONS
Shelly Nortz Deputy Executive Director of Policy Coalition for the Homeless	394	
Saima Akhtar Senior Attorney Empire Justice Center	400	
Kristen Kerr Executive Director New York Association for the Education of Young Children	406	
Elizabeth Deutsch Director New York State and New England Community Mobilization for Housing Works	411	
Daryl Hornick-Becker Policy and Advocacy Associate Citizens' Committee for Children of New York	417	
Cynthia Dames Project Manager The NEW Pride Agenda	423	
Gregory Brender Director of Children and Youth Services United Neighborhood Houses -for- Winning Beginning NY	428	
Alana Pilar Cantillo Senior Director of Advocacy New York Immigration Coalition	432	

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So I'm Assemblywoman Helene Weinstein, chair of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee, and today we have the fourth hearing in a series of hearings conducted by the joint fiscal committees of the Legislature regarding the Governor's proposed budget for fiscal year 2020-2021.

The hearings are conducted pursuant to the New York State Constitution and the Legislative Law.

And so today the Assembly Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee will hear testimony concerning the Governor's budget proposal for human services.

So just couple of ground rules. For the -- well, let me introduce the members first that are here in my conference, and then Senator Krueger will introduce -- Senator Krueger, chair of the Senate Finance Committee, will introduce the members from her conference from the Senate.

So we have with us the chair of our

Children and Families Committee, Ellen Jaffee; the chair of our Aging Committee, Harry Bronson; a member of the Children and Families Committee, Assemblyman Al Taylor.

Liz, would you like to introduce your --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Sure. Actually I'm joined by the sitting-in ranker for Finance for the Senate Republicans, the acting, Senator Gallivan. Senator Seward couldn't be with us today.

Then I am joined by the chair of Social Services, Velmanette Montgomery; the chair of -- I did it backwards? I did it backwards, excuse me. The chair of Children and Families, Senator Velmanette Montgomery. The chair of Social Services, Senator Roxanne Persaud. The chair of Aging, Senator Rachel May from Syracuse. Senator John Brooks, chair of Veterans. Senator Diane Savino. And I am Senator Liz Krueger. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We also are joined by Assemblyman Hevesi, chair of our Social Services Committee.

And Assemblyman Ra, our ranking member, will introduce the members of his conference who are here with us.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

Joining us this morning is Assemblyman Jake Ashby and Assemblyman Mark Walczyk.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

So now a few ground rules for everybody. Keep an eye on the time clocks. It's been helping us get through our hearings with having time for the witnesses to present testimony, for the legislators to be able to ask questions. The clock time is both for -- other than for the people testifying, but for the members. Just be mindful, the clock is both for your questions and answers.

And we try and keep a pretty tight ship because there are many nongovernmental witnesses who are joining us today, as they have other days, and we want to make sure that the last person on the list gets an opportunity to speak to the members.

So -- and just for the members, the chair of the relevant committee has

10 minutes to ask her questions and get answers; the other members, five minutes. The chairs are the only ones -- the relevant chair can have a second round of five minutes. And when we go to nongovernmental witnesses, the nongovernmental witnesses will have up to five minutes to present their testimony, and members will have three minutes to ask a question.

We also, before we get started, we're joined by Assemblyman Vanel.

And with that, I think we are ready, Commissioner, to begin. So we begin with Sheila Poole, commissioner, New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Thank you. Good morning, Chairs Krueger and Weinstein, Children and Families Committee Chairs Montgomery and Jaffee, and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly. My name is Sheila Poole, and I am the commissioner of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, and I am pleased to have this opportunity to discuss this year's

proposed budget for OCFS.

This year's Executive Budget maintains OCFS funding just above last year's levels to support our core child welfare, childcare, and juvenile justice programs, while investing in new initiatives to better serve New York's children and families.

As you know, on October 1st of 2019 New York reached an historic milestone when Raise the Age took full effect. In keeping with Governor Cuomo's pledge to fully fund Raise the Age for eligible counties, the Executive Budget adds $50 million to support Raise the Age implementation, for a total of $250 million in the coming fiscal year.

The Executive Budget expands the Empire State Child Tax Credit to provide $157 million in relief to 400,000 families who have children under the age of 4 and who earn up to $50,000 a year.

Having adequate access to childcare remains a national policy and fiscal issue as well as one here in New York State. The Governor's Childcare Availability Task Force

is continuing its important work and will issue its final report in December.

In the meantime, the proposed Executive Budget maintains its commitment of nearly $832 million for childcare subsidies -- the highest level of investment in state history, serving more than 100,000 low-income families and 170,000 children.

We're also pleased to share that New York State has awarded an additional $20 million in federal funding to expand subsidized childcare statewide by an additional 2500 childcare slots.

In addition, OCFS anticipates additional funding this year through the federal Childcare Development Fund. And the New York State Council of Children and Families, which OCFS hosts, has also been awarded federal funds in the amount of $40 million through the Preschool Development Birth through Five Grant, which will strengthen our early childhood care and education system.

Governor Cuomo mandated the Regional

Economic Development Councils to consider childcare in their proposals, and they answered. During Round 9, nearly $8.8 million was awarded to 16 childcare projects, and an additional $7.3 million was awarded to four projects that have a childcare component. Every region has responded with proposals specific to their area, and we're looking forwarded to seeing these public/private ideas come to fruition.

But still, we recognize there is more to be done to make quality, affordable childcare accessible to all families who need it, and we will continue our work toward that end.

The Governor's proposal again expands access to quality after-school programming by adding $10 million for a fourth round of Empire State After-School Program grants. This will create 6250 new after-school slots for students in high-need districts, and will bring our total expenditures for after-school programs to $134 million and serving 80,000 students.

When combined with funding for prekindergarten programs and child-focused tax credits, the state's overall support for families with young children has increased by more than $500 million since 2011.

As cochair of the Governor's Domestic Violence Task Force, I'm pleased to report that the Executive Budget includes ambitious proposals to address the growing problem of domestic violence. As urged by the task force, the budget adds $5 million in new funding for a pilot program to expand innovative models and provide a greater flexibility in meeting the needs of families affected by domestic violence.

The number of children entering foster care continues its downward trajectory. However, we know that far too many children from minority families end up involved with the child welfare system as a result of implicit bias, despite the best intentions of our dedicated child welfare workforce.

This year we will take the bold step of requiring every county in the state to

follow a blind removal process when considering to remove a child from their home. It is time to adopt blind removals and take a significant step forward in ensuring social justice for all children and families.

And last year, with your support, New York began implementing the federal Family First Prevention Services Act, with a Family First Transition Fund to help local social service districts support, recruit and retain foster families, including kinship caregivers. The Executive Budget continues $3 million in funding for the state-supported transition fund.

It also provides authorization to spend up to $75 million in new one-time federal funds that we've recently received through our aggressive lobbying efforts in Washington. This new funding includes up to $50 million for the Administration for Children's Services in New York City.

And before I close, I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge you, Senator Montgomery. This is your last Human Services Budget

Hearing, I understand. When I was here earlier in the week doing some meetings, I ran into a group of young people, a large group of young people proudly wearing their YouthBuild t-shirts, and they reminded me, obviously, of you.

So it's been a pleasure. You have been a fierce and tireless advocate for children and families. I will miss you. And I look forward to our final session together.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: Thank you.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: I thank you again for the opportunity to address all of you, and I look forward to your questions.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

So today's hearing the Assembly is coordinating, so I'll go first to the chair of our Children and Families Committee, Ellen Jaffee, for some questions.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: Thank you very much.

Thank you very much, Commissioner, for your advocacy, the work that you've been doing, and the opportunity to speak today, as

well as on a personal level we've had the chance to review some of the issues of concern.

But I do want to review some of the concerns, and I wanted to ask you -- as noted, the budget does include 75 million, which you know, will help counties with their ability -- their compliance with the federal Family First Prevention Act, $50 million for the statewide compliance, 25 for the counties, giving them the opportunity, if they have the expired Title IV-E demonstration projects -- this way, they can have that support.

How will the funding work in terms of meeting the requirements of the Family First Prevention Act? Can you provide, you know, more details about the Title IV-E demonstration projects and how they work and how this will come into support?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Sure. So just going back to your question about the Title IV-E demonstration projects, they date back I think five or six years ago. And New

York City was the only county in New York State to take advantage of a Title IV-E waiver that the feds allowed municipalities to use Title IV-E funding in sort of new ways, in unrestricted ways, to test out evidence-based models of care.

And so New York City took advantage of that. They've had some success in adopting several models of evidence-based care that have had some really good outcomes. They've reduced caseloads for foster-care workers.

But unfortunately, those federal waivers expired, and so there was no replacement funding strategy for that. And so for many states who had really deeply invested in these IV-E waivers, sort of the bottom was going to drop out of these new programs and services that were really showing some promise.

And so many states, including New York -- and with our partners in New York City -- we have made a lot of noise in Washington about the need, if we're going to be successful in implementing the new Family

First federal act, that we need to find ways to not only continue those waiver services that were allowable under the previous waiver, but also give states additional new dollars to help us do the many things that are now required for us to comply with the federal statute that will take effect here in New York in 2021.

So the money that is appropriated in the budget, so the 75 million, Assemblywoman, approximately 21.4 of that will be for the general use for us as a state to consider how we can use those funds to sort of carry on the work that we began last year with the $3 million transition fund -- so ways of recruiting and supporting kinship relatives, you know, doing kinship support groups, sort of whatever it takes for us.

You know, there's a lot of provisions in Family First about independent assessors and agencies having to meet QRTP standards. There are a lot of things that we still have to find a way to fund and to do.

So that's our thinking. We haven't

developed, you know, our plan for request for proposals yet, but it's a one-shot. So it's -- $20 million, as you know, is not a huge amount of money for a state as large as ours, and we want to be very thoughtful and strategic about how we use that investment.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: Well, within the Families First Prevention Act, how do you define what the -- how they have qualified for the residential -- what -- what is -- what creates a qualified group for residential treatment? What is the qualifying need?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yeah. Yeah. So this new federal act, which New York State took advantage of a two-year waiver -- because there were many questions, and that was among them. So what does it really mean for residential programs to be considered a QRTP, a Qualified Residential Treatment Program?

So those programs, under the new federal definition, will need to adopt or be able to implement trauma responsive models of

care. They must have nursing services. They must provide up to six months of after-care for children in their care. They must do significant outreach to families of children who have wound up in residential care.

And so looking across our current service system in New York, we believe that many of our current residential providers would meet that QRTP designation.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: Can you share the impact of the market rate that went into effect last year? What is the statewide cost, you know, for that increase? Is there consideration being given to returning the market rate to the 75th percentile, which was recommended by the federal government?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: So New York -- so we're on to childcare now, just, right, switching gears a bit. So New York State maintains, as a result of the last year's market rate, a 69th percentile rate, which is among the highest in this nation. We watch where we stand in comparison to other states. So we remain

among the top states in preparing for the market rate at 69th percentile.

This year, this fall, we will again -- it will be our cycle to do a new market rate analysis, so that will give us another opportunity to do a sampling of a variety, a stratification of providers across the state. And so that survey allows us to really ask providers what is the actual cost of care that is providing for you. We collect that information, and then we begin to determine how we can continue to support the cost to childcare providers.

So again, that would mean that our new market rates, Assemblywoman, would take effect in the fall of 2021.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: There is -- I have concern -- the Executive proposed eliminating the 18.42 percent state share for outside-New York City residential placements for children with disabilities by, you know, the Committee on Special Education. Which the cost will be -- will be by the school districts, then, which is a concern in terms

of how the school districts are going to be able to maintain that stability, having to then add -- this is added to their cost and impacts their budget.

Can you explain the purpose of eliminating the funding and how it will then -- how we can -- the school districts, how they'll be able to maintain their stability?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Sure. So the proposal in this year's budget is to really create parity with what was already done for New York City several years ago. So, you know, these children, frankly, the payment for the CSE really does not belong in the Office of Children and Family Services budget. These are not children in foster care. These are not children in prevention services. These are children who are a school district's responsibility to provide services for.

So it is -- it's shifting responsibility in the budget where we believe responsibility lies for these Committee on

Preschool Education and Special Education Services for Children.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: We should then also increase funding for our school districts. I'm very concerned that this will really negatively impact in terms of their ability to provide the programs and the education that is necessary. So this is an issue we need to follow up on.

The budget, the '19-'20 budget implemented the Family First Transition Fund that included $3 million. Are there any updates that you could provide regarding this fund? Is the $3 million in the Executive proposal added on top of last year's funding? How did this work?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yeah. Good. So lots of questions there.

So last year when we passed the budget, that included the $3 million fund. In May we distributed all of the funding out to every local social service district in the state, including New York City. And we asked them to submit a plan to us about how they

planned to use that money. Again, to better support the recruitment and retention of foster parents, but with a real specific focus on doing a better job in supporting our kinship families.

So those counties all submitted plans to us outlining their strategies. All of those plans are up on our OCFS Family First website, so I'd encourage all of you to take a look at those plans.

And so we've been following those activities on the local level, and they've done some great things, ranging from new marketing campaigns to starting focus groups for kinship and foster families. Some have used the money in creative ways to help kinship families and foster families who might not otherwise -- maybe their house needed smoke detectors or something to meet the certification standards. So there's been a lot of good work and activity across the state.

So we are adding an additional $3 million to this year's budget to be able

to continue those efforts across the state, and that will be in addition to the $21.4 million that we expect to receive from the federal government.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. We go to the Senate now.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. We've been joined by Senator Sue Serino, the ranker on -- Social Services? Thank you.

And our first questioner is Velmanette Montgomery, chair of Children and Families.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Good morning.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: Good morning, Commissioner. Good morning. I'm trying to get the microphone to work.

Thank you for those kind words.

I want to just ask you, if you will, you mentioned in your remarks that -- let me just give you a little of background. We did some traveling around the state to speak to people who were the front-line people providing services in various aspects of your particular area.

And one of the things that kept coming up which I found very interesting, that people all over the state, an issue that people are grappling with is how do we improve our system to better address what you have identified as biases that people have that perhaps are unintended. So I interpret that as culturally competent ways of looking at what happens with children and families.

And you talked about a blind removal process. I'm just wondering where you are in terms of having counties across the state look at this particular tool in a way that is effective to address the issue of being more sensitive and removing this unintended bias that we bring with us in our work.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Thank you, Senator. Happy to talk about that.

So just by way of -- before I answer your question, Senator, just by way of introduction to the topic, you know, while I mentioned in my remarks that we continue, unlike many states, to see a decline in the overall number of children in foster care in

our state, we have failed to make really significant process in terms of the number of minority children who are in foster care.

And so in a general sense in terms of kids in foster care -- and we have under 16,000 kids in care. Over 40 percent of the children in foster care in New York are children of color, mostly black and brown. So we've got a ways to go.

And so we have been watching for a number of years a pilot initiative that Nassau County Department of Social Services undertook where it introduced a blind removal process. So it's relatively low demand in cost, but it requires a different level of decision-making as to when Child Protective Services is considering the imminent risk removal or removal of a child.

And so what Nassau County has done is developed processes where they redact, they de-identify information regarding parents or a child's name, address, zip code, anything that might, right, lead someone to make a decision -- unintentionally. As we all know

from the work and training on it, this is the way our brains work, unfortunately.

And what Nassau County experienced as a result of redacting that and making it blind, right, to race and ethnicity and other issues, is that -- not surprisingly, right -- the number of black and brown children entering care in Nassau County declined significantly.

And so we have been working with a number of other counties -- Westchester, Onondaga, there's a number of other counties who also wanted to adopt this. So there's been a curriculum that has been developed, in partnership with the School of Social Work here at SUNY Albany. And frankly, the time is now for us to require that every county in the state adopt this blind removal process.

And so we at OCFS throughout 2020 will be requiring all the counties to adopt this curriculum and to adopt those practices as they are making decisions -- a very critical decision, obviously -- around children.

What I will also say, Senator, is that

this seems like the logical place to start, right, in terms of child welfare decision-making. It is the most difficult and impactful decision there is, when you're removing a child from their family. But make no mistake about it, we are all aware that there are many other places in child welfare and in all human services, for that matter, where implicit bias enters into decision-making and negatively impacts families and communities of color.

So I am hopeful, after we roll out this initiative of blind removals, that we can then continue our work on where else in our system, right, does implicit bias play a role.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: Thank you. Thank you for that. And I hope you start with New York City.

I just want to just briefly talk a little bit about the Families First. It's very -- I'm inspired and encouraged that this perhaps will be part of how we begin to reduce the numbers of young people in care,

especially the congregate care.

My question to you is, to what extent have we been able to, one, create sort of a target that you have in mind to the numbers that you see us looking more like we should look, as it relates to how many children go into congregate care versus how many children either remain out of foster care or are in other family care? And especially with a sort of, I guess, a target focus on kinship care in particular.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yes. Yes.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: Could you give us an idea of where we are with that?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: So when Family First passed in 2017, right, we knew that we had some ways to go in New York State to sort of re-shift our focus. And when you look back in 2017 to New York State's reliance on congregate care as compared to other states in the country, we were above the national average.

And so we began preparing data. We have provided every county in the State of

New York with very detailed data analysis of where the children in those counties are placed, how many are in congregate care, what levels of congregate care, who are they, how long are they staying, as well as the number of children in foster care, the number of children in kinship foster care, and the number of children being cared for.

And so we've done a lot of work since 2017, including all the things I've already discussed, to really help counties begin to think about making sure that the only children entering congregate care are children for whom there is no fit and willing relative who would support, right, and services that sometimes are not always made available could be successful in a lower level of care.

So we did, we did exactly what you suggested and we set targets as a state. So we said that we would like all -- that we would like, as a statewide target, at least 34 percent of kids in -- 30 percent, rather, of children to be placed with kinship care.

I am happy to say that as of today, statewide -- and it's because many of you have been beating this drum and supporting us in this work -- that today we have 34 percent of children in foster care placed in kinship care.

Again, New York City is a little bit ahead of the rest of state, but the rest of the state is really making some very significant progress. So we are -- you know, we're excited about that.

But, you know, you also have to make sure that you're not just moving kids out of congregate care, right? Kids in congregate care in our state are kids who have many, many special needs. Right? So when we look forward to Families First and what that will mean -- no one is suggesting that there will not always be a place for our congregate care facilities, right, but we have to make sure under Family First that only those children who need that care get in there, that they only stay for the right dose of time, as determined by an independent assessor, not

just local districts or the congregate care agencies.

And that's where that culture, that sea change, right, that we have to sort of create here is going to be very challenging. And we're doing our best to work with our COFCCA partners, with all the local districts. So we're on our way, but there is still a lot of work to be done in anticipation of the effective date in September of 2021.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: Thank you. And I believe I see in the budget where we have eliminated -- proposed to eliminate funding for the Kinship Navigator. So that seems to be going in the opposite direction to what you're saying, so we will continue to have that discussion.

And thank you. I hope we'll go far beyond the 34 percent, but we're getting there.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: I hope so too, Senator.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We've been joined by Assemblywoman Barrett, chair of our Veterans Committee; Assemblywoman Fahy; Assemblywoman Dickens.

And we go to Assemblyman Hevesi for questions.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: We've also been joined by Senator Brian Kavanagh. Oh, excuse me, and Senator Gustavo Rivera.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. So now we go to Assemblyman Hevesi for questions.

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Hi, good morning, Commissioner.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Good morning.

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: You know, I've come to look forward to our time together at these hearings.

(Laughter.)

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: So I'm going to go quick, and there are some questions that

I'm going to ask Chairwoman Weinstein to ask for me because I'm not going to get to them. So I haven't had coffee, I'm not going fast on purpose, I just -- there's a lot of topics I've got to get through.

So first, let me start with a general thank you to OCFS and OTDA and the other O agencies and the agency staff for all the work they do. You really do do a great job under difficult circumstances, and I want to say thank you.

A couple of other thank yous. Thank you for continuing the Family First Transition Fund, appreciate that. It's a $3 million -- look for us to try to get that up to 4.5 million, but we appreciate that.

I'd like to thank you for the firewall, the kinship firewall. Great proposal, I think that will be very helpful. Look from us, from the Assembly -- and I will talk to my Senate colleagues -- about looking to have an open-ended new funding stream pulling KinGAP out of the Foster Care Block Grant.

In an effort to replicate the success we had with preventative services, we will drill down on what the right reimbursement for counties is. But we believe that KinGAP is the future. You're moving in that direction. I think we should put some money behind it.

Thank you for the childcare tax credit. That's really impressive. You've been listening to the advocates, I appreciate that. And thank you for the childcare slots. This is all good stuff.

Now, if you don't mind, I'm going to ask you on four topics. I'll ask them quick, and you can take your time answering them and I'll just go through.

In your Article VII language you have some language about assessors, and it seems that the assessor who will be making determinations about placement of children goes above and beyond the federal requirement for Families First, and that gives me pause and scares me a little bit. So that's the first one. I'm going to keep going, so if

you want to --

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: {Inaudible.}.

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Yeah, sorry, it's the time constraint, I apologize.

The second is COPS. You have opened up the Community Optional Preventive Services program. Just if you could touch on what the intent of that is, and make sure that the programs that are already in there stay whole, because there are some very good programs in there.

Third topic -- and again, sorry for throwing these all at you -- the public/private partnership. This funding is already used to help vulnerable children and families, and it has a private match. What are we doing with that? I just want to make sure that those programs stay whole.

And then the last question -- and I'm sorry to bombard you -- apparently the Childcare Availability Task Force made a bunch of recommendations, but they're not reflected in your budget.

So I apologize for throwing all that at you. But your thoughts?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Thank you, Assemblyman. And I do appreciation your recognition of the work of my agency.

So as for the independent assessors and the proposed language in our Article VII bill, our interpretation of the federal statute and regulations is clear, that the feds expect that it is the role of the independent assessor to determine the appropriateness of the child's stay in congregate care.

And if the independent assessor determines -- they have 30 days, under the federal law, to do their independent assessment. If at the end of that 30-day assessment they come back and they say "Sheila does not belong in a QRPT," it requires that the county make an immediate plan to transition that child to an appropriate lower level of care.

So they will have up to 30 days, following that 30-day assessment, to make a

plan to move that child to the right level of care.

After that 30 days of transitional funding, the Title IV-E money will go away for the entirety of that child's spell in care going forward. So I want to put that there.

The federal bill also sort of -- they complicated things, in our view, that they also said there's an additional new Family Court hearing at a 60-day mark. However, the federal language doesn't give any authority, in our interpretation, to a Family Court judge to overrule or overturn the determination of the independent assessor. Right?

So we are concerned that if an independent assessor -- who the feds are saying is really tied to the continuation of these IV-E dollars -- says a child doesn't need this level of care, well, first of all, that was the whole point of Family First, is to say someone needs to be asking hard questions about whether or not this child --

so it would seem that if an independent qualified assessor says they don't, we should be making plans to step them down or to look for relatives or a foster home.

But we're also concerned, Assemblyman, that with that IV-E federal money clock ticking, we don't want to set counties up to unintentionally be assuming. Right? If they're going to lose IV-E funding, what other funding stream, if they keep the kid in congregate care, are they going to be using to support that placement?

So that is why our Article VII was intentionally written the way that it was. So I hope that clarifies a bit for you.

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: It helps. It does, thank you.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: And again, you know, a bill is the beginning of a conversation. Right? And so we'll be -- I'm looking forward to what our colleagues have to say.

So COPS?

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Please.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Just to move quickly. So Community Optional Preventive Services, for those of you who might not be familiar with it, has been around. It has been the same funding stream, about $12.1 million. We've been funding the same programs since 2008.

And so as we are looking across all our funding streams at OCFS and we're asking questions about when is the last time you looked at this funding stream, is what's being invested sort of in line with where we are 11, 12 years later in terms of Family First and other pressures and our work towards kinship and foster families, what we're simply saying is that the time has come for us to open up COPS.

And our goal is to open up a procurement that eliminates some of the restrictions that currently exist in COPS. Because there have been no changes to how COPS funding has been able to be used since 2008. It's now 2020.

So that's really our intention, is

it's time to stop, open it back up to be more relevant, right, to where we are in 2020 in terms of the kinds of services and programs that we're trying to implement.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you, Commissioner. Perhaps you could follow up with some of -- in more detail with information to the committee that we could share with the members.

So we'll go now to the Senate.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Diane Savino.

SENATOR SAVINO: Thank you, Senator Krueger.

Good morning, Commissioner. I want to thank you for the meeting we had earlier this week where we talked about some of these complicated issues, including the role of the independent assessor and what -- what -- what complications they could create for Families First.

I do want to follow up with you, though, at a later time on this blind removal thing. I think I might be the only person

here -- although there are new members of the legislature -- I think I might be the only one that's ever done that work. So I'm trying to figure out how it would work --

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yeah.

SENATOR SAVINO: -- and I don't want to waste our time here today. It's interesting.

I just want to quickly raise my concern again about the failure to fund Close to Home. It is probably the most successful program that we've created for young people to turn their lives around. And I'll say it again, as a result of Close to Home, less young people are winding up arrested and now going through the Raise the Age program.

I also want to raise my concern about the fact that the city has the bulk of the kids in the Raise the Age program, and they're not getting any money from the state. That's fundamentally unfair. We need to change that.

Two other points. I'm very concerned about the workforce. We have, over the

years, shifted almost the entire burden of child welfare services, with the exception of protective services, to the nonprofit sector. And the turnover in those agencies is extraordinary. And that is equally traumatizing to children, every time they lose someone who is working with them.

We need to do something about stabilizing this workforce. Everyone cannot work for the government, and somebody has to work directly with these families. So we find more creative ways to either do tuition loan forgiveness for social workers in the nonprofit sector the way we do loan forgiveness in the public sector. But it's critically important that we stabilize these agencies. They really are the ones who are doing the hard work right now. Not to take anything away from my own union, but they're not doing foster care anymore.

One other thing I would like to point out. I know you can't talk about what happened in Suffolk County, it's too soon. But what I would hope that you could convey

to members is don't jump in with legislation to fix a problem that you might not understand. There's more to every case, and we cannot second-guess our workforce every time a bad case makes the headlines. There's a lot of people that play a role in whether or not children are removed or whether or not there's intervention.

So I just would ask you to convey that message to everyone. Calm down, we don't need 50 bills changing the child welfare system thinking that they can solve the problem.

And finally, last year we passed a bill on preserving family bonds which would allow for post-termination visitation in particular cases. We broke down over a potential chapter amendment. We still firmly believe in this, that these young people who want to have connections to their parents post-termination should, in certain circumstances.

And I understand your department is going to bring forward a departmental bill.

So if you are, I would appreciate -- let's do it, and let's do it quickly. I think that's a victory that we can have for some young people whose lives have been disrupted by the system, for better or worse, and they can have some continuity with their families.

So I think that's it. Thank you.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: I would just reflect back, Senator. You know, your prior experience as a worker in the Administration for Children and Families shines through. In your role as Senator you raise all very important, very challenging issues that, as you know and I think appreciate, we work toward every day at OCFS.

And with respect to legislation, right, it is a new year, a new time for, you know, the reintroduction of things that didn't happen perhaps in 2019, and we are always open to having those conversations again. So thank you.

And I also want to especially express my thanks to you for your comments. So the Senator is referring to what I'm sure you're

all aware was a horrific fatality of an 8-year-old child in Suffolk County that has been devastating for everyone involved, including the child protective staff in that county.

And so because of confidentiality, I know you all appreciate the fact that we cannot speak about the case, but I do want to echo the Senator's caution that it is often during times of a case crisis that we -- everyone feels a sense of responsibility to do something, and I appreciate that. But sometimes what we choose to do in the short term is sort of done hastily, and it's not always the right remedy to the solution.

So again, I think as we continue our open dialogue and work together, there are ways that we can continue. And I hope -- I hope -- if nothing else, that you see me, as commissioner of OCFS, committed to always working toward that goal.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We now go to Assemblyman Walczyk.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: Thank you.

As Mr. Hevesi was saying, and I appreciate all of his questions, the Executive Budget eliminates 3.5 million in P-3 funding. Nonprofits who have created pragmatic and successful programs will be affected here. Can you point to some assessment that would have forced this to be eliminated?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: So I think, Assemblyman, that the short answer to that is that it is part of our contribution, if you will, to trying to assist in helping close the state's budget gap.

You know, I can't say for sure, but as we had sort of the COPS conversation, it is a possibility that some of those programs that may no longer be receiving the public/private partnership money, you know, might be able to respond to the procurement of the COPS funding. But I can't guarantee that.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: But from your agency's perspective there's no assessment that you've done that says, you know, these programs aren't proven or this program should

be eliminated, the 3.5 million?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: You know, I think our overall assessment has been that all things considered, where we are making our investments, that that $3.5 million is a place where I think we have the opportunity to provide services in other ways. Many of those programs are local programs, with all due respect, you know, to the work that they are doing, so we're not achieving sort of a statewide practice change as a result of those.

But again, whenever we have to make these very difficult decisions, we will do whatever we can through other potential funding mechanisms to make that continuation possible.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: I appreciate that. Thank you, Commissioner.

And I think as you sort of segued to COPS as well, if that's opened up, is there an assessment that shows that the agencies that are currently funded through there aren't doing a great job or, you know --

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: You know, I think my answer is that, you know, COPS was created a long time ago. And that again, we are 12 years ahead now. Our pressures to do business differently, our driving toward more kinship care and doing things sort of -- you know, allow us to ask ourselves the question, which I think we should be, is it time to open this up and try and modernize some of the funding available.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: I would love to see something on paper there, and maybe your agency can send me something. Because I see those current funding streams as pragmatic progress, the way that the Governor likes to be on it, and I think they've done a great job.

The average New York family is spending $16,000 annually on childcare. The next couple of questions are real big picture. How can we reduce that cost?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: {Chuckling.} That is, Assemblyman, you know, the million-dollar question. And, you know, I

know and you all know that the Governor's Childcare Task Force -- and they are an amazing group of individuals. They are smart, they are fierce, they have rolled up their sleeves and done, you know, an amazing amount of work. And they're fierce, and they are determined to make recommendations for change here. And you'll be hearing, I'm sure, from many of them when they speak later.

You know, the challenge for us is in spite of all of the investments that we make on a state level -- the tax credit, our high market rate, the number of children tapping into subsidy, all the good things that I listed out in my testimony -- and even with additional federal dollars coming, you know, the truth is that this is a huge economic issue to solve across the country, and we're no different in New York.

And so I think the question before us is even with the state's investments, with the money we get from the federal government, right, we are still falling short in, you

know, meeting the needs for families who -- working families who rely on subsidy.

And the cost of care is high. And for good reason, right? Because we have a highly regulated system. We put a lot of value and emphasis on health and safety, you know, regulations here. So it's a very challenging issue.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: One final one, and you mentioned this as an issue country-wide. I couldn't agree more. We have an interesting demographic in New York State, and I just wonder what you'd think about rural areas and recruiting additional providers. Right now it's not even so much the cost as it is the access to childcare for a lot of the area that I represent.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yeah. I think that the workforce and the salaries for the childcare workforce and the childcare deserts and the particular challenges in rural communities are just another dimension, right, of the challenges for us to be solving.

You're right, it is more challenging in some of those rural communities. And grappling with the salary structure and what childcare workers make in New York and across the country is in fact, you know, one of the major components, I think, of the discussions of the task force and the things we are struggling with moving forward.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We've been joined by Assemblywoman Wright. And now to the Senate.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. We've been joined by Senator Tedisco.

And our next questioner will be chair of Social Services, Roxanne Persaud.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Good morning, Commissioner. It's always great to see you and to work with you.

I am -- in the interest of time, I'm just going to go through some questions that we have.

In reference to special education residential placement, can you tell us what's driving the proposal that the Governor has

sent in the budget of the cost shift? Can you provide us the financial breakdown for school districts? Do you have a geographical map of where these placements are?

Also in terms of that, has the state consulted with the educational stakeholders on this proposal? The cost shift is -- it's something that we're very concerned with, as you know. We've had that conversation.

Do you also know what is the average maintenance cost for the special ed placement?

In terms of the Childcare Availability Task Force, can you provide us a status update on the recommendations that were made? Also, do you anticipate that the task force will be holding any hearings in the near future so that everyone -- the public will have input?

Then in terms of the rightsizing of youth facilities, we know that a facility is going to be closed, it's on notice to be closed, it's located in Delaware County. Is there going to be an impact on the workforce?

What are the plans for that facility? And are there any other facilities that are underutilized at this time that are on the list to be closed in the near future?

Okay. I'll give you that, and then I'll come back for my next one.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Okay, great. Thank you.

So with respect to the proposal to shift -- it is approximated to be about $22 million out of OCFS's budget, and to shift that to the State Education Department. And that is in the overall context of trying to close the budget gap, Senator.

I do not have the distribution by school district of that, nor the actual rate. I can certainly follow up with you, but I do not have that analysis at this point in time.

With respect to the Childcare Availability Task Force, so just to be clear, though the task force has been meeting regularly, the final report of the task force is due in December of this year. I do not believe as of now that public hearings are

contemplated. But there have been, obviously, regular and ongoing meetings.

And, you know, so the task force has not issued its final recommendations yet, although I know that members of the task force had hoped to see deeper investments in the budget. But again, that is part of the discussion we had about the challenge, right, and just the magnitude of what is needed here.

And then thirdly, Senator, with respect to the proposed closure of one of our juvenile residential facilities, it's the Youth Leadership Academy that you're referring to. It is located in South Kortright in Delaware County. It is a 25-bed limited secure facility, and it has been significantly underutilized over the past couple of years. So on average, we've had seven or eight young people there.

And because we have the -- so it's not cost-effective, frankly, to continue to operate that program. And we do have availability in our other OCFS limited-secure

facilities to accommodate those young people.

No layoffs will happen as a result of this, so we have already met with the staff at YLA. We have other OCFS facilities in the Rochester area, in Finger Lakes. And so those staff who work at YLA will have first priority for any vacancies at OCFS, and then they will also go through the civil service ARTL process where they are prioritized for any other civil service positions in other state agencies for which they qualify. And also it's a year closure notice, so we'll have a year to work through that process with the staff.

And as for the future intended use of the facility once it's vacated, no decisions that I'm aware of have been made yet.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. Quickly, can you tell us about the TANF cost shift in the FFFS services? Can you give us some highlights of that?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: So the proposal in the budget is to increase the child welfare threshold under the FFFS, the

Flexible Funding for Families. So that also sits in OTDA's budget. It's all TANF funding. I think the total FFFS is around $954 million.

The current child welfare threshold that has been in effect is about $342 million. The proposal calls for that threshold to increase to $382 million.

So what that means as a practical matter, because it's complicated, is that local districts will be required to spend more of their federal FFFS money before they can tap into the state's 62/38 enhanced reimbursement.

So what that may mean for counties is -- it may not necessarily mean a cut in child welfare services, but it is assumed that it will require counties to sort of go back to their FFFS funding, which allows them to pay for a number of services, including a lot of administration costs are in FFFS. But there's other services.

And this increase in the threshold is likely to result in districts having to make

some decisions about how they prioritize the use of their FFFS.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So, Commissioner, I think we've seen a pattern now. People have a long list of questions for you, and then the clock goes off and you want to answer. What we've done in other hearings -- you have staff here. If you will please, your staff, take careful notes, get the answers that you were not able to complete in the time frame for anyone who's asking questions.

If you send them to Helene and I, we will make sure all of our colleagues get the letter from you explaining the answers. Because I don't want to show any disrespect for my colleagues or for you being able to answer, but we have these time clocks for a reason.

So with that, I'm going to send it back over to the Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

And as my cochair says, just a reminder to members that the time is for both

your question and answer.

Assemblywoman Fahy for questions.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FAHY: Thank you.

Good morning, Commissioner. Thank you for being here. And always good to see you.

And I want to start with just a couple of comments. It is good to see that we are seeing some federal increases. So many other areas that we touch into, whether it's the environment or water infrastructure or roads, where we're seeing a rollback. So it is good to see in a few areas where you are mentioning the increases from the feds. So that's somewhat encouraging, given the pushback.

I also want to commend the increase on Raise the Age -- that's something that has really helped up here with implementation -- and also pleased on some of the kinship care as well.

A couple of questions, something I have not heard mentioned. One was the home visiting programs, which you know are near and dear to me and I think would go a long

way, since we've heard a lot today about child abuse and child preventive services.

The Healthy Families New York, I think you've proposed -- the Governor has proposed level funding on that. And yet the need -- I think we're serving the tiniest fraction of those who could be served or be eligible. Can you talk about that, and if there's any room for moving the needle on that funding?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Sure. So we're very proud, and thank you for your acknowledgment of our evidence-based Healthy Families program. So the budget does maintain $26 million of stable funding for the program. And we serve about 6,000 families a year. I think we conduct over 70,000 home visits to families. So it's a very effective program.

You know, one of the opportunities -- and it's not a this-year thing necessarily, Assemblywoman, but one of the things that we do look forward to is -- again, back to all things Family First -- that down the road when we submit our prevention plan, home

visiting programs are one of the evidence-based models that are in the federal clearinghouse that we can potentially invest IV-E dollars into using to expand, potentially, Healthy Families down the road.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FAHY: Yeah, I think the evidence is profound, decades of evidence on home visiting programs in general. And we'd love to work with you on really expanding that package. I'd love to see us down the road look at universal access for those programs or universal services for all families, because I do think it is profound, that very earliest of intervention.

The second question is on DV. You mentioned in your testimony that there is a growing issue of domestic violence. And certainly we've read a -- you know, I read a lot of the national numbers. And then you've also proposed a new fund for flexible domestic violence services.

Can you mention what the growing -- you know, what numbers you're seeing on domestic violence in terms of the growing

problem, and then where the flexible domestic violence program has come from?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: So I will certainly say from my child welfare hat and my experience, you know, the prevalence of domestic violence in child protective service reports is astonishing. It is everywhere, seemingly.

We're also, right, knowing from some very serious cases reported in the news across the country -- Staten Island, New York City, out in the western part of the state. You know, too many murders, deaths, acts of violence. And I think it's just -- it's nationally recognized.

You know, whether it's actually an uptick versus more awareness and folks are coming forward, you know, that's always a question for us.

But what we do know is at the end of the day we need to do much more across the system to do more prevention, to really help our service providers who are now, you know, working to meet survivors where they are,

where they're at.

Our domestic violence model of funding in New York State has really not changed significantly in 30 years. And, you know, as I'm spending more and more time in state government, there's a lot of things that we really have not taken a look at -- models that were built, you know, 10, 20, 30 years ago that have sort of stayed the same.

And as we look across the country and other states, we see new models of innovation. And so as we're doing our work on the task force, we have NYSCADV, we have many of our domestic violence service providers. And so the way that we fund our shelter system now is sort of inflexible in some respects. And so we want to sort of test out some new funding models.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FAHY: I'm almost out of time, so I just want to add I'd love to hear more on that. And then, finally, just want to add that the workforce training that you mentioned for the nonprofits, and that some of my colleagues mentioned, would love to

hear more on that point, given the turnover rates really do impact services.

Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. Senator Rachel May.

SENATOR MAY: Thank you.

And thank you, Commissioner.

I have just a couple of quick questions. One is -- I represent Syracuse, and we have a sad statistic in Syracuse that about 10 percent of the students in the school district are functionally homeless, which means a lot of them are couch surfing on friends', families' couches and that sort of thing.

I'm wondering if you have any systems in place to identify kids who are facing those kinds of challenges and to help them get the services they need.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yeah, that's a very sobering statistic, Senator.

We don't at OCFS, you know, work with

the schools in that way or track those statistics. You know, the way that sort of child welfare system would have knowledge is if there's some reason to believe that those children are being maltreated, and a call would be made to the SCR.

But we don't at OCFS. But maybe our colleagues at OTDA -- I don't want to speak -- but as part of their homeless prevention may do some work in that area, but we do not at OCFS.

SENATOR MAY: Okay. Thank you.

And my other question is about the -- I was encouraged to hear about the REDC program actually identifying childcare as a priority. One of the complaints I hear about state economic development is that it tends to prioritize new projects and entrepreneurial projects when there are a lot of things out there that could employ people tomorrow if they just had more funding. So -- and childcare is one of those areas where, if we could just pay childcare workers more, we could employ a whole lot more

people, we could keep the childcare workers off of public assistance, we could make it a job that people wanted to go into at higher rates.

Is there -- when those regional economic development decisions are being made, is that being taken into account, that we just want to beef up programs that are already out there?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: I am not an expert in the REDCs, to be honest with you.

You know, I think that the -- all the issues that you articulated are -- many of them are issues of the broader task force and of the broader challenge in childcare in New York State. You know, I think we wanted to take advantage of the REDCs, who have their own very specific purpose, right, in sparking, you know, regional economic development and growth. And I think the Governor and the Lieutenant Governor's message to them was while you're doing that, don't forget -- right -- if you're building new businesses, to take childcare into

consideration. And to your point, they have clearly responded to that.

You know, how much we can expect them, you know, to own as part of the greater childcare problem, you know, I think remains to be seen. But I think it is amazing in a very short period of time, right -- in only a year -- that almost $16 million have been sort of in acknowledgment of the overall childcare challenge, so.

SENATOR MAY: Great. Thank you very much.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: You're welcome.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Assembly?

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to Assemblywoman Barrett.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Good morning. Nice to see you. And thank you for all you're doing and your leadership in this really essential area.

I share the comments or support many of the comments that my colleagues raised.

But I just want to focus on workforce and the whole notion of care continuum. One of my great frustrations in government is all the silos and how -- you know, when you try to look at something that works across agencies, there's always kind of roadblocks and, you know, why that should happen. And I know there's been an effort in some of the areas, you know, in Veterans and in Ag and in EnCon, to work across those agencies.

But I think that there's a real need in this state for a caregiving continuum that starts with childcare, goes through the aging and the senior population, but in between addresses families with kids with special needs. And so it would be kind of an OPWDD, you know, your agency, OMH, and Aging working together, potentially with SUNY, to look at how we could be doing a better job of creating a professional caregiving workforce that has the prestige and has the career possibilities commensurate with the essential work that they're doing in our communities.

And so often this population is -- the

caregivers are women, women of color, often immigrant women, family members, who are often the daughters and the wives who are unpaid. But I feel like we can't just kind of put Band-Aids on this and look for short-term patches rather than address this in a more holistic and more statewide way.

And one -- you know, some of us have been looking at the idea of a caregiving fund, a workforce fund that we would put in the budget, you know, and look for innovative solutions in the -- you know, either regionally, for starters, or have it be across the state.

And I wondered what you think about that and whether it's something you could support and see working with colleagues around.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: I -- you know, I would acknowledge wholeheartedly that -- and I think as you speak to my other colleagues leading other human service agencies, that workforce is in every conversation. It is a challenge in every

corner of our work, the not-for-profits and state government and all of our human service agencies as well. And I am more than willing to sit and, you know, dialogue with you about your ideas.

You know, the Governor has a new leader of workforce development on behalf of the state, Madhuri, she's fantastic. So I know we would absolutely be willing to sit down, think this through, think about how we can develop some of those strategies.

Because, you know, to your point about sort of being siloed, right, it's not really the best way to sort of maximize all the resources and thinking because we're all sharing the same challenges across many sectors.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Thank you, I appreciate that. Because I think people often do say, Well, we're just talking about childcare, we're not talking about older people or people, you know, that need help with caregiving on a daily basis, or working in an agency. And it is, it's a crisis, and

it's a crisis that's only going to grow, which I'm sure we'll talk about when the commissioner of Aging is here.

But it is a continuum, and I appreciate that and would love to engage with you on that further. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Sue Serino.

SENATOR SERINO: Good morning, Chairwoman Poole. And today I wear two hats, I'm the ranker on Social Services and the ranker on Aging.

And I know that we've had this conversation a few times about extending the hours of the Elder Abuse Hotline for -- to make it eventually 24/7. We know abuse doesn't just happen between the hours of 9:00 to 5:00. The Governor has expressed support for the initiative but said that it needed to be handled within the context of the budget.

And in 2018, we were able to have a compromise in the budget when the Senate

fought for and we were able to secure an extension of the hours for the Elder Abuse Hotline for a minimum of three additional hours per day, Monday through Friday, from 5:00 at night to 8:00 p.m. at night. And the Senate added $326,000 to ensure this was done, which is a minuscule amount of money when you think about our big budget.

So my questions -- the first one is, what is the status of the extended hours for the Elder Abuse Hotline right now?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: So I'm happy to say that we continue to provide those extended hours.

I also want to point out when we look at the statistics for the numbers of calls being made to the Protective Services Hotline at our Human Services Call Center, we actually saw a pretty significant increase in 2019 as compared to 2018. But the vast majority of the increase is actually during the daytime hours when it is -- which makes sense.

So the call volume between the hours

of -- the extended hours of 5 o'clock and 8 o'clock is comparatively low when we look at the numbers during the day. But I think the good-news word is out that this call center exists, by virtue of the fact that the number of calls is increasing.

And it doesn't appear, Senator, at this point in time, just based on the number volume, that we're not meeting the current need for the after-hours calls.

SENATOR SERINO: Really, a year isn't enough time to get the message out there? That's really disappointing that we wouldn't be continuing that.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: No, we will be continuing. Oh, we will absolutely be continuing.

SENATOR SERINO: Okay. And keep track. And keep track.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yes. Yeah.

SENATOR SERINO: Oh, okay. All right, very good.

And I just wanted to echo some of my colleagues' comments. Assemblywoman Fahy,

when she talked about the proposal to increase the funds for -- the flexible domestic violence funds -- I fully support this. You know, right now the funds that are there are restrictive. So this is a flexible funding. And I know in our community we have DART, which is domestic abuse response teams that -- it's multidisciplinary crisis teams that work with the domestic advocates. And it's just been amazing.

So I fully support that. I'm hoping that that continues to go on.

And then the other issue was the workforce. I know Senator Savino had spoken about that, and so did Assemblywoman Didi Barrett. And that is so important. Our vulnerable population, they get attached to the people that are working with them, and it's just such a shame. We really need to work on that. And, you know, the Governor fought very hard for the minimum wage increase, but we just -- we need to do more. Costs rise, and we have to be able to ensure that we can keep these workers.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: I agree.

SENATOR SERINO: Thank you. And I don't think I have anything else.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We go to Assemblywoman Wright.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Good morning.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Good morning.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: I wanted to -- {inaudible; mic off.}

Good morning. Can you hear me now? Thank you very much. I wanted to talk with you first about the Family First Preventive Services Act. And we're anticipating $75 million in new funding, but I don't see anything dedicated to permanency efforts for older foster kids in there, and the explanation of where and how we're going to be using the funds.

So I wanted to ask, what is it that you're thinking about and how you would like to see this and what you will be supporting to support permanency for older foster children? First.

And then I'd like to ask you to turn your attention to protective services for the aging. We've had very long conversations, or I and your staff, regarding what and -- the manner in which protective services is able to enter the home and then they have a lack of transparency to report exactly what directed them to enter the home of and to begin the investigation when it becomes -- when it's a case of an aging person or that's an alleged abuse.

So -- but there's been a tremendous amount of resistance from your office in examining the procedures that we use. But I think that this is one of the cases where we have an old model that's not working and we are not -- we're not giving enough information to the person who is purportedly being abused. And oftentimes -- and in cases that I've reported to you from my district -- we've had elders who have been what I would say railroaded into a court process to prove that they're not incapacitated. And as we all know, it's very difficult to prove the

negative.

So I'll give you both of those.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Sure. So I'll start there, and we'll sort of work in reverse order, because I want to acknowledge what you've just raised.

And, you know, Assemblywoman, I know that you are very concerned about that one case in particular, and we have done our best, as we always do, to try and address your questions. And I'm sorry that you're unsatisfied with that. I think there are times that despite our perspectives, we're not always able to come to agreement. But I am more than happy to come back to the table with you and to continue those conversations.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: But you didn't address what the pol -- the procedure and the regulations that I'm asking you to talk about.

So we have a regulation that allows people to enter the home and to call for emergency services if they deem it an emergency.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Right.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: However, under normal circumstances of an emergency, they are supposed to provide an affidavit to a judge, who expedites that case and gives them an order to enter the home.

There's no procedure in place for them to explain why they want to call the police. That's what I asked for, and that's what I'm asking you to address.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: I think that conversation will take a lot of time for us to continue to have, Assemblywoman. But I am happy to continue to have that with you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Okay.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: So as for the Family First Preventive Services Fund, so we have $75 million appropriated in the budget. So we think up to $50 million of that will go to New York City to help them continue their services that they did under the waiver.

The additional funds are designed, by the federal statute, specifically to help

states prepare for the transition to the Family First Act. Which is really focused not as much on permanency, but it is focused on the recruitment of kinship foster families and foster families, because that's where we want to move more kids to in placement.

However, you know, to your focus and your good question about what about permanency for older youth, what we do know is when children in care are placed with relatives, placed in kinship families, that the likelihood of real permanency is better for them.

And so that that's all part of our hope and sort of march forward on Families First, that we're going to have more older teens -- instead of going into congregate care, that we're going to build better systems of support so that foster families and kinship families can care for their teenagers wherever possible so that they're not going into congregate care where sometimes permanency becomes more challenging and we have kids aging out, right, when

they're 18, leaving care without sort of a permanency resource and a place to live.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Gallivan.

SENATOR GALLIVAN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, Commissioner.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Good morning.

SENATOR GALLIVAN: The Governor's budget called for authorizing the transfer of adolescent offenders from the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision to OCFS. And part of the rationale -- among the items the executive talked about is that this will free up 750 beds, allowing for a prison closure. So I don't want to focus on the DOCCS part of it; rather, the OCFS part of it.

I have a whole host of questions. Where will you put them? How will you handle it? I didn't see any corresponding

additional staff to handle it. And the training, the security, all of those things. You can start anywhere.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: We're ready. So we have --

SENATOR GALLIVAN: Tell me how. How are you ready?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: So just to say that in OCFS's current secure facilities, about 87 percent of the young people we serve are ages 16 and older. So we already -- and have for years -- served older youth. And we have, you know, youth who have serious charges, longer sentences.

We have made -- and I would love for you, Senator, I've offered you this before, but now is another time for me to offer you to come and tour an OCFS facility. I think you would be quite pleased with seeing the investments that we have made in providing college access to young people in our care, doing vocational programs. Our model is very trauma-centered and focused for these young people.

And so I believe that this is a good proposal. They're talking roughly about less than 40 young people who are in the DOCCS system. I think the numbers of women are extremely low; I think there's one woman.

We have available capacity today within OCFS's secure facilities and enough funding for adequate staffing to transfer these youth in -- again, as the Article VII proposal calls for, a planful transition process.

So I feel -- I've had numerous conversations with Commissioner Annucci. We've been great partners on Raise the Age. I feel confident in my system that we are more than well-equipped to serve these kids. And I believe what we have built up in our youth justice system over the past decade at OCFS can really achieve better outcomes for those young people when they leave care.

SENATOR GALLIVAN: So DOCCS had originally planned for the male population to be -- to have essentially an east and a west, two separate facilities, I believe, for them.

How would you -- so you say you have the capacity. Would they be going to facilities across the state, these adolescent offenders, or are you focused on one or two geographic areas of the state?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: We have capacity at a number of my secure facilities. So one of the first things that we would do with DOCCS is figure out where is home for the 30-plus young people that they have. And we would do whatever we can with our existing capacity, right, to try and position young people in the transfer to sort of be as close to their homes as possible.

Because one of the other elements of our work in youth justice is a strong emphasis on family engagement and after-care services. So that would be the ideal plan. And as I said, Senator, with our current available capacity at OCFS, I think we can absolutely achieve that.

SENATOR GALLIVAN: The time is now to follow up on that.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Right. I

hope you'll come to visit.

SENATOR GALLIVAN: It simply has been scheduling rather lack of desire. But I think it's more than appropriate now.

Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to Assemblywoman Dickens.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DICKENS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you, Commissioner, for your testimony and being here this morning and the work that you've done, which has been great.

However, I do want to piggyback on my colleague Assemblymember Wright's question about the elder abuse, in that frequently particularly single women, seniors -- the Department of Aging focuses on them because there's no one to really care for them, there's no relative, no children, no husband, no family -- they are removed out of the home once they start having difficulty and then their homes are put up for sale.

But if there is a small mortgage --

because frequently those homes have been paid for. But if there is a mortgage left on there, the banks are complicit in this, in that the house is sold and then the money is not -- none of the money is designated even for them to have burial, let alone any additional money. The money is taken by the Department of Aging.

So I'd like you to address that. That's number one.

The second thing is -- and this is rather short. In the Domestic Violence Task Force -- and I commend you for being the cochair for that. Domestic violence cases, frequently the children are put into foster care if it's designated that the mother is unable to protect the child. And I see here that, for instance, there's been a proposal in the Executive Budget to decrease, for instance, kinship care by $2 million and the Youth Development Program by $1.5 million, settlement houses, 2.45, and Safe Harbour, 3 million. That could significantly impact particularly the kinship care on the care

that the youth can receive from family members that may need the additional help.

In addition, because of the necessity for mental health, I see that also for a union professional development, that there is a proposal in the Executive Budget that although 4.3 million is there for childcare, that it represents a decrease of 4.3 million for FY '19-'20 for state support for professional development and quality enhancement activities.

Can you give me some answers to that, please. Because -- and the other thing is that frequently in certain communities it's a severe undercount in the number of domestic violence cases because culturally they don't make the report. So the numbers that we see are really not the correct numbers.

Thank you.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yeah, of course.

So when you began your comments, you described something that sounds very alarming about some of the patterns that you may be

seeing in your district. I would like us to follow up, Assemblywoman, and perhaps bring our commissioner for the Office of Aging just to talk about some of those case-specific scenarios and find out what's really going on there.

So the cut that you referenced is with respect to contracts that we have had with our partners at UFT and CSEA for professional development and grant programs. And they are proposed, as you said, for a reduction. And I want to say that the work that they've done is very valuable. In fact, when you look at, though, the amount of money that has been in the contracts versus the amount of money that actually has been spent in the contracts, there's been a lot of underspending of those contracts.

And so I think what our sense is is after having experience with these contracts for a number of years now, that what we believe should remain in the budget actually more accurately reflects what the right spending level is for those programs.

The second thing I would say is even with the proposed funding reduction that we're talking about, that based upon the current funding that is still left from previous contracts, that both UFT and CSEA should be able to continue the work they're doing with their existing funds through the end of 2021.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DICKENS: All right. Well, thank you so much. Because that includes mental health, and that's extremely important for women of domestic violence families and their children. So thank you so much.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. So this isn't a question for you to answer today, but hopefully you and your people can put together a chart for us.

It seems to me that there is a pattern over -- I'm going to say let's go back eight years. We keep shifting more and more of the cost for human services, children's

services -- the same question will be for OTDA afterwards, so if they're here listening, I'd like a chart that shows X program that's within your agency, what amount did you spend each year, what percent was state responsibility, what percent did you send over to the localities.

Because I'm very concerned, and I think many of us are, that we keep balancing our budget by shifting the cost responsibilities to the localities. We cut our aid continuing to them. We cut our local share, we tell them they have to cap what they can tax themselves.

And I think we maybe walk through life with the illusion that as long as it's getting paid for somewhere, it's getting taken care of. But you and I both know that's not how life works. The localities then find themselves unable to keep up with the increased costs on themselves, so they end up not delivering on the programs that we all think are the right programs, or having to cut something else that isn't as extreme a

mandate for them, which also does longer-term harm.

So that's all I'm asking for. It's a chart showing the amount change and the percent of change of what is state and what gets passed on to the localities for your full budget.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Thank you. I have your request, Senator.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to Assemblywoman Jaffee for five minutes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: Thank you, Commissioner. I wanted to follow up on something that I think is really essential in the conversation. In my discussion with a variety of childcare leaders throughout the state, an issue of great concern has been availability of the workers, the childcare workers, who are at the levels of professional development that is so essential in terms of their education and preparation.

So there's -- the difficulty is often the limited amount of funding that can be

provided to the childcare program limits their ability to be able to provide the salary for the workers that encourages workers to come into the childcare program, that encourages them to maintain those programs after they've gone to college and gotten that level of education at that cost, and too many, as have been noted, move on to other levels of jobs.

And so there has been a great deal of struggle within the childcare programs on maintaining the programs at a level that is so essential in terms of the workers who are educated in the areas that are absolutely, you know, needed and required for these programs.

And so it truly is a major issue that we need to focus on in terms of providing more state funding for our programs so that they can then assure that there is the level of academic ability of these workers and then attracting workers at salary levels that maintain them.

So that really -- these are very real

issues. As well as -- well, the task force that I created that we're discussing, maybe we can sit down with the task force and talk about their thoughts about this issue as well. Because it really is something that has come up over and over again in my conversation with childcare programs in a variety of areas.

So it's something that we need to move forward with to assure that there are enough childcare providers and then, within that context, the workers are those that have that education level that is so essential.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: I can assure you, Assemblywoman, that what you just articulated is among the top-line issues and concerns being discussed and brought forward as part of the task force, for sure.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: So we will -- can sit together, because it's something that we really need to move forward and assure that we are responding to this very real issue. So thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We'll go to Assemblyman Ra for a question.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Good morning.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Good morning.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you. I just had a question about the Pay for Success program that had been launched a few years ago. There's been, you know, appropriations made for this. Is that operating? Or where are we with regard to that program? Or is that more OTDA?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yeah, that's not in my agency budget. I think Commissioner Hein and his staff can better answer your question, Assemblyman.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay, thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So -- Commissioner, so I have a few questions. And we'll start with a couple that Assemblyman Hevesi didn't have a chance to get to.

So the federal Family First Transition Act also includes -- there's been some discussion about that already -- resources for jurisdictions who are transitioning off

Title IV-E waivers. And New York City was the only jurisdiction to have the waiver. So it's about $50 million that we do for New York City. So I think we just want to make sure and clarify that that money will be for New York City, as intended by the federal government.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yes. So the answer is yes. The federal bill on that is very specific about what portion of the funding, of the total funding pool has to be directed toward those communities who had a waiver. And by extension, given that ACS was the only community that participated in the waiver, that money will be directed to ACS.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: And how is the state planning to use the 25 million from the federal Family First Transition Act?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yeah, so we expect that -- I don't know that it's going to be 25 million, but I think we think it's around $21.4 million.

And as I described earlier, we have not made decisions yet about how. It's a

one-time infusion of dollars. It's not a lot of money when you look at everything we have to do between now and September of 2021 to adequately prepare for it.

But it will absolutely -- you know, Congress intended this money to support states' efforts to make the transition. So again, looking at further efforts to support kinship families, further efforts to recruit and support foster families. We're going to have to think about how do we prepare independent assessors, how do we allow agencies who might be interested in applying to be a QRTP but don't have an accreditation. There are a lot of things sort of on a list for us to take into consideration, you know, given what I think is a welcome but relatively modest pool of money, all things considered.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Then a question about -- that really goes -- that is both to you and I guess as it relates to OTDA also -- the child welfare services funding stream has historically been funded with $635 million.

The Executive proposes a $25 million reduction and would require an additional 25 million of the FFFS to be used for child welfare, which seems to leave that whole.

But there's a question that the city has used -- historically used some of that funding for senior centers. So I guess by putting the -- is there a way to assure that both the children and seniors remain whole?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: So, Assemblywoman Weinstein, I -- and again, I will defer to my friends at OTDA who are more expert than I on it. So I think the funding stream that you're referring to for the senior centers in New York City was Title XX funds. And I don't believe that that is on the table or impacted by the FFFS.

But if I am wrong, Commissioner Hein and his exec dep will tell me.

But there is no question that it will require -- it will have a $25 million impact, assuming that the counties are spending in the way that they have before.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: And then a

question -- several years ago, actually based on some legislation that Senator Savino and I had sponsored, we raised the age for runaway and homeless youth that could be served up to age 21. And we're wondering if these youth are being served. Now that there's the authority, is the funding stream sufficient to serve them? And can you just give some feedback on what's happened since we made that change.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Well, you're not giving yourselves enough credit, because you actually got it raised to 24.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. Oh, right, from 21 to 24. You're right, yes.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: So since that was passed, there are about 14 counties, including New York City, who have opted in to take advantage of that expansion. There are a small number of programs that have actually been certified to date to serve the older population.

So I know in New York City they did a separate procurement. I believe they have

four programs in the city who are able to serve the older youth. In upstate, I believe there are two programs. And I understand that there are also several others in the state that are considering taking advantage of the option.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Great. And I was wondering, last year we had some discussion when you were here about changes to -- the proposed changes based on a federal guidance related -- in relation to domestic violence programs, relating to public assistance.

And I just wonder if we can get an update on how that change is working without the requirement to have to apply for public assistance. Have programs reported decreases in funding as a result? And what findings did -- I assume the task force looked at this also -- did the task force make?

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yeah, absolutely.

So, you know, as you may recall, when that change was made and there was a lot of

concern about it, we committed to keeping a careful watch on sort of what was the downstream impact of that.

And we meet regularly with NYSCADV -- both OCFS and they are a valued member of the DV Task Force. So we have not heard of any significant concerns. And had not heard anything from any local department of social services, of course, concerned that it would -- you know, by not requiring them to apply for public assistance, you know, create other challenges.

I will say to you just last week I met with all of the local district commissioners for their annual conference, and there were a couple of smaller counties that did say to me that they've seen a bit of an increase. That was the first time after over a year I had heard that. So we are following up, as we promised we would, you know, with those counties to see really what the impact was, because that was our commitment, that we were going to be keeping an eye on that.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Great. I

believe that that is the end of questions from the members. I know there are a few items that you'll get back to us on that there wasn't time to address. And thank you so much for being here today, Commissioner.

OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Thank you all very much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Next we'll be hearing from the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Michael Hein, commissioner.

Just letting everybody -- a minute to let everybody settle down.

(Pause.)

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay, Commissioner Hein, you're welcome to -- welcome, and please begin.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you very much.

Good morning, Chairpersons Krueger, Weinstein, Persaud and Hevesi, as well as the other esteemed members of the New York State Legislature. I am Mike Hein, the commissioner of the Office of Temporary and

Disability Assistance, and it is my honor to appear before you today to discuss the 2021 Executive Budget and the important work of our agency.

OTDA's core mission is to help vulnerable New Yorkers by ensuring essential services for families and individuals that help them advance economically by providing meaningful opportunities for stable employment, better access to affordable housing, and quality nutrition for both themselves and their families.

In addition, our agency administers vital programs for those temporarily unable to work, as well as for many working families who simply struggle to make ends meet. These programs create much-needed housing and provide employment services, healthy food as well as heating assistance. We also inspect homeless shelters to improve safety and security, make critical disability determinations that dramatically improve people's lives, provide child support services, as well as assist refugees and

immigrants that come to New York in search of the American dream.

And this year we are extremely pleased that while the Executive Budget addresses serious fiscal concerns, it continues the Governor's $20 billion investment in affordable housing, which is creating or preserving more than 100,000 units of affordable housing and 6,000 units of supportive housing over five years.

All of these efforts share a common goal -- and that is to help individuals and families meet immediate, essential needs while supporting their efforts to achieve lasting economic security.

Building on this initiative, the budget makes a major new investment in the Homeless Housing and Assistance Program, or HHAP, by actually doubling the funding from $64 million to $128 million, while investing $5 million for projects specifically designed to assist homeless veterans.

HHAP provides pivotal capital grants and loans to expand and improve the supply of

permanent supportive, transitional and emergency housing for individuals experiencing homelessness.

This funding expansion will help a wide range of populations, including those experiencing mental illness, and also substance use disorder, victims of domestic violence, youth, as well as our veterans.

Under Governor Cuomo's leadership, New York has also made a strong commitment to fighting hunger and ending food insecurity. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program has been a vital part of that work. SNAP can provide more than $6,000 a year for a typical household, making it significantly easier to feed a family and make ends meet.

Currently, there are roughly 1.5 million households in New York, totaling nearly 2.6 million people, receiving approximately $360 million in SNAP benefits each month.

In this year's State of the State, the Governor announced plans to further expand access to SNAP for eligible community college

students, ensuring more students receive essential nutrition assistance as they work towards a college degree or certificate and a better future for themselves and their families.

And to reach even more people, OTDA has worked with the Department of Health and NY State of Health so that people who are eligible for Medicaid can quickly opt in to receive information about SNAP and over 100,000 applicants have already done so.

On another positive note, the Executive Budget increases funding for the very successful Summer Youth Employment Program, providing $45 million to help approximately 19,000 young people from low-income families get a job this summer. This program helps youth develop relevant skills that can lead to improved school performance, better positioning them for success in the future.

The Executive Budget also continues New York State's commitment to OTDA's other core programs. This includes resources to

fund the agency's child support program, which collected more than $1.8 billion last year on behalf of nearly 800,000 families.

As you know, child support is an important source of income that helps families achieve financial stability. It reduces childhood poverty and, in turn, childhood trauma.

OTDA also oversees the federally funded Home Energy Assistance Program that helped nearly 1.5 million households heat their homes last winter and reduce energy needs through energy-efficiency investments.

This winter, HEAP again allows for a maximum regular benefit of up to $726, which is especially helpful for low-income households that pay a higher percentage of their income towards energy costs.

Senators and Assemblymembers, like you, we at OTDA fully recognize the importance and gravity of the work we are committed to and the lives we touch in the process. In partnership with the Governor and the State Legislature, through every

program that we administer, we strive to empower vulnerable New Yorkers to improve their financial security and household stability in support of stronger individuals, families, and communities all across our state.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I welcome your comments and questions.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to the chair of our Social Services Committee, Assemblyman Hevesi.

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you, Chairwoman.

Good morning, Commissioner. How are you, sir?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Good morning. Good.

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you for coming, and thank you for all of the work that you and your staff -- and I see some of them here, Ms. Guinn, Ms. West and the rest -- thank you for all the work that you guys do at the staff level.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I know you do good work under difficult circumstances. It is appreciated.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I am going to focus on one topic only today. It's -- we've talked offline about this, and it will be a little out of left field. Normally people would expect me to talk about homelessness, I am not going to -- with the exception to say I am going to leave that alone because I believe that the big dogs at the mother ship are going to be handling that. That includes both chairs of Ways and Means and the Speaker; they are fully engaged now -- and I believe the Majority Leader as well -- and they will be handling the issue of homelessness. So I'm going to move on.

The one issue I want to talk to you today -- and I need your help, frankly -- is human trafficking. And I've got to set the stage for my colleagues just so we all have a sense of how we got there.

So a couple of years ago the Assembly held a hearing about human trafficking and identified that the primary need for trafficking victims is you've got to get them out of the abusive environments, you've got to get them safe houses. And we put in a bill, the bill was passed unanimously by both houses -- that means every one of my colleagues voted for it -- and it was a nice victory, and the law requires -- and this is my Bernie Sanders moment: "I wrote the damn bill." So --

(Laughter.)

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: So the bill says that for every trafficking victim in New York State, there will be culturally competent short-term and long-term safe houses -- again, to take these victims of human trafficking out of the abusive environments so they don't have to -- and I don't want to overstate this, but we're talking about predominantly women who are being sexually abused, raped, beaten, branded, drugged, the worst horrible abuses. And every night that

we in government are not providing those actual safe houses I believe is our problem.

So I'd like to work with you. I just need a couple of pieces of information about the -- how we fill that need. Okay? So the first question for you is, how many certified human trafficking victims are there -- or survivors, I shouldn't say victims, survivors in New York State?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Well, that question is two parts. One is -- I have the question of how many we are serving.

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Mm-hmm.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: And then the size and scope of the problem.

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I think there's no question that the size and scope of the problem, we are serving a fraction of that. And that is consistent with what's happening all across the country. There is an enormous challenge bringing people forward and making sure that we're able to provide them services.

So there's a huge outreach effort going on right now. The legislature did a great thing when it changed the law and made sure that we could supply services for individuals regardless of their immigration status, which was a critically important component.

There's also a reality that we should talk about, and that is that the numbers that we saw going from '15 to '16 were a significant increase -- a 150 percent increase. And then what we saw was a leveling. And the challenge that we saw at that point, that we clearly are seeing right now is while we are seeing more individuals who are documented, we are seeing a significant drop-off in people who are undocumented, victims who are willing to come forward, because they're concerned about the net outcome for them.

And so that's a component of this process. Again, the number that we are actually serving is consistent across the board, it's about 288 individuals at this

point.

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Two-eighty-eight.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Correct.

Now, the question about housing is a really important one. And there might be a nuanced distinction here, but I think it's important that we have the conversation and we appreciate the discussion.

To provide this service across the entire state, we partner with six incredibly strong not-for-profits. And in our conversations with them what they have made very clear to us is they are able to provide housing to all who need housing -- and that is, again, all who will accept assistance in providing housing, because not everyone that comes forward will accept housing assistance. But the ones that do, and there's a large percentage of them that will, we provide the entire myriad of services to them, whether that be permanent housing, temporary housing, obviously, or emergency housing as well.

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. So first, thank you for the 288 number, that's helpful.

And again, you know, this will wind up being a range, it always is, when you're trying to budget.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure.

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: And we have corresponded -- my colleagues don't know this, but we have corresponded about this, and I know that we rely heavily on -- I thought it was five RHTPs, the regional --

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: We've added another one.

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: You added another one?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay, great.

I know we rely on them to make determinations about what housing needs to be provided and what services need to be provided, but under the law that we just passed, all of them are entitled to housing. So that's number one.

Number two, the temporary -- some of the housing methodologies that you had mentioned in your letter -- housing

methodologies sounds weird. The types of housing that you had mentioned in your letter include domestic violence shelters, temporary shelters and others. None of those -- and this is an important point that we need to agree on -- none of those comply with the law.

Domestic violence shelters do not provide the same services as is now required by -- for safe houses and long-term houses. Neither does temporary housing. They may provide some, and I'm open to the idea that some of the housing could be in compliance. But as a general principle, the answer is we are no longer in compliance with the law.

So I'm going to assume, in the absence of other information from you -- and we'll share and work on this together --

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure.

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: -- that none of the 288 that we're supposed to be serving are in housing that complies with the law that we just passed.

And as such, it is now our job as the

Legislature and the Executive to figure out, okay, you have 288 certified victims, they are all legally entitled to housing, the housing is supposed to have a number of components, now we've got a budget for it. So how are we going to do that? How much capital money is that going to take, how much operational money is that going to take? And I would like to get those answers and work with you in time for this budget.

My only concern is that we don't come to an agreement on what those numbers are in time to act this year, and then we would have to wait another budget cycle. And as you and I both know, and I'm sure we agree, the victims of human trafficking don't have another year to wait for us to get our act together and get the right housing.

So I would like to -- thank you for the 288 number, that's very helpful as a baseline for our Ways and Means staff. We would like to work with you on maybe in the Governor's 21-day amendments -- and certainly in our Senate and Assembly one-houses --

coming back with a program to comply with the law to create and build, if need be, culturally competent, short-term and long-term safe houses. So I look forward to working with you on that, sir.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very much, Commissioner.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. We go to the Senate.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. The chair of Social Services, Roxanne Persaud.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Good morning.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Good morning.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you, Commissioner, for being here.

And my mic just doesn't want to work today. Can you hear me now? Great.

I'm going to start with the Summer Youth Employment Program. I know you were touting the success of that program. Why is it, then, that we're not adding additional slots for kids across the state? You know, we're increasing the budget by a million

dollars; it's only covering the cost of wages. Why aren't we adding additional slots?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Again, we're very pleased at, again, the success that we're seeing. We're seeing it across the entire state, and that's one of the real wonderful parts about it. That's what makes it such a success, it works upstate, it works downstate, it works across the spectrum.

It really comes down to this is a conversation in the context of a larger budget question. These are difficult financial years, and we firmly -- we're committed to making sure that we move forward and continue what we had. And obviously we made accommodations for the additional rate.

SENATOR PERSAUD: But wouldn't it be in our best interests to ensure that those kids who are coming from the vulnerable communities are actually being employed by the Summer Youth Program?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Again, I understand the question. I'm very concerned

about making sure that we retain the funding that we're talking about here. It is a $45 million expenditure. And we are very pleased about it, and we know that we will be serving 19,000 youth in this process.

But I understand your question. I think it really comes down to -- it was a budgetary question.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. Now, my colleague spoke about the homelessness issue. And, you know, we don't want to belabor the questions about homelessness. But have we -- in 2018 when we added the $50 million to the pilot program for HSS, have we looked at the cost, you know, how much it's really costing us? And are we intending to add additional counties to that program?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: To the pilot program?

SENATOR PERSAUD: Mm-hmm.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Maybe we should talk a little bit and get kind of an update on where we stand at this point.

Currently where we stand in that is

that Monroe County has been approved, and they are beginning that operational side in Rochester. And then what we expect in our conversations with New York and where we're at is that New York will be operational by June of this year. And obviously we're anxiously awaiting the outcomes of that. That's again a significant commitment and I'm looking forward to seeing what the results are.

But no, at this point there hasn't been a conversation about adding additional cities to that.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. You know, every day we hear about the homelessness crisis across our state. We look -- you know, I'm from New York City. We see it every day.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure.

SENATOR PERSAUD: And we -- I'm not sure when we'll get a handle on that situation. And there is a need for us to do more. And, you know, if we have to add more counties to HSS -- we have to do something.

We need to get people off the streets. No one across the State of New York should be living on the streets in the conditions that they are living in.

You know, this morning I turned on the television and I am hearing talks about, you know, the possibility of us spending money to keep a football team in New York State -- but we have people living on the streets. Those are the kinds of things -- we have to understand which is more important. People living on the streets of New York City and New York State is not acceptable. We have to do more on that.

You know, we've had these conversations, and I really appreciate you coming in and us having these conversations so that we can really fight for the people across the state who are most in need.

Can you tell us about, you know, the SNAP benefits and what the federal government authorization is going to do to the population of New York State, the SNAP population?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure. I mean, what you're talking about is some of the rule changes associated with SNAP?

SENATOR PERSAUD: The rule changes, yes. Mm-hmm.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Well, again, there was a recent Supreme Court ruling that just came down on the {inaudible} --

SENATOR PERSAUD: An appellate --

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: -- area of that, many of us know.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Yup.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: It removed a stay that was in place, and so now that rule has taken effect.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Yup.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: For us, it has been -- we've been working in advance of that, obviously. And to us it's about reducing the size of the pool of individuals who would be impacted by this rule change.

Obviously early on when the rule change first came out, we put out comments on that that were very focused against it, as

did many other people -- actually, 100,000 comments plus, the vast majority against. The unfortunate truth is not only did they move forward with it, we think they've actually made it worse.

And so the reality of this process is that it will be in effect as of April 1st of this year. Again, our role is to minimize the negative impact in that situation. So we look at the pool of individuals that are affected, and we want to make sure that their status hasn't changed, that there aren't some other mitigating factors that would remove them from that pool.

Again, so we're in the process of trying to reduce that with all of the districts. And then, at that point, working more with the districts to make sure that all of the necessary training and assistance is available for them so that individuals aren't impacted. So there's an aggressive effort to be able to help ensure that that rule change, when it takes effect on April 1st, either impacts the fewest amount of people or has no

impact in New York, and that's the goal.

SENATOR PERSAUD: And you've allocated funding -- what is the cost to the state so far, based on your calculations?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Well, again, we work extensively with the districts on a daily basis, and those costs are rolled into OTDA's normal budget.

SENATOR PERSAUD: This is over 100,000 people we're talking about that's in that pool.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Correct. We think that at this point it's 113,000 people in that pool.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Thirteen thousand?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: One hundred and thirteen thousand.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Interesting.

The cost shift to New York City, can you talk about that? Why are we -- you know, we only last year shifted additional costs to New York City, and right at -- again, we're shifting it more. Why is that necessary?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Well, I think

it's important that we talk about really where this is at. And I think this is a challenging public policy conversation that needs to take place.

When we talk about where that 10 and now 15 percent proposal would come from, it really is directly tied to the escalation in Family Assistance, Family Assistance dollars. It's the rate of increase associated with that.

And the rate of increase isn't going up commensurate with cost of living, it isn't going up commensurate with caseloads, it's going up, in our most recent calculations, almost quadruple anywhere else in the state. And so it is our position that it's not unreasonable for New York City to share in that process as we look to try to identify ways to be able to control those costs and control the rate of increase.

SENATOR PERSAUD: But New York City is sharing the burden of the increase, the highest --

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: It's an

eight -- it's an eight -- with Family Assistance we're still paying 85 percent in this proposal.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. Thank you.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Again, I understand the position and I understand the question. And I understand it can be controversial. But I also -- again, it's not an unreasonable thing to start to examine that escalation in cost that goes to, again, near quadruple anywhere else in the state.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Quadruple. Okay.

And my final -- the Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative. Have all the municipalities developed their plans as yet? And what is the status of the implementation plans across the municipalities?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure. Again, a wonderful innovative way of being able to look across the entire state to try to develop different strategies that were really grassroots-driven. That's phase -- Phase 1 really was working with the individual -- 16 individual communities on strategies that

they believed could be helpful in reducing poverty in their particular area, with a respect for what works in one location may not work in another.

That really was Phase 1. Phase 2 was the implementation and operationalizing of those plans, which has taken place now and is taking place as we speak.

The next phase is -- we expect that there will be a full recommendation made going into next year's budget based off of those, on things that we have seen that have worked -- because again, it is designed in many ways to be an incubator. So to be able to identify ways and programs that we think should be expanded throughout the state.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay, quickly, the $40 million reduction from the Flex Fund for Family Services, can you talk about that? And is there really a need for concern about that, the cost of that shift?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I think -- I'm always a big believer in having these conversations in a very frank way. There's

no question there's a $25 million positive impact to the state budget.

That said, in that action we firmly believe that it also prioritizes child welfare, that we all believe is critically important in that fund. We also believe that we'll be able to work -- {time clock beeping}.

Did my answer get beeped?

SENATOR PERSAUD: Can he finish answering the question for me, please? Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Give it a whirl, yup.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Okay, I'll give it a whirl.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And then when we cut you off, you will answer anything further in writing to us all.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Absolutely.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: So -- I'm sorry, where were we?

(Laughter.)

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: We'll get back to that question, I apologize.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to Assemblywoman Jaffee.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: Thank you. There is so much need, and we really -- in so many communities, it's truly unfortunate and troubling and very traumatic in many areas. I can tell you I've met with so many throughout -- in my areas as well who are struggling. Too much homelessness in this state. It's just unacceptable.

But I wanted to ask -- and I thank you for the work that you are doing, and the leadership, and really attempting to respond to so many of these issues and to so many families in particular.

In terms of certain of the issues regarding mental illness or substance abuse, domestic violence, all those real issues, is there counseling -- did you -- how do you

move forward in terms of providing support? Is there recommended counseling? How does that work?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Okay. I think -- if we're talking about street homelessness at this point --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: Well, homelessness in --

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: In general?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: -- you know, those who have substance disorder, what exactly is provided to assist them?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Well, the nonprofits that we work with, and we work with shelters on plans, and we also work with the local districts that will bring those types of services into the shelters to be able to assist in that process.

We're also simultaneously working with OMH on strategies to be able to enhance mental health services -- again, one of those classic conversations where no one who is seeking true mental health services who walks into a hospital should ever walk out the door

the next day. Okay? To be able to try to be in a scenario where we're able to provide real assistance and real services is something that we're working on.

We also have homeless services plans with each one of the districts specifically dedicated to being able to address mental health issues as well as substance abuse issues.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: Thank you. I think what I'm going to do to move forward, given this information, is meet with some of these groups to really see exactly how things are moving forward. So I appreciate that, and the funding that's provided. Because it really is a disaster in certain areas, you know.

Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

To the Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Velmanette Montgomery.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: {Mic off.} Thank you. Good morning, Commissioner.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Good morning.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: {Mic on.} Good morning. Thank you so much for your patience answering some questions.

I just want to ask you specifically about the whole issue of homeless housing. So I was able to visit one of the programs that really focuses on housing for young people, and the thing that was so striking to me is that it's really a very strong organization, they do a very excellent job. They serve young people, I believe up to maybe age 24 or so, but for practically every young person in that program, in that facility, with excellent supports, great service, great outcomes. But it took basically a whole staff department to figure out how each of those young people, how their service was funded.

So it just occurs to me that we have a great investment in terms of homeless housing, but there are so many different regulations for the same population. I just don't understand.

So my question to you is, to what extent are we looking to coordinate the funding streams and the regulations and the guidelines and all of those things between the different agencies, you and other commissioners, HCR and whoever else is doing housing, so that there is a uniform way of looking. If a person is homeless, if they were just recently homeless, if they were about to be homeless -- why should we have a different set of regulations for each of those different categories? So that's one question that I have.

And the other thing that I would like to ask you to comment on, all over the state -- we've been traveling around the state, and everywhere we go, homeless and housing are critical issues for practically all of the different categories of people who are vulnerable, and families in particular. So how are we looking at this as a statewide issue but looking at the different regions, what their needs are, and ways in which we can tailor our activity to meet the needs

from Long Island to the rest of the state?

And the last part of my question is, families and children are particularly vulnerable. The way that we -- so children also need to be able to get into a school no matter where they end up, where their family ends up, whether it's the Bronx or Brooklyn or whatever. And many times we have families who are temporarily housed in Brooklyn, children left school and have to go all the way back to the Bronx, and it just creates an impossible life for young -- for children whose families find themselves in homeless shelters in particular.

So I would like to hear how you are looking at trying to figure out a resolution or a solution to some of these issues that we're talking about.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I'd like to start by saying that may be the best question I've ever been asked.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: And you only have a minute, so we'll --

(Laughter.)

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: -- I know, we'll take it in writing, but whatever you have to say --

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Very comprehensive.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: -- would be helpful.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I'll go fast.

(Laughter.)

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: First and foremost, I understand -- I've been in these shelters, I've seen the issues, and I understand the importance of being able to make sure that children can go to the school and keep a continuity and what that can mean in the quality of an individual's life. What that means also for the entire family, for after-school programs, for the like.

So there is a significant commitment to that in the shelters at this point, but I always say we can do better. And so there's a reality on that front.

The homeless services plans that we're talking about, when you hear us mentioning

those, those really are designed to be able to better coordinate services. That's the next logical step, first to develop the homeless services plans and then to begin to work on a level of coordination between agencies, between local districts and the state to ensure that it's seamless. And to make sure that there isn't waste when it comes to the process, to make sure the services that are delivered are actually benefiting the individuals who are in need.

{Timeclock beeping.}

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: And streamlining --

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Just under the wire.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: -- streamlining regulations, please.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Correct.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to Assemblywoman Barrett.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: {Mic off; inaudible.}

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Ah, here we go.

I would like, if you could, to have you share with us -- first of all, I want to thank you for the money and the attention to homeless vets. Obviously, as chair of Veterans' Affairs, that's a key issue.

I would like to hear your thoughts on what is in this budget to support people at risk and others in rural communities. I always feel like this budget focuses so much on urban issues, and we have issues of homelessness, we have issues, obviously, of rural suicide where -- you know, agricultural challenges, all sorts of things going on in our -- the rural parts of the state. And I'd love to hear your thoughts on that, please.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure. I think one of the challenges -- and again, having come from the role of a county

executive in a rural county that also had an urban center in it, we understood fully the differences that could exist in those situations. And obviously rural poverty is very different in those situations.

For us, it still comes about making sure that everybody has access to services, making sure that social service districts are doing what they're supposed to. We have a regulatory role in that process, in making sure the programs that we roll out really are thoughtful of the idea that what works in, say, Clinton County is very different than what may work in the Bronx.

And so there's a real thought process that goes into all of our planning in this process. And again, those homeless services plans, when you're dealing with specifically the homeless population, it's again tailored to the individual district.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: But what does that look like? Because I don't think that we have the services in the rural parts of the area that we have in even -- in -- for

example, like, you know, in Kingston or in Poughkeepsie, the eastern parts of my district aren't -- don't have any of those resources.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I wouldn't disagree that there are areas that are less served than others, there's no question about that. And I think that there needs to be an effort towards that end. I think we're very focused on being able to make sure we bring that kind of parity across the system.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Okay. So at the moment there isn't anything intentional, but you'll work on that?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Okay. Thank you very much.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator May.

SENATOR MAY: Commissioner, you probably heard the question I asked earlier about functional homelessness. Is that a concept that you deal with? We have a lot

of -- we said 10 percent of the student population is either homeless or functionally homeless in Syracuse, so they're living on someone's couch.

Is that -- is that just a concept in your lexicon, and do you have ways of dealing with it?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: It's not lost on us at all in that situation. And we recognize that there is a portion of the population that is, for lack of a better conversation, couch surfing. And that scenario, we are very focused and working with the not-for-profits and with the schools to make sure that we can identify those individuals and those families, to make sure that they are accessing the services that are available in that particular district. That really is the challenge, though.

But there's no question, there's a segment of the population that is not falling into the standard counts.

SENATOR MAY: All right. Thank you.

And do you expect the MRT process to

have representation of people who represent the concerns of community-based nonprofits that are dealing with the needs of people with disabilities or the populations that you serve?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I would defer to others on discussions about the MRT. I'm sure that all of us are anxiously awaiting what is inevitably going to be a very difficult job.

SENATOR MAY: Okay. And then finally, about refugees. So all across the Thruway communities, refugees are very important parts of our communities.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: No question about it.

SENATOR MAY: And the federal government has basically abdicated its role both in resettling refugees but also supporting the refugees who are here already.

Just can you tell me what you're doing to support the organizations that are there to help them --

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure.

SENATOR MAY: -- and the people themselves?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Again, in serving our refugees -- I'll give you the good news. There hasn't been a drop in federal funding at this point. Okay? That doesn't mean that we're not concerned about it, because we are. When the access to communities, especially in New York, of individuals who are coming who are refugees, it's a deep concern. We have seen a significant drop in numbers.

The Governor has made it very clear that New York is open, New York is here and welcoming, and it's what we were built on and that we are very focused on that. So -- but when it comes to the services, obviously language services, obviously any and all of the social services that we have available on the human services side of the house, making sure that access to schooling and culturally competent services -- that front as well.

SENATOR MAY: So is there any kind of additional funding -- I mean, when you say

federal funding hasn't dropped --

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: It doesn't mean --

SENATOR MAY: If they're not resettling people --

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Correct.

SENATOR MAY: -- then they are not sending the money in.

And there are a bunch of organizations that -- Interfaith works, for example, in Syracuse, which does a huge amount of work with refugees, and they have depended -- you know, a lot of their funding has come from new refugees coming in and they're not getting that funding now. So they're having to stretch everything they've got to provide the language support services and the, you know, cultural support services that they're --

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure.

SENATOR MAY: So I'm just wondering, is the state trying to fill those gaps?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Yeah, I think it probably warrants a further conversation.

And if you don't mind, I'd like to be able to have that with you.

SENATOR MAY: Okay. Thank you.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: You're welcome.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblyman Walczyk.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: Thank you, Chairwoman.

Good morning, I think, still. Commissioner, appreciate the time.

We've talked a little bit about different solutions to end homelessness in the State of New York, and we actually have a program by that title already, the Solution to End Homelessness Program, or STEP, as many call it.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: Why, in your view, were a handful of counties in rural and upstate New York denied their renewal for a five-year contract in this last round last

year?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Well, I think it's really important, when we talk about STEP, we highlight the fact that there was no cut in the STEP funding.

There is a normal process of the procurement that takes place every five years. And in that process we are very focused on being able to make sure that we obviously follow the rules, follow the law, and make sure that we meet -- again, some wonderful, wonderful programs that are out there.

But we also do recognize that in that process sometimes there are programs that are not selected, and they can be -- we're aware of the program that you're speaking about, and we're very focused on trying to figure out are there alternative ways to be able to move through procurement going forward. And we look forward to having that conversation as well.

We think there could be kind of a step-down process to STEP that might be also

helpful. We're exploring different options.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: Well, I appreciate that, and your remaining open and flexible and understanding.

As we were talking on the dais here, I could hear a number of different things that certainly strike home for me. Watertown, New York, is home to the Urban Mission, who has taken advantage of STEP funding in the past and is actually I think a shining example of what we can do here to bridge people out of poverty and provide that sort of extra hand up for their independence. They actually have a 97 percent success rate six months after someone has used rapid rehousing through Urban Mission and your STEP funding. Six months later, they're in stable housing and independent -- 97 percent of their clientele.

You know, in 2018 they served 830 families: 34 percent of those families had children under 18, 3 percent of them were veterans. So, I mean, we're hitting a lot of the -- you can talk about the programs and

consolidating all of them. I think this is one of those excellent methods that when you leave it to the locals who know it and do it every day, it's a shining example of what we can do right.

So I appreciate your flexibility and look forward to working with you further on that one.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you very much, Assemblyman.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: Most programs that we have in the State of New York -- this is a little bit bigger-picture, if you'll entertain me --

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: -- are based on income thresholds. And I just wondered if you could sort of explain your beliefs in benefit cliffs and whether they're a myth or a reality, and then what we can do and what your agency can do moving forward to eliminate some of those benefit cliffs programmatically. And how we as policymakers, sitting here and making

decisions that restrict you and your agency's ability, what we can do to make a difference and remove some of those cliffs.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Again, the concept of benefit cliffs are huge and depends on -- again, it's a public policy kind of a conversation that is so critically important: Making sure that an individual who is receiving services isn't provided with a disincentive to be able to continue to transition.

That's why currently in our benefits package there are transitional benefits to be able to assist people in a whole host of areas, whether it be through SNAP or whether it be through Medicare. It's a whole host of benefits that come through on a transitional basis to be able to assist in that process.

But again, as we look at what these cliffs look like, those are big, real conversations. If what we're talking about is providing additional benefits, we have to understand what's the exit strategy to help someone transition off of public assistance.

A good example of that is making sure that they have significant employment training that can get someone through that process. Last year 51,000 individuals transitioned from public assistance into the private sector.

(Discussion off the record.)

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Savino.

SENATOR SAVINO: Thank you, Senator Krueger.

Good afternoon. Just 12 o'clock on the dot, Commissioner.

I just want to quickly echo some of the comments of some of my other colleagues, my concern about the Summer Youth Employment and the length of OMH time it takes to do the processing.

As well as -- I'm going to tell you the same thing I told you last year and as I recently told Commissioner Poole from OCFS. It's beginning to be offensive -- and I know this is not your decision; you didn't craft the budget. It's beginning to be offensive, though, as a New York City representative and

a New York City taxpayer, that the state says to the City of New York that the people who live there are your responsibility with no obligation on the part of the state. It's just inherently offensive to New York City. They are not New York City's children or New York City's elderly or New York City's seniors or New York City's poor. They are the state's. We are all residents of this one state. I just have to say that again.

Because assuming that the city will pick up the responsibility for everything because they will find a way to make it work, these are also requirements that are placed on the City of New York by the State of New York.

So I would just hope that we could begin to stop this trend of shifting the burden totally to the City of New York for everything.

I want to ask specifically about one program because, as you know, there are severe challenges to providing housing for people who are either suffering from mental

health issues or the fragile elderly. A lot of them have relied on adult homes over the years. The adult home industry is closing largely because of the Olmstead decision, which says we have to move people to, you know, independent living where we can. Many of those individuals are decompensating, and they are winding up in our nursing homes because there's nowhere for them to go because the adult homes aren't there.

One of the things that could help stabilize the adult homes while they're still needed is an increase in the SSI rate. And I know the feds have pushed through this SSI COLA increase. What can we do to allow them to capture more of the SSI rate so that they can help provide more stable homes for people who really have nowhere else to go?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: We recognize that there was legislation to be able to move down that path. I think the conversation really moves now to -- again, that took place outside the budget confines last time, and it ultimately ended up in a veto.

I think the question really is to have those kinds of public policy conversations during the context of the budget, because --

SENATOR SAVINO: What we're doing right here. That's why I'm asking you.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I appreciate that. But we don't -- it's not that we do not understand and appreciate the management magnitude of what those organizations do.

SENATOR SAVINO: Well, I just don't want to go down that rabbit hole again where we pass legislation and the Governor vetoes it, saying it belongs in the context of the budget, and we try and put it in the budget and they kick it out and say do it later in legislation, because that's not solving the problem. We really need to figure out an answer to that.

And I think that was it. Oh, no, one question. In the Governor's budget proposal he projects that public assistance cases are going to be reduced by about 6,000. How do we -- where did we arrive at that number? How did we arrive at the projection that

we're -- public assistance either applicants or cases are being reduced or dropping?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: No problem. We used an econometric model that was consistent with how things are going across the entire state and what trends are showing. And that's traditionally the model that we utilize to be able to do that.

Again, we have seen trends moving downward at this point. But also, obviously, we have to make sure that OTDA is prepared, in case we have a scenario where the economy turns or other challenges come forward, we have to be able to provide those services.

SENATOR SAVINO: And I just want to echo also the concern about the benefit cliff. We hear that routinely from agencies that employ people who are marginal. And unfortunately, one of the unintended consequences of the minimum wage increase is it puts people up against the benefit cliff and it forces them to make a very harsh decision, staying in the workforce or leaving their job because they can't afford to

replace Medicaid, SNAP, or any of other supplemental benefits that they receive.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure.

SENATOR SAVINO: Thank you.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to Assemblywoman Wright.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Good afternoon.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Good afternoon.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Thank you very much for being here.

And I guess my question sort of follows suit to some of the others that have already been made, because we are talking about how we're tailoring needs to actually address what the local communities need and/or have decided would help their local population. But we're finding that it's -- so I'm going to ask you to help me reconcile or how we might be able to reconcile the challenge that we're facing, in that housing for the elderly -- I live in an aging

community -- the housing for the elderly and the benefits for the elderly, particularly if we use the term fragile elderly, is being supplanted with homeless and oftentimes chronic homeless when we try to develop housing options for our aging communities. So I guess I'm going to pass that to you.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: To me, I look at these scenarios and say to myself, these are -- though they're oftentimes discrete populations, the reality is there's need for help on both fronts. Okay?

And so when it comes to what OTDA focuses on, we're very focused on homeless housing, obviously, through HHAP as a critical component of that. We're excited about what that means in making sure that those housing projects take place. But we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that we also invest heavily as a partner from HHAP in projects that serve a great deal of people across the entire spectrum, not just individuals who are homeless.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: So I guess

because we're not seeing an emphasis on the elderly or those who are disabled elderly, we're not getting funding to help support that endeavor.

So in aging communities where people are unable to take stairs, they need assistance to get dressed, they -- we're just -- we're -- I understand the emphasis on homelessness. But what we're doing is creating a population of elderly that are homeless or going into nursing homes prematurely, and they shouldn't have to do that.

So I guess what I'm asking as if there's a way for us to begin to emphasize that there is a disabled elderly population that needs particular attention.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: The answer is yes. It's not a traditional HHAP kind of a discussion, but there's no question that there's need in the area.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Okay. What about as a disability conversation? Are we having it as part of the disability

conversation? Because that would be a disability.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: The answer would be yes, in other agencies within state government. The disability within OTDA really is about disability determinations.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Okay. All right, thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Sue Serino.

SENATOR SERINO: Thank you.

And good afternoon, Commissioner Hein. So good to see you here. And as Assemblymember Barrett said, we miss you in the Hudson Valley but are very happy that you're here.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you.

SENATOR SERINO: And I'd like to just comment on Assemblyman Hevesi's comments on human trafficking. I thank him and you for working on that. It's something that we've been working on in the Hudson Valley as well.

And I always say education is the key to prevention. I carry a couple of bills for that.

I was thrilled to see the additional $5 million included in the proposal to address the issue of homelessness among veterans. I was just wondering if you can tell us how that funding would be distributed.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Well, the exciting part about that is that the additional $5 million will obviously go for units across the state, to be able to provide housing for the individuals.

We are also seeing homelessness among the veterans population around the state fall precipitously, so the capacity to be able to really move towards a number where we hopefully long for the day where there are no homeless veterans anywhere. And so this is an effort to be able to push towards that direction. You'll see additional units being built, but we shouldn't lose sight that the housing units that HHAP also does oftentimes

have a veterans component attached to them.

I was at an incredibly wonderful opening at a place that's called Serve Vets in Coney Island, and it really is extraordinary. We're seeing individuals have life-altering experiences. I was in the apartment of a gentleman who really was so proud to be able to show it, and it was the first time he had permanent housing in 20 years.

SENATOR SERINO: Oh, that's amazing.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: A wonderful veteran.

SENATOR SERINO: I'm concerned, though, there's a line in the proposal, though, that reads, essentially: However, if an insufficient number of viable proposals for veterans are received, the balance of the funding can be used for the development of housing for other priority-need populations.

And I know that we're talking about it going down, but I've known you for a long time and I know, like me, you care deeply about our veterans.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure.

SENATOR SERINO: So I just wanted to put this on your radar. And you know, we -- and I know the Dwyer money doesn't come under your budget, but the Dwyer funds and the people that work -- I know in our district we have a great team of guys and gals, and they help get that message out and they find our homeless veterans. So I don't know if other areas are the same. So when you're not getting proposals from other areas, they just might not have their finger on the pulse like our guys do. So just something -- like I said, I'd like to put that on your radar, and hopefully take that --

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Your point is not lost.

SENATOR SERINO: -- part out if it's at all possible.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I think it's designed to be able to provide maximum flexibility. I don't see it ever being a provision that would be utilized. In that situation we fully expect that we will have

to satisfy veteran proposals to be able to move this forward.

We're working, again, with Veterans' Services at the state level also to make sure that we're coordinated in our efforts, because I think it's really important.

SENATOR SERINO: That's great. Thank you so much.

And Senator Savino had spoken to you a little bit about the SSI. And like you said, that's something that we've passed bills, you know, constantly in the Assembly and the Senate, and the Governor had vetoed it. And I understand that the SSI pass-through falls in your portion of the budget.

So the current rate, for those that are listening, is only $41 a day. And because of this abysmal rate, dozens of homes serving SSI individuals have closed after the last few years. You know, I was chair of Aging for four years, and now ranker, and it just breaks your heart because it's one of our most vulnerable populations. So -- and that state supplement has only been increased

once in 25 years.

So I wanted to know what you think about -- is the $41 a day adequate? What are your feelings on that?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Again, this is that time for that conversation. Because, you know, we've talked about whether it takes place in or outside the budget. Clearly it is budget time and it's an internal budget conversation, and we would be glad to be able to participate in that conversation.

SENATOR SERINO: Great. I look forward to talking to you, Commissioner, about this, so can we fight for our vulnerable population. Thank you.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We'll go to Assemblyman Ra for a question.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Good afternoon.

So I tried to ask this earlier, but I'm told you are the appropriate representative to ask about the Pay for

Success program.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I'll have to take that up with Sheila.

(Laughter.)

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Or you can take it up with Assemblyman Hevesi, because he also recommended --

(Laughter.)

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: -- that I ask you about the issue.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I hate to do this, because I think I could answer it very quickly. I heard this, the -- Senator Krueger was right, we were in the room, so we heard the question.

The challenge is Pay for Success isn't an OTDA program. Okay? So we will gladly find the answer for you, because it's a legitimate question and you have every right to have an answer to it, but it's not an OTDA program.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator John Brooks.

SENATOR BROOKS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Actually, two of my colleagues touched on a point that I just want to reemphasize. I think the homelessness on the college campuses is far higher than we think and much more dangerous than we think, particularly in those areas where the climate this time of year is not the best.

And the other issue on the veterans' housing -- I think, again, that's a hidden problem too. Many of those who are homeless are too proud to step forward. I'm not sure that $5 million is anywheres near enough. I think there are individuals who take steps to try to protect themselves, but if they miss, they're risking their lives in some of the locations they're putting themselves in right now.

So I appreciate that we do have a program designed specifically to look at the vets, but I think that too is a bigger problem than we think. And I think -- I was

in a meeting the other day on the island where a group said, "No, we don't have homeless vets anymore on Long Island." That's not even close to being right.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Of course.

SENATOR BROOKS: And I think -- one of the things I worry about sometimes is we're not being as honest with ourselves as we should about the significant number of people who are first homeless -- and then we had an incident over the summer where I was speaking with a group of kids in an educational program, and the teacher told us the one girl -- part of the educational program was current events, and the girl wasn't allowed to watch television at night. So they helped her with the current events.

When I talked to them later and we talked about getting food and the rest, it wasn't that she wasn't allowed to watch television. The family had no electricity. Which meant they had no heat, which meant they didn't have hot water, which meant they couldn't keep food.

So we're in a situation that there's almost grades of homeless. Being in a house that doesn't have electricity or heat is homeless.

But I appreciate that you're working on the programs that covered it, so I didn't have a specific question, I just wanted to underscore how significant these problems are.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Senator, thank you very much.

I will share with you something -- again, for that kind of a scenario where an individual is in a home but has an electrical shutoff, there are programs and emergency services available to assist them to make sure that that does not take place.

There is a significant commitment in every district to make sure that the capacity exists to be able to help individuals in that particular condition.

The other situation that you were mentioning about homelessness among veterans, I come from a community -- and I remember

hearing those voices that said, We don't have a homeless problem among our veterans population. And ultimately we built the transitional housing for homeless veterans and we really -- there was a big move to be able to reduce homeless veterans within our community, and it was ragingly successful, especially when you began to tackle things like PTSD and a series of other major issues that happened at that point.

SENATOR BROOKS: Yeah. I brought up the young lady only to illustrate the fact that she just accepted that as a way of life, didn't think it was out of the norm.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure. I think you're really talking about adverse childhood experiences, you're talking about childhood trauma, you're talking about things that affect people for their life. It's why many of us got into human services in the first place, to be able to make a difference and change people's lives.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. I believe I'm next, and last for the Senate.

I'm glad you closed with childhood trauma with Senator Brooks, because we look at the numbers of children who are in the shelter system and we might as well be writing up the reports now on what we're going to need to pay into their adult years because they did have so much childhood trauma, moving from location to location, school to school, et cetera, et cetera.

So the Governor said in his -- I believe it was the State of the State speech, not his budget speech, that he was going to do more for homelessness this year than ever. So tell me how we're doing more this year than ever. I know that we have a commitment from 2016 for 20,000 supportive housing beds. We've only gotten to 6,000. Are we doing 14,000 this year? How many are we doing?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Again, I will only speak to the commitment as I understand it, and the commitment as I understand it is, again, the $20 billion that is for affordable housing across the board, 6,000 supportive units to be completed in a five-year window

that ends next year. We should highlight -- and then a 15,000 -- excuse me, a 20,000 unit commitment for supportive housing over 15 years.

And so when it comes to the commitment -- and we should touch base on this -- we're very proud of the work that has happened. We've got an enormous amount of it through HHAP, but obviously others as well in this process. And when it comes to the supportive housing side, we now have 4,000-plus units, well on our way to being able to attain and exceed the 6,000 supportive housing units.

That doesn't mean there isn't even greater need, but that commitment is -- we're very focused on being able to make sure that we attain it and exceed it. And the overall affordable housing number, we are also ahead of schedule.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So you also referenced -- and I think in answer to a question, not in your testimony -- that the City of New York, with the largest numbers of

homeless, is spending too much money in their programs. So can the state do it cheaper, and will you?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: If you're asking if the state will take over Family Assistance and Family Assistance operations, what we are working with with New York City at this point is to be able to amend their homeless services plan and to assist them to be able to speed the process. You're really talking about extremely expensive hotel and motel rooms, and the attempt to be able to reduce the time spent in those units.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: What is the most cost-efficient model for ensuring that people don't continue to flow into our very expensive homeless shelter system with such a long timeline for getting them out of the homeless shelter system?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sufficient permanent housing.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: What prevents us from getting them into sufficient permanent housing?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Enough units.
CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Enough --
OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Enough units. And again, we are in a scenario right now, especially in the metro New York area, where that portion of it -- there is, without question, a crisis with that situation.
CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Do you think it has anything to do with too little rental assistance to afford the units in the locations where people are?
OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Well, what I would say is this. Very few people are transitioning -- not in total numbers, but I'm talking about percentagewise, transitioning over from PA into the shelter system. Okay? So there are clear strong supports, both state but again extensively from the city as well, to have supports in place to be able to assist people staying in their homes, CITYFEPS and the like.
CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So I just want to repeat that. So we don't think -- your data shows people are not ending up in a shelter

system having been evicted from an apartment they couldn't afford.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: No, we're not saying that at all. What we're saying is that that percentage is significantly less than people who are not coming out of the PA system.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So where are the people coming from?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Again, I think that we're seeing a whole myriad of reasons for homelessness. In the city, obviously cost of housing. Clearly things like mental health and substance use disorders and a whole host of other challenges, as well as economic factors.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Have you taken a look at the Assemblymember's housing support proposing -- the HSS proposal which would provide an increased rental supplement to keep people in their homes or to move them out of shelters?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I have.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: What is your

opinion of that?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Well, again, I think rather than being able to comment specifically on any legislation, I think it's important that we talk -- and again I commend the Assemblymember and everyone else for pushing to have this kind of public policy conversation. We think it's really important.

For me, it's more about the conversations about what things should be considered in the conversation and how we move forward. Clearly there's budgetary concerns associated with that, and the finances need to be addressed.

There also needs to be -- in my opinion, one of the factors that should be discussed is how we ensure that when we look across the entire state that we're not treating, say, Clinton County the same as we would treat the Bronx or some other portion of the city. We want to make sure that -- again, to me, those are two of the -- two key components. I want to make sure that I don't

make mistakes, and I really appreciate the time.

In addition to local variations, there is the cliff conversation that needs to at least be discussed, and how we're going to transition over. I know that there's a component of it that carries out for an additional year. But the real conversation about how we ensure that an individual doesn't find themselves in a situation where the cliff makes them -- in a situation where they're just as bad but a year or two down the road. Okay?

We understand the value in the conversation. And I am also very much looking forward to the outcomes of the pilots that have been proposed. I think the pilot in New York City will be a very informative study, specifically tied to, again, the area where we see some of the biggest crisis. But also to be able to see the results of that pilot in Rochester will speak volumes about how upstate cities are dealing with that as well.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Because there are such higher costs for housing in New York City --

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: No question.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: -- does the state support the City of New York moving people into other counties with lower costs for housing and shelter?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Again, if what we're talking about is the SOTA program that was traditionally run and continues to be run out of the city, we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that that program is funded solely with city dollars and not state dollars.

But we do support, if individuals can find access to employment or family members, that people have a right to be able to move.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. Would you support the city being allowed to use money they currently can only use for shelter placement -- which I think is now close to 72,000 a year -- would you allow the city to use more of those funds specifically to help

provide rental housing so that either the family can go into a housing unit sooner or avoid having to leave a housing unit?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I think it's an area that I'm going to have to take a closer look at. I can't speak to it right now.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So -- but you will take a look at that.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Absolutely.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. Because we're basically setting up that only the most expensive failed model can be used. So I would really like the state to look at the economics of that.

And you are right that not everybody goes into the shelter system from losing a home. The data actually shows a huge percentage, at least of the singles, are released from State DOCCS -- I think about a third of the people going into the singles shelter system.

There are other -- and there have been historically MOUs and discharge planning so

that people leaving mental health institutions, people leaving DOCCS aren't simply dropped off, as it happens, at the 30th Street Men's Shelter in my district. We have seen an enormous growth in populations just being dropped off with nothing.

What can OTDA do to ensure that DOCCS is not simply busing people into a nonsolution? Which is going to increase their likelihood of ending up right back in DOCCS anyway.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure. Again, we all recognize the importance of and the value of proper housing and strategies for release and why that's so important to reduce recidivism and how that can be effective.

I've also seen firsthand the 30th Street Shelter in full operation and recognize the value that that particular facility provides in the system, and note areas for improvement as well.

That said, it is imperative that the state agencies all collaborate. And we work together now, but there always is room for

improvement to be able to make sure that whether it's DOCCS or OTDA or any other different portion, different agencies are collaborating to make sure that we don't find that situation where an individual is dropped off and the chances for success are extremely limited.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Are you operating under any MOUs today? I found some pretty old ones.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: There are some old ones. And we are --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Can you get those to me, please, after the hearing?

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Of course.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

And again, you heard me when I asked Sheila Poole from OCFS. I would also like to see the same information, because --

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: They are working on it as we speak.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Excellent. Thank you very much for your testimony today.

I believe the Senate is done,

Assembly.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So that concludes the questions for you, Commissioner. Thank you so much. And we look forward to some of the follow-ups that you've committed to.

OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you very much. And thank you all.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Next we will be hearing from New York State Office for the Aging, Greg Olsen, acting director.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: You guys ready for me?

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Feel free to -- well, wait one second. People are just -- actually, leaving very quietly. So, Greg, you can begin.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank you. Well, good afternoon. It's always a pleasure to be here.

Chairpersons Krueger, Weinstein, Chairpersons May, Bronson and all the distinguished members of the Assembly and standing committees, I'm Greg Olsen. I'm the

acting director of the New York State Office for the Aging. And as always, I'm always honored to testify on the portions of Governor Cuomo's proposed budget that affect older New Yorkers.

Governor Cuomo's commitment to older New Yorkers is unprecedented, and New York is viewed across the nation as a trailblazer for the work that we're doing to support older adults through the Office for the Aging. Our approach is so much broader than one agency. It's about making New York the healthiest state in the nation through a multi-agency coordinated focused effort on improving physical and behavioral health, implementing preventive healthcare strategies, embedding healthy aging principles into planning, procurement and policies to change the built environment, and much more.

Utilizing the state's 2019-2024 Prevention Agenda as the umbrella, and instituting a "health across all policies" approach, all New York State agencies are incorporating health considerations into our

planning, our programs, and our initiatives. We have been charged to work together and consider how all of our policies further our efforts as the first age-friendly state in the nation. This approach will have and is having a significant positive impact on New York's older population.

Under the Governor's leadership, New York State became the first state in the nation to receive the age-friendly designation by the AARP and the World Health Organization because we ranked high in the eight domains of age-friendly, livable communities. But more importantly, we have a comprehensive plan to systematically build age-friendly and smart growth principles into how government operates and functions. We're truly leading the nation in this collaborative and thoughtful approach.

The fiscal year '20-'21 Executive Budget continues its ongoing commitment to older New Yorkers. It includes: The continuation of the historic $15 million targeted investment that was contained in

last year's enacted budget to assist those who are awaiting services in our network. And I want to thank you all for your support of that historic investment.

The continuation of $1.5 million to the CSE program that was contained in last year's enacted budget.

The continued support for the New York Connects systems reform, which exceeds $20 million annually to help individuals of all ages and payors access long-term services and supports.

Maintaining our $500,000 funding stream that draws down an additional $2 million to support our enhanced multi disciplinary teams to combat elder abuse and financial exploitation.

Provisions by the Governor to lower prescription drug prices, which will have a significant impact on older adults.

And maintaining all core funding levels from last year.

The 2021 Executive Budget proposal will continue to help hundreds of thousands

of older New Yorkers maintain their independence, support their loved ones who care for them, reduce future Medicaid costs, and further demonstrate why New York is the first-age friendly state in the nation.

The State Office for the Aging and our network does not stop there. We can't stop there. In order to meet emerging goals, we need to do a lot more together, and that's exactly what we do.

Through innovative partnerships with foundations, state and community partners, and our own efforts, we are expanding services and testing new delivery models. These include advancing our state age-friendly work via grants to help communities replicate the Governor's signed Executive Order 190 at the county level; bringing new municipalities into AARP's age-friendly network; standing up, first in the country, five Age-Friendly Regional Technical Assistance Centers that are being led by the New York Academy of Medicine and creating a learning collaborative to assure

the success of our grantees in the short-term and then an expansion, hopefully, in the long-term.

Implementing our private-pay program as a result of receiving the statutory authority in last year's enacted budget -- again, I thank you for that support. Working with the PPS systems and health plans and providers around the state to purchase services from our network that address the social determinants of health. Significantly expanding our state certification and skills-based trainings for staff who deliver services across the state. Expanding our partnership with the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to provide targeted nutrition counseling and nutrition education in low-income targeted areas across the state.

Working with the Village to Village network and the Albany Guardian Society to seed local village movements that organize neighbors to help neighbors, and stood up the first-in-the-nation regional Village to

Village Technical Assistance Center right here in the Capital District.

Participating in a statewide collaborative to educate the public on the devastating impacts of sepsis. Reducing social isolation via the use of animatronic pets. Working with the New York State Council on the Arts to bring arts and arts education to senior centers and libraries in three regions of the state, which will help improve health, reduce social isolation, improve cognitive functioning, and support professional artists.

Working to better understand the fiscal impact that caregiving has on the public and private workforce as well as the healthcare costs for those caregivers in the work environment. And working with the DDPC, the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, to provide training and education resources that will help us better serve individuals with disabilities who are entering our service infrastructure.

So we'll continue to engage all the

state agencies, our private partners, not-for-profits and other community-based organizations to serve New York's older population as effectively as we can.

As always, always appreciative to be here, and I'm happy to take any questions that you may have.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

So we go to Assemblyman Bronson, chair of our Aging Committee.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Thank you, Chairperson Weinstein.

Acting Director Olsen, thanks for being here.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: My pleasure.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: It's always a pleasure working with you. And I do want to credit the Governor and your office for your commitment to older New Yorkers and the type of work that we've been able to do.

The $15 million increase in community-based services last year was huge. And I -- my first question is actually about that. And, you know, we were trying to

address the waitlist. At your request, we offered some flexibility in how those funds were distributed county by county.

So my question is twofold. First, were all counties able to participate? And if not, which ones didn't and what was the reason for that? And then, second, if you have an estimate of the number of people on the waitlist that we were able to provide services to.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Sure. Thank you, Assemblyman, and Senator May. You know, you guys came in last year, and that was really a historic investment we hadn't seen in over 20 years.

I think what was key about that proposal -- which you all supported -- was that flexibility in bypassing our traditional funding formula. That's how dollars go out the door. It's based on the percentage of people over the age of 60 by county gets a certain percent of the dollars. And that model works effectively well for a lot of our programs.

But you know, as you mentioned, what's reported back to us in terms of unmet needs doesn't necessarily follow the traditional formula. So what we were able to negotiate with you all last year was the ability to bypass that, get resources directly to the communities that reported back. Hence, the $15 million.

So out of the 59 county-based area agencies on aging that are part of our network, 50 of them reported unmet need. And so those resources were directed towards those communities.

For some of the nine who did not report, I don't necessarily view that as something that they didn't do right. What that says to me is that with their federal, state and local resources, the contributions that they may get from the residents who are receiving service, their own fundraising, that they're able to meet the current need. That's a success story.

I will tell you that a few of the counties who did not report unmet need --

which we've been receiving information for quite a long time in terms of what that looks like -- did have middle-of-the-year issues, and we were able to redirect some resources to them.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Okay. And thank you for that work. It's really important for our older New Yorkers and their families.

What happens if someone is on a wait -- well, let me back up. First of all, you know, I have information to suggest that there's significantly increased numbers of waitlists, upwards of 9,700. And, you know, we need to quantify that and get a real number. But when someone is on a waitlist, what happens to them? If they're not getting those services they need to age at home, what happens to them?

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: So there's a lot of different things that could potentially happen. So we have a policy that we put in place in 2014 that targets people who may be awaiting services that, if through their own resources or through a family

member or friends, can private-pay while they're working their way up that service category.

What we look at first, though, is the acuity level of the need. And so individuals who are not receiving services due to adequate funding are prioritized based on some factors, right, their income level, geography, their functional limitations. And so, you know, they would receive a priority over other people who may not be receiving services.

But because you may not be receiving services through us doesn't mean that there's not an effort underway by the area agencies and the community-based partners to connect them with other community resources. So I say that because we're not the only game in town. We're an important conduit to really look holistically and person-centered at an individual and what they may or may not need. But there are a variety of other entities at the local level from town and municipality programs, CAP agencies, you know, the

United Way, those types of things that offer similar types of services that we can connect to.

Some are case-managed while they're awaiting services. We can look at things like are they receiving SNAP benefits, try to hook them up with SNAP and HEAP and low-income subsidy to put money back in their pockets to get connected to services.

So it's not like they just languish while they're waiting. The area agencies are very adept at capitalizing and leveraging their community resources, because that really is how the network is structured.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Yeah, I appreciate that. And the network is very good, it's important to do those evaluations, those assessments, and try to get to the high-needs people as quickly as possible.

But if we don't get them the community-based needs, you know, they -- some go into, you know, nursing homes, others go into other forms of managed long-term care. And those costs are astronomical. And the

state is currently facing a Medicaid issue. Yet we have services to keep people at home, where the annual cost is around, you know, $6,000, $6,300 -- yet the cost of a nursing home is $150,000 annually.

You know, we don't have to discuss this in detail, but I think through budget negotiations what I'd like your office to be involved in, as we look at the Medicaid Redesign Team No. 2 and the parameters that are set out there, if we could also ask them -- and with your assistance -- to look at if we invest more in keeping people at home, can we save money on the Medicaid side of the equation?

And with that -- $15 million last year -- I'd be willing to advocate for more money for those services so that we can save that money at the Medicaid end.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, and I think what you just recognized and have recognized, with the support of the investment last year, is similar to what the Governor and the Health Department

recognized. You know, would $15 million come out of the global Medicaid cap. I'm sure that -- you know, going back to Senator Krueger's -- the model, what's an effective model that might be less expensive, you know, I think that this will be talked about through budget negotiations. You know, our network is able to intervene a lot earlier than the medical model, and that's by design. And we should have a system like that that focuses attention on the front end in the community, waiting -- you know, not waiting for people to devolve to a point where you need those higher levels of care.

So I think that $15 million investment came from exactly those facts, that we can target people who are at imminent risk of Medicaid and spend-down, and help serve them and their families in their homes and communities for quite some time. Hence, the investment.

So I'm hopeful that this will be a conversation that will play itself out during negotiations.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: I am also hopeful.

I've had conversations with you recently, along with your staff, in connection with nursing home transfers and evictions, and its relationship to the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program. The Comptroller had issued a report toward the end of last year about these types of transfers and, you know, what we could be doing to prevent this disruption to folks who are in these facilities and make sure that they're getting the notice that they're required under federal law and things of that nature.

Can you expand on this a little bit? What's happening with our Long Term Care Ombudsman Program and its effectiveness, and how could we be more effective?

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, that's a great question.

So the program on its whole -- we could talk a little bit about that for a second. You know, we regionalized a couple of years ago for economies of scale. We had

several programs that were very, very small. It's difficult to run a county program, you know, when you're receiving $15,000, especially to complete the functions that the program provides.

And so what it does is really the quality control eyes and ears in facilities to help individuals make sure that their rights are maintained and that they're receiving quality of care.

The eviction issue has been one that we've been working with the Health Department on to develop a process in order to, first, make sure that people know what their rights are in terms of the eviction, and then how to go through an appeals process. I'd be happy to share, you know, what that process is in writing with you, but that's something that we are working on.

In terms of the ombudsman program itself, you know, it's a challenge. We have a fairly large cadre of staff around the state, 35 full-time, 10 part-time, a little over 400 volunteers. So I think what we're

seeing both within LTCOP and within our Health Information Counseling Assistance Program, and probably elsewhere in other systems, is the face of the volunteer is changing.

You know, these types of programs require a four-day intensive certification in order to become an ombudsman. The task is pretty intense, and you've got to give a lot of credit to these folks that are putting in 20 hours a week. But the bottom line is that the face of volunteers are changing. People are spending less time doing the day-to-day volunteering and more, you know, the weekend warrior type of thing once or twice a year, which is perfectly fine. But it certainly has an impact on the programs and services that we provide.

So we've tested a couple of things over the last year, and I think I mentioned this in last year's hearing. You know, we looked at implementing a $75 a month stipend in the LTCOP program in four regions to see if that would have an impact on retention,

training, and the amount of work that you would get out by providing a small stipend. And it's been very, very successful. So that's something we're looking to potentially expand a little bit more, which would help us with the workload, which makes us able to go to more places and do the same thing with the HICAP program.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Okay. So, again, I'd like to continue to work with you regarding, you know, methodologies that we can better recruit and retain volunteers as well as paid folks in this area. And I'll defer and ask you questions on my second round.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Okay, thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Aging Chair Senator Rachel May.

SENATOR MAY: Thank you. Thank you.

And thank you, Commissioner. It's been a pleasure working with you over the

last year.

Let me help out my colleague here, because I was going to ask about the ombuds program as well. Have you considered a travel allowance for the volunteers? Because certainly in our part of the state they have to go long distances often.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, many of them have that -- have an allowance built in, so that that type of thing should not be on the backs of the volunteers.

What I like about the -- you know, what I like about the stipend idea is it's a low-budget, high-yield impact. It recognizes the value that these folks bring to the table every single day. It's something that's pretty complicated and not always positive if you're seeing, you know, things that you don't want to be seeing in some of these facilities.

And, you know, I think that on the receiving side from the volunteer, in addition to all the other recognition things that the program does -- and the support that

we try to provide in various other areas really is monumental in terms of them feeling valued for the time commitment that they put into this.

So we're certainly not averse to any of those types of incentives that are going to help not only, again, recruit people, but make sure once they're in and feel that it's a volunteer experience that's important to them, that we hang onto them.

SENATOR MAY: Okay, great.

So let me go back to these issues about keeping people in their homes and out of nursing homes. And the first question is, in the MRT process do you anticipate having a voice in what gets decided? And do you think that community-based programs that serve the elderly will have any kind of input into that process?

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: You know, I do think we will be -- always are and will be interacting with our Health Department colleagues. And I think that Dr. Zucker and Donna Frescatore mentioned that yesterday.

I think because -- the way that we kind of view our role in concert with the Health Department is that we do have a continuum of care. We're the front end of that. We are pre-Medicaid. We're trying to keep people out of the emergency room. You need a strong community-based network to be discharged safely back to the community.

So there's always going to be a positive interaction between those two things. I don't think it should be lost on any of us that that investment we got last year came from the Health Department's budget because they recognized that we are able to target certain individuals that eventually could wind their way into the Medicaid program, that we can do it for very, very low cost, hence what the investment is.

So I feel confident moving forward that some of the things that our network may be able to offer will be part of that conversation.

SENATOR MAY: Thank you. So that $15 million investment last year was

predicated on a savings of about $34 million from Medicaid in keeping people out of nursing homes. Have you run the numbers? Are you seeing that kind of savings, or is it too early to tell?

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, I think, you know, what we did do is we were able to tag future Medicaid savings. Because if you're receiving services in our network, you are not receiving services somewhere else.

So, you know, we began the process with some assumptions based on some feedback from the area agencies that reported what happens to people if they're awaiting services and not getting them. I think what we have a little more definitively at this point -- I think our reporting requirement that we had agreed to in the budget last year is September, so I'll know a lot more by then.

But I can tell you this. I asked 10 of the counties fairly recently to go through some of their client data of folks who were awaiting services when they reported it back

in the '17-'18 cycle, which predated the $15 million, to the time that we were able to release the money based on the enacted budget, what happened to those folks. And so they went through 2200 individual case files, which is a monumental labor-intensive process, and I appreciated that they did that.

And I think Assemblyman Bronson hit it on the nose. Those numbers are similar to what we found: 10 percent went directly from awaiting services into a nursing home. So that would have had a cost. Because, again, the clients that we're serving are traditionally 83-year-old females who live alone, are low-income, have four or more chronic conditions, and have three needs in -- you know, functional needs in a variety of different areas. So they're pretty much at risk.

So again, I think that the investment speaks for itself.

SENATOR MAY: Thank you.

So like Assemblyman Bronson, I -- it

makes me wonder why we don't just multiply the investment by 10 and reap, you know, that much more in terms of the savings.

So I'm interested in a few things where I feel like we're kind of nickel-and-diming our home care system. There's not a COLA in there again. We are deferring the cost-of-living adjustment yet again, which makes it harder to find people to do the work of home care.

I didn't see if there was an increase in funding for NORCs, but that's a way that we support -- a pretty low-cost way of supporting seniors in their homes. The affordable senior housing service coordinators are -- what I'm told is they save about $4,000 per person per hospitalization, helping them, you know, coordinate everything more easily. The Senior Companion Program that we have out in Onondaga County, where seniors are going and just visiting with isolated seniors, and it's great for both the volunteers and the people receiving those services. Data systems for

senior centers to connect with hospitals for discharge planning so people aren't missing meals, home-delivered meals or that kind of thing.

So tell me about all of these areas: Is there room for further investment in these in order to save a lot of money on the Medicaid side of things?

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, and I think you mentioned a lot of very important programs that are part of a much bigger coordinated system. And that's why, again, you know, when we're going through the private-pay protocols -- and what we want to do to try to get people to the front door of the Office for the Aging. And they're not looking at one particular program, they're looking holistically. It's a person-centered approach looking at the individual and what do they need, what are their strengths, what other things can we leverage.

So I think that those things are very important. It's very difficult at times to get people to accept services, but that's the

culture that we live in. And our job is to make sure that we're out there in the communities letting people know that there are a variety of things they may be eligible for that they're not receiving that we can help them with.

I think what's the most promising thing -- and, you know, now being in this network for 27 years, what's happened over the last couple of years, at least where aging is concerned, to me is very exciting: The focus on value-based payments, shared savings with Medicare, with Medicare allowing services to be paid for that address the social determinants of health -- all of those things that we do very well in our network.

And so we've had some very, very productive conversations lately with Emblem, with Excellus, with the Albany PPS, with the Adirondack Health Institute, that are looking for ways not to recreate the wheel. And that's where we fit in.

We've got a network that's been around for 50 years that has, again, 59 offices for

the aging, 1200 community-based contractors that provide a variety of services that you just talked about, as well as, you know, 800 congregate sites, 2400 home-delivered-meal routes. There's a lot that we can be doing in looking to diversify our funding, whether it be through private pay, Medicare contracts, others, to significantly expand service to do exactly the kinds of things that you and Assemblyman Bronson have mentioned.

SENATOR MAY: Thank you.

And then the last thing is to talk about what's my top priority legislatively, and I believe Assemblyman Bronson's as well, which is the Family Caregiver Tax Credit. Which is partly just a recognition of all the work that families do, but it's also intended to make it easier for more families to do that kind of care and plug the gap in terms of the lack of the home healthcare workforce, and also to help people stay in their homes so they're not going into nursing homes.

So if that didn't make it into the

budget, is that something that you're willing to advocate for? We feel that that's very important. AARP does. It's potentially a really valuable thing in terms of return on investment, I believe.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, and there's been a lot of conversations about the tax credit. So I'm sure again, as we move forward, that will -- that's not going to be the last time it comes up.

I can tell you, one of the things I'm proudest about in the state is the caregiver investments that have not only been made in our agency, but also in the Health Department. I think one of the most exciting things what we're working on currently -- I'll just quickly share with you -- is I think we get a lot bigger bang for the buck when we can show what the impact of caregiving is to the economic bottom line.

So we are working now with AARP nationally, AARP New York State, Emblem, the New York State Health Department and Excellus to do a really comprehensive study of the

impact of caregiving on state employees, county employees, and then maybe the 20 biggest businesses in New York State. We have the ability through some health insurers, Emblem and Excellus, to look at claims data. What's the impact on healthcare, healthcare spending of caregivers? What does it cost businesses in terms of turnover, lost productivity? We know the wage reductions for women, which is a huge problem.

So I think that, you know, collectively the impetus behind getting data like that is really going to be an eye-opener, not only at the state level and the county level, but also through private businesses, where then we can be working together to provide strategies that not only help identify who caregivers are, because that's the number-one problem, but also connect them to the myriad of services that we have in New York State. We have over 76,000 respite and caregiver programs at the community level that people, you know, use

but may not know about, because a lot of this is crisis-driven, as you know.

SENATOR MAY: Great. Thank you. Is there a date for when that report will be coming?

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: It's going to be this year. I mean, we are moving quickly and there's a lot of excitement. It's going to be not only a great assist to New York State, but it will become a national model to really hone in on this at the state level everywhere, because it matters, as you know,.

SENATOR MAY: Great. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We go to Assemblywoman Wright.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Good afternoon.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Hi.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Hi. I do want to first acknowledge that there are some very good outcomes in my community related to the age-friendly program, and we recently designated a NORC, and so we're able to further support our aging community with those things.

However, I am finding and hearing and getting complaints in my office that the problem really centers upon -- elder abuse is really centered upon the abuses that exist because those who we believe are supposed to be helping our elders have too many gaps in the systems and regulations that govern their operations and allow abuse to occur.

So I do want to ask, first, how much influence, oversight, do you have on adult day care centers?

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: You want me to --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Yeah.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Okay. Sure.

So there -- I'm going to answer that two ways, because there's two different oversight entities. There are the social adult day centers that we operate directly, so we contract with directly. We have 13 of those. And so those are required to, you know, meet the state standards, which are actually in our regulations.

The area agencies on aging themselves

operate or contract with another 83 social adult day -- same thing, they're mandated to be monitored annually, we have monitoring tools, et cetera.

Then there are those that are receiving Medicaid funds. That's under the jurisdiction of the Health Department and their Managed Long Term Care contracts, and they are required to be certified through OMIG. So there are about 330 of them in New York City that would fall into the Health Department MLTC oversight.

Our role in that is to make sure that the plans that the SADC programs that we don't oversee directly, that everybody understands what the regs are, the types of things that they're supposed to do in monitoring. We've provided some tools, some self-monitoring tools. They all have to --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: May I ask, do you monitor what type of information they're allowed to collect regarding the people who attend the facility and what they're able to do with the information that they collect?

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: So I can only speak to the little over a hundred that we touch directly. The ones that are, excuse me, touched by the -- overseen by the Health Department, the MLTC plans, I can't speak to that.

But we certainly do have, you know, HIPAA and a public -- we definitely have requirements in terms of not sharing public health information or personal information.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Not health information, just total information that they're able to collect and what they're able to do with that information.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Let me look at the regs. I don't think that there is something that our programs are particularly sharing with anybody. But let me -- I want to make sure I answer that correctly.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Okay. And I'm imagining the local departments of aging and protective services for the aging or elderly in the municipalities, you have -- do you have oversight or is it just partnership?

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, so the area agencies -- so in this regard, DFTA, New York City Department for the Aging, again, if they're contracting with social adult day programs -- which they are -- using the funding that we have, then they're required to follow the same monitoring schedule that we require of ours. And they do do that.

And as you know, that DFTA is also -- runs a social adult day ombudsman program where they field complaints from all the SADC programs.

Of course if they're theirs, they would go out and do that monitoring themselves. If they're not, and they're attached to a Medicare dollar, those complaints go to my office, they go to the Health Department, and they go to the Office of Medicaid Inspector General, where then they will look into and make the appropriate actions or correct the action plan.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: And then I guess the last thing I want to leave -- I think it's more of a statement than a

question -- is that what I'm finding are those that are supposed to be protecting our older community are actually working to undermine the world that those people have created for themselves when they become vulnerable or in need of assistance. Instead of fortifying the connections that they've built around them, they work very diligently to pull them apart.

I'm finding that we have too much attention and strong-handed responses when the alleged victim of abuse is single, a woman, and childless. I have a case that has come to my office where after nine months of -- one, they broke down the door to get in. Then they put it -- it was in the court case. After nine months of adjournments, the first time my office misses an opportunity to show up in that courtroom, they make a decision that she's incapacitated. Within two months, she's in a nursing home, although she's been living independently all before this. And during the nine months that they've been involved, she did not have

anyone bring even food to her home. She's two months into the nursing home, and then within a month after that, both of her homes are up for sale and guardians are being paid.

I think your office needs to pay attention to what's going on in New York City, because it's a problem.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, and I know you were making a statement; I think that's a great statement. There's a lot of work that our agency does, not only in coordinating and administering the state's enhanced multidisciplinary team, but working with the city Elder Abuse Coalition and others -- but again, others across the state.

Look, we are in a culture now where a lot of people have no idea who's living next door to them. You know, people don't talk to their neighbors anymore. I know that the Governor had proposed some additional measures to combat financial exploitation within the budget this year. There are a lot of touch points that, regardless of how isolated the older person is, they're going

to see somebody, whether it be a physician or it be in the ER.

We're doing a lot of work in terms of trying to make sure that those different touch points can understand what the signs and symptoms are of physical and other types of elder abuse, but also on the financial part.

So what I would love to do is, you know, follow up with you on all the things that we are doing. And if there's things that we're not doing, to have you advise us on that would be very helpful.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WRIGHT: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

So hi.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: How are you, Senator?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Fine, thank you.

So I'm always amazed with how small your agency is, given that the population of New York State trends to older and older.

That's going to be a discussion for another day.

It's a huge population over a 30-year age framework. So there are issues for the frail elderly and those who need home care. I'm going to say -- and nursing home questions. The number-one issues that come to my district office for older New Yorkers are discrimination -- discrimination pushing them out of the workforce when they hit a certain age, discrimination in refusing to consider them for hiring, even though one of the realities of living much longer than everyone estimated is that they need more money because they're living longer. And yet they can't go back to work because there seems to be a consistent pattern of discrimination against seniors when they try to get jobs.

Discrimination of even -- I always find this is interesting. Medicare is the healthcare program for seniors. At least in my district -- and we're doing a survey, and I'm wondering whether your agency might

consider taking on a similar survey -- doctors don't want to take Medicare patients.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER: Mm-hmm.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I heard that "uh-huh." Well, yup, it's not just me. So we need to do something about that. I know Medicare is a federal law. But a couple of things.

One, if they're not taking seniors, somehow we're both flunking the test. And two, just FYI, if you can't get services through Medicare and you're a lower-income senior, you're going to line up to get Medicaid, and that was yesterday's conversation, that we have too many people on Medicaid and it's an issue for our budget. So we need to make sure that we as the State of New York are maximizing the ability for our older New Yorkers to actually draw down correctly on Medicare services.

But if everybody is confirming what I thought -- I was starting to think, oh, it's only me in my district, that nobody wants to take on Medicare patients -- I just think

this is huge.

So, one, I ask you to look into and perhaps do surveys, because that's what we're doing, about -- you know, we actually just go through the medical referral lists and find out -- because you can do it by computer -- how many are taking Medicare for new patients. And you find there's nobody. Or in Manhattan, you can find seven. Seven. That's not the exact number, but that small.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, that's crazy, right.

(Cellphone sound.)

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: That's crazy.

So I really think we have to do something about this. And we have to do a lot more to ensure that we put systems in place that are making sure -- I don't know who's ringing --

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I just want to make sure it's not me --

(Laughter.)

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: It's not me.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Somebody's mic

and phone are on.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: -- that this growth of discrimination in employment as well. And I'm wondering whether you have seen anything or been able to do anything about that.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, so on your second point, you know, you'll be hearing from the Association on Aging in New York State. That might be something in terms of the physician networks, and that's something we could potentially work on together. I think that's really important, and I agree.

You know, the discrimination side, Senator, I feel exactly the same way you do. And I think if you look at the kinds of things that our agency has been talking about for the last seven years or so, is really to try to combat ageism stereotypes and the discrimination. And we do that a number of different ways.

I mean, we all -- we know how we grow up in this country, we know how the media

portrays older people. We know how cartoons do it, to start it with our kids. People are scared to get older. It's an age -- you know, young-age type of environment that we live in.

But I think when you start to aggregate the facts of what older adults mean to their families, to their communities -- the biggest bloc of entrepreneurs, biggest givers to philanthropy, largest volunteer group, hold 83 percent of the nation's wealth, support 90 million jobs, are 43 percent of the federal tax base, same at the state and local level, in New York State represent 63 percent of all the personal income generated, and the thousand of years of work life and voluntary experience that you have -- you know, we're in competition with other states because they recognize the value of this population, have built it into their economic development, you know, talking points as ways to get older adults from the Northeast to move out of New York and go there.

Hence the whole effort around age-friendly. I mean, for us that's a couple -- there's two reasons to do that. One is to try to stop people from going to New Jersey, Connecticut, Florida. And the other is to make New York State the type of community that people want to move to.

So we are currently working on a campaign to do a little bit more on the media side in terms of ageism and discrimination. And Assemblyman Bronson and I have talked as recently as Tuesday on looking at some ways we can address the workforce, have an age-friendly workforce. You know, dispel some of those myths that they cost more in health insurance -- they don't. That they won't learn computers -- they will. That they're not reliable -- yes, they are. And so I think collectively we all have a role to do that, and that's really the basis of what an age-friendly state does. It tells the truth, it raises these issues and tries to solve them.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblyman Bronson.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Thank you.

So let's follow up on older New Yorkers in the workplace. And as you just indicated, we've had conversations about this this week, actually.

And as an employment lawyer by trade, I'm well aware of the discrimination that happens on the basis of age as well as other factors, and so education and awareness is definitely an element to this.

But I think we also need to think creatively. As we're looking at what we do with the gig economy in this budget, as we look at what we do with paid sick leave in this budget, as we reflect on what we've done with paid family leave in this budget -- in the prior years, I think we need to creatively look at some certainty in scheduling for our older workers at the same time as we look at flexibility to allow them to meet the other needs in their lives. And a recognition that some are in the workplace

still because they want to continue to contribute and they want to do it in that way, versus maybe volunteerism; some are in the workplace -- and unfortunately, more and more -- because they can't make ends meet. And especially with that population, we owe it to them to find ways for them to continue to work in a flexible environment that allows them to do that.

So, you know, the discriminatory piece of it, we can work on that. The educational piece of it we have to work on. And what you pointed out, what our older New Yorkers contribute to our economy is enormous, and we need to build on that.

So you don't really need to answer the question -- it's not really a question -- I just want to make sure -- and I know I have a commitment from you, because we talked about it before. In this budget cycle there are a number of policy decisions we're going to be making that I think have an impact on our older New Yorkers who are still in the workplace or want to be in the workplace or

are transferring in the workplace. And so we owe it to them and we owe it to all New Yorkers to see what we can do in that regard.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, and I think that, you know, given your background, that is something that I'm absolutely interested in working on, because I couldn't agree with you more.

And, you know, the proportion of older people in the workplace compared to the younger population is only going to grow. And so as you mentioned, there's a variety of different reasons, there's a variety of flexible things that have been tried. And so we would be absolutely honored to work with you on that.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: My family, like many families in New York, are -- we found ourselves in the situation of the highest number of people you serve, and that is my mom, in her early eighties, a woman alone at home who had 24/7 medical needs. Not because she couldn't function, but because she could

have a medical episode that she couldn't respond to, and that could have been life-threatening.

She wanted to age at home. She wanted to stay at home to the end. We worked with -- we have the luxury of a huge labor pool. I have 11 brothers and sisters. So we had that fortunate labor pool to be family caregivers. We also self-paid and we also relied on insurance and other mechanisms for home care.

So I reiterate Senator May's, my number-one priority when it comes to the Aging Committee is the Caregiver Tax Credit. We are capping it so we know the dollar certainty. We're limiting it so that it's verifiable, eligible costs, so we know what we're going to offset costs for for our families.

But we also have to address the home care workers. And you had talked about collaborating with other agencies in other ways. I would ask that you collaborate -- when we're looking at home care workers, we

need to develop this workforce, recruit, retain and train workers. But it has to be the medical healthcare, and it has to be the healthcare workers that help our aging.

So what strategies would you use so that we move forward in a unified way to address all home care workers so that we're building that workforce?

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I mean it's a huge issue. Obviously it is for Medicaid, and you heard about that yesterday. And, you know, for our in-home program, it is for us as well. It's the fastest-growing-need labor pool of every sector in the country. You know, people are living longer. That's a great thing. I mean, if you're born today, you have a 50 percent chance of living to a hundred. I'm not sure if we're supposed to, but we are. Right?

So, you know, this -- there's a couple of different things. So the Governor, you know, recognizes the workforce issue, not only in this but in other areas. And there are internal workgroups having some of those

conversations to see how we can address them.

I think we had a couple of pretty innovative models that came out of the -- some of the areas that had a shortage with the $15 million investment. One is one of our counties -- and it was an old practice, years ago, that counties could hire their workers directly, and many of them got out of the business because the admin costs were pretty expensive. But one of our counties got back into the business. So you can assure that, you know, the workers are there to meet the need.

We had one county that had a commitment and an arrangement with a local home care agency to have seven aides, full-time, assigned to the Office for the Aging, which is really great.

What I really like about the model is that the aides come to the office every morning and are part of a care team. Their experience of what they see in the house with the customer, maybe the family, some other things, are part of a larger conversation.

Many of them don't get that kind of support. They also were able to lease vehicles to make sure that they had rides to get to where they needed to be.

I like to try to look at this issue a little bit more broadly. So there's some things that we're working on currently with the Home Care Association and some of our own other partners to try to look at this workforce issue out of the economic development lens.

And so what I mean by that, there's three areas that I think we could look at. Is there a healthcare cost either to the individual or to Medicaid or Medicare if an individual either can't have their case opened because there aren't the aides, or they're getting less hours than they were authorized because of an aide shortage. And what's the implication of that? Emergency room visits, hospitalizations or, most importantly, the inability to discharge safely back to the community and therefore --

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: If you could

quickly finish.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, sorry about that.

-- number one. Number two is, you know, the wage impact on other benefits that individuals would receive by being paid a low wage, and is there an offset there.

And then finally, if you're receiving additional dollars, is it an immediate impact to the economy, to the tax base, local businesses -- does it support the schools, the tourism industry if you have more discretionary money in your pocket?

So if we kind of pull these things together, we might be able to have a different conversation about the value.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And we have a second round for Aging chair Rachel May. I think our chairs are tag-teaming.

SENATOR MAY: We are tag teaming each

other, because I want to follow up on that and a question I asked earlier about money for economic development around the state.

So we've got a zero-sum or a negative-sum budget that we're dealing with. And I definitely hear a lot about why we're putting money into regional economic development to develop new businesses or new opportunities for employment when we've got already such needs for people to work in a field like home healthcare. And if the government would consider shifting some of that economic development money into areas where you could employ somebody tomorrow, if we had the money, if we were able to, you know, boost that with a salary to something where people would really want to do it.

So I'm wondering if that is -- if you work together in any way with the REDC or other economic development folks to just talk about this.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, I think our role has been -- you know, given the leadership of, you know, our agency, the

Health Department, the Department of State in helping, you know, advance the age-friendly principles, et cetera, we've had a lot of opportunities to present to the REDCs across the state and really, again, talk about, you know, the economics of aging and the investment and trying to keep these resources in the community by supporting, you know, the types of things that need to be done to improve people's health.

So I know that the way that the REDCs work is, you know, within the regions you can submit ideas to be funded. And so certainly that's an option that I hope that folks are thinking about and proactively pursuing.

SENATOR MAY: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

So I believe that's all of the questions we have for you for today -- oh, I'm sorry. Senator Serino.

SENATOR SERINO: Thank you. Good afternoon, Commissioner Olsen.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Hi, Senator, how are you?

SENATOR SERINO: Good. Nice to see you.

And I just want to say Assemblyman Bronson asked quite a few of my questions, and I echo his sentiments. And with the CSE, the $15 million is great, but I really do feel that we need more money. I agree with the -- having a seat at the table for MRT, and I hope that we can all work together on that.

Assemblymember Wright, the points on elder abuse, I echo those as well. The care tax credit, that should be a number-one priority. It will drive down costs in other areas.

The ombudsman, a lot of people, unless you've had somebody in long-term care, you probably don't even know who they are or what they do, but they're the watchdog and the patient advocate for these individuals, and they're so critically important.

So my question, Commissioner, is do you think that we have enough ombudsmen operating in the state now?

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I think that we could definitely -- part of our strategy is to increase the number of highly trained volunteers to make sure that we have 100 percent service coverage.

SENATOR SERINO: And then do you have ideas for incentivizing volunteers? And do you think that you're going to need additional funding to do it?

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, so as I mentioned earlier, we've been pilot-testing the $75 a month stipend to some of the volunteers that have really shown that there's been a positive impact on recruitment and retention and, more importantly, that those higher-functioning volunteers are doing a lot more work because of that stipend. So there's been a real positive cause and effect, which we were hoping. And that's what we wanted to test.

So I think that's something that we're looking at internally whether we can, you know, not only continue but expand -- and also want to do same thing with the HICAP

program for exactly the same reasons. A very, very labor intensive-type program with a lot of specialty. And, you know, you need a special person to do that type of work. And so it's amazing that we have almost 900 volunteers in those two programs that, again, are state-certified, go through an amazing training. But it's intense, as you know, and -- so I'm proud that we can -- that we can suggest that, yeah.

SENATOR SERINO: And then my other thought is with retirees. You know, so often people live longer, they're retiring and they're looking for things to do to give back to the communities. Maybe if we did like a tax credit for them, that would incentivize them to do this as well, like we do with the volunteer first responders.

My other question is, because it's one of the biggest issues that I hear about, is the affordable housing in our area. And I see in the proposal there's a reappropriation of over $100 million for rental affordable housing for low-income seniors. What

coordination of efforts do you have underway with HCR to ensure that housing needs for seniors are going to be met?

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I think the -- you know, the Governor's housing plan specifically tied funding to units. So I know that there was 8,659 units of housing so far that have either been built or refurbished specifically for older adults, and more as part of that plan.

I think again, you know, part of the effort that we're undertaking to have a top-down approach on age-friendly in the eight domains, of which housing is one of them, in a bottom-up approach is so that -- you know, we've got 27 municipalities now that are officially certified and AARP/World Health Organization age-friendly communities -- are a grant that we just completed that we're going to contract with now, will bring another 13 communities on board.

And why that's important is because this is a real local effort, which again,

housing and transportation and social inclusion, all those domains that you're very well aware of, these will be part of and have to be addressed as the municipalities go through this local planning process. And so a lot of these decisions in terms of, you know, what's needed, how many housing units do you have, what are the ability to do X, Y, Z, will come as part of that planning process.

And so I think you can see from like where I come from that the opportunity here to kind of push this -- the idea that these are the types of things we all need to be thinking of -- you know, workforce -- aging is not just out here. I mean, there's every system that, in state government and community, has to deal with older adults, period. And so, you know, part of the planning and implementation process to become age-friendly, that these housing options are going to have to be discussed and planned for and built at the local level.

SENATOR SERINO: And that's one way of

keeping our seniors here. Because we keep talking about the outmigration of people here, and we talk a lot about the young population, but we're really not doing anything to keep the older population here.

So -- and that was my question, too. Do you have any other ideas for keeping the seniors here? Like how do we keep them here -- and I guess we'll have to continue this conversation, because I see my clock is running out. But I think it's just something to keep in the back of our minds that we do, because once our older generation goes, the younger tend to follow too, so.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah. And, you know, just quickly, because I would love to talk to you more about this -- I mean, that has been our strategy. We're aware of that.

We're also aware that the reason people don't always move is not just because of taxes and the high cost of living. There are plenty of reports and studies about the entire nation, using 85 different indicators

on what matters to you in your community. And what's very interesting is that if you survey older adults in terms of what they want, how do they want their community designed, it's exactly the same types of things that millennials want. They want to not have to rely on the automobile. They want to go someplace where they can sit with a friend. They want to socialize. They want to have access to trails and parks.

So all these things that I keep seeing in the Governor's budget proposals over the years, with the Empire Trail and parks and things, all fit into this -- you know, that's what's going to help us attract people to come here, because this really is a great state. I'm a lifelong New Yorker. But you're not going to get these types of environments elsewhere. And recognizing that we're competing with other states.

So, you know, as we talk to counties and municipalities about why to engage into these types of things -- because we are competing with others who really get it. And

I think we are starting to get it here. And that's why the Governor's leadership has really put this on steroids through Executive Order 190.

SENATOR SERINO: Great. I look forward to talking to you about that.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. So that completes the questions from the members. Thank you for being here.

Next we will hear from Colonel Jim McDonough, director of the New York State Division of Veterans Services.

ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I am going to just say, before I get out of here, I just appreciate all of your support, both in the Senate and the Assembly. It's been long term for our agency and your local offices for the aging. It's meaningful, and it matters. So thank you.

(Off the record.)

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Welcome here for the first time.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yes, thank you very much for the invitation. So I

wanted to say that right up front.

So good afternoon, Chairs Krueger and Weinstein, and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly.

My name is Colonel (Retired, U.S. Army) Jim McDonough, and I am the director of the New York State Division of Veterans' Services, or NYSDVS. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss Governor Cuomo's 2020-2021 Executive Budget as it relates to the New York State Division of Veterans' Services. The core mission of the Division of Veterans' Services is to connect veterans, members of the armed forces and their families and dependents to various economic, medical and societal benefits, programs and services available to them due to their active-duty military service.

As an agency entering its 75th year of service to New York State, DVS's professional benefits advising staff prepares, presents, and processes applications for United States Department of Veterans Affairs -- VA -- compensation and pension awards, education

benefits, burial benefits, vocational rehabilitation training, health care, nursing home care, real property tax exemptions, and other resources, services, and care on behalf of individual veterans and their families.

Under Governor Cuomo's leadership, New York remains a state where veterans and their families are proud to call home. And with the additional support of the State Legislature, we can continue to provide the best possible care and assistance for those who have served our country.

The agency's economic impact, delivered directly to New York's veteran families, yields incredible results annually, with over $750 million in tax-free federal dollars for thousands of New York's veterans filtering into every community across New York State, this alone due to our agency's actions. These efforts have a real and measurable impact on improving the quality of life and access to care for veterans and their families.

This year, under Governor Cuomo's

leadership, the division strengthened its relationship with our partners in county veterans' service agencies through improvements being made in training, technology, and tools by which to best serve our mutual clients. Importantly, the division is overhauling its training programs to be more inclusive of our partners in county veterans' service agencies by offering them access to all training and education endeavors. Our strategy is simple: what we provide for our own team, we will ultimately provide to the counties, and at no additional expense to them.

It is with this same commitment to bettering the lives of New York's veterans and their families that this year's Executive Budget includes initiatives which will additionally address their mental health, housing and educational needs. The Governor's budget also seeks to establish further dignified burial options for New York's veteran families by establishing the state's first veterans' cemetery.

The proposed budget also supports investments of $5 million to expand permanent supportive housing for homeless veterans through the state's Homeless Housing and Assistance Program, HHAP, and $1 million to partner with organizations to help veterans, law enforcement, and first responders with suicide prevention efforts.

We are grateful for the continued support of Governor Cuomo and his administration in further investing in the needs of our veteran families. We are committed to working with our partners at New York State Homes and Community Renewal and the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to support housing New York's veterans and to apply these additional resources best. We will also utilize other funds such as the Homeless Veterans Assistance Fund to address additional societal needs of New York's veteran families.

As the state agency of record charged with assisting them, we maintain a very

robust and outwardly facing stance, with easy-to-access offices in every major VA Medical Center in New York State, coupled with an increasing presence in VA Vet Centers and community-based outpatient clinics, as well as community settings.

Combined, our agency's efforts will continue to provide the best quality service to New York's veterans, service members and their families for the next 75 years and beyond.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Governor's Executive Budget to the committee. And on behalf of New York's veteran families, thank you for your continued support of the agency's mission. I look forward to answering any questions you may have. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for being here.

And we'll go to our Assembly chair of the Veterans' Committee, Didi Barrett.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Thank you. Thank you for being here --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yes, ma'am.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: -- and thank you, Madams Chair.

I appreciate the commitment in the budget and your focus on -- well, let me say at the offset we're really happy to have you here, and we're happy to have a head of the division. It makes a difference in this budget process, but it obviously has been making a difference all along, since you were -- came into this position last spring, was that --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: April. April of last year. My second time, as you know.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Yes, your second round. But the first as the director, right?

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: I was the same position.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Oh, the same position?

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: I'm on my second spin, yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: And the second

time's a charm?

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: It is, absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Good.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: It's an honor, actually, so.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: I appreciate the commitment and the work on housing. But as you know, many times especially veterans, but others, are homeless because of other issues. And so I'm very concerned -- and I know this is not in our budget, but what are you doing to ensure that the Governor puts in Dwyer funding, which has been one of the most effective programs in the peer-to-peer -- with the peer-to-peer model. It's not in every county yet. It should be in every county. It should be fully funded. And it should be funded from the Executive, not just from the Legislature.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Sure. Let me address the Dwyer program. Although my colleagues in the Office of Mental Health run the program, we are more or less integrated

behind the scenes on the delivery of those resources to the 26 of 62 counties to which they now flow.

It's a good program. I think it needs to be looked at in terms of a bit of standardization and quality in terms of what are the deliverables behind the program. I think we need to look at things like impact, measurable outcomes desired to the program.

And I think the program could use a bit of a refresh around what we put in for all. There are very good programs in those 26 counties. They differ as much as the counties differ.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: So would it help if it were under your division as opposed to the OMH?

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: You know, I -- it matters not to me where it's ultimately placed, but what impact can I have on the program from whether I sit at the center of it or adjacent to it. I'm actively involved with my partners in OMH in shaping the future of that.

I can tell that you that as I approve the monies to be sent forward, because it does come through the division out of OMH, I look hard at what are the activities, the scope of work, and what's the impact that we're seeking through those grants.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Okay. Thank you. I mean, it is one -- the one issue that I hear from all my colleagues over and over, is they know when it's working in their --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: I hear the same. And they are hungry for a bit of reinforcement around quality and expectations and training that goes into the program.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: And consistency. I mean --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yup.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: -- I think, you know, and there are counties that have, you know, no access to it, so that makes a difference.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: I was very happy last year to sponsor the legislation

which became law that allows veterans with bad papers, as you know, to apply for New York State veterans benefits that they otherwise would not have been eligible for.

What, if any, are the resources that you've put into this year's budget to implement that measure?

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Sure. And thank you for the leadership on the Restoration of Honor Act, both you and Senator Brooks, and we really appreciate that.

So the Restoration of Honor Act, signed into law by the Governor on Veterans Day of last year, is a very new programmatic effort within the Division of Veterans' Services. And just as you indicate, this is really a first-of-its-kind in the nation opportunity for those individual service members who have been uncharacteristically discharged from their military service due to five conditions or issues -- posttraumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, military sexual trauma, and sexual

orientation or gender identity.

And so if a service member has been uncharacteristically discharged with paper other than honorable, we are the first state in the nation that's going to say to those individuals, there's a process for you by which to apply for and receive state veterans benefits. And while we're not influencing the federal benefits delivery system yet, we're recognizing that as a progressive state in this country, we have an additional responsibility for New York's veteran families to turn on those benefits as we can.

We have baked into the backroom of the Division of Veterans' Services a complete business process for handling those applications. The infrastructure is in place. We have an education campaign about to get underway with other state agencies and state leaders. Because as you know, the division doesn't control every state veterans benefit -- Parks and Rec, fishing licenses those things, DMV. We've got a big education campaign ahead of us to get the state

agencies on board with recognizing that as we approve these benefits, their responsibility is to turn them on.

I've spent a lot of time on this, Didi. The last three to four months of my time have been focused inwardly on getting the Restoration of Honor Act's elements in place so that we can begin processing those applications right away. And we're about 30 days away from putting that in place.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: So you think there will be specific funding in the 30-day amendments, or is that the --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: No. I think what I'm referring to is that we have the business processes in place, the eligibility determinations, the infrastructure to process those applications.

My understanding of the fiscal impact of the turning on of state veterans benefits is negligible, given where we are with cash ceilings and appropriations in these various programs.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: So with your

current staff and with the current network --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: --- you feel it's just a matter of --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: I do.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: -- of prioritizing and getting this information out --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: I do.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: -- at no cost?

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: We oversee a lot of programs, this being one, and we're fully capable of addressing this within the division.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: What about for the appellate unit to upgrade? Is there funding implications of that?

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yeah, I -- within the division's overall budget I've carved out funding for our brand new appellate unit, as you referred to it. It's, again, the first time the division has had such infrastructure. I'm actually reinforcing it in the next 90 days.

At this point it's more about shifting assets to their first best use and looking at efficiency before I pop up and say I need more. I am making more right now with what I have, as my first course of action, because I actually believe that's what I'm paid to do. And then I think the appropriate response, given additional requirements, will be -- will be met, so.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Okay, thank you. And then on the issue of the Article VII language, I mean, as you know we've got a couple of colleagues who are interested in having state military cemeteries in their districts. The committee that I guess you're chairing for site selection and the development process -- is there such a committee?

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Is there a process in place? Can you tell us about that.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Sure.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Because I

think there's a lot of concern to have -- you know, in what you've been asking for, that, you know, we might be abdicating some of our responsibility for some of that.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yeah. No, I will not let that happen. As you know, my relationship with you and others is one where we are partners in this endeavor, so.

The current statute, the amendment being introduced is being introduced to get us up and running relative to the times. I think if you look at 15 years ago when the statute was first drafted, it called for a study. We have to put a study together, even in the revised language being introduced into the study, for siting and management and oversight of the cemetery. So for me it's a process whereby I will engage with you throughout. Just because I'm putting the committee structure together doesn't mean that I'm going to not live up to my responsibilities to be your partner in government, to involve you in every step of the way.

So the committee is being formed. There will be an announcement forthcoming about its membership. Key to the committee's responsibilities will be to engage with the Legislature on all fronts to make sure that that is not the case. And you have my personal commitment to making sure that is not such.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: And you will be open to hearing the -- you know, the other possible locations --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: -- as well as, obviously, the questions about long-term funding. And, you know, the fact that we can't fund a lot of programs that we want to fund, but we're putting money into this.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Every step of the way. I mean, what we have to do as a committee is we have to come together on the siting, first and foremost. And then we have to put together the management, the resources, the infrastructure required to support state veterans cemetery operations.

I've been working with the Division of Budget and my partners in the executive branch with cost models relative to the other 48 states that operate state veterans cemeteries. We're dialed into the National Cemetery Administration and its requirements. And I'm pleased that we're where we are in terms of the planning to kind of establish the state's first veterans cemetery.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Okay, thank you.

And just as a final point, I've been hearing from people -- and we did at the last hearing we did on the nursing homes that are our state nursing homes --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: The state veterans homes?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Yeah, the veterans homes, sorry. Can you talk a little bit about how -- the funding and, you know, the viability of those?

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yeah. Again, I don't run them or own them, but my partners in the Department of Health and SUNY actually

oversee our five state veterans homes -- four in the Health Department, one in SUNY down at Stony Brook.

I think I've been in all of them. And while they're wonderful facilities, every program we're part of has room for improvement. The most challenging of the homes is Oxford in terms of its staffing models, and I think we need to look at that carefully as to what incentives could be put in place to kind of incentivize clinicians, providers to kind of work in that rural neck of the woods in our state.

If you go to Long Island, it's -- the census is always there, St. Albans, Montrose. I've been in a lot of nursing homes lately and a lot of senior facilities. And the state veterans homes, while they have their share of challenges with staffing, are some of the best-run facilities that I've been in in the past three years of my life, my mom having passed away in one of them, so.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. Senator John Brooks, our chair of the Veterans Committee.

SENATOR BROOKS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. {Mic off; inaudible.}.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: I think your mic, sir --

(Off the record.)

SENATOR BROOKS: Okay, good. Sorry. Once again, Colonel, it's good to see you.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: You too, sir.

SENATOR BROOKS: Thank you for your service, by the way.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: It was an honor.

SENATOR BROOKS: You know, I think our veterans in this state are probably one of the key assets we have -- men and women who have served this country with -- many with distinction, served in different sets of circumstances. And unfortunately, many of them are facing issues, and as you and I well

know.

We have a suicide problem. We had a group in the other day, the female side of that problem seems to be getting worse. We've got many people, homeless people looking for food, people with mental health issues. A lot -- a lot of problems there.

You know, I think we've done some good things. This particular budget, I'm very -- very disappointed in one -- one particular situation. You know, the budget -- and you and I have talked about the cemetery a number of times. It's in the budget, and that's good. But the legislative incentives -- or initiatives, rather, that we put in the budget last year, all of them were cut out.

That's programs for the living. That's programs that respect the service that these men and women gave to this country. It addresses the needs and problems that they're dealing with today. We know, for example, with many of the Vietnam vets, the Agent Orange problems are only becoming worse. Yet it's all cut from the budget. And these men

and women who serve this country, some in battle, are now, over the next couple of weeks, going to come back here and beg us to put that money back in the budget.

They are owed more respect from us as a state than to do that. Those programs work. Those programs should be expanded. The Dwyer program right now in Washington is being considered to be taken national. We shouldn't be in a situation of in a way disrespecting our veterans by telling them: You've got to come ask for that again.

We should be in a situation today where you're in a position to announce that because of the various programs, we've housed 5,000 more veterans, or the suicide rate has dropped by 30 percent. So I find the history of the way we've handled this budget in some ways very disappointing. And I don't direct that at you at all. And I compliment you for the approach you've been taking, the discussions that we've had. But I think we have to do better.

And I think we have to recognize that

these folks have some serious challenges. And it's unfortunate, you can go in many of the communities in this state and see somebody with a sign that says "Veteran, homeless." We can do better than that.

So I appreciate what you're trying to do. I appreciate the initiatives you're taking. I think the cemetery program is a good program. But we have to be honest with ourselves. We have to be honest with ourselves that many veterans are facing significant, significant challenges. And we should be proactive and recognize those programs, put the money in the budget at the front end, recognize what we're going to do, be in a position to report the information back.

You know, we've talked a lot about communication with the veterans and programs to make them aware of, and assistance. And it's all good stuff. And I want to work with you to make sure we accomplish that. But when I saw the budget once again and we saw, what, $106 million cut from the budget from

programs we worked hard to put in place, programs that do work, programs that veterans groups are counting on -- and now we're going to go through the process of trying to fund them again. And last year we know we missed some of them, and those funds weren't there.

So, you know, you're showing great leadership in this, and we've had many a good conversation. But this budget isn't the way it should have been done. This budget shouldn't say to veterans, come ask us again for what not only you deserve, but we should be proud to give them and talk about how we're enhancing some programs.

So I don't really have a question. I mean, we've talked about pretty much everything under the sun --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yeah, may I address a couple of your points?

SENATOR BROOKS: But -- but I just -- I think we could do this better. And our veterans deserve better.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: So you're never going to hear me say I can't do

something better, because I know that's part of life every day. So that's point number one.

The second point I'd like to make is that when we talk about our veteran population, the tendency is to think of these individual baskets of problems. The truth is there's a lot of co-occurrence that transcends veterans' issues. Housing is related to legal, is related to family, is related to financing.

So the best thinking in the world will tell you that at this point in life -- and I've been part of it for the last 15 years since retiring -- is that there's a lot of capacity out there that just remains, you know, unnavigable. And the greatest effort has got to be put forth in breaking down the silos where there is rich capacity to address human needs. That's point one.

Point two is that for every veteran who has a problem, there's five to eight veterans who are functioning highly as wonderful assets in our communities, setting

examples for others to kind of live their lives by. So I know we tend to think of those with problems. Just flipping that narrative slightly to recognize that these problems are real, they're overlapping, they co-occur -- but all around these troubled souls are in fact people trying to help them, and they're very good veterans of our armed force.

With respect to the budget, I want to make this very clear, that the Governor's commitment, based upon inputs from those of us on the Executive side of the coin, reflect what we believe are some of the greatest priorities, you know, that need to be addressed for our veteran population. Housing, a $5 million additional investment in tackling the homeless problem. That's a large investment given where the fiscal realities of the State of New York are right now. A new million-dollar initiative to address suicidality amongst law enforcement, first responders and our veterans.

So the things you talk about, we're

listening. We're doing more with these new initiatives in the next 12 months than have been done in the last three years. And while I recognize my responsibility is to work with you to kind of right whatever wrong I can -- you have my commitment to doing so. Both you and Assemblywoman Barrett know how closely I want to work with you.

So I'm one of them, is the last thing I'll say. I am a veteran myself. This is personal and professional. And I go to work every day trying to meet the expectations of those I am charged with serving. Some days we do it better than others, but every day we put forth a good-faith effort across the agency, with our partners in county government and in the federal government, to make a dent in the problem, so -- and you have my ongoing commitment to do so.

SENATOR BROOKS: Yeah. No, I -- and I do think we have opportunities.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yeah, we do.

SENATOR BROOKS: Certainly as we look over the program in Stony Brook, the nursing

home and the day care center, we should try to expand that where we can.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Absolutely.

SENATOR BROOKS: I think there's a lot of opportunities. I just -- I just am upset --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: I get it, sir.

SENATOR BROOKS: -- like I said, that people are going to have to come to ask for things that we know work. We should have shown the respect of putting them in the budget.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: I think in this budget we are doing some new things that weren't there a year ago, and we will continue to press for innovative program delivery and capacity to address the needs of the people I served with, so.

SENATOR BROOKS: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblyman Walczyk.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: Director

McDonough, sir, first, thank you for your 20 years -- 26 years of service. And we're certainly very fortunate to have you continue to serve in this capacity, so --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: -- thanks for being here.

I have the distinct honor of representing what I call the front yard of America. It's northern Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties. I have a 120-mile border with Canada, and Fort Drum is in my backyard. So we have the fastest-growing veteran population in New York State. And as such, veterans services is near and dear to my heart and important to the representation that I do in this job.

You as a young officer I'm sure were told to salute and execute at times --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: {Chuckling.}.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: -- and there's no real -- in the same way that we do our business here in the Legislature, there's no opportunity, many cases in the Army, for

compromise or negotiation. People die if you're taking that time, right? So you salute and execute.

And something else -- and I also served, but you've talked a few times today already about doing more with less. And I can think of these training opportunities in the past where, all right, well, we didn't get all the equipment we want, but we'll figure it out, because that's impressed on you as a leader.

But I think when it comes to taking care of our veterans, doing more with less is not an acceptable thing. When you talk about the great work that the Private Joseph P. Dwyer Program is doing, if you look at the Veterans Outreach Center in Watertown, New York, I mean, I've seen it firsthand how important this funding is. When you talk about Helmets to Hard hats and, you know, the work that they're doing with our local IBEW to transition soldiers out of the military and hand them right into the workforce -- and we're talking about retaining some of the

best leaders and young minds and great workforce in New York State. I mean, that's an investment I can't compromise on.

When you look at the great work that Clear Path for Veterans is doing in Central New York, the phenomenal things that they're doing -- service animals to yoga, you know, you can enter a yoga program there, Project Healing Waters. Even SAGE, I was surprised to see the Governor -- which is, you know, addressed as a group that he usually says he's very friendly to and can't be ignored, certainly in our veteran community.

You were an OCS graduate, right?

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Correct.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: Me as well. And I don't know if you remember the call and response in OCS, but at Officer Candidate School, when you salute, one individual says "Standards." And do you remember what the response is, sir?

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: "All the way" is what we said.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: Well, that's

Airborne: "Airborne all the way."

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yeah, I was an Airborne soldier.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: Yup. And Airborne's right behind the OCS School. But the response is "No compromise." And that's where I'm at on this --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Understood.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: -- when it comes to zeroing out these important programs in this budget that the Governor's set forward. I don't think there's room for compromise here. I think they have to be restored. And I'd appreciate any comment that --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yeah, sure. So let me take a swing at this.

So, first of all, I actually didn't say "do more with less," so let's be clear on what I did say. What I did say is my first course of business is to make sure that I'm making the best use of the resources I have. And I have found inefficiency. I have found malpositioned veterans' benefits advisors that I've moved. I have found the ability to

kind of squeeze where resources weren't being put to their first best use, and I have shifted those responsibilities.

So this is not a game of doing more with less. This is, first of all, a set of responsibilities that recognizes my responsibility is to run a good organization to the best of my ability, first, and then if that's not possible, to seek the additional resources to do so.

But I'll be honest with you, I found a lot of inefficiency. I found malpositioned resources. I've found people where the demand wasn't there. I've shifted them to where the marketplace demands more resources.

I was the state director who placed veterans' benefits advisors on Fort Drum, New York, to cooperate with the DOD, where I used to be assigned, to assist in the transition of people like me off that installation. The last seven years of my life I built the Onward to Opportunity program, the Career Skills program -- of which Helmets to Hard Hats is one -- which

does a great deal of work to ensure that today transitioning service members leave service with a job before they separate from service. So I couldn't agree with you more.

But let's recognize I've been in the chair for nine months. My first responsibility is to make the first best use of my resources. When that's all said and done, I'm not afraid to seek the additional resources required to run this place best. And I think the Executive Budget reflects my voice that housing and suicide prevention is a big issue in this state, as it is in this country, and I'm going to do my best to kind of address those issues.

So I'm not -- for those that know me, I don't compromise. I am relentless in my pursuit of right and what's good for people who serve their country, and I will continue to be so.

ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: Thank you, sir.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yup.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Savino.

SENATOR SAVINO: Thank you, Senator Krueger.

Commissioner, I just have one -- two questions, actually. One, on the veterans cemetery, I know there's going to be a lot of competition for where it should go. But there's long been an effort to bring one to Staten Island because of the difficulty and the distance that Staten Island residents have to go currently. So I'd just hope that that would be part of the discussion.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: It is, yeah. So -- can I comment on that very quickly?

SENATOR SAVINO: Sure, absolutely.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: So the National Cemetery Administration is putting forth an effort to build a columbarium on the grounds of St. Albans. And so I think you'll see that come about. It's in the National Cemetery Administration's priorities. As you know, land is a premium. So this is an inside columbarium, kind of a first-of-its-kind set of plans. So I think when we get to down to Queens and areas like that, you'll

see some improvements right there.

SENATOR SAVINO: Hopefully so.

And then finally, three years ago on Veterans Day the Governor signed an amendment to the Compassionate Care Act, which is our medical marijuana statute in New York State, and he did it largely to add PTSD as a qualifying condition. That decision was driven largely by the efforts of the New York State Veterans Council and others recognizing the vast numbers of veterans who are suffering from PTSD.

So since that time do you have any sense of how many veterans have been able to avail themselves of it? And has their been any coordination with the VA?

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yeah. Yup.

SENATOR SAVINO: Because there was always a concern that they would use that against them.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yeah, it's still a tricky issue because of the difference of opinion between the federal government and -- and certainly the state.

We are part of the newly stood-up Governor's Cannabis Task Force, where we will kind of address the concerns of our population within the development of a cannabis program for the State of New York. But it is of concern in our population because of access to VA benefits. There's a lot of hypotheticals out there on what could happen.

It's a tricky place to navigate with an individual veteran because of pain management and the things that the federal government does not allow. But we are having input to the process in the Cannabis Task Force that is stood up by the Governor.

SENATOR SAVINO: That's my final point on this. So my brother-in-law passed away two years ago, he was a veteran. He got his medical services from the VA. He suffered from spinal stenosis, which as you can imagine is incredibly painful. While New York State said you could only get a 30-day prescription at a time for Oxycontin for his pain, the VA would mail him 90 days at a

time. Suffice to say he became incredibly dependent on the medication. And when they added fentanyl patches to it, it was only a matter of time before he died. That's what happened.

So is there any coordination between the VA and the healthcare providers and even yourself in this state to say the amount of drugs they're giving people at one time is contributing to an early death for a lot of these veterans who are suffering from PTSD, suffering from chronic pain? Injuries that they may have sustained decades ago are still bedeviling them. I mean, what can we do to get a handle on this?

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: So first of all, I'm sorry for your loss. That's the first thing I will say.

SENATOR SAVINO: Thank you.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: The second thing is I think you'd be surprised how involved I am in formularies at individual clinics across the state. I have a friend of mine who's a cardiac nurse in Plattsburgh,

New York, and she couldn't get a drug out of formulary for a veteran, a Vietnam veteran that she was caring for.

She called me and let me know the frustration he was having. I went right to the VA Medical Center director and explained the situation; he went right into the lab and reestablished the proper medication, the cardiac medication.

So we are involved in small ways and in big ways. You know, I'm of a generation where a lot of drugs were prescribed to my friends who served with me -- overmedication, as you'd say. That's kind of going by the wayside a little bit. The trend line is less so, because I think what we're realizing is that sadly, that doesn't solve a person's problems. So I think you're seeing the trend shift a little bit away from overmedication to other forms of therapy and clinical approaches. But certainly my population recognizes the danger of being prescribed too much in terms of the pain and suffering that comes from war, so.

SENATOR SAVINO: Thank you. And finally, there are some local initiatives that are coming forward. In Brooklyn a local veterans group is starting a mindful meditation program. And I think those are the types of things the VA and the State Veterans could be very helpful in establishing and, you know, coordinating with veterans organizations.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: I mean, you mentioned Clear Path for Veterans and yoga. We fund Clear Path for Veterans. We fund SAGE Vets. So we're investing in these I would say innovative approaches to dealing with pain management, trauma and the impact of war. And we're big believers in whatever --

SENATOR SAVINO: Whatever works.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: -- works for one person. I'm not a judge. If someone tells me that these things work, I'm generally going to take a hard look at it, can we can develop the evidence around it, and go from there, so.

SENATOR SAVINO: Thank you.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: You're welcome.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

We go to Assemblywoman Barrett for a second five minutes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Thank you again for being here.

And I just wanted to clarify a couple of points and then ask for one additional subject we haven't covered.

We may in the enacted budget fund SAGE and Clear Path and Helmets to Hard Hats and a lot of other things, but it's never in the Executive Budget. And to my colleagues' points here, you know, it would be -- it's very hard to explain to constituents when you get back, you know, to the district, or veterans in general that, well, no, it's not in the Executive Budget, but we're -- it's a legislative add. What does that mean to -- you know, to most people? Nothing.

So I think that it's really important -- and I know that you've only been

here 10 months and it's -- you know, and you've done a tremendous amount, and I really appreciate particularly the outreach with the counties, because that has been a real bottleneck and a real source of waste --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: -- and redundancy, so that's really important. But, you know, I think that it's important that this budget be a holistic statement of what matters not just to the Legislature but to the state. And I would love you to kind of look more seriously at that in the future.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: And the other issue that I -- and I'll let you answer both of them -- is that we really didn't talk at all about the special issues around women veterans. And I'm wondering if there's anything in the budget here or in your priority list that's addressing that.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Sure, let me talk about that for a moment. And thank you for the question.

So before I came over here this morning, I introduced to my own organization our new deputy director for diversity, equity and inclusion. Kind of an elevated title, if you will, beyond "women veterans coordinator," which by statute I'm supposed to have.

My approach to this is to kind of integrate our efforts across all lines of activities that I'm responsible for. The idea of marginalized subsets of the veteran population is highly disturbing to me. The nature of becoming a veteran of the armed forces in this country has been plagued by membership and identity with one group versus another.

And I -- I don't buy that. You served your country, you are in fact entitled to the fair treatment that I can deliver regardless of the circumstance. That even extends to those with bad paper. The subsets or the subdemographics don't concern me. What concerns me is elevating them up into this pattern of services, resources and care that

can be delivered to anyone in the least amount of time with the greatest amount of efficacy.

And so my approach, why I introduced this person this morning to my own team, is because the perspective is that we need a women veterans coordinator. Well, we need to deal with the issues that are sensitive to women in an inclusive way because they are also veterans.

So my approach is to peel back this with strategy and efforts that integrate our lines of activities, recognizing that our responsibility is to be inclusive, equitable and accommodating to all. And that's the approach that I will take in bringing these programs to life in the State of New York.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Well, and specifically issues that often -- like childcare, you know, just need to be kind of taken out of the mix and addressed. So I hope, you know, that that's part of it too.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Things like expanding our hours. There's several ways to

be accommodating to those who work, who are single parents, childcare.

You know, my colleague Mark Schroeder in DMV had to expand office hours and do things that traditionally government wouldn't think of doing with all the rules behind the -- we have to be accommodating. We have to be accessible. We have to be approachable.

The Governor has challenged every one of us with engaging better with our stakeholders and our constituencies. That was the message we received in the most recent cabinet meeting. That's me. You know, I want to get out in front of it as much as I can.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Great. Thank you. Thanks very much.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yes, ma'am.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Hi, I'm going to jump in probably just for one minute --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yes, ma'am.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: -- because

Assemblyman Barrett just brought up an issue. So, you know, we're live-streaming, so that people are watching. And they're texting. So they said as of a few weeks from now, there will be no women counselors in your system in all of New York City. And I know what you said about wanting to make sure you have the broadest diversity in treating everybody equally. But there's got to be issues women veterans feel more comfortable talking to a woman counselor about.

So could you please double-check that for me, because this is --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Oh, no, I have women veterans benefits advisors based in New York City and Long Island.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So I'm being told that that's not going to be true --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: I run the place.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: -- that there will be administrative staff left, but as of February there will be no -- because you closed one office and they have just

St. Albans?

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: No, St. Albans, we moved that benefits counselor -- we will, once her appointments free up, she's moving out to Hicksville in Nassau County. We will be backfilling her. So that's underway right now, ma'am.

So the young lady's name is Kristin, she's a good veterans benefits advisor. We're moving her to a Hicksville office because we have no presence there. Again, my resources are somewhat malpositioned. But I will backfill that office, so.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So how many counselors do you have in New York City?

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Ma'am, I have about 80 veterans benefits advisors, the majority of which are in and around New York City and the Lower Hudson Valley.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So you don't know for specifically in the five boroughs, how many --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: The five boroughs? I can get you that answer, ma'am,

so -- I will.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Because there's quite a few women veterans in New York City, I run into them all the time.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yeah, my -- my -- the person I just spoke of is based in Brooklyn. So the lion's share of my staff are located in or around New York City and Long Island.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. I look forward --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yes, ma'am, I'll get you the information.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: -- to getting the follow-up information. Thank you.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: But that is not true. We do have women veterans advisors.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Okay, we'll keep going with the Senate. Senator Sue Serino.

SENATOR SERINO: Good afternoon, Commissioner. Thank you so much for being here today.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Thank you.

SENATOR SERINO: And I basically have more a couple of statements.

I just wanted to say I agree wholeheartedly with Senator Brooks, I think we're sending the wrong message to our veterans. You know, they have to schlep up here to tell us what they want when we know what they need and want and what actually works. The Dwyer funding has been phenomenal, I know, in our district.

And it goes through working with Mental Health America. When you think of all of the suicides and the increase -- I'm someone who lost a brother to suicide. He wasn't a veteran, but I understand the mental health issue of it, and that's key. And to not have this in every single county and to not have it in the Executive Budget is like a slap in the face to these guys and gals that fought for us.

The other concern that I have too is I spoke to Commissioner Hein earlier -- very excited about the $5 million for the homeless

veterans. But with the way it's written, if it's not -- if they're not getting the proposals in, that could be drawn back. And when you think about it, I think you said 26 counties have the Dwyer money.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: That's correct.

SENATOR SERINO: And I know our guys and gals have their finger on the pulse of what they need. They know the homeless veterans. So those other counties could be missing out and not -- you know, not be involved as much like to have this resource to be able to tell you guys what they need.

So I'm just really worried about that. I'd love to see that eliminated. I'd love to see your support on both of those counts. You seem like somebody -- you get it, you've been there --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: I do, yeah.

SENATOR SERINO: -- you've got the heart for it, and now we just need to fight for it. So thank you.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: You're

welcome. And both Senator Brooks and Assemblymember Barrett know my commitment to working with them and the veterans committees to kind of improve upon the service delivery. So thank you for that.

SENATOR SERINO: Great, thank you. Thank you, Commissioner.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. And to close, Senator Velmanette Montgomery.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: {Mic off; inaudible.}

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Hello, ma'am. Thank you.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: Hi, I'm sorry. I would be remiss if I didn't mention the group that I always talk about, and I want to start by thanking you for the attention that you pay the group that we in Brooklyn consider our veterans organization, Black Vets for Social Justice, that --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: I know them well.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: -- you know very well, yes. And I thank you for that.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Good friends with Wendy.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: Yes, great.

And you mentioned -- I see 5 million for housing for veterans. That's wonderful. We certainly would like to see much more, but at least it's on your agenda --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yes, ma'am.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: -- and we appreciate that.

I want to just say to you that I have two armories in my district that house men, African-American black and brown men, basically, and many of those men are veterans. So the need for housing is just absolutely tremendous. And it seems to me that an organization like Black Vets would be ideal as a -- to partner and consider doing some housing around, you know, veterans' needs that would be housing and support services in a supportive housing fashion.

So I just wanted to put that on your --

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Thank you.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: -- your agenda, and hopefully we can talk about that at some point.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: I'd welcome the conversation. I'll get down there and speak with you. And they're good old friends of mine, so.

SENATOR MONTGOMERY: Great. Thank you very much.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Yes, ma'am.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. That concludes questions, thank you.

DVS DIRECTOR McDONOUGH: Thank you very much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for being here today with us.

So now we begin the public portion of -- the nongovernmental witness portion of our hearing. Just as -- the first witness will be Gail Myers from New York StateWide Senior Action Council, to be followed by UJA-Federation of New York, Association on Aging in New York.

I just encourage people, as you're getting close to speaking, to make your way down. And a reminder, just in timing, the witnesses have up to five minutes and members have three minutes if you choose to ask a question.

Gail, go ahead.

MS. MYERS: Thank you very much.

I really appreciate the opportunity to testify today, and thank you all for the work you do to support the needs of older New Yorkers.

I will not be reading my very detailed and extensive testimony, because I know you will as soon as I leave, but I want to give a special shout-out to Senator Montgomery for her many years of leadership and advocacy for vulnerable populations. So thank you for that.

I'll start with the two programs that we have that are funded through the New York State Office for the Aging. One is our patients' rights and advocacy hotline, and the other is our managed-care consumer

assistance program. We have details on our programs and the services that we offer, but I want to get to the budget ask. And the budget ask is for the Legislature to restore our program to the current fiscal year level as you're contemplating next fiscal year.

The Executive put in the budget for $31,500 to run our program, and the last two years the Legislature has added $100,000 to that, which we very much appreciate and need.

Secondly, we ask you to reappropriate the $100,000 that you put in the budget in '19-'20 because, due to problems in contracting, we still have not gotten that money. So please have it roll over, because the loss of that and services already done would be devastating.

The second thing is our managed-care consumer assistance program. We have a line in the budget, along with six other agencies, to provide services and counseling to older New Yorkers. We -- in addition to what we do for Medicare and EPIC enrollment, we also provide enrollment assistance in the Medicare

Savings Program, which I will be talking about in some more depth, and that gives low-income Medicare enrollees premium relief and also extra help, which is the federal program for prescription drug assistance, 100 percent funded -- that last part by the feds.

What is disturbing is that only 38 percent of currently eligible New Yorkers are receiving that benefit. That is far under the national average of 51 percent, and it makes us sixth from the bottom in the country of states that have penetrated moving up in enrollment on that. So because of that, we're asking for the MCCAP programs to receive $1 million of additional funding spread out among our six not-for-profit agencies so that we can increase the opportunity to get people enrolled in the necessary benefit.

Now I wanted to talk a little bit about unmet needs. The $15 million that was added to the budget by the Governor, and that you all worked very hard to have included

last year -- and it is back in the budget again this year -- addresses need. But we think it really focuses on past waiting lists, and there is so much more to do to ensure access to services for older New Yorkers based on the demographic data.

Now, we very much thank Senators Persaud and May for your committees' work and holding that hearing on poverty, and also for Mr. Bronson and the Aging Committee in the Assembly for holding a hearing on services in -- this fall. It really helped -- and of course your staffs. It really helped us focus on being able to report to you, and as a result we've completed a county-by-county compilation of data regarding older residents who may be relying or need to rely on aging services. And I don't think we should be shocked, as we're seeing the very, very predictable high use of long-term care in the Medicaid budget, we should also be able to predict that the same is true for people who have been relying on aging services.

So based on the census for New York

statewide -- as I said, we have this county by county -- but in the state we've got 33 percent of older residents, 65 and older, living with a disability -- 65 and older, about 9 percent have difficult in self-care, about 6 percent have difficulty in independent living. Those are people that would be, depending on their income and eligibility, prime candidates for expanded services from the Offices for Aging.

From the GAO report from the federal government, they looked at the services funded by the Older Americans Act, which comes into the state -- in large part funds NYSOFA services -- they found, of food-insecure older adults, 83 percent of them do not receive any meals from aging funding services. Two-thirds of older Americans who struggle with activities of daily living receive limited or no home-based care. Twenty percent of older Americans are potentially at risk for needing transportation.

Now, that information from the GAO was

being used by our Congress's committee to look at funding for the Older Americans Act. And the House of Representatives has recommended that for the first of five years -- something's broken with the clock.

(Laughter.)

MS. MYERS: For the first of five years there needs to be a 7 percent increase, and 6 percent increases in the years that follow.

We have recommendations on capacity and reporting, we have recommendations on increasing the home-care worker shortage, initiatives, and ask for a $15 million investment over three years.

We have concerns about the long-term-care ombudsman program. There was a 37 percent decrease in volunteers in that program.

And then on the last two issues -- very, very quickly, sorry -- we have proposals that we will talk to the Health Committees, Ways and Means, and Finance about on how to achieve some savings on the

Medicaid side of the budget by expanding the Medicare savings program and also by improving eligibility requirements. The State of Louisiana took one option and saved $2 million per year, so we think there are some savings to be had there that would improve benefits for seniors.

And we ask you to look at the EPIC program to improve the transparency and accountability surrounding the programmatic changes, because there have been some things -- including our concern about the second year of a proposed cut in the program where there have been benefits that have been cut within EPIC -- that we would like to see restored.

Thank you. Sorry.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. You were very comprehensive. We have no questions.

You've got to talk faster next year, Gail.

(Laughter.)

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Next we will have UJA-Federation of New York.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Sorry. Sorry. We have a question.

Chair Rachel May.

SENATOR MAY: Thank you, Gail. And thank you for mentioning the Home Care Jobs Innovation Fund. I think that's an important one.

I wanted to follow up about the hearing we had about SNAP and low-income New Yorkers. But we talked a lot about the senior issues, and most of what came out of that hearing -- because we held it before the federal government cut those benefits, and basically what everyone was saying is we've got to make sure the federal government doesn't do that. And that was basically the outcome of that hearing. But they did it anyway.

So are you already seeing any results from that? And what should we be doing? It was very frustrating to come out of that and say all we can do is stop the federal

government from doing this.

MS. MYERS: Well, there could be an investment -- when I look at this, I look at it from a senior perspective, because that's the population that we deal with mostly. But of course this affects children and everybody in New York State.

But from a senior perspective, I think that an investment increase in what's called the WIN program within Aging, which is wellness and nutrition, would help to offset some of the food insecurity that we're seeing among seniors. Calls that we're getting -- what we find is that the anxiety level raised in a very large way as a result of the potential for federal cuts -- I haven't gotten calls recently about people saying "I don't have the benefits that I need," but we do get calls to say "Where can I go for food?"

SENATOR MAY: Okay. Thank you.

And then the one other thing I wanted to ask about was -- oh, the 7 percent increase that you recommend for over what the

core NYSOFA programs -- how is 7 percent arrived at? Why is that the amount?

MS. MYERS: Well, we felt that the GAO was a pretty good source and that was what U.S. House of Representatives used as their source for making a recommendation that the federal government should invest 7 percent followed by 6 percent in each of the four consecutive years.

So I guess I figured if it was good enough for the House of Representatives, it was good enough for statewide as an initial recommendation, knowing how tight money is. We think that should be a minimum and that you should continue to grow these services across the board, year after year. So we followed the federal recommendation of the house.

SENATOR MAY: Okay, great. Thank you very much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblyman Bronson.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Gail -- and you thought you were going to get away. In your

materials you have a couple of sections that talk about Medicaid. And as you know, one of the most serious issues we're going to face during the budget is the Medicaid situation. And I use "situation" intentionally.

Could you share with us how we in the area of serving older New Yorkers, how can we work toward Medicaid savings in particular? And, you know, the connection between Medicaid and Medicare and your services of getting people on benefits -- if you wouldn't mind, just outline for us how we can address Medicaid and help that benefit our system as we move forward.

MS. MYERS: All right. Well, I think there's two areas that I would point to. One is the CMS has already made recommendations to the states on how they can improve their eligibility and processing of people who have the Medicare Savings Program. That is funded in part by our state Medicaid and the local social services districts doing the work.

So the first would be: Achieve all the savings you can by streamlining and

improving that process, which would also stop people from the churning off-cycle by having to reapply and so on. First thing.

And the second thing, we think that most people come to the Offices for Aging when they are beginning to enter a crisis situation. I need this, how do I get it? And there's a lot more that can be done, number one, to prevent moving into that crisis situation through programs that the offices offer.

But also, in terms of averting that crisis mentality, we need to let people know that the services are there. People don't know -- they call our office, they call our hotline, and we're speaking to them and we refer them back to their county Offices for Aging -- who are doing great work. People just don't know: Oh, that's available to me? Oh, that's how I would get that?

And we do educate people earlier on and do more outreach, which we think we need for all of our programs. That should delay -- it should keep people healthier and

we hope should delay Medicaid eligibility or their crisis where they enter into a hospital and then never go home.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Okay. And we have less than a minute, but on the EPIC program, what is your suggestion on how we expand EPIC so more seniors can take advantage of that?

MS. MYERS: Well, there are two pieces that have happened this year. One is a new application which requires a lot of detailed information that was not previously required. It is going to, we think, be a disincentive for people to enroll in EPIC. So we'd like you to fix that.

The other thing is rather than using the line of the Governor's cut, to restore that money and then to start lowering the age of EPIC eligibility from 65 down, so that people as they are entering seniorhood are coming in with the resources that they need. Everyone on EPIC, everyone on Medicare, which is including the persons with disabilities population, should have the same benefit, and

we'd like to see that expanded to everyone.

There are some bracket changes that could be made. The regs on EPIC allow a cost-of-living adjustment, which has not been made in recent memory. Things like not throwing someone off because they have just a little bit more money because they've gotten a COLA increase in their pension or Social Security.

So there are numerous recommendations --

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Right.

MS. MYERS: -- but we'd like to see more transparency and accountability in the system. There used to be a consumer advisory panel that doesn't exist anymore. That would help bring in more seniors into the program. And the program has declined significantly in their outreach, from nine outreach workers in the past to I think three now across the entire state. People don't know about the program, that it's there for them.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

MS. MYERS: Can I leave this time?

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Now you can leave. We're not going to call you back.

(Laughter.)

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Ariel Savransky, advocacy and policy advisor, UJA-Federation.

MS. SAVRANSKY: Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'm just going to touch on a few points from my testimony as you have the full, longer testimony in front of you.

On behalf of UJA-Federation of New York, our network of nonprofit partners and those we serve, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the importance of maintaining and expanding support for the human services sector.

Established more than 100 years ago, UJA is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. We support a network of nearly 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are the most vulnerable and in need of programs and services.

UJA's network of nonprofit partners delivers programs, services, and resources that support the well being of all New Yorkers across their lifespan. However, while New York's economy has been growing steadily since 2008, state funding for the human services sector has been cut by 26 percent. This leaves a lot of our partners unable to provide the services that vulnerable individuals need.

We make the following recommendations for investments in this year's state budget, including a 3 percent increase on all human services contracts and rates for the next five years; allocating $100 million in recurring funds to the Nonprofit Infrastructure Capital Investment Program; and expanding State and Municipal Facilities Program eligibility guidelines to include nonprofit organizations.

Additionally, Medicaid has been discussed a lot. While the Medicaid Redesign Team has been tasked with identifying $2.5 billion in savings to the state, should

that not be achieved, it is critical that nonprofit providers are held harmless.

I also want to touch on Holocaust survivors. New York State is home to nearly 40,000 Holocaust survivors. Forty percent of them live below the poverty level. As New York continues to support its immigrant communities and address the rise in antisemitism and hate crimes, it is imperative that we not leave Holocaust survivors behind. We appreciate the investment of $400,000 in last year's budget, but more must be done. We ask the state to invest $5 million to fund care, services, and resources for Holocaust survivors living in poverty.

Along those same lines, we appreciate the inclusion of $25 million to support the safety and security projects for at-risk facilities. We request that eligibility guidelines for this funding be expanded to all nonprofits that are at risk due to their beliefs or ideology, including houses of worship. This will provide a broader

understanding of statewide community vulnerabilities and ensure that all nonprofits are protected from hate-based attacks.

Next I want to talk about the Summer Youth Employment Program. We thank you for the proposal to provide a $1 million increase for SYEP to cover the minimum wage increase.

However, as Senator Savino brought up earlier, there is an issue with the Article VII language that was enacted by the '19-'20 budget that implemented new, comprehensive background checks for both new and current employees at school-aged childcare licensed programs statewide, and this includes SYEP programs. Because of these new regulations, there is a huge backlog in the processing of these background checks, and it often takes months for a background check to be -- to go through. For a six-week program, which is what SYEP is, this creates real barriers to ensuring that these programs can be staffed and that these kids can have the opportunity to participate

in the program.

Before the regulations were in place, providers waited only two weeks for completed background checks. Due to the complexity of the new background checks, OCFS and local registrars require additional resources and staff to be able to perform the background checks in a timely manner. Providers also require more guidance on the background check process, specifically on how to properly stop their program if the process is not expedited by the time the SYEP students have to start their job placements.

And lastly, I just want to talk about food insecurity for a second. UJA appreciates the inclusion of a new initiative to reduce food insecurity among college students that Commissioner Hein mentioned in his testimony earlier today. This will really ensure that we can combat food insecurity on these campuses. We urge OTDA to ensure that the policy is changed in this budget cycle. And we also urge the state to consider ways to expand this to all college

students, as food insecurity is a real problem, not just in community colleges.

I also want to emphasize what my colleagues who spoke before me said about increasing WIN funding, which is another way to combat -- to reduce Medicaid costs as well.

And then, just along the lines of the SNAP attacks on the federal level, we have already started to see the reducing -- people reducing their use of SNAP benefits and thus relying more on food pantries, so that is something that we really need to make sure to fill some of those gaps.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I'm happy to take any questions.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. Thank you for being here today.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

MS. SAVRANSKY: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Next we have the Association on Aging in New York, Rebecca Preve. (Pause.)

Okay. I'm sorry, yes, please go

ahead.

MS. PREVE: Good afternoon. I wanted to say thank you to members of the Legislature for holding such an important hearing.

My name is Becky Preve, and I'm the executive director at the Association on Aging in New York. Our membership contains the 59 local area agencies on aging, otherwise known to you as Offices for the Aging -- I know there's at times confusion. Out mission is to support and enhance the Offices for the Aging to promote independence, preserve dignity, and advocate on behalf of older New Yorkers.

We serve a large number of people, and we serve in four different categories. So our first category is really active older New Yorkers. We provide volunteer opportunities. They engage in our senior centers for health promotion activities. We also touch those with small needs -- so individuals that may need help with their Medicare, they may need some counseling

services, they might need to get enrolled in new plans, and they're kind of a soft touch in our community.

We also serve the high-risk frail elderly. And so Commissioner Olsen spoke to this; under our core programs and services, we're typically serving clients at very high needs, early eighties, single females that live alone who have real deficits in being able to bathe, dress, go to the grocery store, et cetera. We also have a very strong caregiver support program and provide respite services.

I want to kind of start the conversation by doing a level set on this aging population, and I think Commissioner Olsen also spoke to this. So this population has a huge social, intellectual, and economic footprint in New York State. New York State is fourth in the nation as far as our aging population, and in 2015 we had 3.6 million people over the age of 60. By 2040, we're going to be looking at 5.6 million in that category. By 2025, 86 percent of counties in

New York State will have a population that's 25 percent or more over the age of 60.

Again, this population contributes enormously across our service spectrum. The 50+ Longevity Economy indicates that the population over 50 represents $9 trillion in economic and unpaid activities from 2018. That's going to triple to $28 trillion by 2050. What that means for New York State is that individuals over the age of 45 contribute $379 billion per year to our economic situation. That's 63 percent of the income in New York State from this population.

Their volunteerism is worth over $13 billion per year, and their unpaid caregiving has a value of about $32 billion to the state. This kind of lays the framework for why New Yorkers really deserve the care and services that we're able to provide them, and it's also the reason that I'm here today to ask for an ongoing commitment to our aging network.

The $15 million in last year's budget

allowed my members to bring older adults services that were on waiting lists, some from two months to three years. That meant home-delivered meals, transportation, personal care services, and other vital services to our economic drivers in New York State.

My membership also shared kind of a deep data dive, so we looked into actual case files. And out of the 2,200 case files that we looked at, 10 percent of those individuals went directly to a skilled nursing facility under the Medicaid benefit; another 9 percent went to MLTC plans or traditional Medicaid coverage.

Again, if you look at that from an economic standpoint, the state's share of Medicaid on those people is over $60 million per year, so very, very significant statistics.

What I'm asking for this year is the fact that my membership have reported to me ongoing waitlist issues. And so what that means is that the waitlist was a snapshot in

time, we had that data from a few years back, but that doesn't mean our waitlists stop. So people continually come on our waitlists and the membership reports that, and we currently have a large sum back on our waiting lists.

So the ask behind the 19.5 million in my testimony is directly tied to the 9,000-plus people we have identified on waitlists, and the calculation is based on what a unit of service costs for that individual. So there's metrics behind the ask.

I also took a deep look at our CSE budget, and I know that there's been asks for an increase in that. Again, I really feel that we have clients behind these numbers, and so we do ask for a $53 million investment in CSE. And that's for two things.

Number one is targeted case management. So the people that receive our home-care services and case management, those are exactly those very high risk, frail individuals who qualify for a skilled nursing facility placement. Right now, on average,

they get one hour of case management per month. And again, with the issues that we see with the older population, one hour really is not sufficient to meet the needs. So 10 million could bump that to two hours of case management.

The additional funding again goes directly to our personal care program, so the home health aides that assist with bathing, toileting, dressing, feeding -- and our average client only gets 4.6 hours per week. The Medicaid system usually authorizes 20-plus. So the ask behind that investment would be directly for increasing our home-care hours from the typical 4.6 to an average of 10 for New York State.

Our services and supports are predicated on keeping people off Medicaid-covered services, and yet our funding has remained relatively stagnant. We provide services that keep people living in their homes and support the population that is the economic support New York State thrives on.

I would like to thank all of you for your time, and I welcome any questions.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Any Assembly? Assemblymember Bronson.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Thank you.

I've talked about this earlier with other witnesses. But your numbers show that an average cost in the nursing home is $150,000 annually for an individual, whereas if we have a community-based services for individuals who would qualify to go into a nursing home, those costs are $6,300 annually.

Tie that to the fact that even though with the $15 million we addressed -- whatever, I can't remember what it was, the 2017 or 2018 waitlist -- but now you have identified somewheres above 9,000 people on the waitlist. How -- in those kind of savings, if we can keep people at home, safe with a quality of life, how does that impact on Medicaid -- and shouldn't we be talking about that, number one?

And then, number two, do consumers

have a voice on the Medicaid Redesign Team II? Do -- you know, are agencies like yours, is there a voice there for Medicaid Redesign Team II? I mean, we need voices to make this argument as we're making the decision between now and April.

MS. PREVE: Absolutely. I couldn't agree more.

And I can tell you our population is traditionally non-Medicaid, and our services and supports -- you know, they don't last a month or two. So we're keeping people out of skilled nursing facilities for years.

So the aggregate cost savings that I quoted, that's only for one year of the cost savings. So if you look at someone on the EISEP program that we've kept on for three years, you know, you triple that amount.

And so, you know, as far as the MRT II, I absolutely feel that the consumer and advocate portion of New York State needs to be included in that conversation, and I absolutely think, again, in the climate of

Medicaid that we're looking at right now, our services are tried and true and they're proven that they absolutely can keep people off Medicaid.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Thank you very much.

MS. PREVE: You're welcome.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator May.

(Mic problems.)

SENATOR MAY: Thank you, Rebecca.

I just have one quick question. Of the 9,000 number that you have of people on the waiting list, how does that compare to what it was before the $15 million was put in? How many people came off the waiting list as a result of the investment?

MS. PREVE: So we were actually able to get over what we anticipated off the waitlist. So it was over 8,000 that came off. And I think the 9,000 that we now have on is a combination of numerous things. I think it's value-based payments.

So people are really looking, from the

healthcare sector, on getting people on services sooner. So our referrals from hospitals and the physician base have absolutely increased, and then our NY Connects program has grown enormously. We have a very large online presence now, so people definitely are coming to our services at an earlier time. And I think there was a lot of press involved with the historic investment that we received, and so people really were in tune to the fact that our services absolutely could help their loved ones.

So, you know, as the aging population continues to grow, our waitlists are going to continue to grow just because of the basis of the population that we're serving.

SENATOR MAY: So Gail Myers testified that we're maybe not doing the best job of getting the word out about what the services are that are available. Can you say what you find is working and what is needed in order to make it work better?

MS. PREVE: I definitely think that

social media has played a huge role. Our membership has absolutely started advertising their services on Facebook, tweeting, those types of things, so I think we're catching maybe the younger caregivers that might not use traditional ways of getting information. And I think our NY Connects marketing plan has been very successful.

And again, it's one of those things that there are many times where people don't want to plan or think about the future when they do have needs, and so some people kind of put blinders up until they're in that crisis mode.

SENATOR MAY: Okay. Thank you very much.

MS. PREVE: You're welcome.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Sue Serino.

(Mic problems.)

SENATOR SERINO: Hello. Sorry about that. I can't get the mic to work.

But I just have to commend you on the incredibly thorough testimony that you put

here today. If my colleagues haven't gotten a chance to look this over, it's amazing. You really break it down for us, and I really appreciate it.

And in here you rightly point out that our senior population will virtually double in the next 20 years, and keeping our seniors here will be vital to our economic viability. I completely agree.

So I wanted to start by talking about the CSE funds. A couple of people have mentioned it already, and you know we were excited to get the $15 million, but what do you see? Do you think that we're going to need more money? Like you talked about doing more on social media, and more -- you know, you're hitting other people, maybe a little bit younger, too, than notoriously {sic} would take the money. And if you think we do need more, do you have any idea of an amount?

MS. PREVE: Of the CSE funds?

SENATOR SERINO: CSE.

MS. PREVE: So the CSE -- that's included in the testimony. It might not just

be laid out --

SENATOR SERINO: Oh, maybe I'm -- okay.

MS. PREVE: But the CSE ask that we came up with of the 53 million, I felt it was really important to have data behind that number, to have a specific ask, because I think that's beneficial for you to make decisions.

And so that was directly tied to our highest-risk customers, so those individuals that have three deficits in activities of daily living, three deficits in independent activities of daily living, and four or more chronic conditions. So that was based directly on this population, and the calculation was to double their case management and to essentially double their home care hours per week.

SENATOR SERINO: Okay. That's great.

And then the other question that I have, because I was really intrigued by your home-care innovation fund that you're proposing in your testimony -- so can you

elaborate a little on your vision for that too?

MS. PREVE: Sure. So the home health aide crisis -- in my previous work I was a director of a local AAA, and we actually worked very closely on the home care crisis coalitions. So we did some deep diving into this a while back, and what home health aides had shared with us were a couple of things that could be an easy fix with a pilot project. So it was "New tires for my car" or "A lease" or "I don't have anyone to care for my child if I have a case from 6 to 9 p.m., because my traditional daycare isn't open." So I think that there's a lot of work that could be done in that space.

I think the other thing that was eye-opening for me personally is two of the members of my staff were previously home health aides and went back to school and came out as case managers. And I asked them: If you got paid the same amount of money to do case management or to provide direct care service in the home, which would you choose?

And they both laughed at me and said that they would be direct care workers immediately if they could make the same money.

So I think that was kind of eye-opening to me, that if -- you know, if we can look to pilot a higher wage in certain areas and then really prove that those cases didn't go unfilled, again, that's some data to have behind what we're doing. And I think looking at those failed discharges from acute care facilities, or people that are readmitted, would be a really good place to start.

SENATOR SERINO: That's a great idea. I love it. Thank you.

MS. PREVE: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

MS. PREVE: Thank you very much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Next we have Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, Dede Hill and Crystal Charles.

MS. HILL: Hi. Good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Since 1872, the Schuyler Center has been advocating to strengthen public systems that serve low-income and disenfranchised New Yorkers, particularly children and families.

First I'd like to just make some general observations and create some context around this Executive Budget. While this Executive Budget contains some important proposals and new investments that will benefit children and families, it is not a budget that puts children and families first. It's not a budget that, if enacted as is, will meaningfully reduce New York's high rate of child poverty. It is not a budget that will make any progress at all in addressing the state's persistent childcare availability crisis.

It appears that when the many proposed cuts are implemented at the county level, including the caps on Medicaid, many New York families that are already facing the obstacles of poverty and systematic racism and ill health and disability, those families

are going to be set back further.

Turning to the specifics of the Executive Budget, there are a few issues that I want to highlight. And I promise I'm not going to go through everything in our testimony, but there are a few things.

First I want to just touch on something that is not in the budget, but we think that all New Yorkers -- and we'd like your leadership in leading New York -- should make a public, binding commitment to cutting child poverty in half by 2030. We think New York has -- our child poverty rate has sort of lingered around 20 percent for more than a decade, and if we do not make a public commitment and if we don't sort of start down the path of incrementally reducing child poverty, we will never tackle this problem. So let's do this this year.

Turning to child welfare, there are a number of proposals in this Executive Budget that we applaud. The kinship firewall is a really important step. Blind removals, this is really going to move this state towards

addressing its overrepresentation of black and brown children in the state's foster-care system. These are important steps.

But we do have some concerns. I want to turn your attention to an issue that Senator Persaud has raised in her questions about -- there are cuts to the preventive protective funding stream. They're kind of hard to discern in the budget. But what it looks like is done is there is a proposed $40 million cut to the TANF Flexible Fund for Family Services. These are funds that we understand counties use in a variety of ways, including to support senior services, to support childcare in some counties, to support child welfare in some counties. So this is a $40 million cut that will deliver a $25 million savings to the state. It has to be transferred over to preventive services.

We're also concerned that this may mean that counties utilize their preventive services a little bit less because they have to draw down more county funds before they can access those preventive services.

We really want to draw attention to this. I don't think it's on a lot of people's radars, and we are -- it's of deep concern to us. And it reminds us of something that happened in 2017. There was a proposal to shift $20 million in Title XX funds and move them to childcare. We raised the alarm about that, and we actually reversed that. We hope you will do that again this year.

In the area of foster care, we're very excited and pleased that there is continued support for the Family First Transition Fund, but we want to see some more investment this year.

One other thing -- my time is running out there -- there is no new funding in this budget for childcare. We have -- the Governor convened a childcare availability task force a year ago. It's been working hard, it has made some -- it is contemplating some very ambitious proposals. But even as the task force is taking, you know, a half-step forward and doing some really good

thinking, the childcare system is crumbling around us.

We are moving backwards, and so we are going to be starting at a deficit when we finally get recommendations a year from now. So we urge investment in childcare this year.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Assemblywoman Jaffee.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: Yes. The task force, which I created and has been moving forward, has really something we're going to be meeting on to discuss their recommendations, because I think that they are recognizing that there are some significant issues that -- of concern.

Regarding the childcare funding for the childcare in the state, impacting the children, obviously, and their future and their families, who need to be able to have the children in environments that are very positive while they maintain their jobs and their work, what specific numbers and issues do you see with the budget that the Governor has presented? I have concerns about that

also. Could you provide some details?

MS. HILL: Yes. With respect to childcare -- so I think that the headline, the most important message is there is no new state funding for childcare in the Executive Budget. There has been some confusion, some suggestion in the Budget Briefing Book that the child tax credit proposal which -- and I want to be clear, we're very supportive.

There is a proposal to expand the state's current child tax credit, which currently omits children under the age of 4, to expand the credit to include them, as it should. It's a child tax credit, it's designed to offset the high cost of raising children, it should include young children.

However, the child tax credit is not designed nor is it robust enough to be an answer to the childcare crisis. At most, it will provide a family between -- an extra $333 a year in income. Again, this can be critical for a low-income family; if they have a car that is not working, they can fix it, they can go to work. It's a critical

step in efforts to reduce child poverty, but it is not a solution to the childcare crisis.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: And the other issue is workers in childcare. There is -- as I noted earlier, there is a very real issue in terms of having the availability of workers who can provide assistance and work within the childcare programs. Is that something that you see of concern as well?

MS. HILL: Yes. So the other piece of the childcare puzzle is that while childcare is unaffordable for most New York families -- it costs an average of $15,000 a year -- at the same time, the childcare workforce is very underpaid. Most of the -- 60 percent of the workforce actually has to rely on some sort of public assistance, because they are paid wages that are that low.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: So we need to -- you know, certainly, thank you. So we need to certainly move forward in terms of getting -- having the Governor provide more funds for our childcare program and to be able to also expand the opportunities for the

salaries for our childcare workers so that we are able to have that kind of availability in programs to ensure that all of our children are in positive environments.

But thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: Thank you so much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for being here.

MS. HILL: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Next we have the Council of Family and Child Care Agencies, followed by Early Care and Learning Council, followed by New York State Network for Youth Success.

MS. BRADY-STEPIEN: Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Kathleen Brady-Stepien, and I'm the associate executive director of the Council of Family and Child Care Agencies, or COFCCA. We represent the more than 100 child welfare organizations around the state.

We were very disappointed not to see more of a commitment to our human services programs in this Executive Budget proposal.

We are proud to partner with our fellow human services organizations around the state to bring one single unified ask before you this year, and it's called #3for5. It's a request for a 3 percent increase in our rate in funding for our human services programs over the next five years. We believe that this would go a long way towards acknowledging a sector that has been ignored in our state budget for far too long, and we believe this would also go a long way toward allowing us to recruit and retain the best possible workforce for New York State human services programs.

What is our New York State budget, after all, if not a statement of New Yorkers' values and priorities? And human services programs around the state are very important for New Yorkers should they need to access them.

Turning to the foster-care workforce

now specifically, we have just updated our turnover and our salary information in a survey that we do of all of our agencies, and we know that our salaries remain far too low to be competitive. We're competing with fast food establishments for our front-line staff, and we have a 41 percent turnover in our front-line childcare workers. We have a 38 percent turnover for our caseworkers around the state.

This is unacceptable because, as was brought up earlier, every time one of our workers departs a program, it is the loss of a relationship that a young person in foster care has built with a caring adult that they've come to rely on every day, that they go to with their challenges and successes. And we simply must do better on behalf of our kids to stabilize our workforce.

And we will be coming around to all of you for your help in driving an increase to the foster-care rate, which is set, post-budget, administratively between DOB and OCFS. Your partnership has been completely

invaluable over the last couple of years in helping us to make sure that we have an increase in our main mechanism to provide salary increases to our foster-care staff.

We're also asking for your help in growing two programs that are actually higher ed programs for our child welfare staff. There is one that is focused on loan forgiveness for our child welfare workers and another one focused on tuition support for our child welfare staff. Those programs are in the Executive Budget at 50,000 each. We are appreciative of that, but we are asking for $1 million for each one of those programs.

HESC just made the first round of these awards this past fall, and we understand that there was just enough funding to hand out four awards around the state. And so while that's a handful of childcare workers and childcare staff around the state that are benefiting from those programs, we know that the need is far greater, and we ask for your help on that.

We are going to be implementing the federal Family First Act this next fall in our child welfare field, and it's hard to understate how much change that's going to bring to our field. There's also a lot of opportunity in it, and we are really excited about the opportunity to work together with OCFS and with our other partners in the counties on making sure that kids in foster care are in family-based settings whenever possible.

It's just that there is some very ambitious Article VII language that has been included on the independent assessor, and we have some serious concerns that if this particular part of the language, which has the independent assessor ultimately making the placement decision -- there are some safety concerns that brings up.

What if the local district is actually unable to find another placement within the 30 days, as is written in the ELFA language? And we don't understand why this independent assessor has been given so much power to, it

seems, override the judgment of a judge and other local district commissioner who, at the end of the day, is ultimately responsible for the safety of the young people in his or her care.

And also there have been no details established on this independent assessor role yet, which is a brand-new invention of the federal act. And so we think that this is really asking the Legislature to, you know, sign off on this before we have all of the details needed to understand the proposal in full. So we're asking for your help in just making sure that that language makes sense for the system that we need.

We know that we need to invest a lot more in building the amount of foster homes that we need and supporting our kinship caregivers around the state, and the amount of transition funding that's in the budget is just simply not enough to do that yet, so we're asking for your help with that as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Assemblyman Ra.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

Good afternoon. I just had a couple of questions.

In terms of the share for special education placement, can you tell us about what the impact was when that shift was made in New York City? Just, you know, in terms of what we can expect it's going to have on the system and the rest of the state if this was to go through.

MS. BRADY-STEPIEN: Thank you for that question. Our understanding is that it hasn't had too much of an impact on the number of placements that were made from the New York City School District when the shift went through a couple of years ago at the New York City level.

You know, ultimately it is up to the school district to make the best decision on behalf of the young people that they see before them. I think what's important to point out is that, as Senator Krueger brought

up before, this is something that was done to New York City a couple of years ago in the budget, and here we're hearing in this year that it is now parity, that it's going to be carried out statewide.

And so, you know, the impact on the school districts -- it seems like it's about 25 million that they're picking up this share, and we are trying to figure out some data in terms of answering your question on what kind of impact there was in New York City.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: I mean, I'd assume with any cost shift to a municipality, obviously, you know, it has an impact on their budgeting. And outside of New York City, with the tax cap and things of that nature, it makes it that much more difficult. And obviously you're dealing with independent school districts that are much smaller as well.

One other issue I wanted to ask you about, the ELFA language and Family First. I think what I'm getting is that this really

goes further than the federal government is really asking us to go; is that correct?

MS. BRADY-STEPIEN: It does. And just that one particular part of it which has the requirement that the local district would have to remove the young person out of the QRTP within 30 days -- that's not required by federal law. So OCFS and the Executive Budget are going far and above that with this proposal, yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

MS. BRADY-STEPIEN: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Savino.

SENATOR SAVINO: Thank you, Senator Krueger.

Good to see you again.

I just want to make this point, because we've had this discussion before. You heard me speak earlier today about my concerns about the human service workforce. But just in case people think I'm exaggerating, the starting salary for a caseworker in the nonprofit sector with a bachelor's degree is $36,994. The starting

salary for an ACS worker in the City of New York with the same bachelor's degree is $49,279. That number jumps to $53,519 if they complete six months of probation and they are moved up to the next level, Child Protective Specialist Level 2. If you become a brand-new youth development specialist in the City of New York -- those are the workers who now service the Raise the Age program -- they walk in the door at $46,000.

So this gap between the nonprofit and the public sector is growing further and further apart every year. And so I join you in your support calling for the establishment of a real fund to provide social work loan forgiveness, because these agencies are not going to be able to recruit anybody or retain them, and it has -- as you know, it has a terrible effect on young people.

And for those people who think these kids don't know the difference, I have not been a full-time caseworker since 1996. I still have young people who were on my caseload who call me, oftentimes in crisis,

because they don't forget the people who made a difference in their life. And so when they're separated again or there's disruption again, it doubly traumatizes them.

So I totally support the idea of expanding the current social work loan forgiveness program to the nonprofit sector, adding as much money as we can. Thank you.

MS. BRADY-STEPIEN: Thank you so much, Senator, for your advocacy and for pointing out the reality in terms of the huge disparity between us and the public sector.

And the reality is that we simply cannot compete, and that's what we're finding. And also we're often the training ground, really, for the public sector, because folks are with us for, you know, maybe a few years, they're recent graduates, and then they move on to the public sector. There's more money, there's better benefits, and who can blame them.

But as you point out, the importance of that relationship that is built is something that sustains over time. And for

our young people it's one more loss that they're experiencing after they've been through a lot.

Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblywoman Jaffee.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: Thank you.

There's no question you also recognize the difficulty with childcare and affordability in terms of asking the workers as well --

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Is your mic on?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: Is it on now?

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: Okay. I'm sorry.

The issues of childcare workers and the salaries, the limited salaries they earn, and then with that, the affordability of childcare, you mentioned that within this context. Do you see this continuing at this time? Is it something that we need to address? How soon can we move forward with

that?

MS. BRADY-STEPIEN: Yes, and so for us, the parlance of childcare workers refers to our front-line staff working in our residential foster-care programs. And so no question, you know, we have to do more to raise their pay.

I think to your question about childcare more globally, my friends from the Schuyler Center just spoke before me, and I completely support everything that they said about the need to invest more in childcare. Because after all, if parents don't have a safe childcare option, their children become at-risk. And so I applaud your efforts and those of your colleagues and certainly my colleagues at the Schuyler Center for everything you're doing to make sure that there's really an investment there.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: We need to be very vocal about that. It's really something essential for our youth and their future. We go into that in so many issues.

But there was something that you had

discussed about the safety and living spaces for those in foster care. Could you explain a little bit more about that?

MS. BRADY-STEPIEN: Thank you for giving me time to do that. I couldn't fit it into my five minutes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: I know, I just said that for --

MS. BRADY-STEPIEN: So we have had a capital proposal the last couple of years. We are asking for an investment from the Legislature for our residential foster-care campuses around the state and group homes and things of that nature.

Our foster-care rate was held flat for many years, and our agencies did not have the resources from the state to be able to make those capital investments -- it's things like boilers, roofs, and it's also just making safety investments. We are, in our residential programs, under the jurisdiction of the Justice Center, and the Justice Center often wants to see camera footage of events that occurred, so it's investing in those

cameras also. So we'd like to see 15 million put forward for that.

There's been a nonprofit infrastructure capital investment program made in the past. In terms of a couple of years ago, there was about $120 million available for that. We also certainly support larger efforts to put more money into that. That would cover us as well.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: We don't really have the time, but the issue regarding the foster-care youth in college -- I've had several come to me and ask for assistance. Once they are out of that foster-care system, they really are left very much with the need and with the inability to have the funding for their college program. So it's something we do need to focus on.

MS. BRADY-STEPIEN: Right. We want to go to that program this year. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: Yes. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Next we have Early Care & Learning

Council, Meredith Chimento, followed by New York State Network For Youth Success, followed by New York State Kinship Navigator, Catholic Family Center. Those folks should start to make their way down. Thank you.

MS. CHIMENTO: Good afternoon.

I think that one of the hot topics today is the availability of quality affordable childcare in New York State. And I'd like to speak specifically to the role that the childcare resource and referral agencies play in developing quality and affordable childcare.

Ten years ago, the Early Care & Learning Council and 35 CCR&R agencies were awarded a continuation of a long-standing contract to serve childcare providers, parents, businesses, and their communities. In 2012, those contracts received a cut. It has remained untouched since then, yet the work of the CCR&Rs continue.

A CCR&R's role in the community is multifaceted. It helps parents locate quality childcare, it helps businesses stay

in the community by assisting employees and finding quality care for their children. CCR&Rs also provide a variety of training and intensive technical assistance to assist childcare providers in exceeding standards of quality, best practice, and meeting regulations.

This year, as you all know, has been almost the perfect convergence of national and local attention regarding the childcare crisis, its exceedingly high cost, and the underpaid wages that the predominantly woman-based workforce earns. At the same time, the Child Care and Development Block Grant afforded many CCR&Rs and my organization, the Early Care & Learning Council, an opportunity to expand its services towards increasing the quality of infant and toddler care in New York State.

Mental health consultants, infant/toddler specialists have been hired and trainings have been developed, all working toward meeting children and the individuals that care for them at a time in

their lives when their neurons are firing, brain cells are developing, and the foundation for an exceptional education is being formed.

Yet the workforce responsible for the development of these centers, of the family members and providers who care for our youngest and most vulnerable citizens, are vastly underpaid. We are losing staff to programs where the pay is higher, to state jobs, and to different fields. Over the past three months, at least three long-term, highly qualified, and valued CCR&R staff have left due to insufficient pay.

Last year the CCR&Rs in New York State fielded over 40,000 referral calls, delivered 37,000 hours of basic technical assistance, and 19,000 hours of intensive technical assistance which helps parents locate care, helps providers increase their skills, knowledge, and behavior.

What these figures don't show is the challenges that each of the 35 CCR&Rs face. With flat funding for 10 years, and the cut

to the contracts in 2012, the staff at the CCR&Rs suffer. Many have master's degrees, and many just earn just over minimum wage. The stress that these employees feel and the choices that CCR&Rs have to make are devastating.

Next week, over 250 childcare advocates will come here to Albany to carry the ask of the Early Care & Learning Council, Winning Beginning, Empire State Campaign -- which you'll hear more about from my fellow advocates. But many CCR&Rs will not be able to attend. They have lost grants, travel and professional development budgets have been cut, and one CCR&R even called us last night so disappointed that they lost another grant, that they aren't able to join their sisters in the Capitol and rally to meet with each of you to tell the successes of our field and the challenges.

Sixty percent of New York State has been classified as a childcare desert, which means there's no care within reasonable proximity to a person's home. To address

this issue, the Childcare Availability Task Force has been working diligently for the past year to make recommendations at the conclusion of 2020. Regional Economic Development Councils have been tasked with making childcare a priority, and the aforementioned historic increase in the CCBG grant and its funding of infant/toddler services in New York State, have all laid a foundation for quality care in New York State.

However, CCR&Rs will only be able to work with existing providers and new providers by offering boot camps, fiscal management, teaching them how to braid and blend funding, connect to local businesses and chambers to support their growth and ensure their sustainability, if we receive and realize a contract increase. CCR&R staffs have gone for many years without a cost of living adjustment, without an increase, without the ability to care for their own. Some CCR&R staff earn so little that they qualify for childcare subsidies

themselves.

I ask each of you to consider the hard work and success potential of these CCR&Rs. We ask you to identify $5 million to account for a lack of COLA which will support the critical work of EC&LC and position ourselves at the ready to meet the needs of the recommendations of the Governor's task force and the Regional Economic Development Councils.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. Thank you for being here.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: May I?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assemblywoman Jaffee.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: Yes, I want to thank you for your comments and your focus.

The childcare subsidies are truly essential for our families so that they can provide the opportunity for their child to be in an environment, a very positive environment where they are able to maintain their work when they are at that very, very limited of income. It really is essential.

And the after-school programs as well that you note are so important to ensure that our children are in an environment -- it's very positive. It gives them emotional and social skills in a very positive way, and it's something that we need to continue to focus on. And so I thank you for that suggestion, and perhaps we can discuss this as we move forward.

MS. CHIMENTO: Absolutely. Thank you for your continued support, as always.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. Thank you for being here.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you for being here.

MS. CHIMENTO: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: As I said, next we have New York State Network for Youth Success. I'm not sure if there's anybody here from New York State Kinship Navigator; I don't think anybody has signed in yet. So then we would have, following this, Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Elders, SAGE, followed by

New York State Association of Training and Employment Professionals.

So we have Trudy Morgan, policy coordinator. Please proceed.

MS. MORGAN: Good afternoon. Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Trudy Morgan, and I'm the policy coordinator of the New York State Network for Youth Success.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Could you pull the mic a little bit closer to your mouth?

MS. MORGAN: Is that better now?

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay.

MS. MORGAN: So my name is Trudy Morgan, and I'm the policy coordinator for the New York State Network for Youth Success, and I'm here to talk to you about after-school, summer, and expanded learning opportunities.

And before I invite you to look at some of the research with me about the crucial impact after-school has on New York State's children, I would like to emphasize

that I am a testament of why after-school matters. I am where I am today in my role, following my passion, because I was able to participate in several after-school programs that broadened my perspectives as a new immigrant, equipped me with the necessary skills and resources to navigate my academics, and served as a catalyst for my robust interest in policy and advocacy.

Evidence shows that after-school programs play a critical role in improving student outcomes. A recent study looked at a broad range of after-school programs across different age groups and focus areas -- such as academics, athletics, and career pathways -- and found significant positive impacts on students. These quality after-school programs support our students to pursue their passions and learn how to take chances and make calculated risks and healthy choices.

We also know that our after-school programs do not only help working families build bridges to their children's school day

by offering academic and social supports, but they also help working families maintain their own economic stability at work while knowing their children are safe and engaged.

We are pleased that the state has shown an interest in after-school by increasing investments through the Governor's Empire State After-School Program. While we support additional investments in after-school programs from the state, we must ensure that existing funding streams that support currently operating after-school programs are adequately funded as well.

Therefore we urge the Legislature to restore funding for the Advantage After School Programs. The Governor's budget proposal of $28 million is a reduction from last year's enacted budget of $33 million. We thank the Legislature for restoring the $5 million cut last year and ask you and urge you to do so again.

At least 2,500 students currently enrolled in Advantage programs will be at risk of losing access to their programs if

funding is not restored. We also ask the Legislature to increase Advantage funding by $5.1 million to increase the per-pupil rate to $2,320. This $2,320 would account for the minimum wage increase while holding all other factors related to after-school programs constant, including the number of children served.

We also urge the state to restore $1.5 million in funding for the Youth Development Program that was cut from the Executive Budget this year, and also maintain the Governor's proposal to increase funding for Summer Youth Employment by an additional $1 million.

On childcare, we also ask the state to invest $40 million to create a fund to increase workforce compensation and improve childcare quality, and another $60 million in the state's childcare subsidy program to expand access to more working families.

More than one-third of childcare allows New York to support childcare for school-aged children, including after-school

and summer programs. We also urge the state to reinstate $50,000 in Child Care and Development Block Grant funds to provide technical assistance to Advantage After School Program grantees and other school-age childcare programs around increasing program quality.

These funds helped the network create and maintain the Quality Self-Assessment Tool for more than 15 years, which is the quality standards assessment tool created by experts and practitioners in New York State and is recommended for use by all state-funded after-school programs, including the Advantage After School Program, the Empire State After School Program, and the extended learning programs.

We also urge the state to invest an additional $1.8 million towards the Educational Incentive Program, for a total funding of $7 million. The Educational Incentive Program provides scholarships to assist childcare providers participating in professional development activities with the

intent to build provider knowledge, skills, and competencies to improve quality childcare in the state.

Finally, we request that the state invest 25 percent of any revenue secured through the legalization of adult-use marijuana into after-school programs. In Alaska, which allocated 12.5 percent of revenue from the legalization of recreational marijuana to after-school, data shows that youth who participated in programs just twice a week were 40 percent less likely to use marijuana.

I know that after-school works, because I am the return on investment in after-school.

In closing, I want you to know we are part of Winning Beginning NY, and we support the coalition's agenda.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Assemblywoman Ellen Jaffee.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: Yes, I want to

thank you because you are speaking to the very real issues in terms of additional funding for childcare subsidies and so many of the other issues in youth employment and after-school programs.

All of those issues that you bring to the table here are so essential for our youth, it really is an investment in their future. And I thank you, and I -- it's something that I stand with, and we know how important it is. So thank you very much.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you very much, Assemblymember Jaffee, for your continued support.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And Senator Roxanne Persaud.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Good afternoon. Thank you very much for your advocacy.

I just have one question for you. On the Summer Youth Program, you indicate here that the funding -- the additional $1 million of funding will support the additional staff and increase the number of youth that the staff will serve by 750. That's not what our

analysis shows.

MS. MORGAN: Yes. That's actually correct. So this was a -- something we confirmed as of last night, that this would go toward the minimum wage increase while holding the number of students served in the Summer Youth Employment constant.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. So this -- I just wanted to clarify that this is not --

MS. MORGAN: Yes.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you very much.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Good for catching the error. Thank you.

Thank you very much for being here today.

Our next testifier we believe is not here, New York Kinship Navigator. Anybody want to argue differently? Okay.

Then -- sorry -- Melissa Sklarz, Services & Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Elders -- or, as we call you, SAGE.

MS. SKLARZ: Much simpler.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And for people

lining up, next is the New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals, followed by New York State Defenders Association Veterans Defense Program.

Hi, Melissa.

MS. SKLARZ: Right. Hi, Senator.

Okay, so my name is Melissa Sklarz. I'm the SAGE senior government relations strategist. Thank you to the members of the Senate and Assembly for holding this hearing today and allowing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of SAGE.

SAGE is the country's first and largest organization dedicated to improving the lives of LGBT elders. Founded in New York City in 1978, SAGE provides services and programs to LGBT older people throughout our five SAGE Centers across the city, four SAGE affiliates here in New York State -- including Bay Shore, Hudson Valley, Syracuse, and Rochester -- and a network of affiliates across the United States.

Because of thin support networks, LGBT older people need to rely more heavily on

community service providers for care as they age. LGBT older people are more likely to face discrimination when accessing health care, social services, and other programs. For so many LGBT elders, it is their safety net.

I wanted to speak briefly today about three programs here -- of course housing, but that will be next week -- but within our SAGE housing, we have our SAGE Centers. As you may or may not know, this year we've opened our first LGBT-friendly housing in Brooklyn, called Stonewall House, in the Fort Green area in Senator Montgomery's district. We had the ribbon-cutting last month. It's 145 units. Twenty-five percent are formerly homeless elders, 77 percent are people of color. And that will mesh well with the neighborhood. We -- it was split between LGBT people and people from NYCHA.

And this year, coming in April, we will be following up with a second house in Crotona North, in the Bronx, which will have 83 units.

Both of these will have SAGE Centers, as the first LGBT-friendly housing in New York State. The Sage Center in Corona Park will be the largest SAGE Center in the state, over 10,000 feet, and the one in Brooklyn will have 8500 feet.

And so many of the elders who attend our SAGE Centers daily struggle with mental illness, substance abuse, and homelessness, requiring an intensive amount of care management and social service support. So with these houses open and to be open, we expect higher levels of needs among the residents and elders in the surrounding communities. Our SAGE Centers are open not only to the residents but the elder residents that are in the neighborhoods here, and so we expect to see a great influx. No one's ever complained there's too much social service for elders in New York.

So we will be requiring additional investment in our care management and SAGE Center program to meet these needs. SAGE requests $100,000 in support from New York

State to provide comprehensive care management. SAGE Center programming support services alone cover predominantly LGBT elder residents in and around the -- our welcoming elder housing developments.

SAGE also requests a restoration of $200,000 in support of our general services and expenses in support of our state LGBT elders. In total, we request a restoration of $300,000 in fiscal year 2021.

Finally, as our veteran program -- we heard today Colonel McDonough and Assemblymember Barrett talked about SAGE vets. We are growing, we are expanding, we are -- most of our LGBT vets do not live in New York City but live throughout the state.

Our manager of SAGE Vets has been traveling from Long Island up to the Adirondacks, through the Southern Tier, to let veterans know that their discharges can be updated and approved, that care management is available, that legal services -- and the more that we can connect people to the federal system will make it easier on

New York State to have to worry less about the problems of homelessness and suicide if we can access them to the federal system.

So in this fiscal year, SAGE respectfully requests an increase in funding, requesting $150,000 to continue the outreach and benefits connecting to LGBT elder veterans. The increased support will expand the SAGE Vet program and access LGBT elder veterans throughout the state through a re-grant to our SAGE affiliates at Out Alliance in Rochester and in SAGE Upstate in Syracuse.

So thanks for the chance to do this today, and I'll be happy to answer any questions.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Anybody? Then thank you very much for being with us.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFEE: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

MS. SKLARZ: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Next we have New York Association of Training and

Employment Professionals, Melinda Mack, executive director, followed by the New York State Defenders Association Veterans Defense Program.

MS. MACK: Hi, how are you. I usually think my organization's a mouthful, so I'm glad that there's others that are also tough.

Hi, everyone, and good afternoon. My name is Melinda Mack. I'm the executive director of the New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals, which is known as New York State's workforce development association.

I'm also not going to read through my testimony, but I want to spend a few minutes highlighting a few things that I think we've touched on a bit but haven't addressed yet in today's hearing.

So as you know, I represent members who provide workforce development services, which are also part of the human services field, across New York State and all 62 counties. They range from really small organizations like community-based

organizations to huge institutions like SUNY and CUNY.

I think one of the things I want to underscore is, as you know, many of the folks that our members serve are those who need jobs not only the most, but also will lift folks out of poverty based on their outcomes and employment. As you also know, around 42 percent of New Yorkers have a high school equivalency or less. And so as we continue to think about human services investment, we really should be focusing our efforts in education, job training and employment services for the many New Yorkers who need support and skills training to be able to access good or better jobs.

I also want to just mention that, you know, we've worked with United Way over the last couple of years to highlight those who are working poor. We do know in our state about a quarter-million New Yorkers are stuck in part-time or low-wage work. These are folks who are working. These are people who have jobs, who are struggling to still make

ends meet. And about 45 percent of New Yorkers fit into that ALICE criteria as described by United Way.

For about 20 years now, New York's strategy to solve the workforce development crisis that we're facing -- and we have about 50,000 jobs right now that are open and in demand that we cannot fill -- has been flat funding, cuts, or tax credits. When we look across the budget this year, the Executive Budget, we're about $40 million short of the enacted budget last year.

However, there are some bright spots. We heard Summer Youth Employment mentioned here -- again, to offset the increase in minimum wage. There's also two new initiatives, one supporting environmental justice training across the state and then also diversity in entertainment.

I do want to spend a minute touching on the Governor's investment last year of $175 million in workforce development, which is managed through the new Office of Workforce Development. Again, for those

who've seen me testify before, this was a huge win for the workforce system statewide, to think that there would now be dedicated resources going to education, job training, and employment to start to, you know, address, a little bit here and there, what we're seeing across the state in terms of service delivery needs.

At this point about $3.4 million in funding has been awarded, and the Governor has recommitted to investing in those dollars for the upcoming years. I do, however, want to draw your attention to the fact that the flexible dollars in that fund are coming out of the Pay for Success contingency fund, which continue to remain relatively unflexible, or inflexible.

We are sort of at the discretion of the Division of Budget in terms of what constraints they put on those resources. For the human services sector -- again, of which many provide these economic development and workforce services -- they're required to have all of the money up-front in order to be

able to deliver the services, and then they're reimbursed by the state based on their outcomes. It's just not tenable, it's not reasonable, and it's not the way that we know to do effective best practices in workforce development.

Additionally, we've prescribed performance for an outcome of employment after one year. If you're working with those with low basic skills, if you're supporting individuals with disabilities, if you're working with some of our hardest-to-serve populations or even trying to put someone through an apprenticeship program, one year is not enough time in order to be able to help someone access a good or better job.

The last thing I wanted to mention before I also touch on childcare is that we still also struggle across the state in being able to measure the performance of our systems. I'm sure many of the other human service organizations or folks who represent human services would say our members have to enter data into anywhere between 10 and 12

data systems across New York State. It is a huge time-suck.

It also does not allow us to effectively describe or showcase what we're able to do. So we often hear from you all, "So tell us how many people you placed into employment across the state, across your many programs." I can't. I can't do it in a meaningful way.

And so we also ask and encourage you to continue to focus on -- I know Assemblymember Bronson has talked about this for years -- a way to better articulate and communicate the success of the workforce system and our investments in education, job training, and employment.

The last thing I wanted to mention is that childcare is a huge issue. Everywhere we go across the state and we talk to employers, people are missing work, they're having to call in, they cannot find access to affordable, reasonable childcare. This will continue to be a major impact on our economic development investment. You can deliver

jobs, you can have job numbers, as many as you like, but if you cannot find affordable childcare for people to be able to actually take those jobs, we're going to continue to struggle.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any of your questions.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblyman Bronson.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Thank you. I just want to follow up on the $175 million.

MS. MACK: Sure.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: What was the dollar amount that you said has already been disbursed or authorized?

MS. MACK: Sure. So we've seen a press release two weeks ago, $3.4 million in funding.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Okay. And are you aware of applications that have been submitted and pending, and what that dollar amount translates into?

MS. MACK: No, so I don't know the

number.

But I do know that there's been a number -- so the way that the Governor's office is structured, the application process, there's a phase one that goes through a subcommittee of the Regional Economic Development Council where they sort of bless it, they say it aligns with the original strategy.

If that makes it through that gauntlet, it then goes up to the Office of Workforce Development in the Division of Budget, in which they negotiate and decide whether or not it meets the criteria for the funding stream. It then goes through a second phase of application where then they sort of go into contracting and end up supporting -- or moving forward.

So I do know there's a number that's sort of in that middle ground, but we certainly aren't spending money anywhere near fast enough.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Right. And this is actually the second year that there was

174 million, but nothing happened the first year, correct?

MS. MACK: Correct.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: All right. And are you aware of or can you issue some kind of idea on what's happening in connection with these $175 million that are available, and how we're addressing the home care workforce?

MS. MACK: Yeah, so there is not a direct connection in terms of how it's dated. Again, I think we see across all caregiving occupations a consistent challenge around wages and the ability to recruit based on wages and educational requirements. So whether you're a direct support professional, home health aide, or childcare worker, we're seeing very similar challenges in the workforce field.

Of course, the 175 can certainly be used for education, training, and placement of those workers. It cannot be paid to replace wages. And so that's one of the struggles we're seeing.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: All right. And so it's been identified in home care workers some of the struggles, some of the barriers -- childcare being one of them, transportation being another, the fact that they get paid such low wages they can't even pay for their car maintenance, yet that's an essential part of their job because they have to travel from site to site.

Your understanding of the parameters of these funds, could that offset any of those costs, and possibly a pilot program or something else as we're looking at developing that workforce?

MS. MACK: Yeah, we're hopeful that the Division of Budget sees those as opportunities for innovation, right?

There's also something called the Employer Resource Network that happens across many regions where it's a coordination of community-based services and human services to support low-wage workers.

Right now, the way that it stands, it needs to end in employment. So any of those

retention supports that are necessary to get low-wage workers the skills and, more importantly, the work experience necessary to move up -- right now it doesn't look like those can be invested in unless there's an employment outcome.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: Okay. And just a quick shout out to the Empire State Apprenticeship Tax Credit Program.

MS. MACK: Yeah.

ASSEMBLYMAN BRONSON: So we need to make sure that gets renewed in this budget. Thank you.

MS. MACK: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Next we have NYSDA, New York State Defenders Association, Veterans Defense Program, Lieutenant Colonel Roy Diehl, to be followed by the New York State Veterans Council, to be followed by Prevent Child Abuse New York.

LT. COL. DIEHL: Thank you. I see you're enjoying acronyms, which is, for

anyone in uniform, something that you both live by all the time, trip over, and use to abuse your friends and family.

So my name is Roy Diehl. I'm here as the deputy director of the Veterans Defense Program, a statewide program of the New York Defenders Association.

So I'm also one of the 718,000 veterans who call New York home. I enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1984 at the height of the Cold War and served in West Germany at the Iron Curtain, I graduated from Albany Law School in '92 and was commissioned as a judge advocate in the New York Army National Guard in '98. I served with so many of my fellow New Yorkers in the 42nd Infantry Division in Lower Manhattan after 9/11 and in Iraq when we deployed there in 2005. I retired from the Army Reserve as a lieutenant colonel in 2015, and I'm now very proud to serve with the New York State community serving our New York State veterans through the Veterans Defense Program.

So the VDP, a three-letter acronym for

the Veterans Defense Program, provides training, support, and legal assistance to promote trauma-informed effective representation of veterans in criminal and family courts. I ask for your support for a legislative add to the budget -- legislative adds, a total of $720,000.

So state funding has allowed us to help justice-involved wounded warriors suffering from mental health conditions to receive treatment and probation and avoid incarceration with a cost savings of up to $77 million over the past four years. This year we request a $500,000 renewal matched evenly by the Assembly and the Senate for a statewide program and a $220,000 renewal by the Senate for a Long Island office where the highest concentration of our veterans are located.

So in brief, that's what I have to say. You have a lot of good things about the way we do our program in the written materials that go with the testimony.

So I'm subject to your questions.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: No?

Thank you --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: -- and we have the remainder of your submitted testimony.

Oh, I'm sorry.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Savino.

SENATOR SAVINO: Thank you. Thank you.

I just have one question for you, because on the back page of your presentation you have a graph that shows, of the 718,000 veterans in New York State, an estimated 30 percent, or 215,670, have PTSD, TBI, or depression.

So I just wanted -- as I mentioned to the director of Veterans' Services, when we added PTSD as a qualified condition, it was largely driven by veterans. Do you have any indication of the number of vets who are suffering -- are trying to avail themselves of the Compassionate Care Act? Are they running into obstacles, are you hearing from them?

LT. COL. DIEHL: This is part of the joy of being a veteran. We internalize so much. We self-medicate, we self-treat, because we were taught to be self-reliant. If you've got a problem, you just need to overcome.

So how many people have issues that they're dealing with that have not manifested at this time? This is the best guess from the professionals who study these things. We know when people commit suicide, they went really, really deep. We know when they have gotten themselves arrested because of drug or substance abuse issues or some kind of violence, acting out, we know they're manifesting these things.

But there are other people who can be going along for years and years and you don't notice until all of a sudden something snaps.

So you just never know. It's not like we're all, you know, Rambos out there waiting to blow up in people's faces. But the ability to get in and reach out and touch people, to say, Hey, we got your back, come

on in, you know, we can help, you could use some help -- that's part of this whole thing in the Dwyer Program, as I understand it --

SENATOR SAVINO: Right.

LT. COL. DIEHL: -- with the mentors, to reach out and just drag people in so that they don't feel alone, they're not isolated, and they can get the help that is out there for them.

Again, with our program, we're only getting them when they get into the court system one way or another. When, you know, we need to make sure the government is not adding to the abuse and the pain. You know, so that's where I feel really good in helping my clients.

SENATOR SAVINO: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for being here.

LT. COL. DIEHL: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Next we have New York State Veterans Council, Kirby Hannan and Bob Becker, followed by Prevent Child

Abuse New York, followed by Coalition for the Homeless.

MR. HANNAN: Bob actually wound up with a VA appointment, so he bequeathed the testimony to me. And I just want to say that you folks have given a whole new definition to "hard-ass."

(Laughter.)

MR. HANNAN: I thought I knew what it meant in the military. My hats are off to you, thanks for your dedication, thanks for listening. Everybody here feels the same way.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

MR. HANNAN: Quickly, I'm going to run through things that I think work together, and I'm hoping that you guys can understand that. And so here goes.

Veteran Service Officer funding -- there's a couple of kinds. One's at the county level, and one's employed by a congressionally recognized organization such as mine, the VFW, or the American Legion.

All right? Having said that, you're funding the VFW, for example, to the tune of -- they have three VSOs -- to the tune of about $125,000. Total, not each. Total. All right? For that, you get back about $1.5 million a month in federal benefits in claims going to New York veterans. So we're getting our money's worth out of that.

And by the way, the county Veteran Service Officers are doing the same thing. They're -- the investment that we make, it's about $30 for every dollar that we put out there. And the counties don't get much at all, by the way, and it should really be looked at again. Because typically they'll get about $10,000 for every 100,000 vets that they serve, and then there's a formula that goes up from there.

All right. So having said that, you know, we don't need to have more money there necessarily. If it happens, good. All right? What we really need to do is to have them, the Veteran Service Officers, way more engaged in the Dwyer Program in terms of

accountability.

You're funding the Dwyer Program to the tune of 3.5 million. We're always concerned about how OMH handles it. I want you folks to take a peek at two bills. One is the Veteran-to-Veteran Peer Certification Program -- it's one bill, excuse me. It's Ortiz/Parker. And then down below, with the Women Vet Peer-to-Peer programs. Again, Ortiz/Parker, it's in the same bill. We thought we could split it out, but it didn't work.

But the bottom line is, the accreditation -- I could take an accreditation course through OMH right now. Or I could audit it, have them recognize me, I could learn more about peer-to-peer techniques as a VSO, and I could manage the program better as OMH distributes the funds. All right? And that -- I don't need to paint a different picture from that. And OMH could recognize me for having audited it. It doesn't have to be a requirement. It could be, for getting the funds, for that matter.

All right, moving to women veterans, because we are concerned about that -- and I heard that numerous times today. All right? The Women Veteran Peer-to-Peer is kind of left out. The men -- Dwyer's an AA program, all right? It's an AA program, it's an anonymous program at the post level for veterans to help other veterans. You just heard from Roy Diehl, he said the same thing. All right? It's ongoing at the grassroots level.

Having said that, if women are -- don't go to the post as much. I'm going to say men go to the post, women not so much. All right? So having said that, Marlene Roll, an ex-past commander of the VFW, about once a year calls the women together in Erie County. She gets 200 women every time she sends the invite out. So this is what we're talking about regarding that Ortiz/Parker bill.

No brick and mortar, no money. Again, the accreditation program, no money. We just want to up the culture in terms of

understanding of how Dwyer can work. And I heard more about Dwyer today than I have in the last five years that we've been testifying, and I just want to say thank you, because you've been listening.

Veterans Treatment Court benefits from this because they get a monitor and a mentor that knows what they're doing, and then if they can get into additional training from OCA, they'll know how that fits into the court structure and then we've got an alternative sentencing program that can really work. You've heard from Roy Diehl, Veterans Defense Program, I don't need to kill that.

So there we are. Thanks. I don't blame you, you're not going to insult me if you don't have any questions. Don't worry about a thing, I get it.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Kirby, you were very succinct and effective.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for being here.

MR. HANNAN: Okay. All right, thanks.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Next, Prevent Child Abuse New York, followed by Coalition for the Homeless, followed by Empire Justice Center.

MR. HATHAWAY: Good afternoon. You have my testimony in front of you. My name is Tim Hathaway, I'm the executive director with Prevent Child Abuse New York. I'm not going to read through this entire presentation but instead pick out a couple of important points.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Bring the mic a little closer.

MR. HATHAWAY: Absolutely.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

MR. HATHAWAY: Prevent Child Abuse is a statewide organization, not-for-profit. We have projects going on in Niagara Falls all the way down to the tippy toes of Long Island. So we're doing a lot of different work.

What I want to call your attention to are a number of projects. Some of them have

been mentioned today already. We believe primarily that child abuse prevention is a community-based activity. It's about putting the right sort of resources in communities and ensuring that those are working well on behalf of children and families.

Right now it's estimated that the average cost of one child abuse case is about $210,000. So if we have to march through the 68,000 cases that happen annually in New York State, we're talking about a lot of dollars. It's much easier to prevent those child abuse cases, and we know that there are programs at work today in the state that do that prevention work for us. And I'm going to talk about five of those programs. These are all evidence-based programs. We know they work because the science tells us they work.

The first one is maternal/infant/early childhood home visiting. We've heard a little bit of discussion about this today. Our budget ask around this is $2 million for the Parent-Child Home Program, $1 million for Healthy Families New York, and $4 million for

Nurse-Family Partnership.

I will note that the cut to the private-public partnership is going to hit in particular the Parent-Child Home Program. So this will eat at their funding that's already in place. We're going the wrong direction if we don't do something about that cut to the public-private partnership.

We also want to spend a minute on Family Resource Centers. Family Resource Centers are places in communities where parents can go to find a supportive voice, to find information about child development and about other community resources. They can find many times the sort of resources that help strengthen their family in ways that we know prevent child abuse.

The evidence around this program says that in neighborhoods where Family Resource Centers are placed, the rate of child abuse goes down. Simple, simple prevention.

We're asking, based on what we've found, discovered in our work -- we're asking for a $200,000 request to place two

additional Family Resource Centers, one in the Mohawk Valley where there is not one currently, and then also in another location to be determined.

Housing. We've heard a little bit about housing today. Housing is child abuse prevention. We know when families have stable housing, it reduces the amount of child abuse. Assembly Bill 1620 and Senate 2375 would build out our current affordable housing availability in the state.

Childcare we have talked about many, many times today. I'm not going to spend a lot of time there, but what we know is that when childcare facilities, when providers are in place, it protects children and builds strong families.

The final one there is after-school. Again, we've heard a lot about after-school today. Again, if kids can be in a spot where there are caring adults when their parents are not available, we know that protects children. It supports families. It's important for us to build out that funding

and replace that budget cut of $5 million that's been proposed.

Also attached to my testimony in the last seconds here is the childcare budget request from Winning Beginning and Empire State Campaign for Childcare. Prevent Child Abuse is a proud partner with those organizations.

Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for being here today.

MR. HATHAWAY: Yes.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Next, Coalition for the Homeless, followed by Empire Justice Center, followed by New York Association for the Education of Young Children.

MS. NORTZ: Good afternoon. My name is Shelly Nortz. I'm the deputy executive director for policy with the Coalition for the Homeless.

Senator Krueger, Assemblymember Weinstein, thank you for your endurance. Other members, I appreciate your being here

and your willingness to listen.

I'm going to just hit the high points of my testimony. Can you hear me? Yes? Good.

Last year saw homelessness rise again to record levels in New York State, evidence of a continuing and unchecked affordable housing crisis as well as the most extreme income inequality found anywhere in our nation. Shockingly, nearly 253,000 New Yorkers were homeless in the 2018-2019 school year, staying in shelters or doubled up with friends and family, a number exceeding the population of every city in the state with the exception of New York City. This consists of 133,000 unduplicated children and adults sleeping in New York City shelters, 79,000 homeless students in New York City not sleeping in shelters, including those doubled up, 34,000 homeless students outside New York City, including those doubled up, and 5,944 homeless adults sleeping in shelters outside New York City.

As we know, thousands more sleep on

the streets every night on steam grates, cardboard boxes, and in the transit system. New York City, where 85 percent of the state's undomiciled population lives, remains the epicenter of the worst homelessness crisis since the Great Depression. The number of children and adults sleeping in shelters each night was 63,000 in November 2019, including more than 22,000 children and an all-time-record 18,681 single adults.

The New York City shelter census rose sharply in the first several years of Governor Cuomo's tenure in the executive chamber and remains at unsustainably high levels, due in large part to the withdrawal of state resources for a housing subsidy program that was never replaced, and a years-long delay in funding and initiating a new state supportive housing program. Thousands more adults have entered New York City shelters directly from state prisons, as we heard earlier, thanks to inadequate discharge planning and a lack of sufficient reentry housing options for people trying to

get back on their feet.

Indeed, the number of people staying in New York City shelters each night rose by 60 percent between January of 2011 and November of 2019, an increase of more than 23,000 children and adults.

There are far more single individuals seeking shelter in New York City today than during the terms of any other governor since modern mass homelessness began, as you can see from the table. The reasons for this are clear. Governor Cuomo not only eliminated state funds for a mediocre rent subsidy program without replacing it with a better one, but he also dragged out the process of starting a new state supportive housing program for years and has released increasing numbers of people from state prisons directly to New York City shelters.

The number who moved into supportive housing units in fiscal year 2018 reached a 14-year low even as the number of single adults sleeping in shelters reached an all time high. Fewer than 1,450 adults were

placed in supportive housing in 2018, or just 3.5 percent of all individuals who spent time in shelters that year, down from 7 percent a decade prior.

Further, New York State prisons released directly to New York City shelters contributed to record homelessness for single adults, representing over half of all New York City releases and 15 percent of all institutional releases directly to New York City shelters.

We have two imperatives for 2020: Home Stability Support, as we've talked about earlier today, and additional capital funds to spur supportive housing development. Thank you, Senator Krueger, for asking the commissioner those questions.

First and foremost, the time has come to enact Home Stability Support legislation introduced by Senator Krueger and Assemblymember Hevesi and cosponsored by 35 Senators and 125 members of the Assembly. A 2016 analysis used to help design HSS found that two-thirds of the 171,000 households

receiving public assistance shelter allowances have rents that exceed their allowances, placing them at risk of homelessness. Of those, more than 80,000 households were then on the brink of homelessness. Surely their number has grown and their circumstances have become more acute since.

I'm going to skip to the next section of my recommendations because I'm running low on time. And let me just say that we are pleased that Governor Cuomo provided additional funds for more supportive housing in his Executive Budget proposal, but honestly it is far too little, too late for the dire circumstance that we see on the ground. And so we ask that the Legislature fund the 14,000 remaining units in this year's budget and enact Home Stability Support without delay, notwithstanding the fact that there's a pilot program out there.

Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you for your years of hard work and for coming before

us.

MS. NORTZ: Thank you so much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Next, Empire Justice Center, Saima Akhtar, followed by New York Association for the Education of Young Children, followed by New York State Community Mobilization Housing Works.

MS. AKHTAR: Is this about right? Or do you need it a little closer? Good, okay.

Good afternoon to the members of the committee. Thank you for sticking it out today. My name is Saima Akhtar. I am a senior attorney at Empire Justice Center. I truly appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony today.

I'll be giving some comments on a few selected portions of our written testimony, just of highlights and leaving the rest as a surprise for later.

Empire Justice Center, as many of you already know, is a statewide legal services organization with offices in Albany, Rochester, two in Westchester and Central

Islip on Long Island. The organization provides support and training to legal services and other community-based organizations, undertakes policy research and analysis, and engages in legislative and administrative advocacy.

We also represent low-income individuals as well as classes of New Yorkers in a wide range of areas that include civil rights, health, public assistance, domestic violence, and SSI and D disability benefits.

As the members of the committee are certainly well aware, the New York State economy has actually been relatively robust in the past year and, in spite of a looming and somewhat self-inflicted budget deficit, the Legislature still has the opportunity and the capacity to take action on behalf of those who are most in need. We can solidify the safety-net programs and provide some real progressive change here in New York.

One of the things that I want to highlight for you today is the Disability Advocacy Program, also known as DAP. DAP is

a long-standing program here in New York, it's existed since the early 1980s, and what DAP does is it funds advocates in every county in the state who assist folks who have been cut off or denied federal SSI or D benefits to secure those benefits and draw down federal funds into New York. This saves the state money. It's about a $2-plus return on the investment for every one dollar that funds DAP.

What we are seeing is that in 2019, applicants for disability benefits began to face additional -- what's called a mandatory reconsideration before an actual hearing is held on a denied application. This process, this desk review process places an additional hurdle along the path of folks with disabilities being able to actually get their application reviewed. It puts them one step further away from securing benefits and receiving payments, it keeps clients poorer longer, it costs the state money, and it is an unnecessary delay that was essentially created by federal regulatory change.

The DAP advocates have willingly taken on this step and have not actually sought extra funding to do it. What we are seeking at this time is essentially a repeated investment, the same -- a hold harmless to where we were last year.

So the Executive Budget provisions have certain set-asides for DAP. We are asking the Legislature to add on $3 million in addition to what's already in the Executive Budget to keep the DAP program funded at $8.26 million this year as it was last year, even with the additional burden of the mandatory consideration process.

Additionally you've heard a fair amount already from my colleagues at the Schuyler Center, the Early Care & Learning Council, Winning Beginning you'll hear from, the Association for the Education of Young Children, about the critical need for childcare. In your written comments are robust data and information speaking to that need.

I cannot summarize that for you and do

it justice. What I will say is that it is a total investment consistent with Winning Beginning NY and the Empire State Childcare Campaign looking for $60 million to increase access to childcare and then $40 million to increase workforce compensation and quality of care.

This is critical. Childcare, as you know, is a work support. And while we are looking at low-wage workers and keeping them here, we are also looking at other portions of the safety net being attacked at the federal level. For those of you who don't know, my primary practice is in the area of SNAP benefits, and what I am thinking about is the fact that SNAP is under attack at the federal level, SNAP benefits potentially stand to be reduced, and to the extent we can take the heat off of low-income families and support them in other ways, this is an opportunity to support families who are going to potentially lose SNAP.

There is shifting that can happen here, and should. And to that end, just in

the smidge of time -- I know there was a question previously put by the committee, I believe it was Senator May who asked about preserving SNAP benefits and whether or not there was any opportunity to do that at this time.

I did just want to take this opportunity to suggest that it would be useful if in New York we moved to a voluntary rather than a mandatory employment and training. Right now the employment and training options are distributed by county. Some counties do a mandatory program. To the extent that there will be additional folks who are forced into employment or training with the loss of ABAWD waivers later this year, freeing those slots would mean that there's administrative flexibility at the county level that would not otherwise be had.

Thank you for your time today.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for your testimony as well as the extensive information in your submission.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: It's a dissertation. We'll have to put a little more time on that.

MS. AKHTAR: Absolutely.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

Next, New York Association for the Education of Young Children, Kristen Kerr, executive director.

MS. KERR: Good afternoon, and thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony today.

As mentioned, I am Kristen Kerr, the executive director of the Association for the Education of Young Children. Our mission is to promote excellence in early care and education for New York State children and families through education, advocacy, and the support of the profession.

As a statewide membership organization of over 3,000 early childhood educators, we represent the workforce that shapes the lives of New York's youngest learners. These members work across settings and are integral in their communities, ensuring that parents

can work with the peace of mind that their children are safe, learning, and well cared for.

However, our state economy cannot reach its full potential when the workforce it relies on operates in the confines of a broken system in a state of market failure. After decades of asking whether high-quality early education works for young children, it is time to shift our focus to what works best and how we can support it.

As we advocate for change at the federal level, we cannot afford to wait for Congress to act. New York's children and families and early childhood educators need us now. Today we join with Winning Beginning NY and the Empire State Campaign for Childcare to ask the Legislature to commit to achieving universal access to quality affordable childcare by 2025.

Our educators are passionate and committed professionals. They often remain in our field for decades because caring for and teaching young children is what they

love. But many do it at a great personal cost. An alarming 65 percent of New York's early educators in childcare settings rely on supports such as SNAP, Medicaid, TANF, and the Earned Income Tax Credit. Nationally, rates of participation of early educators are double the rates of workers across all occupations.

Critical to quality early childhood programs are highly educated teachers and caregivers with a deep understanding of child development, and that are well supported and fairly compensated. Foundational to excellent early learning experiences for children are stable relationships with these educators.

High levels of turnover undermine those relationships, creating unease in children and a burden on administrators. A recent study of early childhood educator turnover rates by the Buffett Early Childhood Initiative found that nationally turnover ranges from 26 and 40 percent of staff per year. This rate is highest in child care

settings, with 58 percent of child care administrators identifying salary as the primary reason teachers leave.

As the minimum wage increases, we have seen an already dire problem worsen. Wage compression has diminished minimal wage differences between new aides and assistants and veteran early educators with advanced degrees. All workers deserve an adequate living wage, and early educators who dedicate years to pursuing higher education and remain in the field deserve a wage ladder that compensates them fairly in addition to this living wage.

A recent Raising New York survey also found that many programs are running at a deficit, and childcare providers who enroll at least one child with a subsidy are more likely to have a deficit than those who do not. The current market rate for subsidy is too low to provide high quality care for families who need it most. In fact, it is too low for programs who accept subsidies to remain financially solvent.

High-quality early learning and childcare experiences must occur in a system that values early childhood educators and childcare providers as the workforce that prepares children for bright futures while their parents work. As a member of both the Empire State Campaign for Childcare and the Winning Beginning steering committee, we share in the deep concern that Governor Cuomo included no new state investments for childcare in his Executive Budget.

We urge the Legislature to work with the Executive to ensure the following commitments and investments are included in the 2020-2021 final enacted budget:

New York commits to achieving universal access to quality, affordable child care by 2025. And to set New York on a path of meeting this goal of universal access, and to curb the exodus of educators from the field while working towards it, New York makes significant building block investments in child care this year, including investing at least 40 million to create a fund to

increase workforce compensation and improve the quality of these programs, and at least 60 million in the state's child care subsidy program to expand access to more working families by making eligibility levels and copays more fair and uniform across the state.

Thank you for considering our budget request, and we look forward to continuing to work with you to support the children and families and early educators of New York.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. Thank you for being here.

Next, we have New York State Community Mobilization for Housing Works, Elizabeth Deutsch, Jaron Benjamin -- three? Oh, okay. Good, I was wondering how three people were going to share five minutes.

MS. DEUTSCH: Jaron's not here. They were just the backups.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. Thank you.

MS. DEUTSCH: I'm going to try not to read my testimony, but there's things in here

that I don't want to miss.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony to the joint budget hearing on Human Services. My name is Elizabeth Deutsch, and I am the director of New York State and New England Community Mobilization for Housing Works, a healing community of people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. Housing Works is part of the End AIDS NY 2020 Community Coalition, a group of over 90 healthcare centers, hospitals, and community-based organizations across the state. Housing Works and the Community Coalition are fully committed to realizing the goals of our historic state blueprint for Ending the Epidemic for all New Yorkers by the end of the year 2020.

Safe, stable housing is essential to support effective antiretroviral treatment that sustains optimal health for people with HIV and makes it impossible to transmit HIV to others. Indeed, New York State data show that unstable housing is the single strongest predictor of poor HIV outcomes and health

disparities. The blueprint's housing recommendations have been fully implemented in New York City since 2016, where the local Department of Social Services employs the New York State HIV Enhanced Shelter Allowance Program to offer every income-eligible person with HIV a rental subsidy sufficient to afford housing stability, and provides a 30 percent rent cap and affordable housing protection for persons who rely on disability benefits or other fixed income.

Upstate and on Long Island, however, as many as 4,200 low-income households living with HIV remain homeless or unstably housed, because the state law limits the 30 percent rent cap to residents of New York City -- and the 1980s regulations governing the HIV Enhanced Shelter Allowance set maximum rent at just $480 per month, and only the New York City local Department of Social Services approves rental subsidies in line with fair market rents.

It is time to ensure that homeless and unstably housed New Yorkers with HIV

throughout the state have equal access to vital New York State housing supports by enabling all local districts to approve rents in line with local fair market rents and extending the 30 percent affordable housing protection to eligible low-income persons with HIV in every part of New York State.

Indeed, the ongoing failure to meet this housing need threatens to undermine the ETE plan -- I'm sorry, I'm going to jump ahead because I'm afraid of running out of time.

ETE Community Coalition members have been told by social services commissioners outside of New York that they lack the resources required to expand housing options for their community members with HIV who remain homeless or unstably housed. So we were very pleased that the New York State fiscal year 2020 budget included our proposal to make $5 million in New York State funding available to enable departments of social services outside of New York City to voluntarily partner with local payers and

community-based organizations to pilot innovative strategies to fund meaningful rental assistance for homeless and unstably housed low-income New Yorkers.

This New York State funding would leverage matching dollars from local partners, for a total of a $10 million annual HIV housing investment. Ample evidence shows that dollars spent on HIV rental assistance generate Medicaid savings from avoided emergency and inpatient care that offsets the cost of housing supports.

However, the fiscal year 2020 budget language included a poison pill that undermined the ability of local districts to secure local partners and propose successful plans. The Aid to Localities language required that any savings realized through improved housing stability be recaptured to reduce the state investment, while still requiring the local partner providing the matching funds to continue to pay 100 percent of the costs for housed participants in perpetuity.

As we predicted when advocating for a fix for this budget last year, no local districts took us up on the offer. And consequently, no one was housed last year.

We are pleased that the fiscal year 2021 Executive Budget again includes $5 million in annual funding for the pilot program as well as the reappropriation of the $5 million that went unspent last year. However, we are very dismayed that the proposed language continues to include the same undermining language.

It is critical to the success of the pilot program that this language be changed to allow local partners to propose the best use of healthcare savings realized through improved housing status, including sharing savings among the local social services district and the health payer to support programs and administrative costs and provide ongoing HIV housing subsidies.

Housing Works and the ETE Community Coalition urge the Governor and the Legislature to fully support this $5 million

rest-of-state HIV housing pilot by including the revised initiative language in the enacted FY 2021 budget, and passing Education, Labor, and Family Assistance Article VII language to authorize the use of funds. We believe that this $10 million investment will support sufficient housing subsidies to finally afford equal access to safe, stable housing for households living with HIV in every part of New York State.

(Laughter.)

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for -- I believe there are no questions. Thank you.

Next, Citizen's Committee for Children of New York, Daryl Hornick-Becker, to be followed -- the next three witnesses are NEW Pride Agenda, Winning Beginning NY, and New York Immigration Coalition.

MR. HORNICK-BECKER: Good afternoon.

My name is Daryl Hornick-Becker, and I am a policy and advocacy associate at the

Citizens' Committee for Children of New York. CCC is a 75-year-old independent multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

I'd like to thank Chair Weinstein, Chair Krueger, and all the members of the Assembly Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees for holding today's hearing.

CCC recognizes the need to be fiscally prudent given the current budget deficit. That said, we are very disappointed that the State Budget is being balanced by cutting and curtailing services for the most vulnerable children and families. We're also worried that proposed caps on Medicaid spending and caps to TANF funds and initiatives would result in significant cost shifts in New York City. We urge the Legislature to negotiate a budget that is balanced in a manner that improves the well-being of children, youth and families.

For further detail, I refer you to my written testimony. Today I'll be summarizing

some key issues across the human services sector.

For childcare, the Executive Budget proposes no new solutions to the current crisis that is facing New York. High-quality childcare is an expensive necessity, and helpful subsidies currently serve fewer than 20 percent of low-income families. Additionally, early childhood educators in many regions of the state are paid so little that many are living in or near poverty.

The Governor commissioned a Childcare Task Force over two years ago, and yet the Executive Budget includes no significant new investments. It does include an expansion of the childcare tax credit, but it would be a mistake to think that a credit of $330 per year could have any meaningful impact on families facing average childcare costs of $15,000 annually per child.

We urge the Assembly and Senate to invest $100 million in childcare: $40 million to create a fund to increase salaries, and $60 million for subsidies to

increase eligibility and decrease families' copayments.

CCC was also disappointed to see only a small investment for statewide universal pre-K that would impact an estimated 2,000 children -- despite the 77,000 four-year olds outside of New York City without access to full-day pre-K. We urge the Legislature to invest $150 million in universal pre-K, to add seats, and to fund regional assistance centers.

In the area of after-school, we applaud the Governor for adding $10 million in a fourth round of Empire State After School grants, but were disappointed to see the same budget propose a $5 million cut to the Advantage After School Program that would force 2,500 children to lose their after-school programming. We urge the Legislature to restore that funding and to add an additional $5 million to increase per-pupil rates, to maintain services, and to accommodate rising operational costs.

Turning to child welfare, CCC is

deeply concerned with the Executive Budget's proposed $25 million reduction in funds to OCFS. The state also continues to reduce reimbursements of preventive services to 62 percent despite statute requiring a 65 percent match. We urge the Legislature to restore these funds, invest in preventive services, and help decrease the number of children placed in foster care.

We're also concerned that the state continues to fund KinGAP within the Foster Care Block Grant, causing it to be under-utilized across the state. There's a clear opportunity to expand the use of KinGAP by funding it outside of the block grant, similar to how adoption subsidies are funded.

In the area of juvenile justice, the CCC was very excited to see the new section of correction law requiring all adolescent offenders to be transferred from DOCCS to OCFS facilities. To build on this progress, CCC urges the Legislature to consider several youth justice initiatives. First, we are demanding an end to all forms of solitary

confinement in adolescent facilities, reversing current practice that permits children to be held in isolation for 18 to 22 hours a day.

Second, we're asking to create a new young adult status up to age 25, allowing youth 19 years and older the same protections as offered under the Youthful Offender Law.

And third, we are asking to lower the age of juvenile delinquency from 7 to 12 to end the prosecution of children who under current law can be subject to police questioning and confinement.

In the area of homelessness, CCC was pleased to see the Executive Budget's investment in supportive housing, but it's unclear how it will be prioritized to impact families experiencing homelessness who make up the majority of residents in shelters. We urge the Legislature to combat family homelessness by addressing one of its lead drivers, domestic violence.

This year's budget should include flexible funding for a Rapid Rehousing for

Domestic Violence Survivors pilot program, a HUD-approved model that connects survivors to safe, affordable permanent housing.

The human services sector is a critical component of the fabric of our state, but budget reductions and cost shifts to localities ultimately impede the sector's ability to respond to the needs of vulnerable New Yorkers. The current budget deficit must not be balanced on the backs of New York's children and families.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for being here.

Next, Cynthia Dames, NEW Pride Agenda.

MS. DAMES: Thank you very much.

Cynthia Dames. I know many of you from my prior life doing government affairs for nonprofits, some old friends, some new friends, and I have embarked on a new -- one last mission to try to move the ball. Thank

you. Nice seeing you again.

Many of you know the history -- I'm just going to speak from my separate notes. Many of you of course know the long history regarding Empire State Pride Agenda. I had the privilege of working for them as a lobbyist in the early years under Alan van Capelle. We worked very hard regarding the passage of marriage equality in the Assembly, and of course we're enormously gratified by its full conclusion and implementation.

A number of us were dismayed when ESPA closed down because we felt there's a variety of discriminatory issues that continue, particularly for young people, people of color, transgender community, communities -- LGBTQ communities of poverty, and really a remarkable dearth of LGBTQ-sensitive services upstate. Really, really striking.

And so we formed the NEW Pride Agenda -- you know, more women-led, more diverse, a variety of trans membership. We just got new board members from Rochester, we're recruiting in Buffalo, Long Island,

Western New York, et cetera. We are committed to developing a statewide, ground-up LGBTQ organization.

We're focusing on civic engagement beginning in New York City, but we'll do that as well upstate, and of course advocacy. So one of our major issues this fall that we worked on -- probably as a prior lobbyist, knowing and sensitive to the need for implementation of law when the law is little trickier or a little more challenging -- and so we had a variety of meetings all fall about ideas regarding implementation of GENDA. And we very much encourage the Governor to think about mandating state employees have an understanding of it. We're very gratified he included that in the State of the State.

We're very gratified that the Department of Human Rights is going to start a public education campaign to understand GENDA, and the companion to that, in our judgement, would be an awareness -- a training program, trans-led, in different

areas of the state, particularly with those that are responsible for implementing the law, whether you're in education or housing, employment, and certainly medical facilities. Perhaps in a phased-in approach.

So we're suggesting, starting in a modest way, $1.5 million that would be distributed in four or five areas throughout the state, different regions, all for you to be decided. But trans-led training.

And I just want to do a separate comment. When marriage happened, we all understand marriage. Marriage has gone on for hundreds and thousands of years. There wasn't a huge educational component needed. But when you talk about individuals having a disconnect between mind and heart and body, and going through transitions and becoming transgender, that's something very hard for many people to understand.

And we are sympathetic to that. I'm learning about it myself. I'm in trans training. My 22-year-old daughter has more trans friends, I'm sure, than I do. It's

generational. It's different. And so we're really -- we know the need, sometimes, to really get behind the wheel and help laws become real.

And so we're asking your indulgence to consider trans training statewide that would help employers and others understand the differences and how to be respectful and how to respond. We ourselves at NEW Pride Agenda did a statewide survey, and the overwhelming response was not that people weren't well-meaning when one went for a job or medical facilities, but they were just ignorant. They didn't have knowledge about it. They didn't know what to do about it.

So this is not about blame, this is not about punishment, this is like -- consider please putting some money forward to help this continuation of really implementing GENDA in a way that it needs to be implemented for people to understand it better.

We thank you also for some discretionary support we got for NEW Pride

Agenda for downstate organizing. We hope to get some for upstate as well. And thank you for your consideration. It's nice seeing you all again.

Any questions? Okay, thank you very much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you, Cynthia.

Winning Beginning NY, is anybody here? Okay. Have you -- did you submit testimony at the desk? Okay, kind of.

Okay. Gregory Brender?

MR. BRENDER: Yes.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. You're on.

MR. BRENDER: Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify and for sticking it out on a long day.

Winning Beginning NY is a New York State statewide early care and learning coalition. We work on issues from prenatal to 8 years old, and we bring together many groups throughout the state. So a lot of what is in my testimony you actually heard

from many of our colleagues.

Just to sort of say who we are, we work with different groups throughout the state, and our steering committee includes Advocates for Children, the Chautauqua Lake Childcare Center, Early Care and Learning Council, Center for Children's Initiatives, Network for Youth Success, New York State Association for the Education of Young Children, Prevent Child Abuse New York, United Neighborhood Houses -- where I serve as the director of children and youth services -- and the Western New York Women's Foundation.

I want to highlight two key pieces where we see this budget really falling short of serving children and families and their communities. First, as you've heard from several of my colleagues around childcare, there's deep disappointment that despite the convening of a task force started in 2018 and the need of communities throughout the state, that the Executive Budget takes no action to address really the crisis in childcare for

New York's children and families.

Working with many of the community-based organizations who provide childcare, we see how desperate so many families are to get their children into something affordable, and how difficult it is for those families to afford child care, and so we ask that the Legislature not wait until this task force completes its convenings but takes action in this budget to move forward to expanding childcare.

In particular, we ask that New York commits to achieving universal access to quality affordable childcare by 2025, starting with two investments this year. One is to invest at least $40 million to create a fund that will increase workforce compensation and improve childcare quality. Program quality, making sure that these are places where people want to have their children, and making sure that childcare programs are the kind of programs that really build on the benefits of childcare, requires a staff who are stable, who are

well-compensated, and who are well-trained.

And then also investing $60 million to both increase family eligibility, so that more low-income families can access childcare. As well as to decrease the copays that parents pay. Because even with subsidies, many parents are struggling to pay for childcare.

I also want to quickly address after-school. For now I think the ninth year in a row, the Governor's budget has proposed cutting $5 million from the Advantage After School Program. This would affect 2,500 children. This is not something -- when we know that families are trying to get their kids into after-school and we know how important it is for families' work schedules and for childrens' development, this is not a cut that should be proposed.

We also want to ask the Legislature to push to increase rates in both the Advantage After School Program and the Empire State After School Program to 23.20 per child. These are programs that in many cases are

struggling to pay their staff and struggling to maintain quality.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. And are there any questions?

Okay, thank you very much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for being here.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you for testifying.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: And the final witness of today's hearing, New York Immigration Coalition, Alana Cantillo.

MS. CANTILLO: Hi, good afternoon. Thank you for convening this hearing. My name is Alana Pilar Cantillo, and I'm the senior director of advocacy for the New York Immigration Coalition.

On behalf of the NYIC and its 200 nonprofit organizations that make up our membership, I'm here to urge the inclusion and renewal and increase of funding to the New York State Enhanced Services for Refugees Program, also known as NYSESRP, in the FY '20-'21 budget.

The Enhance Services for Refugees Program is administered among the refugees services programs in the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. It began in 2017 as a remarkable response to the federal government's retreat from refugee resettlement. New York State did what no other state would: provide flexible state funds to support the state's strong network of resettlement agencies through a difficult time, and help them reframe their focus on integration.

New York State allocated $2 million for NYSESRP in fiscal years '18, '19, and '20. Because of the continued federal cuts in support of refugee integration, the NYIC, as part of New York for Refugees -- a coalition of 16 agencies resettling refugees, along with the Fiscal Policy Institute -- together we are requesting $5 million in FY '20-'21.

NYSESRP delivers measurable impact. In the past year alone, the program has provided nearly 8,000 unique services to

refugees, including almost 5,000 case management integration services, over 1,000 employment training services, and 600 connections to English language courses.

NYSESRP allows agencies to concentrate on long-term integration in a way that addresses the needs of each client, unlike existing federal programs, which focus merely on the first 90 days after arrival. This flexible funding and extended case management opportunities allows agencies to provide deeper and broader support, benefiting refugees and communities. In challenging times, this program is continuing to establish best practices.

NYSESRP is a model for other states around the country. New York State was the first, Oregon followed suit last year, and advocates in California and states across the country have repeatedly reached out and inquired about New York State's program in order for advocates, service providers around the state to receive the sort of best practices that have been established here in

New York.

The state's $2 million investment shows that New York is committed to refugees and the agencies that serve them. This is critical, as over 50 refugee-serving organizations in the United States have closed permanently, and over 40 have ceased resettling refugees since 2017.

I'm going to jump ahead to just note that the refugee resettlement population is on the decline and supports populations that are aging across upstate New York, in some cases even tipping cities toward population rebound. The majority of primary resettlement in New York is in upstate communities, over 90 percent. Resettlement agencies also play a key role downstate, helping individuals reach their full potential in economic and social integration.

NYSESRP attracts secondary migrants to New York as well. Because of the state's support, New York's resettlement agencies and communities welcome people from Bhutan, Somalia, Burma, Afghanistan, Congo, and other

countries from across the United States to be settled in New York.

When refugee and immigrant communities are more prominent, it also attracts young people who want to live in vibrant and diverse areas. A strong network of services that support the success of secondary migrants is critical to positive outcomes for the communities they choose to live in. Without the state's NYSESRP program, there is no statewide network.

This is a critical moment for New York State to take action. The federal government has put the refugee resettlement program under even further strain as years have gone by, setting the Presidential Determination that governs the maximum number of refugees to be resettled at a 40-year low -- around 8,000 arrivals. Because that represents another devastating cut to our agencies' sustainability, NYSESRP is asking that the Governor and the Legislature increase support in the state's budget from $2 million to $5 million.

Thank you so much for your time.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. Thank you for being here today.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much.

CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We have no questions.

This concludes the Joint Legislative Hearing on Human Services. The joint committees will reconvene for a budget hearing on Monday, February 3rd, at 11:00 o'clock, on the subject of mental hygiene.

(Whereupon, the Human Services budget hearing concluded at 4:34 p.m.)