

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

3 JOINT LEGISLATIVE HEARING

4 In the Matter of the  
5 2024-2025 EXECUTIVE BUDGET ON  
6 HUMAN SERVICES

7 Hearing Room B  
8 Legislative Office Building  
9 Albany, NY

10 January 31, 2024  
11 9:42 a.m.

12 PRESIDING:

13 Senator Liz Krueger  
14 Chair, Senate Finance Committee

15 Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi  
16 Chair, Assembly Committee on Children  
17 and Families

18 PRESENT:

19 Senator Thomas F. O'Mara  
20 Senate Finance Committee (RM)

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

23 Senator Jabari Brisport  
24 Chair, Senate Committee on Children  
and Families

Assemblywoman Maritza Davila  
Chair, Assembly Committee on Social Services

Senator Roxanne Persaud  
Chair, Senate Committee on Social Services

Assemblyman Ron Kim  
Chair, Assembly Committee on Aging

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3 PRESENT: (Continued)

4 Senator Cordell Cleare  
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging

5 Assemblywoman Kimberly Jean-Pierre  
6 Chair, Assembly Committee on  
Veterans' Affairs

7 Senator Jessica Scarcella-Spanton  
8 Chair, Senate Committee on Veterans,  
Homeland Security and Military Affairs

9 Senator John C. Liu

10 Assemblyman Khaleel M. Anderson

11 Assemblywoman Jennifer Lunsford

12 Senator Samra G. Brouk

13 Assemblywoman Yudelka Tapia

14 Assemblywoman Grace Lee

15 Assemblywoman Jo Anne Simon

16 Senator Jake Ashby

17 Assemblyman Jeff Gallahan

18 Assemblywoman Taylor Darling

19 Assemblyman Brian Maher

20 Senator Dean Murray

21 Assemblyman Chris Eachus

22 Assemblyman Billy Jones

23 Assemblywoman Monique Chandler-Waterman

24 Assemblyman Brian Manktelow

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3 PRESENT: (Continued)

4 Assemblywoman Sarah Clark

5 Senator Rob Rolison

6 Assemblywoman Marcela Mitaynes

7 Assemblyman Chris Burdick

8 Assemblywoman Jessica González-Rojas

9 Senator Alexis Weik

10 Assemblyman Tony Simone

11 Assemblywoman Marjorie Byrnes

12 Senator Peter Oberacker

13 Assemblyman George Alvarez

14 Senator Rachel May

15 Assemblywoman Marianne Buttenschon

16 Senator Daniel G. Stec

17 Assemblywoman Chantel Jackson

18 Assemblyman Manny De Los Santos

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3 LIST OF SPEAKERS

4 STATEMENT QUESTIONS

5	Suzanne Miles-Gustave, Esq. Acting Commissioner NYS Office of Children and Family Services		
6			
7	-and-		
8	Barbara Guinn Acting Commissioner NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance	12	29
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10	Greg Olsen Acting Director NYS Office for the Aging		
11	-and-		
12	Rev. Viviana DeCohen Commissioner NYS Department of Veterans' Services	171	191
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15	Beth Finkel State Director AARP New York		
16	-and-		
17	Gail Myers Deputy Director NY StateWide Senior Action Council		
18	-and-		
19	Marcella Goheen Founder EssentialCareVisitor.com		
20	-and-		
21	Ann Marie Cook President and CEO Lifespan of Greater Rochester	319	333
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5	ECE on the Move		
	Shanita Bowen		
6	Chief Operating Officer		
	-and-		
7	Jessica Hsieh		
	Respite Coordinator		
8	Chinese-American Planning Council		
	-and-		
9	Meredith Chimento		
	Executive Director		
10	Early Care & Learning Council		
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11	Steven Morales		
	NY Policy Director		
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13	Dede Hill		
	Director of Policy		
14	Schuyler Center for		
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15	-and-		
	Steve Paraza		
16	Senior Research & Policy Associate		
	Cornell ILR Buffalo Co-Lab		
17	-and-		
	Therese Daly		
18	Interim Executive Director		
	New York Association of		
19	Training and Employment		
	Professionals		
20	-and-		
	Michelle Newman		
21	Associate Executive Director,		
	Upstate		
22	Council of Family and		
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6	Director of Partnerships and		
7	Early Childhood Policy		
8	The Education Trust-New York		
9	-on behalf of-		
10	Raising New York		
11	-and-		
12	Lori Rivenburgh		
13	Executive Director		
14	Town of Wallkill Boys &		
15	Girls Club		
16	-on behalf of-		
17	New York State Alliance of		
18	Boys & Girls Clubs		
19	-and-		
20	Stephanie Silkowski		
21	Director of Policy and		
22	Strategic Initiatives		
23	The Bridge Project		
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25	Kate Ryan		
26	Director		
27	Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance		
28	at Adirondack Foundation	413	428
29	Perry Junjulas		
30	Executive Director		
31	Albany Damien Center		
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33	MJ Okma		
34	Senior Manager of Advocacy and		
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11	Director of Policy communications		
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14	Reverend Paul Fleck		
15	Executive Director		
16	Immigration Law & Justice New York		
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18	Lauren Melodia		
19	Deputy Director of Economic		
20	and Fiscal Policies		
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24	Director of Public Policy		
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29	Dr. Daniele Lyman-Torres		
30	President and CEO		
31	Bivona Child Advocacy Center		
32	-and-		
33	Krista Hesdorfer		
34	Director of Public Affairs		
35	Hunger Solutions New York		
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40	for Veteran Reintegrating	483	496
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1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Good morning,  
2 everyone.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Good morning.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Good morning.

5 My name is Andrew Hevesi. I'm the  
6 chair of the New York State Assembly Children  
7 and Families Committee. I am filling in for  
8 Ways and Means Chair Helene Weinstein as  
9 cochair of today's hearing. Chair Weinstein  
10 is recovering from knee surgery and is hoping  
11 to join us for next week's hearings.

12 Today we begin the sixth in a series  
13 of hearings conducted by the joint fiscal  
14 committees of the Legislature regarding the  
15 Governor's proposed budget for the fiscal  
16 2024-2025 year. The hearings are conducted  
17 pursuant to the New York State Constitution  
18 and the Legislative Law.

19 Today the Assembly Ways and Means  
20 Committee and the Senate Finance Committee  
21 will hear testimony concerning the Governor's  
22 budget proposal for human services.

23 I want to tell you it's an honor to be  
24 here with my cochair, Senator Krueger. And I

1 will now start by introducing participating  
2 members from the Assembly, and after that  
3 Senator Krueger will introduce members from  
4 the Senate.

5 In addition, Ranking Ways and Means  
6 Member Ra will introduce members from his  
7 conference.

8 From the majority conference, we have  
9 with us Chair Davila and Chair Kim. And we  
10 also have Assemblymembers Tapia, Darling,  
11 Burdick, Jones and Mitaynes.

12 Senate, please.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

14 Good morning, everyone.

15 And I'm delighted to be joined by  
16 Senators Persaud, Liu, Brisport and, since  
17 Senator O'Mara will be a little late, we are  
18 also joined by his members Senator Murray,  
19 Senator Rolison, and Senator Ashby.

20 And Senator Cleare. Okay, thank you.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great.

22 Assemblyman Ra?

23 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

24 Good morning. We're currently joined

1 by Assemblyman Maher, our ranker on Social  
2 Services; Assemblywoman Byrnes, our ranker on  
3 Children and Families; Assemblyman Manktelow,  
4 our ranker on Veterans' Affairs, and  
5 Assemblymember Gallahan.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great. I would  
7 also like to introduce Assemblymember  
8 González-Rojas as well. And we will be  
9 introducing other members as they arrive.

10 Time limits for witnesses. The  
11 governmental witnesses will have 10 minutes.  
12 Nongovernmental witnesses will have three  
13 minutes. Time limits for questions and  
14 answers, legislators. The chairs of the  
15 committees relevant to each governmental  
16 witness will get 10 minutes, and a second  
17 round of three minutes if desired.

18 The ranking members of these  
19 committees will get five minutes each. All  
20 other members of the relevant committees will  
21 get three minutes each.

22 To all of our witnesses, all written  
23 testimony has been submitted to the  
24 legislators in advance, so we ask that all

1 witnesses please do not read your written  
2 testimony to us. Instead, please summarize.

3 And to all my friends in the  
4 Legislature, please let myself or  
5 Senator Krueger know if you wish to ask a  
6 question of each witness or panel of  
7 witnesses. After the opening remarks of each  
8 witness or panel of witnesses have been  
9 concluded, the list will be closed.

10 Everyone, witnesses and legislators,  
11 should locate the time clock and keep an eye  
12 on it. Please note that when the clock is  
13 down to zero, you'll be alerted that your  
14 time is up.

15 Please be considerate and respect the  
16 clock so that everyone has a chance to be  
17 heard. And please note that these time  
18 frames for questioning include both questions  
19 and answers, so members are respectfully  
20 requested not to commence a new question with  
21 insufficient time on the clock to permit a  
22 witness to answer. I will remember that  
23 myself.

24 Due to the length of our hearings, we

1           have no alternatives but to strictly enforce  
2           these time limits.

3                     I should add that if any witnesses for  
4           later in the day are here and have not yet  
5           checked in, please do so at the top of the  
6           stairs.

7                     And I will now call on the first two  
8           witnesses, to call on you -- you've been  
9           sitting here for an hour. So thank you to  
10          the first witness, Suzanne Miles-Gustave, the  
11          acting commissioner of the State Office of  
12          Children and Family Services, and also  
13          Barbara Guinn, the acting commissioner of the  
14          Office of Temporary and Disability  
15          Assistance. Thank you both for being with us  
16          here today.

17                    Great, please.

18                    ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
19          Good morning, Chair Krueger, Children and  
20          Family Committee Chairs Hevesi and Brisport,  
21          and distinguished members of the Senate and  
22          Assembly. And well wishes to Chair  
23          Weinstein. We do wish her a speedy recovery.

24                    I'm Suzanne Miles-Gustave, acting

1 commissioner of the New York State Office of  
2 Children and Family Services. I appreciate  
3 this opportunity to present Governor Hochul's  
4 State Fiscal Year 2025 Executive Budget that  
5 enhances our mission to protect and  
6 strengthen all of New York's children, youth,  
7 families and communities, a commitment I know  
8 each of you share as well.

9 OCFS is committed to accomplishing  
10 this goal by following our guiding North Star  
11 principle of equity. Our pledge is that  
12 every program, policy, initiative funded by  
13 the Executive Budget will further transform  
14 our human services system into one that is  
15 far more responsive, not reactive, to the  
16 needs of underresourced and vulnerable  
17 New Yorkers.

18 We are doing this with a renewed  
19 commitment to center each of our initiatives  
20 in equity. It's only by transforming our  
21 human services system into one that values  
22 all voices, and brings the changes they are  
23 calling for, that we can make our state safer  
24 and more supportive for everyone.

1                   This year's Executive Budget offers  
2                   another critical opportunity to make truly  
3                   meaningful investments in OCFS's core  
4                   childcare, child welfare and adult services,  
5                   and juvenile justice programs that deliver  
6                   the services New Yorkers need now more than  
7                   ever.

8                   It's a true honor to serve a Governor  
9                   with such an unwavering dedication to  
10                  increasing access to quality affordable  
11                  childcare for New York's families. Before  
12                  Governor Hochul took office, New York's  
13                  Childcare Assistance Program, as you know,  
14                  struggled to give families the help they  
15                  needed. Under the Governor's steadfast  
16                  leadership, investments in childcare have  
17                  grown to record levels and New York is now a  
18                  national leader in increasing affordability  
19                  and access to childcare.

20                  I want to make clear that the more  
21                  than \$7 billion over four years dedicated to  
22                  childcare also would not have been possible  
23                  without your partnership. Today, New York is  
24                  one of just a handful of states where

1 eligibility for childcare assistance is at  
2 the federal maximum of 85 percent of state  
3 median income, which is more than \$99,000 for  
4 a family of four, and copays are capped at 1  
5 percent of family income above the poverty  
6 level for all families, statewide.

7 This year's Executive Budget continues  
8 the state's commitment to affordability, with  
9 nearly \$1.8 billion this year for the  
10 Childcare Assistance Program. To illustrate  
11 just how far we've come, in fiscal year's  
12 2022 budget, a mere three years ago, the  
13 total funding provided for childcare  
14 assistance, from state and federal sources,  
15 was \$832 million. That is an increase of  
16 114.5 percent in just three years.

17 Governor Hochul also understands that  
18 without a strong workforce, we won't be able  
19 to meet the high demand for these services.  
20 Over the last several years, we have invested  
21 more than \$1.4 billion in childcare  
22 stabilization and workforce supports. This  
23 year's budget allocates \$280 million in  
24 underutilized pandemic funds to continue the

1 Workforce Retention Grant program and provide  
2 another round of bonus payments to staff in  
3 caregiving roles, so they will stay on the  
4 job, and funding to support child care  
5 programs' efforts to recruit even more staff.

6 Hardworking families don't just  
7 deserve access to childcare, we need to make  
8 sure that they have the peace of mind to know  
9 that when they drop their children off, it's  
10 at a high-quality program, no matter where  
11 they live or work. The proposed budget  
12 provides \$5 million to pilot Family Childcare  
13 Networks in regions around the state.

14 Home-based providers, which include family  
15 and group family providers, are the largest  
16 component of our provider pool in New York  
17 State and are run by mostly women of color.

18 The budget will also boost quality by  
19 creating an enhanced payment rate for  
20 providers that are accredited by a nationally  
21 recognized childcare organization,  
22 participate in QUALITYstarsNY, or have  
23 completed training and actively participate  
24 in the state's Non-Patient Epinephrine

1 Auto-Injector Initiative.

2 Protecting our precious children is  
3 also a major part of Governor Hochul's  
4 broader focus on the mental health crisis.  
5 The budget invests \$1.7 million in the seven  
6 regional infant and toddler resource centers  
7 across the state to expand the consultation  
8 services they offer to providers and  
9 families.

10 This year's Executive Budget also  
11 provides over \$100 million in funding for  
12 after-school programming, an overall increase  
13 of \$17.7 million from last year's Executive  
14 Budget. The budget also combines the  
15 previous Advantage and Empire State  
16 After-School programs into one single  
17 program, reducing administrative burdens for  
18 providers.

19 Of course, Governor Hochul's  
20 commitment to New York's children, youth and  
21 families, and vulnerable and marginalized  
22 populations runs so much deeper than  
23 childcare, and this year's budget makes the  
24 critical investments in the programs and

1 services that enable OCFS to continue  
2 supporting, uplifting, and promoting their  
3 development. This year's budget includes an  
4 increase from \$4.4 million to over  
5 \$10 million to raise the minimum wage of  
6 employees of state-funded contractors  
7 operating OCFS programs.

8 Governor Hochul has also included a  
9 COLA increase in every budget she has  
10 proposed since taking office. This year's  
11 1.5 percent COLA will once again benefit the  
12 families and voluntary agencies who care for  
13 New York's children in foster care, and  
14 adoptive parents.

15 As New York's first female governor,  
16 Governor Hochul knows and cares deeply about  
17 the matters most important to women. Not  
18 only has she been fighting for women  
19 balancing motherhood and careers by making  
20 historic investments in childcare, but the  
21 Governor has also made tackling New York's  
22 troublingly high rates of maternal mortality  
23 a hallmark of her administration. OCFS  
24 applauds Governor Hochul's focus on

1           addressing the maternal and infant health  
2           crisis in the Executive Budget, which  
3           includes \$2 million in new funding to reduce  
4           the risk of Sudden Unexpected Infant Deaths  
5           by providing something so many of us take for  
6           granted -- a safe crib.

7                        As the Governor noted in her State of  
8           the State, sleep-related deaths are the most  
9           common type of preventable child fatality  
10          that comes to the attention of state  
11          officials, resulting in more than 120 infant  
12          deaths per year. Portable cribs will be made  
13          available to underresourced families who need  
14          them most.

15                      Since taking office, Governor Hochul  
16          has also made keeping all New Yorkers safe a  
17          top priority, as she understands that  
18          ensuring there are effective interventions  
19          for youth who are at risk of engaging in  
20          criminal activity is critical to improving  
21          outcomes for our young people and  
22          strengthening local communities. This year's  
23          budget includes a \$3 million increase in  
24          funding, to nearly \$11.4 million, to enhance

1 the Supervision and Treatment Services for  
2 Juveniles Program, or STSJP.

3 Since its inception in 2011, STSJP has  
4 been a key component of New York's vision to  
5 transform the youth justice system by  
6 incentivizing local programs intended to  
7 divert at-risk youth from placement in  
8 detention or residential care and to safely  
9 maintain them in the community.

10 I would be remiss if I didn't take an  
11 opportunity to also commend Governor Hochul's  
12 Executive Budget investments designed to  
13 increase the prosecution of domestic violence  
14 cases among high-risk offenders, and for  
15 prioritizing solutions for the mental health  
16 crisis, particularly among our children and  
17 youth. OCFS is a proud partner with OPDV to  
18 help survivors recover and gain stability,  
19 and with OMH on important cross-system  
20 collaborations, to advance the Governor's  
21 goals.

22 Before I close, I would just like to  
23 express my gratitude once again for all  
24 you've done to bolster our mission to provide

1 truly equitable and impactful services  
2 grounded in the dignity of our children,  
3 families, and communities. They definitely  
4 deserve that. While we all have different  
5 roles to play, I'm confident that the results  
6 of our partnership, along with the Governor's  
7 unwavering support, is something we will all  
8 be proud of.

9 Under Governor Hochul's leadership,  
10 New York is a stronger, healthier, safer and  
11 more affordable New York than when she took  
12 office, and this year's Executive Budget  
13 continues to advance that progress.

14 Thank you for this opportunity to  
15 speak directly to you today. I welcome any  
16 questions or comments you may have.

17 Thank you.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very  
19 much, Commissioner. We appreciate it.

20 Commissioner Guinn.

21 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Good  
22 morning. Good morning, Chairpersons Krueger,  
23 Persaud, Davila and Hevesi, and other members  
24 of the Legislature.

1                   My name is Barbara Guinn. I am the  
2                   acting commissioner of the State Office of  
3                   Temporary and Disability Assistance. I  
4                   welcome the opportunity to speak with you  
5                   today about Governor Hochul's Fiscal Year  
6                   2025 Executive Budget and its support for  
7                   critical benefits and services our agency  
8                   provides on behalf of New Yorkers.

9                   OTDA is responsible, in conjunction  
10                  with local social services districts, for the  
11                  delivery of benefits that provide economic  
12                  assistance and support to eligible families  
13                  and individuals throughout the state. This  
14                  work includes helping very low-income  
15                  New Yorkers meet their essential needs, such  
16                  as housing, food, and other basic  
17                  necessities.

18                  Since I have the opportunity to  
19                  address you today, I'd like to start by  
20                  thanking the staff of our office for their  
21                  dedication and efforts to serve low-income  
22                  New Yorkers in an unprecedented manner over  
23                  the past few years. Our office played a  
24                  vital role in helping New Yorkers navigate

1 the economic uncertainty caused by the COVID  
2 pandemic, as well as its lingering financial  
3 impacts.

4 Through this work, OTDA delivered  
5 \$18 billion in pandemic-related emergency  
6 food, housing, and utility benefits in direct  
7 support of lower-income households in our  
8 state. These efforts enabled our agency to  
9 go above and beyond to meet the challenges of  
10 providing an unprecedented amount of  
11 assistance to many New Yorkers, some of whom  
12 were seeking assistance for the very first  
13 time.

14 Governor Hochul's Executive Budget  
15 maintains the essential funding for our  
16 agency's core programs. These include Public  
17 Assistance, which currently provides monthly  
18 income support for more than 600,000  
19 individuals; the Supplemental Nutrition  
20 Assistance Program, with more than  
21 2.8 million monthly recipients of this vital  
22 food assistance; the Home Energy Assistance  
23 Program, which issued more than 1.5 million  
24 benefits last winter, totaling more than

1           \$400 million; Child Support Services, which  
2           collected more than \$1.6 billion on behalf of  
3           nearly 615,000 families last year; and  
4           disability determinations, through which our  
5           staff completed over 187,000 medical  
6           eligibility reviews for residents seeking  
7           federal and state disability benefits.

8                     These programs are essential to  
9           helping millions of individuals in our state  
10          each day and to support stronger families and  
11          stronger communities.

12                    As cochair of the Child Poverty  
13          Reduction Advisory Council, I can share that  
14          in 2023 the council made great progress in  
15          our work to develop a plan to reduce child  
16          poverty by 50 percent within 10 years.  
17          Additionally, investments and reforms  
18          Governor Hochul and the Legislature have made  
19          since the Child Poverty Reduction Act was  
20          enacted are already making progress toward  
21          this goal.

22                    This progress includes expanding the  
23          Empire State Child Tax Credit to add children  
24          under 4 years of age, who were previously

1 excluded; investing over \$7 billion over four  
2 years in childcare to expand caregivers'  
3 ability to access affordable childcare;  
4 raising the minimum wage by about \$2 per  
5 hour, phased in over the next couple of  
6 years, and indexing this wage to inflation  
7 moving forward; and implementing strategic  
8 changes to help Public Assistance recipients  
9 with earnings retain more of their benefits,  
10 with the goal of encouraging work and  
11 economic mobility.

12 These initiatives alone have the  
13 ability to reduce child poverty in the state  
14 by 7 percent. The council will build on this  
15 progress and work toward reaching a consensus  
16 and issuing recommendations this year to meet  
17 our collective goal of significantly reducing  
18 child poverty in our state.

19 Governor Hochul's commitment to  
20 reducing poverty continues with the 2025  
21 Executive Budget proposal to invest  
22 \$50 million to support locally-driven  
23 anti-poverty initiatives in the cities of  
24 Rochester, Syracuse, and Buffalo. These

1 three communities have some of the highest  
2 child poverty rates in the nation.

3 The budget also makes other targeted  
4 investments to assist families in need, such  
5 as \$128 million for OTDA's Homeless Housing  
6 and Assistance Program. The program funds  
7 capital projects that create permanent  
8 supportive housing for families and  
9 individuals who have experienced  
10 homelessness. It also is the only state  
11 resource for the development of emergency  
12 shelters, which often play a critical role in  
13 communities' comprehensive homeless services  
14 systems.

15 Governor Hochul also has committed to  
16 join the federal Summer Electronic Benefit  
17 Transfer Program for Children, or Summer EBT.  
18 The program is aimed at reducing hunger and  
19 food insecurity among children who are unable  
20 to access free and reduced-price school meals  
21 during the summertime. Eligible families  
22 with school-age children will receive \$120  
23 per child during the summer months.

24 The Executive Budget invests

1 approximately \$13 million to support the  
2 administration of this program. Summer EBT  
3 is expected to provide over \$200 million in  
4 federal benefits to serve over 2 million  
5 children in New York State.

6 We are also excited that the Executive  
7 Budget continues efforts included in the  
8 fiscal year '24 budget and invests an  
9 additional \$23.7 million to provide  
10 year-round employment opportunities for  
11 at-risk youth. This includes the Summer  
12 Youth Employment Program, totaling  
13 \$50 million, and the Youth Employment  
14 Program, totaling \$38.8 million.

15 The year-round Youth Employment  
16 Program targets areas of the state plagued by  
17 high rates of gun violence as part of  
18 Governor Hochul's comprehensive effort to  
19 address this issue. Both programs are  
20 evidence-based and provide additional income  
21 for low-income households, critical career  
22 development services, as well as positive  
23 outcomes for program participants and their  
24 communities.

1                   As you know, we work closely with our  
2                   partners in the local departments of social  
3                   services, who administer many of the programs  
4                   we supervise. These agencies play a critical  
5                   role in connecting New York families with  
6                   public benefits. The 2025 Executive Budget  
7                   invests more than \$17 million to enable  
8                   social services districts to increase  
9                   qualified staff needed to provide  
10                  family-centered, trauma-informed services.  
11                  With the additional staff, they can offer  
12                  greater support to families as a unit and  
13                  help address any challenges to their  
14                  well-being and help them attain financial  
15                  stability.

16                  Reducing child poverty and helping our  
17                  fellow New Yorkers meet basic needs and  
18                  advance economically is at the core of our  
19                  agency's work. We look forward to our  
20                  continued partnership with the Legislature in  
21                  the coming weeks and months.

22                  Thank you for the opportunity to  
23                  testify, and I welcome your questions.  
24                  Thank you.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. Thank  
2 you, Commissioner Guinn.

3 I am going to allot myself -- and this  
4 sounds selfish -- 10 minutes to ask you some  
5 questions, and then I'll move on to some of  
6 my other colleagues.

7 And, Ms. Guinn, I thank you for your  
8 testimony. Most of my questions are going to  
9 be for Commissioner Suzanne Miles-Gustave.

10 So good morning. How are you?

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: {Inaudible.}

12 Will you introduce your additional members,  
13 and I will do the same. Sorry.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Go ahead. No,  
15 feel free. I'll get my list.

16 Go ahead, Senate.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. I  
18 just wanted to interrupt by introducing  
19 Senator Scarcella-Spanton, Senator May, and  
20 Senator Oberacker.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

22 I would also like to introduce  
23 Assemblymembers Buttenschon, Jackson, Jones,  
24 and Lee are all here. Thank you all for

1 coming.

2 Jo Anne Simon as well? Okay. She's  
3 hiding from me. Okay.

4 (Laughter.)

5 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Oh. And  
6 Mr. Anderson over there.

7 (Laughter.)

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. Welcome to  
9 all of you. All right, Commissioner, thank  
10 you. And thanks for resetting the clock.

11 So I first want to start by thanking  
12 you and OCFS for all of the great work that  
13 you do. And particularly on a personal  
14 level, you've been so gracious in teaching me  
15 a lot about what you do and what your agency  
16 does. And it really means a lot, and I'm  
17 grateful.

18 And thank you to OTDA and all of their  
19 staff as well.

20 So I'm going to spend the first  
21 portion of my questions talking to you about  
22 workforces, just various workforces. But I  
23 think we're in a little bit of a hole from  
24 the prior administration. I also want to say

1           there's some really good stuff in this  
2           budget, and I'm grateful to Governor Hochul  
3           for her leadership on a variety of issues.  
4           We have seen a change, a sea change over the  
5           last three years with the new administration.

6                         However, because of the prior  
7           administration and their mindless austerity,  
8           every one of our workforces, every one of  
9           them is underresourced, all of them. And  
10          they're all in dire circumstances. And I'll  
11          go through them one by one, but the question  
12          will be essentially the same: How do we dig  
13          out of these holes so our workforces can get  
14          paid enough that we're not seeing the kind of  
15          dropoff in turnover rates in these  
16          workforces, which is bad for the services but  
17          terrible for the kids they're trying to  
18          service.

19                         So I guess the -- let me start with  
20          the domestic violence workforce, who has not  
21          received a cost-of-living adjustment since  
22          2008. How do we help them to get paid  
23          properly? We don't see money in the  
24          Executive Budget. So I'm trying to get a

1 sense of how we address this problem, because  
2 it's a longer-term problem.

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
4 Thank you for that question, Assemblyman  
5 Hevesi.

6 And we do appreciate your partnership  
7 as well. My staff, they're the ones who  
8 really accommodate you most often with the  
9 questions, so I thank them. But your  
10 partnership is appreciated.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

12 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: I  
13 would agree. I know that we are all trying  
14 to figure out how to support our workforce.  
15 There are certain sectors that we've been  
16 able to invest in more than others. But to  
17 your specific question about the DV  
18 community, although they are not statutorily  
19 included in the COLA -- and I defer to the  
20 Legislature on any changes there -- they --  
21 it is not as if their rates have not changed.  
22 They have not been stagnant.

23 So their rate is subject to a growth  
24 factor, and so there have been growth factors

1 implemented in their rate for the past  
2 several years. We can get you numbers of  
3 that growth. But we hear from our DV  
4 providers all the time. Much like our  
5 foster-care providers, the MSAR rate includes  
6 a growth factor and trend factors that we can  
7 increase that COLA.

8 So for DV providers, although they're  
9 not -- they don't have the COLA in the  
10 statute, their rate does increase with  
11 specific growth factors. And we can get you  
12 specifics on that.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I appreciate that  
14 answer. And so we have introduced a bill in  
15 the Assembly to catch all of the parts of our  
16 human services workforce that are not  
17 eligible for the COLA. And that is language  
18 that we would like inserted into the budget.  
19 I think we'll be pushing for that in our  
20 houses as well.

21 Is that something -- because you see  
22 that there's a gap, even when we do COLAs,  
23 right? Every time my colleagues and I do  
24 COLAs we think we're doing a great thing; we

1           come back five minutes later and you have  
2           people yelling at us: What about us? We've  
3           been left out.

4                        So we have a bill to address that. So  
5           I would ask you to take a look at that. I  
6           know everything here costs money, but this is  
7           what happens when you spend over a decade of  
8           keeping all of these programs and their  
9           workforces at zero. So that's one.

10                      I'm going to talk about next -- I'm  
11           going to move on -- same topic, childcare.  
12           Great investments by the Governor. By the  
13           way, the Governor's focus on childcare has  
14           been amazing. And that, complimented with  
15           Speaker Heastie and his leadership and Senate  
16           Majority Leader Cousins have caused us and  
17           led us to invest billions of dollars.

18                      However, when you're talking about the  
19           childcare workforce now -- and we have given  
20           them several rounds, using stimulus funds,  
21           and some not -- of stabilization grants and  
22           even workforce enhancement. But it's just  
23           not doing what we need to do. So we've  
24           invested, what is it, 7 billion, or close to

1           that. But if we don't pay the workforce,  
2           we're going to continue to see a lack of  
3           childcare in New York State. Is there  
4           something that we can do to address that  
5           problem? Because even the bonuses and the  
6           workforce retention grants that we did last  
7           year, they didn't have the uptake that we  
8           thought they would.

9                         ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So  
10           I would agree with you that the Governor's  
11           proposals have been historic. So under her  
12           leadership, right, we've committed to  
13           \$7 billion over four years to support  
14           childcare. This year alone, there's almost  
15           1.8 billion in the budget for childcare  
16           assistance.

17                        But I understand your point. We have  
18           invested, although be it with pandemic funds,  
19           over \$1.4 billion dollars in Workforce  
20           Stabilization Grants. A majority of those  
21           grants were focused on worker retention, so  
22           these dollars had to go directly to the  
23           workers to retain them.

24                        But I think we need several

1 strategies, right, to retain our workforce.  
2 I really look forward to our Childcare  
3 Availability Task Force. As you know, the  
4 Governor reconvened the task force, gave them  
5 several charges. One of those were  
6 contemplating the workforce issues. Another  
7 one was creating a roadmap to universal  
8 childcare.

9 I think all of those need to be  
10 contemplated, along with the Legislature, in  
11 the context of the budget. I think we all  
12 have that North Star goal of paying our  
13 workers more, potentially doing more for  
14 families with respect to childcare. But it  
15 needs to be measured, and in the context of  
16 the budget.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Understood. And  
18 I appreciate that. By the way, I'll ask you  
19 a question later on, if I can, about the  
20 timing of the report from the Childcare  
21 Availability Task Force.

22 But again, another area -- workforce  
23 yet again -- foster care and preventative  
24 services workforce. Again, we appreciate the

1           1.5 percent COLA for some parts of that  
2           workforce. There are others that we leave  
3           out.

4                       And then particularly for the  
5           preventative services workers, does the  
6           administration -- does your administration  
7           look on the 65/35 reimbursement to  
8           counties -- which I believe should be  
9           75/25 -- as a way of paying that workforce?

10                    ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So  
11           the 62/38 that's in the budget -- again,  
12           longstanding New York commitment to  
13           preventive services. That does not include  
14           additional funding. So that is the funding  
15           that we've dedicated for a decade, almost, if  
16           not more, to making sure that we focus on  
17           preventive services for families who need  
18           support as a way to prevent their entrance  
19           into the child welfare system.

20                    I do think that, as you mentioned, we  
21           need to look at how to retain workers in all  
22           of our industries, including preventive and  
23           protective and our child welfare workers in  
24           the local districts.

1                   But that 62/38 is open-ended, right,  
2                   so counties can hire as many CPS workers as  
3                   they need. Granted, there's a local share,  
4                   similar with preventive workers. But I agree  
5                   with you that we're trying to do many things  
6                   in partnership with our local districts to  
7                   retain local district staff, both CPS workers  
8                   and preventive workers. Working with our  
9                   civil service partners, you may have heard of  
10                  the HELP program. I know commissioner Hogues  
11                  talked about it yesterday. We've benefited  
12                  from that HELP program, counties have  
13                  benefited from that HELP program, getting  
14                  more people into the industry. It's  
15                  difficult to retain with the current salary,  
16                  to your original question. But we need to  
17                  recruit the next generation to make  
18                  government service a positive and for it to  
19                  be a touted career for those coming out of  
20                  college.

21                  So hopefully with that HELP program  
22                  we're recruiting more folks into our  
23                  industries. And retention, we're working on  
24                  programs within our local districts to retain

1 employees, much like retaining employees in  
2 my industry -- in my agency.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Understood. So I  
4 appreciate that answer. And I just want to  
5 tell you on a personal level I think the  
6 65/35 reimbursement to counties is the best  
7 public policy that I've seen in government.  
8 And the reason why you increase that number  
9 to 75 is to incentivize counties to get into  
10 the business of preventing problems for kids.

11 So we're going to keep coming back at  
12 that until we do it. And I just do want to  
13 say on the record while we are at 62/38  
14 reimbursement, that violates the law. The  
15 law is a 65/35 reimbursement. So I just want  
16 to put that on the record.

17 And I know that that was something the  
18 last administration enjoyed doing, going  
19 below the law. But this administration has a  
20 different tack. So I'd hope we will be able  
21 to change that.

22 And then the last workforce I want to  
23 touch on is the after-school workforce -- and  
24 there's many more, but the after-school

1 workforce. First, thank you for your --

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: I  
3 didn't hear that.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: The after-school  
5 workforce.

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
7 After school, thank you.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Yeah, absolutely.  
9 So thank you for the proposal in the  
10 Executive Budget that adds \$100 million.  
11 Thank you so much for combining the two,  
12 Advantage After School and Excelsior. That  
13 has been a stain on New York State, the fact  
14 that you had some kids at this level, some  
15 kids who are disadvantaged at a lower level.  
16 It was disgraceful of the last  
17 administration. So thank you for that.

18 But the after-school programs believe  
19 that they need to get their per-student rate  
20 up to \$4300 per child to pay the workforce.  
21 Is that something that the Executive would be  
22 open to?

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So  
24 we were -- we are excited that the Executive

1 Budget added 17 million additional dollars to  
2 our existing program.

3 And yes, the intention was always to  
4 combine them, to reduce the administrative  
5 burden on everyone -- on providers, on OCFS,  
6 because we do facilitate those contracts  
7 directly. So we look forward to issuing our  
8 new RFP, which is not quite out yet.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: That is a serious  
10 buzzer. Okay.

11 (Laughter.)

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very  
13 much, Commissioner. Appreciate it.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And it even  
15 applies to you, even though you're running  
16 the hearing.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: No, I'm not so  
18 sure about that.

19 (Laughter.)

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So, Senate.  
21 Okay, our first questioner will be  
22 Chair Brisport.

23 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you,  
24 Madam Chair. And thank you to our

1           commissioners for your time and your  
2           willingness to answer our questions. Mine  
3           are almost entirely for Commissioner  
4           Miles-Gustave at OCFS, and predominantly on  
5           childcare.

6                        I think I want to start by responding  
7           to a section of your testimony saying  
8           New York is now a national leader in  
9           increasing affordability and access to  
10          childcare.

11                      I just want to add on, you know, I do  
12          want to say that we are starting to recover  
13          from a pandemic that did hit our childcare  
14          sector -- when it was already in a state of  
15          crisis -- with multiple closures across the  
16          state. And although we've taken some steps  
17          to stem the bleeding, the underlying crisis  
18          has not been addressed. And I'd like to talk  
19          about how this Executive proposal for the  
20          budget compares to the enormous scale of that  
21          crisis.

22                      In particular, the shortage of  
23          childcare providers that New Yorkers were  
24          facing before the pandemic has not been

1           addressed.  Childcare slots are up less than  
2           3 percent from the lowest years of the  
3           pandemic, according to data from the OCFS  
4           website.  We know that one root cause of the  
5           problem is the poverty wages for childcare  
6           workers, with childcare educators earning  
7           less than 96 percent of occupations in  
8           New York State.  And for the past few years,  
9           the State Budget has included some workforce  
10          grants to temporarily boost wages, but no  
11          significant investment in raising childcare  
12          wages long term.

13                        Why does the Governor's budget  
14          proposal not include measures to permanently  
15          increase wages rather than just issuing  
16          one-time bonuses?

17                        ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  So  
18          thank you, Senator Brisport, for that  
19          question.

20                        I think it's hard to argue that this  
21          administration and this agency has done  
22          incredible things for childcare.  When we do  
23          say New York is a national leader, it's  
24          because we are one of the few states that



1 with our partners we can collectively look  
2 towards a couple of things: Really managing  
3 the workforce crisis and creating that  
4 framework for universal childcare with our  
5 partners in the Childcare Availability Task  
6 Force.

7 So we do look forward to their report  
8 and recommendations. I think the statutory  
9 charge for that task force was to do just  
10 that, to set about creating a framework for a  
11 phased-in rollout of universal childcare.  
12 Because that is, again, the North Star goal  
13 for all of us. I think we need to take  
14 measured steps, and we've done a lot in the  
15 past two years. And look forward to, like,  
16 the negotiations between the Legislature and  
17 the Executive on this budget.

18 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

19 And I want to respond to the market  
20 rate. I appreciate we've increased the  
21 percentage of the market rate survey. I was  
22 reading through a study from ILR Buffalo  
23 reports that found that New York State  
24 subsidy rates still fall far short of

1 covering the actual costs of childcare in  
2 New York State. And I believe we both spoke  
3 about this at last year's hearing and both  
4 agreed that New York's childcare model does  
5 not compensate for the true cost of care, and  
6 that it doesn't make sense.

7 Do you know why this year's budget  
8 still doesn't compensate providers for the  
9 true cost of care?

10 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So  
11 I know that -- to your point last year, we  
12 were reeling from disappointment when the  
13 federal government did not pass the Build  
14 Back Better bill, which would have allowed us  
15 in all states to move toward cost of care.

16 There are some federal rules out right  
17 now that we in the childcare industry are  
18 waiting for the Office of Child Care to  
19 finalize. I think the movement from  
20 all avenues -- from local, state, to federal  
21 partners -- are moving towards potentially  
22 universal childcare, which was in the federal  
23 bill that didn't pass, and the true cost of  
24 care, which we have not transitioned to.

1                   So I know in our market rate survey we  
2                   did include a few questions that tried to get  
3                   at that cost of care, but we are not there  
4                   yet. So we are still under a market survey  
5                   framework. The survey results are back.  
6                   We're analyzing those. That data, the actual  
7                   new survey -- the market rate should be out  
8                   sometime in October, I believe.

9                   But I know that is the goal, because  
10                  we want to fully understand how to support  
11                  the industry.

12                  SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

13                  Another piece of this report did a  
14                  poll that said the overwhelming majority --  
15                  79 percent -- of respondents would support  
16                  public funding for universal childcare. You  
17                  know, a goal that is shared, making it a free  
18                  public service akin to K-12 public education.

19                  This state could certainly choose to  
20                  raise the necessary revenue to do so in this  
21                  year's budget by ending tax breaks on  
22                  millionaires and billionaires. In fact,  
23                  Washington, D.C., raised taxes on the rich in  
24                  order to fund additional childcare

1           incentives.

2                     If the Governor and Legislature agreed  
3           to fully fund universal childcare by taxing  
4           the rich, how would that impact the  
5           efficiency and mission of your agency?

6                     ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: I  
7           definitely defer to the Legislature and the  
8           Executive on any negotiations. And if that  
9           should be passed and a bill signed by the  
10          Governor, OCFS would certainly implement it.

11                    But I think with any industry, if  
12          there is more investment, we can do more. I  
13          think we all can agree that all of our social  
14          services industries would like more funding.  
15          If we had more funding, we can do more for  
16          sure.

17                    SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

18                    Also in the report it showed that  
19          42 percent of families with children in  
20          New York, an adult has stayed out of the  
21          workforce because of childcare needs. For  
22          most of those families, childcare was not  
23          affordable. And nearly one in four parents  
24          kept out of the workforce reported that

1           childcare was simply no longer available or  
2           accessible in their area.

3                       We know from the Cornell report that  
4           many of the poorest areas of New York have  
5           even fewer childcare slots now than they did  
6           in 2021, at the height of the pandemic. Has  
7           OCFS conducted any economic analysis of what  
8           the economic cost to New York has been from  
9           the lack of availability of childcare?

10                      ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So  
11           I wouldn't say we've done an analysis of that  
12           specifically. But I do know that we've  
13           focused our efforts on providing families  
14           with resources and supports to do just that,  
15           to find available childcare.

16                      We have childcare resource and  
17           referral agencies throughout the state that  
18           do just that. They work with providers, they  
19           work with parents, and they help to -- they  
20           help parents find available childcare.

21                      I know that we've also invested in  
22           several supply efforts. So we had our  
23           Childcare Desert Grant last year to build  
24           supply, and it in fact did contribute to the

1 supply in New York State. And in this year's  
2 proposed budget, we are proposing that  
3 \$5 million for the family childcare networks  
4 to, again, support these home-based and  
5 group-family-based childcare providers so  
6 that they can become a sustainable model.  
7 They're already the largest pool of providers  
8 we have in New York State, but they need  
9 supports. These are entrepreneurs and small  
10 business folks.

11 So those are the types of supports  
12 that we would like to give the industry to  
13 help them grow.

14 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

15 And one of the ways in which parents  
16 can become burdened in accessing childcare is  
17 the way we so closely tie work hours to  
18 childcare. And this Legislature has now  
19 passed twice a bill to decouple work hours  
20 from the childcare hours eligibility.

21 And right before Christmas  
22 Governor Hochul vetoed the bill that would  
23 decouple childcare assistance from a parent's  
24 exact work requirements, suggesting she

1 intended to revisit this issue in the  
2 Governor's budget proposal. However, I  
3 didn't see anything in her proposal about  
4 this.

5 Did Governor Hochul discuss the issue  
6 of decoupling with you at all?

7 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So  
8 the decoupling bill was not in this year's  
9 budget. I think, as the veto message  
10 indicated, the Executive is open to  
11 discussing that in the context of the budget.

12 That specific bill had about a  
13 \$140 million price tag, and that investment  
14 was not contemplated in the financial plan  
15 for last year.

16 And we do recognize that families need  
17 flexibility. I think that's why in our  
18 series of strategies over the past several  
19 years we've tried to make childcare more  
20 accessible and affordable for all families.

21 I think that the heart of the  
22 decoupling bill speaks to the burden that  
23 applying for childcare, receiving childcare  
24 puts on a family. And because of that, we've

1 done a lot to make the process smoother. As  
2 the Governor mentioned in last year's budget,  
3 our systems are antiquated, right, but we've  
4 been moving towards fixing that.

5 So this year OCFS issued the first  
6 prescreener on our website to attract  
7 families to the OCFS website to see if they  
8 are eligible for childcare. It is just a  
9 prescreener, so then they can get referred to  
10 their own districts. And we are working on  
11 an online application that we are in testing  
12 right now.

13 So, you know, there are providers out  
14 there that provide nontraditional care. So I  
15 think making it easier for families might --  
16 might definitely help.

17 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. Your  
19 time is up.

20 Assembly.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: (Inaudible.)

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: (Inaudible.)

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

24 Good morning.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Chair, forgive me  
2 for interrupting. If I could just ask the  
3 commissioners to lean a little forward or  
4 speak closer into mics. Some of the members  
5 are having trouble hearing. Thank you very  
6 much.

7 Sorry for the interruption.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: I'm sorry, so I  
9 have two questions for Barbara Guinn.

10 The first one is regarding the overall  
11 public assistance caseload. It's projected  
12 to increase by 19,000 recipients, the biggest  
13 increase of which is in the safety-net single  
14 population. What factors are contributing to  
15 this increase?

16 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So thank  
17 you, Member. Certainly there is a projection  
18 for the public assistance caseload to  
19 increase. We have, after years of decline or  
20 even steady public assistance caseloads, we  
21 have seen significant rises over the past  
22 year to two years.

23 The increase is largely based on, you  
24 know, an economic model that looks at and

1 helps use economic factors to project the  
2 number of individuals who are likely to need  
3 public assistance in the coming year. So it  
4 obviously is tied to, you know, efforts to  
5 get people to work, which is obviously our  
6 objective, is to provide the assistance while  
7 folks need it and then to provide support so  
8 that they can go to work.

9 And I would just mention that, you  
10 know, efforts like the investments in  
11 childcare certainly will help families move  
12 in that direction.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Thank you.

14 I'm going to address the elephant in  
15 the room, and that is can you provide us an  
16 update on how much of last year's \$1 billion  
17 has been distributed to New York City for  
18 shelter costs for asylum seekers? Only  
19 because my colleagues have been asking these  
20 questions and we have not gotten any clear  
21 answers.

22 This year there's a proposal to give  
23 \$2.4 billion. So we would like to know how  
24 much of that \$1 billion that we were able to

1 allocate last year was spent.

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Sure. So  
3 first I just want to say that the investments  
4 that were included last year, as well as the  
5 significant investments included by  
6 Governor Hochul this year, are essential to  
7 helping New York City address this  
8 humanitarian crisis. It is a crisis, and  
9 it's one that Governor Hochul understands  
10 that the state needs to help the city to  
11 address.

12 With respect to the reimbursement  
13 that's been provided to New York City to date  
14 from the 1 billion, to date the city has  
15 submitted requests for reimbursement that  
16 total -- in terms of the state-share portion  
17 would be about 325 million. That amount is  
18 only through September of 2023, and we do not  
19 think that it reflects all costs. So there  
20 is definitely considerable cost yet to be  
21 claimed, and the city is still expecting to  
22 fully draw down the billion dollars that was  
23 included in the current budget.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: As you are

1           aware, we're seeing this played out in the  
2           news every day, all day. And in my mind I  
3           thought the billion dollars was already  
4           spent. But if you say 300 million out of the  
5           billion -- what was the number --

6                     ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: About  
7           325 million has been claimed by the city to  
8           date with respect to the state share for  
9           their cost.

10                    But that does not reflect all the  
11           costs incurred by the still. Additional  
12           claims are expected. And the city is  
13           indicating that they expect to draw down the  
14           billion dollars.

15                    ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Thank you.

16                    My next question is going to be to  
17           Suzanne Miles-Gustave. We have also seen --  
18           the entire world has seen it played out on  
19           the news. Providers, especially providers  
20           that are probably familiar to families and  
21           are not aware but are licensed -- how much of  
22           this money or this increase in childcare is  
23           going to be used for oversight to make sure  
24           that these incidences do not happen again?

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ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

Thank you, Assemblywoman Davila. I know we spoke previously about the tragic Bronx fatality, I think you're referring to, which was abhorrent, should never have happened.

But I think it's just an indication that we all have to be a lot more vigilant when it comes to the opioid epidemic and the gross negligence of some providers. And unfortunately, we've had to look at our training, look at our outreach. It is a shame that we have to train providers on fentanyl exposure, but that is the world unfortunately that we're living in.

So we are educating our providers. We are educating our licensers and our registrants to understand this new world.

As a result of that tragic, tragic fatality, we did a lot in partnership with Department of Health and OASAS to create information to go out to providers, to give them access to that info. We are working on a training video for our providers with respect to fentanyl. And we have increased

1           our inspection requirements for New York  
2           City.

3                         We currently have a contract with  
4           DOHMH. They do our inspections for our  
5           providers. And we are in talks with them to  
6           increase the inspection rates for those  
7           providers in New York City. So all that  
8           is -- is being implemented currently as we  
9           speak.

10                        But I agree with you that we are in a  
11           different time right now. That specific  
12           instance was a criminal activity. It's, you  
13           know, sometimes hard to compensate for  
14           criminal activities. But we are -- we've  
15           taken that incident seriously, and we've  
16           stepped up our training, education and  
17           inspections.

18                        ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: And I just want  
19           to close with this. I do believe that most  
20           people don't understand this, but growing up  
21           in Bushwick, I see it at the corner of my  
22           house right now -- even marijuana, which is  
23           legal, is being completely laced with  
24           fentanyl. People don't understand this. So

1 I think that there needs to be a conversation  
2 regarding that information as well.

3 And providers should be held  
4 completely liable. Not just their licenses  
5 taken away -- completely liable. Marijuana's  
6 part of the problem as well. And I  
7 understand, we made it legal. But legal is  
8 legal. We're buying from farms that we know  
9 where it's coming from. But now there has  
10 been a different market that has been  
11 created. And, you know, we just don't -- we  
12 need to educate our providers that that's  
13 also an issue.

14 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
15 And just to be clear, I would agree with you.  
16 Our health and safety requirements have  
17 always included identifying instances where  
18 health and safety would be a critical  
19 impediment to a childcare service and the  
20 children in that area.

21 So although, right, marijuana is  
22 legal, it is not legal for underage youth.  
23 So that would not be a new piece of  
24 information that our regulators would need.

1 We've always trained them to make sure that  
2 they can spot any health and safety risks in  
3 a childcare service area.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Thank you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. I  
6 think we don't have any more introductions  
7 right now, but before I start with Senator --  
8 oh, Senator Weik is here. And Senator O'Mara  
9 is here. He also was not here before.

10 I just want to answer also  
11 Assemblymember Davila's question. If they  
12 are legal, licensed stores, I would be very  
13 interested in hearing that anyone thought  
14 they were spiking product. The problem is in  
15 your community, almost all those stores are  
16 illegal. They are not licensed. They are in  
17 violation of endless laws. And hopefully in  
18 the budget we are going to be trying to be  
19 much stricter about being able to padlock  
20 them.

21 But you are not wrong. One of the  
22 reasons that drugs are so dangerous, and why  
23 we wanted to legalize, was to make sure that  
24 the products being sold to everyone were

1 safe, as opposed to what's going on in the  
2 illegal market. So thank you.

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: We are seeing a  
4 lot of marijuana being laced with other  
5 drugs.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: But it's not from  
7 the legal stores.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: No, not at all.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: No, I know. But  
10 I'm not saying you're wrong, I think it's  
11 just a reinforcement of why using the legal  
12 product is so important.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Absolutely.  
14 Absolutely.

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Sorry. Didn't  
16 mean to do an editorial discussion on your  
17 time.

18 With that, Senator Roxanne Persaud,  
19 chair.

20 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you. Thank  
21 you.

22 Good morning, Commissioners. It's  
23 always great to see you. And I appreciate  
24 everything that you and your staff do when we

1 reach out.

2 I'm going to start by addressing  
3 Commissioner Guinn. You know, we had the  
4 conversation about the backlog in New York  
5 City. And, you know, it was a positive  
6 conversation. And we thought everything was  
7 going in the right direction. And then the  
8 reports came out telling us otherwise.

9 It seems to be that they're clearing  
10 up their backlog, but more people are being  
11 denied. Can you tell us, why is that  
12 happening? And what is your agency going to  
13 do about that to ensure that the city is not  
14 making up rules to clean up their backlog by  
15 denying applicants?

16 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN:  
17 Absolutely, Senator. You know, I assure you  
18 that the timely and appropriate processing of  
19 public benefit applications is essential to  
20 the work that our agency does. And so we  
21 understand the need for oversight to ensure  
22 that each social services district, including  
23 New York City, is appropriately processing  
24 applications and doing so timely.

1           I believe you may be referring to the  
2           mayor's report that was issued yesterday, and  
3           then also a news story also about denials.  
4           With respect to case processing, the city has  
5           made significant progress in terms of  
6           reducing the backlog. The backlog was quite  
7           high during the summer months, and the city  
8           has been taking steps to add workers to  
9           address that backlog. The backlogs are down  
10          significantly from where they were in the  
11          summer, which is what's reflected in the most  
12          recent mayor's report.

13                 With respect to denials, we have  
14          looked into that, and we are seeing an  
15          increase in denials across the state. It  
16          isn't New York City alone. In looking at  
17          some of the factors that could be leading to  
18          those denials, I'll say, you know, a few  
19          things.

20                 One, whenever you have a situation  
21          where cases are not being processed quickly,  
22          you're going to have individuals who are  
23          going to submit another application. Right?  
24          Because they're concerned, they haven't heard

1 back, and so they submit another application.  
2 That's one factor that's playing out  
3 throughout the state that we're hearing from  
4 many offices throughout the state.

5 Additionally, you know, when you  
6 improve access to benefits where people can  
7 apply more easily, that also sometimes means  
8 more people are applying who may not at the  
9 end of the day be eligible.

10 Again, we have seen an increase in  
11 denials. I think we are going to do a deeper  
12 dive to look more specifically at the denial  
13 population. Each month we have staff out  
14 that are providing oversight and doing case  
15 reviews.

16 The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance  
17 Program is an area that we are very much  
18 focused on in terms of making sure those  
19 benefits are getting out timely. And we will  
20 certainly add a specific review in the coming  
21 months to specifically look at denials to  
22 make sure that those cases are being denied  
23 appropriately.

24 I am told that management within

1 New York City has taken a look at this matter  
2 because they too want to make sure that  
3 workers are processing cases appropriately,  
4 and that by and large they are finding the  
5 denials to be appropriate. That doesn't mean  
6 they aren't finding some issues. And based  
7 on any issues that they're uncovering, they  
8 are certainly providing additional training  
9 to their staff. Because anyone who's  
10 eligible should certainly be given the  
11 benefits they deserve.

12 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you for that.

13 Can you also give us -- you don't have  
14 to give it to us now -- of the number, from  
15 the backlog, what percentage do you think  
16 were duplicates?

17 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: I'm sorry,  
18 what percentage --

19 SENATOR PERSAUD: What percentage of  
20 applications were duplicates? Because if  
21 they're saying that it could be the denials  
22 are based on duplicate applications, what  
23 percentage of those applications in that  
24 backlog were duplicates?

1                   ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right.

2                   And I do not have the percentage of  
3                   duplicates, but we can certainly get that  
4                   information to you. As when we meet with  
5                   social services commissioners, both  
6                   individually and as a group, we are certainly  
7                   focused on timeliness and accurate delivery  
8                   of benefits. And that is what they are  
9                   reporting.

10                   And so we've been trying to do work to  
11                   help them better identify those duplicates at  
12                   one time so that they are able to more  
13                   quickly take action on any applications that  
14                   have come from that household.

15                   SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

16                   We had a legislation last year to  
17                   create a fiscal cliff task force which was  
18                   ultimately vetoed by the Governor. Tell us,  
19                   what is it that we need to do to find out  
20                   what is necessary for folks to survive in the  
21                   State of New York?

22                   The fiscal cliff task force is  
23                   essentially to understand the needs and what  
24                   is it that we need to do so that people get

1 to the point where they're weaned off of  
2 government assistance. If there's no task  
3 force that's informing us as to what needs to  
4 be done, what else can we do to get to the  
5 right answer?

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right.  
7 So, Senator, we're very happy to work with  
8 you on this topic regardless of a task force,  
9 to the extent that we're able.

10 Looking at the extent to which people  
11 are able to earn their way off benefits  
12 without facing a steep cliff is certainly a  
13 worthwhile goal, and it is something that the  
14 state has taken recent actions to try to  
15 address.

16 You know, pleased that in  
17 Governor Hochul's first budget we were able  
18 to get some changes through that are  
19 essential and that we have wanted to get  
20 through for many, many years. And what those  
21 changes did is it eliminated some of the  
22 artificial cliffs for public assistance. So  
23 just because you hit poverty or just because  
24 you hit a certain threshold doesn't mean your

1           benefits should go to zero. So those cliffs  
2           were eliminated.

3                       We also increased the amount that any  
4           recipient of public assistance can earn and  
5           save. So for public assistance, we've  
6           definitely made some steps in the right  
7           direction.

8                       And then also last year, with the  
9           support of the Legislature -- and I know a  
10          particular interest of yours -- we were able  
11          to also exclude earnings for public  
12          assistance once a person enters a new job  
13          100 percent for six months, and then also  
14          very importantly to not count stipends or  
15          other income derived when someone's in a  
16          training program. So that change was really  
17          critical to allow people to participate in  
18          necessary skill development without having to  
19          make a choice between increasing their skills  
20          so that they can attain economic mobility or  
21          meeting their basic needs. It allows them to  
22          do both.

23                      I would say that the investments in  
24          childcare and the increases in eligibility

1 for childcare are also another very important  
2 step that the state has made to allow people  
3 to earn more and make work pay so that they  
4 are not worse off by working due to the  
5 increased cost associated with childcare.

6 Lastly, I would just say that there  
7 are some federal programs that we are  
8 advocating to increase earnings disregards  
9 for, to align with what we've done in  
10 New York.

11 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay, thank you.

12 Can you tell me about the year-round  
13 employment program? What areas are we  
14 covering, and how many youth are in that  
15 program?

16 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So the  
17 year-round employment program is targeted to  
18 at-risk youth in the areas that are  
19 identified by DCJS as part of the GIVE  
20 program. So really targeted to areas with  
21 high rates of gun violence.

22 SENATOR PERSAUD: Do you have an  
23 updated list of those areas?

24 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: We do.

1                   SENATOR PERSAUD: Can you send it to  
2                   us?

3                   ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Absolutely  
4                   we can send you that list.

5                   SENATOR PERSAUD: And I just need to  
6                   know what's the -- how many youth are in that  
7                   program. Because, you know, we've seen a  
8                   spike in gun violence, but we're not seeing  
9                   resources going to the areas where there is a  
10                  spike in gun violence. So I'd just love to  
11                  see what --

12                  ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yeah,  
13                  happy to send you the list of each  
14                  participating area. They all started the  
15                  programs up in January of this year, so we're  
16                  pleased about that. And the expectation is  
17                  that the program will allow about  
18                  2,500 youth, at-risk youth to be served  
19                  year-round with this employment and mentoring  
20                  opportunity.

21                  SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. So what would  
22                  it take for us to have a year-round fully  
23                  funded Youth Employment Program? You know,  
24                  not just we're funding Summer Youth

1           Employment, but the amount of funding that  
2           we're giving -- every year you hear us saying  
3           the same thing -- it's not enough. We just  
4           increase the funding to cover the increase in  
5           minimum wage, but we're not capturing as many  
6           youth as we should be capturing in summer  
7           youth. What would it take for us to do that?

8                         Because we continue to ask for  
9           money -- and I promised my folks that I would  
10          not say the amount of money I'm asking for,  
11          but we need to invest in our youth program to  
12          ensure that the year-round employment program  
13          is fully funded. So thank you for that.

14                        ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yeah,  
15          thank you, Senator. We're big proponents of  
16          the Summer Youth Employment Program. But  
17          right, it is limited to the summer months.  
18          And if there is, you know, a way that the  
19          budget can come up with additional funds, we  
20          would be very pleased to administer it.

21                        SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

22                        ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Thank you.

23                        CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

24                        Assembly.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,  
2 Senator.

3 We have been joined in the Assembly by  
4 Assemblymembers Eachus, Alvarez, Lunsford,  
5 Simone and Clark. Thank you all for coming.

6 And now to Assemblymember Ed Ra,  
7 ranker of the Ways and Means Committee.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you very much.

9 Good morning, Commissioners.

10 Commissioner Guinn, if I could just  
11 follow up quickly on the answer about the  
12 migrant funding. So you said \$325 million  
13 through September. Is that just like housing  
14 contracts? Because I know obviously in the  
15 financial plan we've got up to about  
16 1.9 billion. But that's, you know, stuff  
17 that's gotten through the Department of  
18 Health and other agencies.

19 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right.  
20 Right. The 325 million that's been  
21 reimbursed to date is by and large for  
22 temporary emergency housing-related costs.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. Thank you very  
24 much.

1                   And I did ask Homeland Security last  
2                   week regarding the plan that was approved by  
3                   your agency and the Department of Budget and  
4                   whether any aspects of that could be made  
5                   public regarding, you know, what the city's  
6                   overall plan was. So I would just reiterate  
7                   that concern to you as well.

8                   The other thing I wanted to ask about  
9                   was fiscal cliffs. We had a, you know, a  
10                  task force, I guess you would call it, bill  
11                  that was passed last year that was vetoed by  
12                  the Governor. I'm not aware of any  
13                  initiative within the budget. I think it's  
14                  definitely an issue.

15                 I believe the bill passed unanimously,  
16                 so it had very bipartisan support to look at  
17                 this issue. Because, you know, too often  
18                 individuals are faced with difficult  
19                 decisions with advancing themselves but then  
20                 have a concern that they may lose out on  
21                 benefits as a result.

22                 So is the department doing anything  
23                 with regard to what that task force would  
24                 have done in looking at this issue so we can

1 try to come up with some fixes to assist  
2 those individuals?

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yeah,  
4 absolutely. It's something that we are  
5 focused on. And we'd be happy to work with  
6 your office to provide additional information  
7 absent a formal task force.

8 You know, so Governor Hochul has made  
9 several changes in recent budgets to have  
10 significant changes with respect to public  
11 assistance programs, to eliminate artificial  
12 cliffs that were in place previously. So  
13 pleased to say that individuals are able to  
14 earn more -- currently it's about a 62  
15 percent earned income disregard for public  
16 assistance -- save more, and then also the  
17 investments in childcare obviously help  
18 reduce costs that individuals otherwise would  
19 incur when they go to work.

20 Governor Hochul is fully committed to  
21 supporting families and helping them enter  
22 the workforce. And we agree that individuals  
23 should not have to make a choice between  
24 additional work hours and having that offset

1 more -- you know, their increased wages be  
2 less than any loss in benefits.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: And with regard to  
4 something that was in last year's budget, the  
5 income disregard provision, I know the  
6 department put out a directive I think at the  
7 end of last year regarding this. Are we  
8 expecting formal regulations to be  
9 forthcoming? And if so, when?

10 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yes, we  
11 have fully implemented that consistent with  
12 the date in the statute. So we did issue the  
13 directive at the end of December. So it is  
14 being implemented, and we certainly are  
15 moving forward with corresponding regulations  
16 that are almost complete. So I would expect  
17 those to be issued within the coming months.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay, thank you for  
19 that.

20 One other issue in this budget. There  
21 is this one-time \$50 million appropriation  
22 for Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse for  
23 antipoverty initiatives. Can you elaborate  
24 on any specific plans that you have for that

1 money?

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. So  
3 we will -- you know, as indicated by Governor  
4 Hochul, these will be locally driven, but we  
5 certainly will be providing a bit of state  
6 direction. So the plans will be developed  
7 with the counties, in consultation with the  
8 mayors, in terms of what they think would be  
9 most effective in reducing childhood poverty  
10 in their cities.

11 We would like to see investments that  
12 make long-term changes, not just kind of a  
13 one-off. So it can either be something that  
14 changes the system that's available to  
15 support families, or it could be direct  
16 payments to families that really put their  
17 entire family on a different path from an  
18 economic mobility standpoint.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay, thank you.

20 And lastly, assuming these, you know,  
21 initiatives are successful, would this be  
22 something your agency would look to expand in  
23 the future, not just in cities but to rural  
24 areas as well?

1                   ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. I  
2                   can't speak to what future investments may be  
3                   made, but I would say that the Child Poverty  
4                   Reduction Advisory Council is looking at  
5                   childhood poverty with respect to a state  
6                   lens in order to come with specific  
7                   recommendations to have statewide impact with  
8                   respect to reducing childhood poverty.

9                   ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you,  
10                  Commissioner.

11                  ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: You're  
12                  welcome.

13                  CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.  
14                  Senator Rolison, ranker.

15                  SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you,  
16                  Madam Chair.

17                  And Commissioners, thank you for being  
18                  here this morning.

19                  I'm going to direct my questions in  
20                  the area of OCFS. I had recently met with  
21                  the Childcare Council of Dutchess and Putnam  
22                  and talked about a variety of things after  
23                  last session. And one of the things that was  
24                  brought up was the Child Care Resource and

1 Referral, CCRR. And they indicated that that  
2 has not seen an increase in 10 years and is,  
3 you know, critical to the sustainability of  
4 childcare for a lot of reasons.

5 What are your thoughts on that,  
6 Commissioner?

7 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
8 Thank you, Senator. I would say I would  
9 agree. But we've already resolved that  
10 issue. So we are in the process of  
11 negotiating a new contract with our CCR&Rs,  
12 and we've increased their funding for a  
13 couple of different projects they have.

14 I know that CCR&Rs are go-to technical  
15 assistance providers, so there are several  
16 initiatives that we're contemplating right  
17 now that require technical assistance. And  
18 although some of those have to be RFPd, our  
19 CCR&Rs are the most -- the best suited to  
20 provide that specific technical assistance to  
21 our childcare providers. So I would not be  
22 surprised if they receive those contracts as  
23 well.

24 But we would agree, they are

1 instrumental to our ecosystem.

2 SENATOR ROLISON: And thank you for  
3 that. That's good to hear. I did not know  
4 that.

5 Because one of the things that really,  
6 you know, concerned the Childcare Council's  
7 individual providers is, you know, the lack  
8 of a business plan from many of our providers  
9 because they just don't have the ability to  
10 do it or the time to do it, which impacts  
11 their business, which impacts childcare.  
12 Which impacts families, going to work, and  
13 all the things that -- I know that you know  
14 all of that, of course, right?

15 But these childcare providers that  
16 aren't even -- they're not even -- some of  
17 them it's tough to even collect the monies  
18 and document it. The business plan, where --  
19 what is OCFS doing -- is it through, you  
20 know, the CRRs? Is that the main area that  
21 can really be providing the assistance to  
22 create a viable business?

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
24 That's one of the structures, yes.

1                   So I think that's why we're so excited  
2                   to roll out, if passed in the budget, the  
3                   family childcare networks. Because as  
4                   mentioned, our family and group family  
5                   daycare providers are the largest component  
6                   of our childcare framework -- mostly small  
7                   businesses, predominantly run by women of  
8                   color. And we know that we need to give  
9                   those small businesses, those entrepreneurs,  
10                  the appropriate business supports to maintain  
11                  and sustain their business, because they  
12                  provide the childcare for the state.

13                  So that childcare network -- and we  
14                  have to, right, RFP that out as well -- but  
15                  that childcare network will be that business  
16                  support. It will be hopefully business  
17                  coaching, some peer-to-peer support, to  
18                  really create a foundation for those group  
19                  family daycare providers and a go-to resource  
20                  for those exact specific questions.

21                  SENATOR ROLISON: In the area of  
22                  reimbursement, I've heard -- we heard it last  
23                  year during budget hearings and a hearing  
24                  that Senator Brisport had on childcare early

1 in the session -- was the reimbursement based  
2 on enrollment, not attendance. That seems to  
3 be if the child is not there.

4 Can you elaborate on that?

5 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
6 For after-school or for general childcare?

7 SENATOR ROLISON: Just in general.

8 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
9 General.

10 SENATOR ROLISON: In any of the  
11 programs and funding through OCFS.

12 It seems to me that's a challenge,  
13 because the money's already allocated and  
14 it's already in the budget, and these  
15 children, if they're not there one day  
16 because they're sick or their siblings are  
17 sick, they're there the next day. So why  
18 can't we fund based on enrollment and not  
19 attendance?

20 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So  
21 as a general framework we do -- the money  
22 follows the child, right? The family is  
23 eligible for childcare assistance.

24 However, I think we accommodated that

1 issue last year because now, statewide,  
2 families can have up to 80 absences. And  
3 every childcare provider, every county, it  
4 was not consistent a year ago, and now it is.  
5 Up to 80 absences, and that childcare  
6 provider payment will still go to the  
7 provider.

8 And providers can now have up to  
9 20 closure days. So that is consistent  
10 across the state. And that's built into our  
11 financial plan. That is what our new  
12 regulations for childcare assistance  
13 provides.

14 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you for that.

15 I have 15 seconds. Real quickly, once  
16 the federal pandemic funds are exhausted,  
17 what's your thoughts on that?

18 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So  
19 we've been using our pandemic funds for  
20 things like the childcare workforce  
21 stabilization. So they've not really been  
22 baked into our ongoing financial commitment.  
23 So I think that -- I'm sure the Governor will  
24 continue her commitment of 7 billion over

1 five years.

2 SENATOR ROLISON: Thanks,  
3 Commissioner.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very  
5 much.  
6 Assembly.

7 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
8 Four years. Thank you.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.  
10 Chairman Kim.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you, Chair.

12 I have a couple of questions for  
13 Commissioner Guinn. Thank you for your  
14 testimony today.

15 I want to first thank my colleague  
16 Anderson, Member Anderson, for raising this  
17 particular issue around stolen SNAP benefits.

18 We've seen recently in my district as  
19 well a trend that's rising. I personally  
20 have gone through the process of taking a  
21 disabled person in a wheelchair to the SNAP  
22 office in LIC, with their home-care worker,  
23 and trying to navigate the system and trying  
24 to figure out where's my \$200 for the month,

1 and he can't get any food on the table. And  
2 it was like a seven-hour process from getting  
3 from Point A to Point B to even get clarity  
4 that, hey, somebody's stole your ID.

5 And the only solution that was left  
6 for that person was, Oh, you should just  
7 change your pin code and call it a day. And  
8 that's what they told us at the SNAP office.

9 There was no accountability, there was  
10 no way to track what happened here, like who  
11 took that \$200. So my question here is, do  
12 we have any accountability and effort to, you  
13 know, to figure out how much money we've lost  
14 so far? Are there any protocols, are we  
15 working with any, you know, federal agencies  
16 or local authorities to hold some of these  
17 accountable? And how are we going to fix  
18 this moving forward instead of just changing  
19 individual pin numbers?

20 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right.  
21 Thank you for your question.

22 Definitely the skimming of public  
23 benefits, including SNAP, is a serious  
24 nationwide problem. Our agency has been

1 working with law enforcement, with the US  
2 OIG, inspector generals and others to try to  
3 support efforts to stop this action.

4 Thanks to the Governor and this  
5 Legislature, we now have a better answer than  
6 just change your pin. Provisions were  
7 included and have been implemented as of this  
8 past August that permit us to replace stolen  
9 benefits. So those provisions allow us to  
10 replace both SNAP stolen benefits and also,  
11 thanks to the Legislature, also to replace  
12 public assistance benefits.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Yeah, those are all  
14 great things, and we were definitely helping  
15 the victims get their benefits back. But if  
16 you don't actually fix how you're getting  
17 hacked and how they're doing this, this is a  
18 free-for-all.

19 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: That means these  
21 people are going to be, hey, there's free  
22 money here, we're going to continue to attack  
23 and hack the system.

24 So I think we need to figure out the

1 next solution, how to create a more secure  
2 payment system so we can root out some of  
3 these targeted attacks.

4 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yeah,  
5 you're absolutely right. And one effort that  
6 we will be putting in place next month will  
7 allow recipients to easily and simply lock  
8 their benefits so that they cannot be  
9 accessed until they need them. And so that  
10 we'll roll out next month.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

13 Senator John Liu.

14 SENATOR LIU: Thank you, Madam Chair.

15 First I want to underscore  
16 Assemblymember Ron Kim's issue. The stealing  
17 of people's benefits is a serious, serious  
18 issue. We happen to share the same  
19 constituency, but as you mentioned, it's a  
20 problem statewide and perhaps nationwide as  
21 well.

22 So whatever new technology we can look  
23 at as well as just any measures to both keep  
24 the benefits secure and streamline the

1 process for New Yorkers who need these  
2 benefits, that would be much appreciated and  
3 much needed.

4 My question is for the other  
5 commissioner, which is about the after-school  
6 programs. Because I think more and more of  
7 us are coming to the realization that  
8 after-school programs, the benefits far  
9 outweigh the costs. And so my question to  
10 you is, what is your agency doing with  
11 after-school programs? I know there was a  
12 merging of two separate programs. Has that  
13 saved any money? And can we now extend the  
14 programs to more and more schoolkids across  
15 the state?

16 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

17 Thank you, Senator, I appreciate that  
18 question.

19 So at OCFS we are very excited about  
20 our combined Advantage and Empire program.  
21 Those are the two separate programs. So in  
22 this budget the Governor proposes an  
23 additional allocation of 17.7 million so that  
24 the whole component is \$100 million.

1                   We know that there's been -- there  
2                   have been some issues with our after-school  
3                   program. As mentioned, OCFS administers  
4                   those contracts directly with providers in  
5                   the community. And providers suffered during  
6                   COVID, there's no mistake about it. We had  
7                   to pivot several times during COVID. We  
8                   changed our budget format from enrollment to  
9                   attendance and then, with the outreach of  
10                  providers, at their request we changed the  
11                  framework back to an expense-based budget.

12                  So that's taken some time because  
13                  those pivots required contract amendments at  
14                  every stage. So it's been a tough go for our  
15                  providers. We've lost some seats because of  
16                  that -- because of provider loss. So  
17                  currently we serve about 34,000 students with  
18                  our current after-school program.

19                  Again, the effort to combine them is  
20                  to make the program stronger. We know that  
21                  we need to create a framework for providers  
22                  to sustain their program, and that was an  
23                  issue with the switching from enrollment to  
24                  attendance. It's very, very difficult to run

1 a sustaining program.

2 So we hope that -- we're still working  
3 on that framework currently. The RFP is not  
4 out yet.

5 SENATOR LIU: I think we're out of  
6 time here. But the point -- I would  
7 underscore also the necessity to expand more  
8 of these programs across the state: 34,000  
9 is a tiny number.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

11 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
12 Thank you, Senator.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

14 Assemblymember Darling.

15 ASSEMBLYMEMBER DARLING: Thank you,  
16 Commissioners, for your work and for being  
17 here today.

18 As the chairwoman of the Subcommittee  
19 on Foster Care for the State of New York, I  
20 want to amplify a major concern. When our  
21 foster children age out of the foster care  
22 system, many of them have shared that they  
23 feel like they've fallen off of a cliff.  
24 Many of our children experience housing and

1           job insecurities amongst other issues. And  
2           one way I know that we can tackle this issue  
3           is an increase in funding for the Foster  
4           Youth College Success Initiative.

5                        So we need an investment of  
6           \$10 million, and I say this often -- all the  
7           time -- we can invest in our children today  
8           or pay triple to repair the negative impact  
9           of lack of investment now. Excuse me, later.

10                      So what other plans or measures are in  
11           place within the proposed budget to best  
12           support our foster youth here in New York  
13           State?

14                      ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

15           Thank you, Assemblywoman Darling. I would  
16           agree with you wholeheartedly. We want to  
17           invest in all of our children.

18                      We know that we have to spend  
19           specific time and resources to really bolster  
20           our supports for our aging-out youth. These  
21           are youth who have been traumatized and grown  
22           up, at times, in foster care. Many of those  
23           youth don't have permanent resources. They  
24           are free for adoption but have not found that

1 forever family.

2 So we're doing a couple of things, and  
3 it's -- we're very excited that the  
4 Governor's budget adds about \$3 million in  
5 addition to some of our prevention, right,  
6 funding for older youth. We have youth  
7 development funding, we have our Chafee  
8 funding. So our federal funding provides  
9 funds for older youth. During COVID we were  
10 able to initiate a direct test transfer  
11 program for our older youth. We spent all of  
12 our money, and those youth got upwards of  
13 \$2,000 for -- and they can use it for  
14 whatever they wanted to.

15 ASSEMBLYMEMBER DARLING: They said  
16 that was really helpful, that cash.

17 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
18 And we spent all of our money and were able  
19 to get a reallocation from the federal  
20 government from states who did not spend  
21 their money. So we just received another  
22 \$2 million to put back into the Chafee portal  
23 and \$3 million that we're going to use to  
24 spend on claims from counties who have been

1 administering Chafee funds.

2 So although the Chafee funding is  
3 limited, we're trying to, right, leverage  
4 that as best we can.

5 We are also rethinking what aging out  
6 of foster care even looks like. We are  
7 partnering with a national partner to think  
8 about permanency. Right? Again, not every  
9 older person gets a forever family. Not  
10 every older person can age out into  
11 independent living. Everyone needs a support  
12 system. So we're rethinking what permanency  
13 looks like. And hopefully we'll create a  
14 framework for all of our older youth to make  
15 sure that they age out from foster care into  
16 a network of some sort.

17 ASSEMBLYMEMBER DARLING: Perfect.

18 Commissioner, I'd just ask that we  
19 include the youth and people who have  
20 experienced the system as well as legislators  
21 who are interested in assisting. I would  
22 love to be part of that process.

23 Thank you.

24 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

1           Would love to have you. Thank you.

2                   ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

3                   Senator May.

4                   SENATOR MAY: Thank you -- (mic off;  
5           inaudible) -- I have two questions. Sorry.

6                   I carry a bill to establish a new SNAP  
7           minimum of \$100 raised from the 23 that is  
8           there. And I know OTDA would implement that,  
9           or help implement that.

10                   Can you tell us what that  
11           implementation might look like? And  
12           especially at the county level, how we would  
13           do that?

14                   ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So you're  
15           referring to a state-funded supplement to  
16           SNAP --

17                   SENATOR MAY: Exactly.

18                   ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: -- to  
19           increase everyone's minimum benefit, right?

20                   So, you know, SNAP clearly is a very  
21           effective anti-poverty, anti-hunger program,  
22           and the administration of the program, you  
23           know, in the scheme of things we administer  
24           goes quite well in terms of being able to

1 access families quickly.

2 With respect to state funding, if  
3 there were state funds added as a supplement,  
4 I think we would certainly need to work  
5 through various accounting issues and  
6 technical issues with our EBT vendor. You  
7 know, but in the event the Legislature and  
8 the Executive determine that a state  
9 supplement should be implemented, we would be  
10 very happy to work with you and our vendors  
11 to find a solution to issue those benefits as  
12 soon as possible.

13 SENATOR MAY: And would, say, Double  
14 Up Food Bucks still be able to be applied to  
15 that funding as well?

16 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: In the  
17 event that the Double Up Food program, right,  
18 that they could -- they could change their  
19 model also to apply to state-funded benefits  
20 as well as the federally funded SNAP, and  
21 that would be important in order both to  
22 encourage both, you know, the purchase of  
23 healthy fruits, vegetables and also support  
24 local farmers. Yeah.

1                   SENATOR MAY: Right. And local  
2 stores, actually, too.

3                   ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yes,  
4 absolutely.

5                   SENATOR MAY: My second question is  
6 about -- so I represent Syracuse, which ranks  
7 number two in the country for child poverty,  
8 and Rochester and Buffalo are always together  
9 with Syracuse at the top of that sad list.

10                  I applaud the Governor for recognizing  
11 this problem in the budget with that  
12 \$50 million. Do you have information about  
13 how that would be distributed and how we  
14 would determine the impact of it after it was  
15 distributed?

16                  ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. So  
17 the budget does indicate that about  
18 25 million would go to the City of Rochester  
19 and then about 12.2 million each to Syracuse  
20 and Buffalo.

21                  We're happy that the appropriation  
22 language does also carve out some funding so  
23 that we can evaluate. So we will be able to  
24 contract out, most likely, with an expert in

1 the area of studying economics and childhood  
2 poverty so that we can specifically measure  
3 the outcomes of those.

4 With respect to what's funded,  
5 we're -- you know, we're going to work with  
6 the county social services agencies, county  
7 executives and also the mayors of each of  
8 those cities as they develop a plan. And  
9 what we would like to see is investments that  
10 make real long-lasting change, whether it is  
11 something that is part of the ecosystem of  
12 the provision of supports for families or if  
13 it is direct payments to families to really  
14 turn their lives around and help them move  
15 not only out of poverty but hopefully well  
16 beyond poverty.

17 SENATOR MAY: So you see it as  
18 relatively flexible in terms of the kinds of  
19 things that it could --

20 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: It is  
21 relatively flexible, just we want to make  
22 sure we have outcomes.

23 SENATOR MAY: That's great.

24 And I know a lot of these programs

1           suffer from the slowness of distributing the  
2           funds.  Would you expect that this would be  
3           fast-tracked in some way?

4                    ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN:  I mean, I  
5           would expect that -- we are hopeful that the  
6           Legislature will see to pass this within the  
7           budget that is passed.

8                    And due to that expectation, we will  
9           start working with the areas prior to budget  
10          enactment.

11                   SENATOR MAY:  Thank you.

12                   ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI:  Thank you.

13                   Assemblymember Mitaynes.

14                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES:  Good morning.

15                   I have a question for each of you.

16                   With the recent success of the  
17          promised New York City pilot program  
18          subsidizing childcare for undocumented  
19          families, has OCFS examined the possibility  
20          of a statewide program of that nature, since  
21          the Governor excluded undocumented children  
22          from receiving aid in the past?

23                   ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

24                   Thank you for that question, Assemblywoman.

1                   So we understand the burden of  
2                   childcare on those families whose children  
3                   aren't eligible. Unfortunately our federal  
4                   funds are really specific and children's  
5                   status is most important. So some families  
6                   where their children do have immigration  
7                   status that it's eligible, even if that  
8                   family's undocumented, that child will be  
9                   eligible for childcare assistance. But if  
10                  not, our federal funds unfortunately can't be  
11                  used in that way.

12                  However, I know that we do have a  
13                  facilitated enrollment program in New York  
14                  State. We have a provider in New York City  
15                  and a provider for the rest of the state.  
16                  And in this year's -- last year's budget, two  
17                  specific grant programs were approved. One  
18                  is a program for families who weren't  
19                  otherwise eligible -- so families who are  
20                  above the eligibility rate, families who are  
21                  potentially undocumented.

22                  It is a limited fund, but it is a  
23                  possibility. And we are committed to working  
24                  with the Legislature to see how we can

1 accommodate all families.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

3 What is OTDA doing to ensure that  
4 people who have recently lost EBT money to  
5 skimming are reimbursed for the funds that  
6 they've lost?

7 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So in  
8 addition to outreach to households who have  
9 applied in the past for skimming, we are  
10 working closely with social services  
11 districts to make sure that they are  
12 appropriately implementing the new ability  
13 that we do have to reimburse families and  
14 individuals for lost Public Assistance as  
15 well as SNAP benefits.

16 And I'm pleased to say that to date  
17 we've been able to reimburse \$20 million back  
18 to low-income families and individuals, and  
19 we want to make sure that anyone who is  
20 subject to skimming is able to get a  
21 reimbursement to the extent that we're  
22 permitted to under law.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: And is the  
24 limit of two reimbursements per year

1 preventing people who had their money stolen  
2 from being reimbursed?

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So there  
4 is a limit on -- for each household, that  
5 they can get reimbursement up to two times  
6 per year, with each of those issuances  
7 equaling up to two months of benefits.

8 You know, we would hope through more  
9 education and information that those  
10 households would do everything they can to  
11 protect their benefits, and we are rolling  
12 out a change next month that we will strongly  
13 publicize and look for help from all the  
14 legislative members to also inform  
15 constituents about the ability to immediately  
16 lock their card when it's not in use.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Inaudible.)

19 SENATOR MURRAY: Thank you, Chair.

20 Thank you, Commissioners, for being  
21 here. I hope this is working okay.

22 Commissioner Miles-Gustave, this is  
23 mainly for you. You and I last year, we  
24 talked about childcare and we talked about

1 collaboration with the business community.  
2 Has there been any of that since last year?  
3 Have you been working with the business  
4 community as far as childcare and solutions?

5 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

6 Yes, Senator. We're very excited about  
7 several of our programs.

8 So currently available, open today, is  
9 a tax credit for employers who have created  
10 childcare slots for their employees. We  
11 rolled out the Employer Supported Child Care  
12 Tax Credit program in early January. The  
13 window unfortunately is short, so  
14 applications close today. So businesses  
15 listening, please submit your applications.

16 And those are for tax credits for  
17 businesses who have created infant and  
18 toddler slots in the 2023 tax year, they can  
19 get a tax credit. We do anticipate it  
20 opening again next year for the 2024 tax  
21 year. So we hope that's a good incentive for  
22 employers to start supporting childcare slots  
23 for their employees.

24 We're also in the midst of rolling our

1           what we affectionately call the Tri-Care  
2           program -- the Tri-Share program, but it's  
3           secondly the Employer Supported Child Care  
4           Pilot. So that is a program in last year's  
5           budget where we will -- and there's going to  
6           be an RFP and a facilitator to manage the  
7           pilot. But we're hoping to solicit employers  
8           who are going to support and significantly  
9           pay for a portion of childcare slots. If  
10          they pay a third, the state will pay a third,  
11          and that employee will pay a third.

12                        So those are the types of business  
13           integrations that we're hoping to continue to  
14           roll out.

15                        SENATOR MURRAY: That's great.

16                        And now when you say childcare slots,  
17           what exactly do you mean?

18                        ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
19           Just a spot for a child.

20                        SENATOR MURRAY: But for specific  
21           facilities or opening facilities in their  
22           business? Or is it optional?

23                        ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
24           It's optional for the -- for both programs,



1 I can't say we've been streamlining, but I  
2 will say that we've been supporting potential  
3 licensees. If you're looking to open a  
4 childcare, we are aware that we have a  
5 capacity issue. There's a supply-building  
6 division in my office, and so they're looking  
7 to partner with whoever needs to -- who wants  
8 to partner to open childcare. That worked  
9 really hand-in-hand during our Desert  
10 Program, and we helped folks who would not  
11 have normally been able to open childcare  
12 programs through that grant program.

13 But day-to-day business is helping  
14 providers create and sustain that network of  
15 childcare.

16 SENATOR MURRAY: That's great.

17 Now, one other issue that was brought  
18 to my attention was when getting some of the  
19 childcare assistance, there were some  
20 stipulations like certain -- with, you know,  
21 close to home, childcare close to home. Some  
22 were saying wouldn't it be easier to use like  
23 a voucher system to pick which childcare  
24 company you want to use -- maybe closer to

1 work, maybe make it easier for someone that's  
2 going to work.

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
4 Right.

5 SENATOR MURRAY: Are we working on  
6 flexibility there as well?

7 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So  
8 a primary tenet of our childcare program, and  
9 promoted by the federal government, is family  
10 choice. So families should always be able to  
11 choose where they send their child.

12 There are some jurisdictions that have  
13 very strict processes that may or may not be  
14 funded by federal childcare dollars, but  
15 those programs funded by federal childcare  
16 dollars are required to give family choice.

17 SENATOR MURRAY: Okay, thank you.  
18 That might have been the problem; it might  
19 have been a local issue there.

20 Because I also want to say thank you  
21 for all you're doing, and I also want to  
22 thank the Governor for being very open to  
23 working and finding solutions. So I really  
24 appreciate your efforts.

1                   ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

2                   Thank you. Thank you, Senator.

3                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

4                   Assembly.

5                   ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember

6                   Buttenschon.

7                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: Thank you,  
8                   Commissioners. I echo the previous comments  
9                   of my colleagues on the importance of  
10                  after-school, childcare, and Early  
11                  Intervention programs.

12                  I represent the Utica-Rome area, and  
13                  I'm a lifelong resident of that district.  
14                  And unfortunately I have to tell you that we  
15                  buried another child last week due to gun  
16                  violence.

17                  This is something that -- we've had  
18                  over a hundred youth and gun violence  
19                  incidents. In fact, a resource officer was  
20                  shot in the head by a child on a school  
21                  property.

22                  These incidents are new to my  
23                  district. This is not something that my  
24                  community is used to seeing. The parents of

1 the child that have used guns are asking for  
2 secure, safe rehabilitative environments for  
3 their children to live in. They'd pled with  
4 me that they can't have their children in  
5 their homes at this time due to concerns of  
6 other children and violence.

7 You testified that you had the  
8 incentives of diversion placement, and I  
9 appreciate that. But every child is  
10 different. How will you address the question  
11 that the parents are asking of you?

12 I also -- I will finish with my  
13 questions, because I know you possibly won't  
14 have time to answer and I will have to get  
15 them in writing, so I appreciate that.

16 Also, every child is different. And  
17 we're facing many challenges of dual  
18 diagnosis. What new programs do you see that  
19 you will develop with your fellow  
20 commissioners? And again, I ask "new  
21 programs" because this is not working in the  
22 district I represent.

23 And finally, can you advise me of the  
24 importance of the two-on-one system, as this

1 is something that we have seen within the  
2 community that collectively brings us  
3 together.

4 And one question for Commissioner  
5 Guinn. Did your office have any input on the  
6 cities that will be receiving the  
7 Anti-Poverty Initiative funding? Because  
8 poverty is overwhelming in my district over  
9 the last few years, and we weren't  
10 considered. And we have to work at this  
11 holistically and collectively.

12 I thank you for all the work that you  
13 and your team do, as I know I see them here  
14 and I -- I do reach out quite frequently. So  
15 I know your answer. But I have to talk to  
16 these parents. And we can't have this.

17 Thank you.

18 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: I  
19 can go first. I'm not sure how much time  
20 we'll have, Assemblywoman Buttenschon, but I  
21 appreciate your comments, your sentiments. I  
22 know we work very closely with you. You're  
23 very passionate about your counties, and we  
24 are as well. So we know that gun violence

1 has been a problem and crime is a problem.  
2 Specifically leaving out of COVID, we've seen  
3 a higher need for more programs. We can talk  
4 more specifically about those initiatives.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

6 Senator Cleare.

7 SENATOR CLEARE: Good morning.

8 My question is similar to the previous  
9 question regarding the poverty --  
10 anti-poverty funding for Rochester, Syracuse  
11 and Buffalo. And I'm happy that we are  
12 looking at anti-poverty, especially childhood  
13 poverty.

14 But why are there no similar programs  
15 for other poverty-stricken areas of the state  
16 like South Central Brooklyn, South Bronx,  
17 Harlem? There are other pockets of poverty.  
18 And I just want to understand what was the  
19 strategy, what was the thinking in not  
20 including those areas.

21 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right.

22 Including these areas, they were chosen --  
23 these are just areas of the state that by  
24 many measures consistently rank to have very

1 high rates of child poverty, both in the  
2 state and in the nation. That does not mean  
3 that there are not other parts of our state  
4 that have rates of childhood poverty that are  
5 absolutely unacceptable.

6 We will work, you know, based on the  
7 appropriation that has passed, to implement  
8 and implement in a way that hopefully we can  
9 learn things that are relevant that can then  
10 be extended statewide. You know, this is one  
11 item, one investment. It doesn't mean that  
12 childhood poverty is not something that needs  
13 to be addressed at a statewide level.

14 I would refer back to our  
15 Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council.  
16 This year the council will make specific  
17 recommendations to the Governor and the  
18 Legislature on efforts that we could  
19 implement as a state that will reduce  
20 childhood poverty in our state by no less  
21 than 50 percent. We believe we can do it.  
22 We believe child poverty is something that  
23 can be solved. It requires thought and it  
24 requires investment, and we look forward to

1 sharing those recommendations with all of you  
2 at the end of this year.

3 SENATOR CLEARE: Well, I just want to  
4 urge the state to look at these other areas,  
5 because there has been a long history.  
6 There's a lot of data. And we know that we  
7 need -- it relates -- child poverty relates  
8 to crime, it relates to many other things  
9 that are existing in those areas as well. So  
10 I think we should have a more global approach  
11 to anti-poverty.

12 The other question I have -- and of  
13 course I want to talk about after-school. We  
14 need after-school. Across the board, we  
15 don't have enough. Our children need  
16 after-school. So I'll lend my voice to that  
17 as well.

18 But the other thing I want to ask  
19 about is the nonprofit human services workers  
20 who go out every day to provide services for  
21 New Yorkers and have not seen the raise that  
22 they need to take care of their own families.  
23 So this year we have a budget that again  
24 leaves out a number of state human service

1 work -- contracts, in the COLA language,  
2 under OTDA and other agencies.

3 What can we do to bridge the gap?

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And you will have  
5 to answer that question offline.

6 SENATOR CLEARE: And she'll send it to  
7 me.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Or put it in  
9 writing so all of us can share it.

10 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
11 Sure.

12 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember  
14 Chandler-Waterman.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN: All  
16 right. Thank you, Commissioner. A little  
17 trouble there.

18 So I'm going to talk about  
19 after-school, like my colleagues, about the  
20 after-school program, particularly Empire  
21 State After School Program, which as a  
22 nonprofit exec I had the privilege to be at  
23 the inception of that program.

24 And our district, predominantly Black

1 and brown -- East Flatbush and also parts of  
2 Canarsie, Brownsville and Crown Heights. So  
3 you know that there's a big uptick when it  
4 comes to gun violence.

5 We created a task force that basically  
6 came up with, from education and public  
7 safety, is that we need more after-school  
8 programs. Right? So it was severely, as you  
9 know, underfunded, 150,000 for 110 kids.  
10 There's delays when it comes to the funding  
11 process. I know that the CBOs have not  
12 received their money for the last school  
13 year. And they're doing another school year,  
14 and I don't think they received those funds  
15 either.

16 There is a delay in -- on  
17 dispossession, delay in Galaxy for the school  
18 to administer, for staff to support. And  
19 then also it's due to expire, and we need an  
20 extension, an expansion, with also more  
21 funds.

22 So I just want to make sure that how  
23 do we work out these issues that impact this  
24 community-based organization through direct

1 services, which of course impacts our -- all  
2 the staff being paid a living wage, our  
3 parents, our youth. And it causes a whole  
4 bunch of issues that of course escalates on  
5 the ground with gun violence.

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
7 Thank you, Assemblywoman. I appreciate that  
8 question.

9 So I would agree. OCFS is delighted  
10 to be one of the implementers of our  
11 childcare after-school programs in New York  
12 State. We are only one of, right, a  
13 couple -- New York State SED administers some  
14 after-school, but our Empire and Advantage  
15 programs are obviously administered by OCFS.

16 So we are, as indicated in the budget,  
17 combining those to strengthen them. So we do  
18 recognize that we've -- we had issues coming  
19 out of COVID. It was difficult because there  
20 were no kids in schools, and we changed our  
21 contracts to a different type of budget. It  
22 was difficult for our nonprofit providers to  
23 adhere to those new rules; we then changed it  
24 back.

1                   So there's been a lot of ups and downs  
2                   for the community. We want to save all that  
3                   stress. In combining them, it streamlines  
4                   the requirements, it streamlines the  
5                   administrative burden on both the CBOs and  
6                   OCFS. Again, we are still in the process of  
7                   finalizing the RFP, because we do know it's  
8                   expiring. We have every intention to let an  
9                   RFP out so that in the next school year folks  
10                  know who will receive those after-school  
11                  contracts.

12                  But we are focused on strengthening  
13                  the program and making sure that those  
14                  providers are sustained.

15                  ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN:

16                  Okay. We want to make sure there's not a lot  
17                  of red tape with the RFP. But we can talk  
18                  and work together on how we can make sure --  
19                  make sure the CBOs are in the process of  
20                  figuring out how that could work best for  
21                  them to procure the funds. Because they have  
22                  to pay their staff, and it's going to be a  
23                  problem on the ground.

24                  So I look forward to continue talking

1 to you about it.

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

3 Happy to do that.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Mic off;  
5 inaudible.)

6 SENATOR BROUK: Okay. Hi, good  
7 morning, Commissioners. Thanks for joining  
8 us today.

9 Today we've heard a lot about the  
10 anti-poverty funding, so I'm actually going  
11 to continue with that trend.

12 I not only am proud to represent the  
13 City of Rochester, but I also am a  
14 born-and-bred Rochesterian myself. And I  
15 always want to say there's amazing things  
16 about Rochester. I am so proud to have been  
17 raised there and certainly instilled with the  
18 values of my family there, and a lot of  
19 incredible things have come out of Rochester.

20 Unfortunately, though, most of the  
21 headlines that we see these days are about  
22 things like poverty, things like higher rates  
23 of violence. So much so that last year my  
24 office took on the task of really digging

1           into why we saw some of these correlations of  
2           higher violence than -- it felt like more  
3           violence than other places in the state, and  
4           higher poverty.

5                     And one of the things that we  
6           identified is that if you look at the  
7           relationship between AIM funding year over  
8           year and rate of violence in especially  
9           upstate cities, you see that Rochester has  
10          been chronically underfunded when compared to  
11          its neighboring cities, and continuously has  
12          higher rates of violence. And we know -- you  
13          know, anyone looking at those two things  
14          knows that there is an intersection and a  
15          relationship.

16                    So while we're obviously pleased to  
17          see that there was \$25 million allotted  
18          towards Rochester of this anti-poverty  
19          funding, I'm also concerned. Because  
20          according to our report, to be on par with a  
21          city like Buffalo, it would be \$34 million  
22          annually for Rochester. We're looking at  
23          \$25 million in one year.

24                    And so certainly concerns about what

1 we can do in one year to alleviate massive  
2 amounts of not just poverty, but really  
3 concentrated. And I want to just quickly say  
4 to have concentrated poverty and to grow up  
5 in that, it means that that's all you see.  
6 So to be a young person, all you see is other  
7 hungry young people. Right? When you go to  
8 school, all you see is overcrowded  
9 classrooms. That's all you know. And we  
10 know that that affects your outcome.

11 So my question to you is, how did you  
12 land on the 25? And are there thoughts  
13 around how to create sustained funding?

14 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So with  
15 respect to the amounts, I mean, those were  
16 based on, you know, decisions that  
17 Governor Hochul and her team made in terms of  
18 how to invest.

19 I think 25 million is a significant  
20 amount of money, but it's certainly --  
21 because it is one-time, we need to make sure  
22 that those investments are done in a way that  
23 we can learn something from it and/or make a  
24 significant difference for children, very

1 specific families in those areas of  
2 concentrated poverty.

3 You know, we agree, we certainly  
4 understand the trauma that poverty creates  
5 for children and creates for families. And  
6 that's why I think as a state we all need to  
7 do everything we can to reduce childhood  
8 poverty.

9 You know, I would point to, in  
10 addition to the specific investment, you  
11 know, so many other things that are -- as  
12 part of this budget, are important in terms  
13 of --

14 SENATOR BROUK: Sorry, just -- to not  
15 {unintelligible} but really quickly, I just  
16 need to know, are there limitations on what  
17 municipalities could use this for? And  
18 you'll have to write that to me.

19 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: It's very  
20 flexible, and we'd be happy to work with  
21 the counties.

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

23 Thank you.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

1 Assemblymember Maher.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Thank you.

3 Hello. Two questions.

4 Specifically, one is on youth  
5 employment. I see that the budget has  
6 increased, and I just want to say I've had  
7 personally experience with this program with  
8 several of the counties that I represent in  
9 the Hudson Valley, and they are doing  
10 tremendous work. We are working with local  
11 youth and local families and school districts  
12 to identify the youth and their families who  
13 could work in these jobs. But we are losing  
14 some opportunity with the income threshold.

15 And just like we've seen that  
16 threshold increase for childcare services and  
17 assistance, would it be possible and is it  
18 part of the conversations in the future to  
19 increase that for the youth employment, both  
20 year-round and in the summer, to catch more  
21 youth who are just at that cliff of  
22 eligibility?

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: The funds  
24 that we are using to support this program are

1 federal Temporary Assistance to Needy  
2 Families, and so that does have a limit of  
3 the 200 percent of poverty.

4 Certainly would be willing to work  
5 with you and see if there is any flexibility  
6 there. The federal government has actually  
7 kind of hinted in a different direction that  
8 they're going to be a bit more strict with  
9 respect to income limits for that program,  
10 that states wouldn't have any opportunity to  
11 exceed the 200 percent. But we certainly,  
12 you know, are glad to see that you've  
13 recognized the positive impacts that these  
14 programs have. And we certainly encourage  
15 all areas to really conduct outreach to reach  
16 the neediest -- the neediest youth in the  
17 counties.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Is there an  
19 opportunity to use a different pot of funding  
20 from the state to increase that threshold,  
21 especially if the feds are going in the  
22 opposite direction?

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So at this  
24 point we are solid in terms of the federal

1           200 percent of poverty level. In terms of --  
2           it would require, obviously, a different  
3           funding source to be identified.

4                   ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Yes. Okay, that's  
5           something I would advocate for, just on the  
6           record.

7                   The second part is, do you audit these  
8           programs? I know that some counties do it on  
9           their own and some contract with nonprofits.  
10          Just seeing how we're maximizing every single  
11          federal dollar, what is that audit process  
12          like? And would love to have access to some  
13          of those statistics to see if our model in  
14          some counties work where maybe they don't  
15          work in others.

16                   ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. We  
17          do. We go out and visit programs, many  
18          programs on an annual basis to get a sense of  
19          how they're using the funds, the populations  
20          that they're targeting. And obviously we do  
21          look at the cost per, and do everything we  
22          can to keep administrative costs associated  
23          with the program down.

24                   There's a lot of variation among the

1 counties both in terms of the type of jobs  
2 that are available and also the length of the  
3 program. So that also makes a difference.  
4 But we do perform reviews of those programs,  
5 and we'd be happy to talk with you about what  
6 we've found.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: I'd love to know  
8 whether it's an audit that's available via  
9 Excel. Just the statistics on how many  
10 counties are using all of the money, is there  
11 an allotment from year to year that they're  
12 not hitting because they're not being able to  
13 sign up the youth because of the threshold.  
14 I'd love to be able to quantify that, both in  
15 my district and statewide, to see if there's  
16 things that we can do to address it.

17 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. I  
18 mean, by and large counties are spending  
19 every single penny of the Summer Youth  
20 Employment Program funding.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: And even the  
22 year-round, the newly established year-round?

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: The newly  
24 established year-round just started, so it's

1 yet to be seen. But I would expect similar  
2 outcomes because they're very -- you know,  
3 they're not only meaningful programs but  
4 they're also very popular programs for youth  
5 throughout the state.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: I couldn't agree  
7 more.

8 I definitely want to pivot now to  
9 childcare. So I know that the minimum wage  
10 increase, the \$2 per hour, there are a lot of  
11 things in here that speak to those that are  
12 providing employment for childcare providers.  
13 But there are a lot of childcare providers  
14 that are hindered because of some red tape  
15 and bureaucracy that does exist in the State  
16 of New York, or so they say. And I just  
17 wanted to talk a little bit about increasing  
18 ratios and what that process is like.

19 So if you have an emergency -- a  
20 facility closed and there's an emergency and  
21 there's weeks before parents can find a  
22 childcare provider, some of them have to  
23 drive an hour to and from work. But if there  
24 was a process in place to easily allow,

1 temporarily, the ratio to change for existing  
2 providers -- how are those conversations  
3 going with your office and are there any  
4 recommendations being made?

5 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So  
6 I think those conversations are ongoing. And  
7 thank you for your question, Assemblyman.

8 You may know that we were able to  
9 waive some of our regulations during COVID.  
10 And so to the extent that some of those  
11 waivers might be helpful to the provider  
12 community on a more permanent basis, we're  
13 open to those discussions.

14 So if you have not gotten an answer or  
15 you think the issue has not been resolved,  
16 we're happy to contact you.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Fantastic. Thank  
18 you, and thank you both.

19 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
20 Thank you.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

22 Our next questioner is Senator Tom  
23 O'Mara.

24 SENATOR O'MARA: Good morning. Thank

1           you for being here, and your testimony.

2                       Commissioner Miles-Gustave,  
3           regarding -- there have been a couple of  
4           questions already on the Advantage and Empire  
5           State After School programs. What -- my  
6           understanding is that the RFPs are not out  
7           yet. When do you expect the RFPs to come  
8           out? And it's also my understanding that  
9           many agencies still have not been notified of  
10          awards under the 2024 programs.

11                      What's the status? And when can  
12          people expect to see these come out?

13                      ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
14          Thank you, Senator, for the question.

15                      So we are excited about our new  
16          combined after-school program. The RFP is  
17          almost finalized. We do anticipate it being  
18          released in the next several -- I'll say  
19          weeks, to jinx myself. But hopefully really  
20          soon. We do understand that providers need  
21          to know what their plan will be for next  
22          September. So we know we're in a limited  
23          time frame here. But that is in the works.

24                      With respect to your question about

1 previous payments, I know we've had some  
2 challenges with those iterations of  
3 contracts. So many of our providers who are  
4 in the middle of a contract amendment have to  
5 close out that contract year before they get  
6 allocations or before they can even claim for  
7 the following year.

8 So we unfortunately have a lot of  
9 providers who we call constantly. We have a  
10 team here working on making sure there is no  
11 backlog of those after-school contracts. And  
12 we give very personal technical assistance to  
13 all of our contract providers.

14 Some contractors just don't have the  
15 capacity to continue, right, to finalize one  
16 year to then move on to the next. So we're  
17 trying to work with the providers who are  
18 still on our open list, and we track those  
19 very specifically, try to close those  
20 contractors out so they can then move on to  
21 the next year's funding.

22 SENATOR O'MARA: Okay. So they can't  
23 even apply until they're closed out?

24 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

1 No, I'm not saying they can't apply to the  
2 new RFP. But they can't access their  
3 subsequent year's funding until they close  
4 out their previous year.

5 SENATOR O'MARA: Okay. Will the  
6 coming RFPs, are they going to be -- for what  
7 period of time? A five-year period of time?  
8 Or what period of time? Or just annually?

9 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
10 I'll get back to you on that. Good question.

11 SENATOR O'MARA: Okay. Are there --  
12 other than these two programs, Advantage and  
13 Empire State After School programs, are there  
14 any other after-school programs in the budget  
15 that I haven't brought up?

16 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So  
17 we do intend to fund, through some additional  
18 after-school funding, out-of-school time for  
19 older youth. So we recognize that our  
20 after-school programs are school-age  
21 childcare, really care for folks under 12 --  
22 kids under 12. That's our school-age  
23 childcare.

24 We know that there needs to be

1 specific focus on middle school, high school  
2 kids, and specific youth development  
3 programming focused on those children after  
4 school or out of school, during that time.  
5 So we do plan to create a program and to fund  
6 in a couple of regions a very specific  
7 out-of-school-time pilot for older youth.  
8 But that's in progress.

9 SENATOR O'MARA: Is -- with the tight  
10 time frame it seems to be ready for the start  
11 of the next school year. Is there any  
12 possibility of extending the current  
13 contracts?

14 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
15 Well, the new RFP will be ready for the next  
16 school year. Programs will have allocations  
17 for next school year. And we're hoping to  
18 have the older youth out-of-school-time  
19 programs be ready for next year as well.

20 SENATOR O'MARA: Okay. Thank you.  
21 And perhaps for both of you, just in  
22 general with regards to the \$2.4 billion  
23 allocation for the migrant crisis in New York  
24 City, all these programs we talked about with

1           you today, are all those programs also  
2           available to migrants, so in addition to the  
3           2.4 billion that's allocated in the budget?

4                    ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN:  So -- I  
5           mean, every program's eligibility criteria  
6           differs.  But with respect -- I mean,  
7           migrants -- some migrants are eligible for  
8           Public Assistance benefits and some are not.  
9           And it does depend on their status.  We have  
10          expanded the -- you know, last year there was  
11          an expansion with respect to Public  
12          Assistance to expand the number of  
13          noncitizens who are eligible, but clearly  
14          many of the individuals will not be eligible  
15          for Public Assistance.

16                   You know, the Governor's focus --

17                    SENATOR O'MARA:  What kind of -- those  
18           that are eligible, do you have an estimate of  
19           the numbers?  And, more importantly, what the  
20           impact is on these programs for New York  
21           citizens --

22                    ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN:  Yeah.  I  
23           mean, at the moment the numbers who are  
24           receiving Public Assistance, it's not a large

1           number. In New York City we are looking to  
2           see the future, but our focus also is on  
3           helping them secure work, legal employment.

4                     SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you.

5                     CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.  
6                     Assembly.

7                     ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.  
8                     Assemblymember Byrnes.

9                     ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: Thank you very  
10            much. All right, looks like we're up and  
11            rolling now.

12                    I want to thank both of you acting  
13            commissioners for being here today.

14                    My question, though, will be for  
15            Acting Commissioner Miles-Gustave. And that  
16            question is about the Raise the Age portion  
17            of the budget.

18                    You know, I spent most of my life in  
19            the criminal justice field as an assistant  
20            district attorney, even as a juvenile  
21            prosecutor. And I've spent a lot of time  
22            with my constituents on these issues,  
23            including union members in the Monroe County  
24            Detention Center. And what they have

1 collectively told me, and which I see all the  
2 time in the news, is that they do absolutely  
3 feel that this Raise the Age has caused teen  
4 violence to increase, carjackings, repeated  
5 offenders, including multiple times, and no  
6 consequences.

7 There's general outrage in my  
8 community. There's also outrage throughout  
9 the entire state. The Governor promised in  
10 her State of the State and in her budget  
11 address, she promised us that her number-one  
12 priority was the safety of New Yorkers. So  
13 as we look at this budget, what I see is that  
14 Raise the Age is not helping. In fact, I  
15 believe it's hurting people and it's creating  
16 more victims.

17 How can we start working on any form  
18 of the solution when the Executive Budget  
19 indicates that it's going to maintain the  
20 same funding as last year and that there will  
21 be no changes to existing services? How do  
22 we get moving forward when it appears we're  
23 stagnant, and stagnant is hurting us?

24 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

1 Thank you, Assemblywoman, for that question.

2 I do understand your concern. I read  
3 the same sensationalized press that's out,  
4 right, that we all do, talking about Raise  
5 the Age and talking about the failure of  
6 Raise the Age. But I think we all need to  
7 bring it back to the intent of Raise the Age.  
8 And again, New York State was not unique in  
9 this respect. We were one of the last two  
10 states in the country to raise the age of  
11 criminal responsibility to 16 and 17. So we  
12 were behind the eight-ball there.

13 So we are trying to save our children,  
14 and not, right, confine them in adult  
15 prisons. We know the research on brain  
16 science and what that means for youth who  
17 experience adverse childhood experiences.  
18 They can't make decisions in the ways that  
19 adults can. These are children, and we  
20 should treat them like children. But we  
21 should also be sure to have the supports and  
22 services to advance their development.

23 And so I do know that counties are  
24 putting alternatives to detention and

1 prevention plans in their country Raise the  
2 Age plans, sending them to OCFS and the  
3 Executive, and we are approving those plans.  
4 So I'd encourage you to go back to your  
5 counties potentially to see what the counties  
6 are doing with respect to those prevention  
7 and alternative to detention programs,  
8 because the budget reappropriates  
9 \$250 million every year to support those  
10 interventions.

11 And I know we're also -- we're  
12 colliding with the aftereffects of COVID, and  
13 we have -- we're seeing the mental health of  
14 our youth decline. So the Raise the Age and  
15 the increase in census that we're seeing in  
16 detention and operated facilities now also  
17 coincided with COVID and --

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: Thank you.  
19 Thank you, Commissioner.

20 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: --  
21 we know we should provide more services.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: My follow-up,  
23 then, would be it wasn't that many years ago  
24 where we had maybe 12-, 13-, 14-year-olds at

1 the detention center who may have stolen a  
2 car, and they were getting services and  
3 things of that nature.

4 And now we have at one point, a little  
5 over a year ago, there were 10 or 11  
6 basically adult males all accused of murder  
7 at the detention center -- because they were  
8 all shaving, they had children of their own  
9 coming to visit them at the children's  
10 detention center.

11 And the staff was afraid. They have  
12 no ability to defend themselves. The whole  
13 dynamics of what should be criminal justice  
14 has changed, and I believe not for the  
15 better.

16 Thank you, Commissioner.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

18 I think I'm the next Senator before we  
19 get to chairs having second rounds.

20 So thank you both for being here.

21 And Commissioner -- sorry, I don't  
22 want to call you by your first names --  
23 Commissioner Guinn, we had talked about this,  
24 but then in the New York Times yesterday

1           there was an article about how the rate by  
2           HRA of approving eligibility for benefits had  
3           actually been plummeting, not going up --  
4           during our conversation, I think you were  
5           under the impression perhaps some progress  
6           was being made. So I just have to ask, and I  
7           know others have brought this up, what more  
8           can we be doing to make sure that the City of  
9           New York -- and again, I don't know other  
10          counties' statistics. I know my city's  
11          aren't going the right direction. I mean,  
12          they are just shocking: 15 percent on time,  
13          that's the rate.

14                 And then, second, tying it into what  
15          my colleague Assemblyman Hevesi talked about  
16          in the beginning, if we were paying a fair  
17          share of the administrative costs to our  
18          local DSSs, might we actually see improved  
19          ability to meet our targets?

20                         ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Thank you,  
21          Senator.

22                 With respect to the performance by  
23          New York City and other social services  
24          districts around the state, I believe when we

1           were speaking we were focused at that time on  
2           timeliness. And we have definitely  
3           significant improvement throughout 2023 with  
4           respect to timeliness in New York City and  
5           other places.

6                         We're not where we need to be, but we  
7           are taking steps in the right direction.  
8           That is due to targeted efforts by counties  
9           to hire. I think that the HELP program that  
10          Commissioner Gustave-Miles referenced also  
11          certainly has been a benefit to counties in  
12          terms of easing their ability to bring new  
13          staff on. We know 38 counties have  
14          participated in that and been able to hire a  
15          thousand workers just since that program was  
16          initiated.

17                        So with respect to the denial rate,  
18          which I think was the focus of the Times  
19          story yesterday, you know, again, we have  
20          looked at it. We will look more deeply at  
21          the reasons for denials to make sure those  
22          are appropriate denials. We have spoken with  
23          leadership in New York City about the issue.  
24          They have looked into the matter to also make

1           sure that those denials are appropriate.  
2           Definitely need to do better there.

3                         With respect to hiring, I think that  
4           any additional funding to counties to help  
5           them hire is always helpful. However, in  
6           this particular instance we are not  
7           necessarily hearing that counties are unable  
8           to hire due to lack of budget authority to  
9           hire. It is really tying back to the  
10          significant workforce challenges that  
11          everyone is facing.

12                        So things put in place to help that,  
13          including the civil service reforms -- I know  
14          some counties have made changes in terms of  
15          the requirements for workers to loosen those  
16          up while still maintaining, you know, a  
17          high-quality workforce, and then also some  
18          limited areas where they have been able to  
19          provide increased wages for staff to do this  
20          work.

21                        CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

22                        And Commissioner Miles-Gustave, so I  
23          just was hearing about the Raise the Age  
24          concerns from a colleague from other

1 countries much farther north of New York  
2 City. So I actually believe in New York City  
3 we mostly feel Raise the Age has actually  
4 been quite effective. And I think we're  
5 seeing a decrease in juvenile crime -- I'm  
6 sure not fast enough, I'm sure still too  
7 high. But I just don't know, is there an  
8 exceptional problem of an increase in  
9 juvenile crime in the counties that that  
10 Assemblymember represents?

11 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So  
12 I would defer to my colleagues at DCJS for  
13 the official stats.

14 But I know in discussions with our  
15 partners we know that overall crime has  
16 decreased, juvenile crime has decreased, gun  
17 violence has decreased. I do think people  
18 are still reeling from that post-COVID spike.  
19 But we've invested money in our services and  
20 I do believe we're back to our original  
21 intention of making sure that we support and  
22 serve our young people in age-appropriate  
23 situations -- facilities.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very

1 much.

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

3 You're welcome.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I cede the rest  
5 of my time.

6 Assembly.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

8 Assemblymember González-Rojas.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Thank  
10 you for being here, Commissioners.

11 As a proud member of the Mom Squad, I  
12 want to thank you for the Summer EBT  
13 inclusion. That's something that -- I wrote  
14 a letter in December, when we were up against  
15 that deadline. So as moms, we really  
16 appreciate that -- that inclusion.

17 Commissioner, there's a recent DOH  
18 report that said one in four people were  
19 struggling with food insecurity in New York.  
20 Are you aware of the minimum benefit for SNAP  
21 for an individual?

22 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: I believe  
23 people can receive a benefit that is as low  
24 as about \$40 per month, but most are 23 --

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: It's  
2 \$23 per month.

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: -- \$23 per  
4 month. That certainly is not the typical  
5 benefit, but it is a low benefit when we're  
6 talking about a supplement to help people  
7 purchase food.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Do you  
9 think that's sufficient to address the food  
10 insecurity that we're facing in the state?

11 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Overall  
12 the SNAP program is a premier program in  
13 terms of addressing food insecurity. But in  
14 the event those benefits could be increased,  
15 we would support those increases.

16 And, you know, at the federal level I  
17 know some changes have been made, and at  
18 least I can say it is a program that is  
19 indexed each year. But certainly families  
20 could use more.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: New  
22 Jersey recently increased their rate to \$95 a  
23 month. So I have a bill that would increase  
24 the rate to \$100 a month, and I hope that

1 we'd have the Executive's support.

2 Last year we funded the Nutrition  
3 Outreach and Education Program, NOEP, which  
4 is vital in ensuring that communities  
5 understand the SNAP program and are able to  
6 enroll. We funded it at \$5.45 million, and  
7 that included a \$2 million additional funding  
8 from the Legislature, right, to support this  
9 outreach.

10 So if it's not restored, we're  
11 concerned about losing NOEP workers in places  
12 that were addressing some of the largest food  
13 insecurity challenges, including Buffalo,  
14 Rochester, Syracuse. So I'm concerned seeing  
15 the additional add that we fought for not  
16 included in the budget. So do you know why  
17 that money was not included, given the high  
18 rates of food insecurity in New York?

19 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So the  
20 fact that the Executive Budget does not carry  
21 forward a legislative add for next year is  
22 not unique to this program, and certainly  
23 does not in any way indicate a lack of  
24 support for NOEP. We too believe that the

1 NOEP program is key to helping make sure  
2 individuals are aware of the benefits that  
3 they can receive and helping them access  
4 those benefits.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: In just  
6 my last few seconds, to clarify, does  
7 New York State allow us to replace skimmed  
8 public benefits, New York State law?

9 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yes. A  
10 New York State law passed -- thankfully --  
11 last year does allow us to replace benefits  
12 that are stolen.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Thank  
14 you.

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

16 For the three-minute chair follow-up,  
17 Senator Brisport.

18 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

19 I have a few more childcare questions  
20 for you, Commissioner.

21 First, being that we've heard the  
22 figure, the \$7 billion figure, mentioned a  
23 few times at this hearing. I just want to  
24 confirm that that was an amount that was

1           promised over four years. And if you could  
2           just confirm how much of that 7 billion has  
3           been spent since it was promised, and how  
4           much is left to go.

5                     ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
6           You want me to do math, Senator?

7                     SENATOR BRISPORT: Yes, please.  
8                     (Laughter.)

9                     ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So  
10          we can give you the exact amount, but I know  
11          there was over a billion last year,  
12          1.9 billion this year. And then the rest.

13                    But we'll get back to you with the  
14                    specific breakout in the financial plan.

15                    SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

16                    I'd also like to ask a follow-up  
17                    question about the differential payment  
18                    rates. Your testimony mentioned an enhanced  
19                    payment rate for providers that are  
20                    accredited by nationally recognized childcare  
21                    organizations. I know earlier you mentioned  
22                    a specific price tag from the Executive  
23                    around decoupling, around 140 million.

24                    Is there a price tag for the

1 differential payment rates? And is it more  
2 than 140 or less or --

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So  
4 not yet. I know we're still working up the  
5 details of that differential rate. But we  
6 are looking towards quality programming, so  
7 trying to incentivize providers to increase  
8 quality in some way. So that is our effort  
9 to do so. But those specific details have  
10 not been negotiated yet.

11 SENATOR BRISPORT: Okay.

12 And I also want to talk a little bit  
13 about the workforce retention grants from  
14 last year. It's my understanding that one of  
15 the big reasons why the funding wasn't spent  
16 is we were hearing that the government  
17 support for workforce retention was difficult  
18 to access. And another reason was because  
19 there was an overestimate from the Governor's  
20 office about how many people would  
21 participate in the retention grants.

22 The workforce supplements were  
23 decreased because of this overestimate. So I  
24 just have a two-part question. Why was the

1 estimate so far off the mark as it was? And  
2 when the Governor's office learned the  
3 estimates were off the mark, why didn't we  
4 increase the amount we were giving to workers  
5 last year?

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So  
7 thank you, Senator. I'm not sure I would  
8 characterize last year's program in that way.  
9 I would say that we allocated 500 million for  
10 workforce stabilization grants, but it is up  
11 to that provider to apply for these grants.

12 We built new systems to push this  
13 pandemic funding out. So I don't know if  
14 it's because of the pace. I have not heard  
15 that. But I'm happy to get some specific  
16 feedback from you on some of those reasons  
17 that you've heard.

18 We are using the remaining pandemic  
19 funding in this year's budget to then  
20 facilitate additional workforce grants. So  
21 the 280, that's the remaining pool of  
22 pandemic funds.

23 SENATOR BRISPORT: But given that we  
24 are rolling over, was there any consideration

1 of an additional payment last year to  
2 workforce?

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
4 I'm not sure if I understand your question.

5 SENATOR BRISPORT: Just as opposed to  
6 rolling it over to this year, having stuff  
7 left over.

8 I'll follow-up with you another time.

9 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
10 We'll get back, yes.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.  
12 Assembly.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember  
14 Grace Lee.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Good morning.

16 I have some questions for  
17 Commissioner Guinn.

18 I want to thank the Governor for  
19 helping to secure \$391 million in the budget  
20 last year for the Emergency Rental Assistance  
21 Program. As of November we had disbursed --  
22 the state had disbursed about \$94.8 million  
23 helping 14,863 households.

24 I wanted to know if you have any

1 updates on disbursements as of this January.

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: And you  
3 are referring to the Emergency Rental  
4 Assistance Program proper?

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Yes, ERAP.

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Okay. In  
7 terms of total payments out the door for the  
8 entire program, we have disbursed about  
9 \$3.4 billion to support payments to --  
10 293,000 payments to property owners on behalf  
11 of low-income tenants.

12 We are very pleased with the  
13 additional funds that were included in last  
14 year's budget that did enable us to also  
15 start processing last year the payments to  
16 households whose rents are subsidized.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Do you have any  
18 updates on that particular pot of money and  
19 how much of that has been disbursed?

20 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. So  
21 with all the money that's available for this  
22 program, including those funds, we have about  
23 \$180 million left to be distributed.

24 With respect to subsidized households,

1 of the total distributed to date, about  
2 188 million has been distributed to  
3 subsidized households, and most of the  
4 applications that we have in-house that  
5 remain to be paid are associated with  
6 subsidized households.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Great.

8 Have you had any challenges pushing  
9 the money, getting the money out to -- or  
10 processing applications?

11 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: No. I  
12 would say that our application process at  
13 this point is pretty smooth. It is -- you  
14 know, does require a bit of documentation and  
15 review, but we have been successful in  
16 reaching out to property owners where we do  
17 need additional information, and case  
18 processing is going quite well.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: All right. We  
20 only have a little bit of time left, but I  
21 wanted to ask about the \$2.4 billion that the  
22 Governor has proposed for migrant assistance.

23 Can you just give us kind of a general  
24 overview of how you're looking at

1 distributing that between upstate and  
2 downstate, particularly in New York City, and  
3 then kind of the services that you're -- how  
4 that that distribution will look?

5 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So the  
6 \$2.4 billion that is in the budget to serve  
7 and address the migrant crisis will by and  
8 large be spent in New York City, to help  
9 New York City address the crisis.

10 The vast majority of funds are  
11 associated with temporary housing so that we  
12 can keep people off the streets, and then  
13 there are also services for case management,  
14 legal assistance and health items.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Thank you.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

17 For her three-minute chair follow-up,  
18 Roxanne Persaud.

19 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

20 So for OCFS I'm just going to ask  
21 general questions, and if you can send us  
22 back the numbers.

23 With the consolidation for  
24 after-school programs, can you tell us how

1 many students would be served by this  
2 consolidation, and could you give us a  
3 breakdown by counties?

4 Also, how many students were  
5 previously served in those programs, and by  
6 counties also.

7 And will there be an expanded capacity  
8 with the new -- with the consolidation of the  
9 after-school programs? If you could just  
10 send us those numbers.

11 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
12 Okay.

13 SENATOR PERSAUD: For OTDA, we talked  
14 about the increase in SNAP benefits. And  
15 could you tell us when was the last time  
16 there was an increase?

17 And as you know, I have legislation  
18 that was introduced last year that would  
19 benefit families more because we would offer  
20 an increase in SNAP benefits of cash  
21 assistance, utility payments, and index it to  
22 inflation. So could you tell me, you know,  
23 what's your thinking on that?

24 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Sure.

1           The SNAP program, which derives from  
2           federal statute, is indexed every year. So  
3           it does receive a slight increase intended to  
4           keep up with the cost of food.

5           The Public Assistance benefits are not  
6           indexed and have not been increased in many  
7           years.

8           SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. So, again,  
9           the legislation looks to increase that. And  
10          I would hope that, you know, both houses and  
11          the Governor would take that into  
12          consideration because the people who benefit  
13          greatly from it, they will benefit because of  
14          the number of increases that they'll be  
15          receiving. So if we can continue to work on  
16          that.

17          I want to again push on the COLA for  
18          human services. We know -- you know, you  
19          hear me say it over and over -- we would love  
20          to have the COLA across the board, not the  
21          select populations that have been receiving  
22          it. And we give the breakdown of every  
23          population that should, and so we're hoping  
24          that the Governor will include that in the

1 final budget this year, and so that the human  
2 service workers will be paid accordingly.

3 So thank you very much.

4 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Thank you,  
5 Senator.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember  
8 Burdick.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Yes, thank you.

10 This is a question for the acting  
11 commissioner of OTDA. And this relates to  
12 ESHI. And as I understand, there's  
13 210 million that's proposed to maintain  
14 operational support for current and new  
15 supportive housing, an unchanged amount from  
16 last year.

17 I have a question with respect to  
18 supportive housing for -- transitional  
19 housing for those released from our  
20 correctional facilities. This is something  
21 that I've been grappling with since getting  
22 into the Assembly. It seems to be an area  
23 that falls between the cracks. HCR handles  
24 permanent housing, they don't handle

1 transitional housing. DOCCS doesn't have  
2 line items for this. And also I'm troubled  
3 that it's operational support.

4 I'd be interested in understanding  
5 what OTDA's plans are with respect to this,  
6 and also whether it might consider funding  
7 some community-based organizations like  
8 Fortune or others that have been very  
9 successful in this area. Because that can  
10 help guide how we might respond to the  
11 Executive Budget with respect to ESHI.

12 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right,  
13 thank you. And certainly ESHI and our HHAP  
14 program that supports the capital development  
15 of supportive housing provides opportunities  
16 for people who are formerly incarcerated who  
17 are otherwise -- are homeless or are facing  
18 homelessness.

19 With respect to -- I know that the  
20 Department of Corrections and Community  
21 Supervision has recently implemented some  
22 transitional programs --

23 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Sure, I'm aware  
24 of that. But if you can tell me what is OTDA

1           doing. Are you building new supportive  
2           housing?

3                        ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yes. Yes.  
4           And we do also have supportive housing  
5           programs that are administered by  
6           organizations such as the Fortune Society,  
7           Osborne and others who clearly do a really  
8           good job --

9                        ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: If I may  
10          interrupt --

11                       ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: -- in  
12          supporting this population.

13                       ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: -- because of  
14          limited time. So is some of that 210 million  
15          actually going towards new supportive  
16          housing?

17                       ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yes. Yes,  
18          the ESHI program is available to support new  
19          providers every year. And certainly part of  
20          our portfolio --

21                       ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: And as you're  
22          mentioning, with community-based  
23          organizations that might be providers and  
24          might be the developers?

1                   ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right.  
2                   Typically there's a developer and then there  
3                   is a provider. Often they're separate and  
4                   the providers are often the nonprofit  
5                   organizations that have expertise with  
6                   serving the specific population being served.

7                   ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Great. Thank  
8                   you so much.

9                   ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: You're  
10                  welcome.

11                  CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

12                  ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: All right, here  
13                  we go. Assemblymember Lunsford.

14                  ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Thank you so  
15                  much.

16                  My question is for Commissioner  
17                  Miles-Gustave. I'm going to ask you some  
18                  questions about our foster care agencies in  
19                  light of the Child Victims Act claims.

20                  As you know, many of our counties' CPS  
21                  services are provided by voluntary  
22                  not-for-profit service providers. These  
23                  foster care agencies serve over  
24                  90,000 children statewide. And according to

1 a recent survey, there's over 800 claims  
2 under the Child Victims Act against these  
3 services, 40 percent of which have no  
4 insurance.

5 Given, of course, we care very much  
6 about the victims of these heinous acts and  
7 they deserve every dime of recompense they  
8 can receive, the reality is that the payment  
9 of these claims is going to have a drastic  
10 financial impact on these foster care  
11 agencies that are providing a legally  
12 mandated government service.

13 Is there a plan for what to do in the  
14 case of financial failure for some of these  
15 organizations?

16 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
17 Thank you, Assemblywoman Lunsford.

18 So at OCFS we completely are aligned  
19 with the intent of the Crime Victims Act, and  
20 we know that victims deserve the justice they  
21 seek. At the same time we do recognize, in  
22 partnership with our provider community, that  
23 there are some unintended consequences of  
24 this legislation. And much of the burden is

1           falling on the current component of those  
2           providers, and their insurance policies, many  
3           of them no longer have them.

4                        So we do recognize this is an issue,  
5           and we're talking with our partners  
6           constantly about potential solutions. So we  
7           agree that the foster care voluntary agency  
8           ecosystem is critical to the service delivery  
9           provision of those services for our  
10          population. So we know they are very  
11          important. But we are trying to work with  
12          them to create a solution.

13                      ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: I think this  
14          is one of those circumstances where not just  
15          for the children who in these foster care  
16          agencies have disproportionately experienced  
17          ACEs already -- and being displaced again  
18          would be very traumatic -- but also for our  
19          counties who would be left having to pick up  
20          this emergency.

21                      An ounce of prevention is worth a  
22          pound of cure, and I just encourage you to  
23          try to find solutions -- some I may have  
24          ideas for -- for how to deal with this in a

1 way that is proactive and not reactive.

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

3 Yes.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Thank you  
5 very much.

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

7 Thank you.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

9 Assemblymember Clark.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thank you. See,  
11 we're so -- we all work well together.

12 (Laughter.)

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: This is to our  
14 OCFS commissioner. So good to see you again.  
15 I am going back to childcare. Many, many  
16 questions; I could be here all day, but I  
17 will abide by my time limit.

18 First, on presumptive eligibility, we  
19 have heard from the feds that their  
20 dollars -- that this is a completely useable  
21 form that we can use their dollars for. Last  
22 year we were -- you know, one of the biggest  
23 issues we're seeing both upstate and in  
24 New York City is some longer and longer

1 waiting times to get approved for childcare  
2 subsidies.

3 And given the fact that this can be  
4 the difference between being able to start a  
5 job, being able to, you know, put your child  
6 somewhere safe when you do start the job,  
7 getting approval for your childcare subsidies  
8 as quickly as possible is really important.  
9 We know presumptive eligibility works; it  
10 should actually be increased in terms of the  
11 metrics used.

12 But if we could get assurances that  
13 the federal dollars -- you know, last year we  
14 were able to allow counties to opt in, which  
15 they sort of already can -- and could before.  
16 But if we could get assurances that the  
17 federal dollars could be used in that way,  
18 would it be something -- would it be OCFS  
19 looking at making it more of a required way  
20 to approve subsidies so that we could get  
21 them out quicker?

22 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So  
23 thank you for your question,  
24 Assemblywoman Clark.

1                   So I know we're looking at presumptive  
2                   eligibility. And as you mentioned, we made  
3                   it optional for the districts. And they  
4                   would be, you know, required to put their  
5                   district dollars in if they went through a  
6                   process and that family was in fact not  
7                   eligible. So I know we're open to having  
8                   conversations about how we continue to move  
9                   down this path to getting better access to  
10                  families, and I know presumptive eligibility  
11                  is a way to get families more quickly into  
12                  that provider --

13                  ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: We have heard it  
14                  out of the vice president's mouth, so I think  
15                  we can figure out some ways to get there to  
16                  make it work for us here in the state.

17                  My last two questions, the cost of  
18                  care -- I know Senator Brisport has talked a  
19                  bit about it. You know, would OCFS support  
20                  us moving to that system? We can move to it  
21                  if we pass it, if we change from market rates  
22                  to cost of care. Would OCFS -- you know,  
23                  this bill had passed many years ago, a  
24                  previous Governor did veto it. But we know

1 we have a much more supportive Governor.

2           Could we get OCFS's -- you know, would  
3 OCFS be on board to sort of get to the point  
4 where we were able to pass it and actually  
5 make it the rule that we use to set subsidy  
6 rates?

7           And my last question is on  
8 differential pay. We allow counties a 5 to  
9 15 percent. Why not just, at this point, ask  
10 all counties to go to 15 percent? We know  
11 most do 5 percent. One of the biggest issues  
12 we hear is nights and weekends and  
13 nontraditional hours is the biggest need and  
14 it's why childcare dollars aren't being used.

15           ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:  
16 Okay. I forgot your first question, but I'll  
17 move to the second one. We'll get back to  
18 you on all of that.

19           (Laughter.)

20           ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: That's a great  
21 answer.

22           (Laughter.)

23           ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember  
24 Manktelow.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Here we go.

2 Thank you.

3 Commissioner Guinn, just a couple of  
4 questions back to the theft of the SNAP  
5 benefits. So you said I think earlier that  
6 an individual could be reimbursed up to two  
7 times, is that correct?

8 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Up to two  
9 times per year, with each instance covering  
10 up to two months of benefits.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: So in that  
12 situation, if two times doesn't cover it or  
13 it happens again, what happens to the  
14 individual then?

15 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: We would  
16 have no authority to reimburse them for  
17 additional dollars that were stolen.  
18 Certainly there are emergency benefits that  
19 could be issued if they are in fact without  
20 food. But we would expect the retroactive  
21 benefit -- the replacement benefits that were  
22 able to provide for their immediate food  
23 needs.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Okay. So --

1 and you said -- I believe that you said that  
2 you've used up to about \$20 million of  
3 reimbursement so far. Is that correct?

4 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yes.  
5 We've been able to distribute \$20 million to  
6 replace stolen benefits at this point.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: So we have the  
8 original 20 million plus the other  
9 20 million, so now we're at 40 million.

10 Of that 20 million, the reimbursement,  
11 where did that come from?

12 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So it  
13 comes from both -- if it's SNAP, it comes  
14 from the federal government, from federal  
15 funds that are authorized to replace stolen  
16 benefits in the manner that we're doing in  
17 New York State.

18 And if it's Public Assistance dollars,  
19 it comes from state, local or federal  
20 dollars, depending on how that Public  
21 Assistance case is funded.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: So it's  
23 possible some of our local counties would  
24 have to be part of that reimbursement, is

1           that correct?

2                    ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN:  Yes.  If  
3           it's a safety-net case, the localities do  
4           have a cost associated with those issuances.

5                    ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW:  And of the  
6           individuals that are actually out there  
7           stealing the benefits, how many of them have  
8           been caught at this point?

9                    ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN:  That's  
10          definitely not something I can speak to.  
11          It's being handled by law enforcement.

12                   We have heard cases of individuals  
13          being caught, and certainly hope that they're  
14          all caught, because it's unconscionable.

15                   ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW:  Is there a  
16          follow-up from law enforcement to let you  
17          know where they are with all that?

18                   ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN:  I do not  
19          believe there's any obligation for law  
20          enforcement to keep us informed about their  
21          investigations.

22                   There are times we are providing  
23          information to support investigations.

24                   ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW:  Okay, I

1 appreciate your time, and thank you for  
2 answering my questions.

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Okay.  
4 Thank you.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Absolutely.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay, thank you.

7 I believe, unless I'm mistaken, I will  
8 be the last to ask questions. And hopefully  
9 this will be an easy one.

10 But I want to go back to the topic, if  
11 I can, of Raise the Age. So first, I really  
12 appreciated your answer, Commissioner. From  
13 my estimation, Raise the Age is one of the  
14 best programs, a stunning victory for us in  
15 2017-2018. And it was right on the science,  
16 as you said. It's right for kids. It is  
17 absolutely a great program.

18 And we're taking political hits on it,  
19 and I think there's a reason for that. So  
20 two things I want to address.

21 So first, one problem that I want to  
22 identify right off the bat is when that  
23 program was created in 2017-2018, we had a  
24 prior Governor who had a history of being



1 Age had been fully funded every year since  
2 2017-2018, we're close to \$800 million or a  
3 billion dollars that would have gone out the  
4 door.

5 We have -- one of my colleagues, Michi  
6 Solages, has a bill that we will be looking  
7 to put into this budget that separates the  
8 capital portion of Raise the Age -- because  
9 you know that's a component -- but the other  
10 piece of it, it stops it from being a  
11 reimbursement grant and allows the providers  
12 to get the money up front. And I think the  
13 reason why we're getting into this trouble is  
14 we're asking providers to lay out money they  
15 just don't have.

16 So the question for you is, is the  
17 Executive open to changing the dynamic of the  
18 Raise the Age program not to be a  
19 reimbursement grant, to be an upfront grant?  
20 And in that way we can get the money to those  
21 kids, get the money to those families, and  
22 make Raise the Age the program that it should  
23 be.

24 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

1 Thank you, Assemblyman. I would defer to my  
2 principals on that specific question.

3 However, I do know that we do need  
4 more outreach to our counties to make sure  
5 that they're taking full advantage of those  
6 funds of the counties that have Raise the Age  
7 plans. We have approved -- about 39 approved  
8 Raise the Age plans. So that means every  
9 county does not have an approved Raise the  
10 Age plan.

11 So I do think that, right, there's  
12 more money to be spent. We fully, right,  
13 fund that appropriation every year,  
14 100 percent reimbursement for Raise the Age  
15 incremental costs for those counties. So I  
16 do believe we all can be doing more.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. I agree,  
18 we need to do more for the entire state and  
19 New York City.

20 Thank you both for your testimony here  
21 today. We very much appreciate it. Thank  
22 you.

23 PANELISTS: Thank you.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

1 (Off the record.)

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,  
3 Commissioners, we really appreciate it.

4 Panel B. I'd like to call up New York  
5 State Office for the Aging, Acting Director  
6 Greg Olsen; and the New York State Department  
7 of Veterans' Services, Reverend Viviana  
8 DeCohen is the commissioner.

9 Please come on up.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And if people  
11 need to grab the leaving commissioners,  
12 please take your conversations out in the  
13 hall so that we are not interfering with the  
14 next panel.

15 (Pause; off the record.)

16 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Commissioners,  
17 thank you. Welcome.

18 Assembly first?

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes, the whole  
20 day. It's your day. Assembly, then Senate.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Let's talk about  
22 taxes. I'm loving this job.

23 (Laughter.)

24 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Just kidding. To

1 the chair at home.

2 Assemblymember Jones. We're going to  
3 lead off with you, sir -- in a second.  
4 Sorry, we were going to questions. I  
5 apologize.

6 Commissioner, you're up first.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes, let's do the  
8 testifiers first.

9 Ten minutes each, please.

10 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: We can go. We  
11 can go right to questions if you want.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: No, no, I want  
13 you to go first.

14 Thank you, Commissioner. Go ahead.

15 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: You got it.  
16 How you guys doing today?

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: All right.

18 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: It's great to  
19 be here, Chairperson Krueger, Chair Hevesi,  
20 of course Chairs Kim and Cleare, a pleasure  
21 knowing and working with you guys. I got to  
22 shout out to Assemblyman Jones and I thought  
23 Senator May was here, the previous chair, and  
24 really all the distinguished members of the

1           Legislature. Always happy to be here to  
2           testify.

3                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Move the mic  
4           closer.

5                   NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, it's  
6           never a problem I've usually had, but I  
7           appreciate that.

8                   My name is Greg Olsen. I'm the  
9           director of the New York State Office for  
10          Aging. Honored to testify, as always, on  
11          Governor Hochul's Executive Budget that seeks  
12          to make New York more affordable, more  
13          livable, and a safer New York, while opening  
14          doors to the communities and people who have  
15          historically been blocked from equal chances  
16          at success.

17                  The proposed Executive Budget includes  
18          many proposals that support older adults and  
19          their families across agencies, even amid  
20          efforts to close a \$4 billion budget gap  
21          through responsible steps that safeguard  
22          opportunities and supports for millions of  
23          New Yorkers and their families.

24                  I am pleased to testify on the

1 provisions of Governor Hochul's proposed  
2 budget that directly affect the New York  
3 State Office for Aging, along with additional  
4 budget proposals that will positively impact  
5 older New Yorkers and their families and move  
6 towards a broader goal of creating a more  
7 affordable and livable New York.

8 The Governor's State of the State  
9 message and subsequent Executive Budget  
10 proposal builds upon accomplishments passed  
11 in last year's budget and sets New York on a  
12 path for a better future regardless of age.

13 Utilizing the state's 2019-2024  
14 Prevention Agenda as the umbrella, and  
15 instituting a Health Across All Policies  
16 approach, New York State agencies are  
17 incorporating health considerations into our  
18 planning, programs, and initiatives. As  
19 agencies, we're committed to working together  
20 and considering how our policies fulfill  
21 New York's pledge as the first age-friendly  
22 state in the nation.

23 We are further strengthening and  
24 coordinating this vital work through the

1 Governor's priority of developing a State  
2 Master Plan for Aging. This master plan is  
3 consistent with the goals and work that  
4 New York has been engaged in to improve  
5 communities for people of all ages and create  
6 healthy environments through which we can all  
7 grow up and grow old successfully.

8 In 2018, as you know, New York became  
9 the first "age-friendly" state in the nation,  
10 receiving that designation from AARP and the  
11 World Health Organization. New York was  
12 first because we ranked high at the time in  
13 the eight domains of "age-friendly," and  
14 because of our plan to move forward in a  
15 comprehensive way to systematically build  
16 age-friendly and smart-growth principles into  
17 how government operates and functions.

18 Through much-needed investments, the  
19 Governor's FY '25 Executive Budget expands  
20 and strengthens that foundation with  
21 initiatives that will help individuals access  
22 needed services and lead healthy lives by:

23 Increasing funding for vital services  
24 such as the CSE, Community Services for the

1 Elderly program, elder abuse and nutrition  
2 funding;

3 Continuing the funding for the Master  
4 Plan for Aging;

5 Continuing the \$23 million in historic  
6 investments for older New Yorkers across the  
7 state for those who are awaiting services,  
8 bringing that amount of investment up to  
9 \$122 million since 2018;

10 Continuing the \$2.9 million to expand  
11 efforts to combat isolation, bridge the  
12 digital divide, improve overall health and  
13 wellness, reducing depression, addressing  
14 elder abuse, and strengthening NYSOFA's  
15 stipend program for volunteer recruitment and  
16 retention.

17 You guys have always had my testimony  
18 in the past; it's usually a few pages. This  
19 one is a lot thicker because all of these  
20 innovations we have been testing, and I put a  
21 sample of them in there so you can see the  
22 incredible return on investment for either  
23 things we are already fully subsidizing that  
24 doesn't cost an older adult anything, or

1 things that we're piloting in terms of  
2 reducing loneliness, isolation, and improving  
3 overall health and wellness. So I encourage  
4 you to check those out. It's really  
5 exciting.

6 We're continuing our bill-payer  
7 program with Ann Marie Cook and Lifespan --  
8 who will be testifying after us -- in  
9 10 counties to prevent and mitigate financial  
10 exploitation of older adults;

11 Providing an additional \$1 million for  
12 our state's E-MDT, an Enhanced  
13 Multidisciplinary Team approach to combating  
14 elder abuse in all its forms;

15 Maintaining funding for the Long Term  
16 Care Ombudsman Program, which serves as an  
17 advocate, as you know, for residents and  
18 their families in nursing homes and other  
19 facilities;

20 Investing an additional \$3.4 million  
21 in cost-of-living adjustment funds for  
22 providers;

23 And for the first time establishing an  
24 interagency Elder Justice Coordinating

1 Council to better plan for and connect the  
2 various agencies and systems that prevent and  
3 address elder abuse.

4 The Governor's budget provides the  
5 support necessary to continue our  
6 trailblazing initiatives. Again, I  
7 referenced those a second ago. Examples  
8 include:

9 Our award-winning animatronic pet  
10 project, which to date has provided more than  
11 27,000 pets to older New Yorkers. This model  
12 is now being replicated in 35 states across  
13 the country;

14 Our partnership with GetSetUp, which  
15 helps provide 4,500 lifelong learning, health  
16 and wellness classes to individuals over the  
17 age of 50 that is completely free for anybody  
18 over 50;

19 Bringing the Virtual Senior Center, a  
20 "self-help in the city" model to 19 counties  
21 in upstate New York;

22 Being the first in the nation to  
23 actually use AI positively through the use of  
24 ElliQ. We have over 900 units out throughout

1 New York State. That's also being replicated  
2 across the country;

3 Our partnership with GoGoGrandparent,  
4 which is a specialized ride share project to  
5 increase additional transportation options  
6 statewide;

7 And then many, many caregiver  
8 initiatives to support caregivers and  
9 individuals themselves through Trualta, Arch  
10 Angels, Memory Lane TV, Relish-Life, and I  
11 could go on.

12 We've implemented more than 20 public  
13 and private partnerships to combat isolation  
14 and loneliness, improve overall health and  
15 wellness, increase physical activity, support  
16 informal caregivers and care receivers,  
17 promote technology, promote the development  
18 of new relationships and friendships with  
19 others. We have measured for efficacy all of  
20 these -- and again, I encourage you at  
21 another time to reference what I've provided.  
22 That's just a sample.

23 I'm proud to say that NYSOFA is a  
24 national leader in the implementation of AI

1 and other technology in serving older adults  
2 and their families. NYSOFA is also the  
3 nation's first state in the country to  
4 partner with the National Association of Home  
5 Builders to make Certified Aging in Place  
6 Specialist certifications available to our  
7 case managers. We're also the only state in  
8 the country that mandates certification of  
9 our case managers and our health insurance  
10 counseling and assistance programs.

11 The budget, though, is about more than  
12 just NYSOFA. As you know, in all of our  
13 daily lives we don't just touch one system,  
14 and older adults do not just touch the State  
15 Office for Aging.

16 One of the great commissioners is the  
17 one sitting next to me, and we work so  
18 closely together because we have 440,000  
19 veterans who are over the age of 60.

20 And so those are just some of the  
21 partnerships that we have to have and  
22 maintain in order to leverage the skill that  
23 other agencies have so that we can serve  
24 people holistically.

1           The following other key investments in  
2           this budget I'd like to just mention:  
3           obviously, increasing affordable housing  
4           stock; eliminating the copayment for Insulin;  
5           investments in clean water and a greener  
6           economy; energy affordability; strengthening  
7           medical leave for those with disabilities and  
8           health needs; expanding access to oral health  
9           and dental care; strengthening  
10          anti-discrimination laws for Section 8  
11          voucher recipients; strengthening storm  
12          resiliency and emergency response;  
13          investments in victim assistance; investments  
14          to make New York a leader in AI; and  
15          reinvigorating the Most Integrated Setting  
16          Coordinating Council, which is really charged  
17          since 2005 with developing and implementing  
18          the state's Olmstead Plan -- and pleased to  
19          see that.

20                 All of those things are important to  
21                 individuals over 60 and their families. We  
22                 will continue to engage anyone, anywhere,  
23                 anyhow who can help us improve the lives of  
24                 older adults and their families.

1 I'm especially proud of our work to  
2 significantly increase access for our  
3 hard-to-serve individuals and communities.  
4 NYSOFA has worked tirelessly with our county  
5 partners to reach diverse communities, and  
6 these data efforts are paying off. I want to  
7 have a special shout out to Colleen Scott, on  
8 my staff, who works every single day  
9 internally and externally to increase our  
10 ability to serve hard-to-serve communities,  
11 as well as my staff for many of the  
12 accomplishments that we have.

13 According to our assessment data, all  
14 of our core services saw an increase in  
15 serving minority older adults, and I'm really  
16 proud of that. We will continue to focus on  
17 diversity, equity, and inclusion and work  
18 with experts to provide training on cultural  
19 competence, trauma-informed training, support  
20 for the unique needs of the LGBTQ+ older  
21 adults, and more.

22 As you guys know, I always appreciate  
23 coming to talk to you about the great work  
24 that we do. And as always, I'm happy to

1 answer any questions after Commissioner  
2 DeCohen.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.  
4 Commissioner, please.

5 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you.  
6 Good afternoon, Chairs Krueger and  
7 Hevesi and esteemed members of the Senate and  
8 Assembly. I'm Viviana DeCohen, commissioner  
9 of the New York State Department of  
10 Veterans' Services and proud veteran of the  
11 United States Marine Corps. And I'm honored  
12 to provide testimony on Governor Hochul's  
13 2024-2025 Executive Budget.

14 Under Governor Hochul's leadership,  
15 and with the support of the Assembly and the  
16 Senate, DVS has continued to deliver on  
17 behalf of New York's veterans and their  
18 families. Throughout Governor Hochul's  
19 administration, DVS has made it a priority to  
20 expand our agency's reach and visibility  
21 within the community, and to bring more  
22 veterans into contact with the state and  
23 federal benefits that they have earned  
24 through their military service.

1                   This has included significant success  
2                   improving our connections with veterans as  
3                   they complete their term of service and  
4                   transition back to civilian life. It has  
5                   also included the establishment of a network  
6                   of digital kiosks around the state to provide  
7                   veterans with information about important  
8                   services available to them through DVS. We  
9                   are also continuing to work toward launching  
10                  a network of Mobile Veterans Centers, which  
11                  will boost these efforts even more.

12                  In addition to all this, DVS has  
13                  cultivated relationships with public and  
14                  private partners at every level, giving rise  
15                  to successful initiatives to connect veterans  
16                  and their families with everything from  
17                  essential needs to events and opportunities  
18                  for community members to show their  
19                  appreciation to our veterans.

20                  This record of progress continued in  
21                  2023, and our accomplishments over the past  
22                  year are a testament to our commitment to  
23                  holistic care for the empowerment of  
24                  New York's veterans and their families.

1 Over the past year, DVS began  
2 operating New York's first State Veterans  
3 Cemetery, launched a new Veterans Memorial  
4 Registry website, awarded millions of dollars  
5 in capital grants to nonprofit veterans  
6 organizations around the state, and  
7 established and built on partnerships with  
8 nongovernmental partners like the Bombas sock  
9 company and Carnegie Hall.

10 In 2023, DVS also continued to provide  
11 nourishing meals to veterans and  
12 servicemembers facing food insecurity, in  
13 collaboration with Hello Fresh and  
14 community-based partners. We have now helped  
15 deliver nearly 1.5 million fresh meals since  
16 the program began. Over the past year our  
17 veterans benefits advisors also helped  
18 distribute \$200,000 in FreshConnect Checks  
19 around New York State, helping put more fresh  
20 food on the table in veteran households.

21 On top of all this, our Veterans  
22 Benefits Advising Program secured a  
23 remarkable \$68.47 million in monthly --  
24 that's over \$800 million -- recurring VA

1 benefits payments through 35,000 filed claims  
2 in 2023. This substantial tax-free federal  
3 financial support directly impacts and  
4 improves the lives of veterans and military  
5 families, ensuring they receive the benefits  
6 they rightfully deserve for their military  
7 service.

8 Governor Hochul's Executive Budget  
9 proposal includes \$1.25 million in  
10 appropriations that will help DVS hire even  
11 more veterans service benefits advisors,  
12 allowing us to assist more veterans with more  
13 claims and ultimately put even more tax-free  
14 dollars, federal dollars, in the pockets of  
15 New York's veterans and their families.

16 DVS remains steadfast in developing  
17 responsive strategies amid changing  
18 demographics and societal shifts. We are  
19 delivering on our mission to "find and serve"  
20 veterans where they work and live, as  
21 demonstrated by the more than 500 outreach  
22 events in which DVS staff participated across  
23 New York State in 2023.

24 DVS, in collaboration with the

1 New York State Office of Mental Health --  
2 OMH -- the State University of New York --  
3 SUNY -- and the New York State Dwyer  
4 Coalition, has also continued its efforts  
5 with a working group dedicated to enhancing  
6 the effectiveness of the Joseph P. Dwyer  
7 Program. This collaborative effort has  
8 resulted in the development and release of a  
9 comprehensive set of tools to support both  
10 new and existing Dwyer Program chapters in  
11 fulfilling their mission.

12 Over the past year, we also provided  
13 training and accreditation to veterans  
14 service officers in every county of New York  
15 State and hosted the largest National  
16 Association of State Directors of Veterans  
17 Affairs, known as NASDVA, conference in  
18 recent history, with over 48 states and three  
19 territories in attendance. This underscores  
20 our commitment not only across the state, but  
21 also across our nation, to ensure the  
22 highest-quality services for those we serve.

23 Our collaborations with external  
24 partners have also furthered our commitment

1 to addressing fundamental needs. For  
2 example, through a collaborative effort with  
3 Bombas, we distributed 15,000 pairs of  
4 socks -- we call it Sock It To Me -- across  
5 the state to our veterans facing housing  
6 insecurity. Bombas has already pledged  
7 another 5,000 pairs of socks, allowing us to  
8 reinforce our dedication to ongoing support  
9 while emphasizing the importance of holistic  
10 care for our New York veterans.

11 In response to the unique challenges  
12 faced by veterans, we also continued our work  
13 with vital mental health resources such as  
14 "Worried About a Veteran," a first-in-the-  
15 nation program aimed at preventing suicide  
16 amongst our servicemembers and veterans by  
17 empowering family members with tools and  
18 resources to intervene early. This  
19 initiative reflects our commitment to  
20 addressing mental health as a critical  
21 component of overall well-being.

22 Governor Hochul's 2024 State of the  
23 State initiatives and fiscal year 2024-2025  
24 Executive Budget actions reinforce her

1 administration's dedication to advancing  
2 veterans' well-being. One proposal involves  
3 collaboration with various partners on the  
4 development of a comprehensive medical  
5 "pocket card" for healthcare providers. This  
6 is crucial, given findings from the New York  
7 Health Foundation revealing that fewer than  
8 3 percent of New York's medical providers had  
9 adequate veteran or military cultural  
10 competency. The card aims to equip them, our  
11 medical professionals, with essential  
12 information, enriching the quality of care  
13 for our New York veterans.

14 Additionally, we acknowledge the  
15 importance of representing the vast diversity  
16 of those who serve. This impetus behind the  
17 Governor's initiative to establish New York's  
18 Women's Veterans History Trail, spearheaded  
19 by DVS, honors the exceptional legacy of over  
20 62,000 women veterans in the state, aiming to  
21 document and celebrate their extraordinary  
22 contributions to military service throughout  
23 New York's rich history, and ensuring that  
24 their barrier-shattering service continues to

1 inspire future generations of New Yorkers.

2 Lastly, we remain committed to  
3 ensuring that the unique needs of the  
4 veterans we serve are met. To this end,  
5 under the Governor's initiative, DVS is  
6 collaborating with partner agencies and  
7 organizations to develop specialized mental  
8 health support tailored explicitly for women  
9 veterans, focusing on combating alarming  
10 suicide rates. This pioneering toolkit and  
11 training program represent a crucial lifeline  
12 for women veterans across New York,  
13 highlighting our commitment to their mental  
14 health and overall welfare.

15 As commissioner of the New York State  
16 Department of Veterans' Services, I am proud  
17 to share the transformative journey we have  
18 undertaken under Governor Hochul's  
19 leadership. The actions taken by the  
20 Governor and DVS -- and all of you -- signify  
21 a resolute commitment to prioritizing  
22 veterans' needs, and our 2023 accomplishments  
23 highlight the tangible impacts of this  
24 dedication. With nourishing meals, benefits

1           advising, mental health resources, strategic  
2           partnerships and more, we have truly laid a  
3           foundation of comprehensive care across the  
4           entire state.

5                       Governor Hochul's 2024 State of the  
6           State and Executive Budget proposals will  
7           allow us to continue our important mission.  
8           As we navigate challenges and pursue  
9           innovation, we remain dedicated to "finding  
10          and serving" veterans wherever they are,  
11          ensuring that New York's veterans and their  
12          families receive the highest-quality  
13          benefits, programs, services, and resources.

14                      Your continued support is invaluable,  
15          ineffable. Together we will continue to  
16          champion the well-being of our esteemed  
17          veteran community.

18                      I look forward to answering any  
19          questions that you may have. Thank you.

20                      ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great. Thank  
21          you, Commissioners. We very much appreciate  
22          it.

23                      We're going to go to Chair Kim for his  
24          questions first.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you, Chairman.  
2 Thank you both for your testimonies  
3 today.

4 Director Olsen, I have four rapid  
5 questions, quick answers, followed by some  
6 deep-dive questions.

7 Does the New York State Office for  
8 Aging manage or oversee Medicaid-related  
9 payments or reimbursements?

10 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: No.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Is it accurate to  
12 say that investing in the State Office for  
13 Aging helps save the state billions in  
14 Medicaid costs in the next five years?

15 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: I don't know  
16 about billions, but certainly saving because  
17 the clients who are Medicaid-eligible we're  
18 able to keep them off of Medicaid.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Okay. Well, our  
20 calculation sees that we can save up to  
21 billions of dollars in the next five years if  
22 we invest in NYSOFA.

23 Does NYSOFA reimburse MLTCs or utilize  
24 managed-care organizations for payment to

1 providers?

2 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: No.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: So to summarize,  
4 NYSOFA pays directly to providers, counties,  
5 municipalities, for non-Medicaid-related  
6 services for older adults who, if you don't  
7 serve, will try to spend down or impoverish  
8 themselves to qualify for Medicaid services  
9 managed by MLTCs or managed-care  
10 organizations. Correct?

11 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: If we can't  
12 provide the service and that's the only  
13 option, then that's something we assist with,  
14 yes.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: So changing  
16 subjects, unfortunately, you know, our  
17 long-term care and end-of-life care has  
18 become a system, in my opinion, of extracting  
19 maximum money from our state rather than  
20 providing patient- and worker-driven  
21 solutions by investing in the right places.  
22 I had hoped by now the New York State  
23 Master Plan on Aging could have started these  
24 honest and bold conversations so we can

1 finally start building solutions.

2 Do you feel optimistic that the  
3 Master Plan on Aging would accurately address  
4 the lack of investment and funding for aging  
5 services?

6 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: I do,  
7 Assemblyman. And I know that there has been,  
8 you know, within the 400 meetings and several  
9 dozen town halls, the investments in terms of  
10 the front-end prevention not only in NYSOFA  
11 but other areas, is at the forefront. Which  
12 is why we're talking about social  
13 determinants of health and value-based  
14 payments to actually pay for the things that  
15 are valuable.

16 So yeah, I believe that the Governor  
17 wants to create a mechanism to look at not  
18 siloed approaches but a whole-systems  
19 approach.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: The Executive  
21 Budget, Greg, proposes Article VII  
22 legislation that would establish an Elder  
23 Justice Coordinating Council with SOFA to  
24 protect older adults from abuse and

1 mistreatment, in enhanced collaboration  
2 between the state agencies involved in  
3 elder justice.

4 What are the Governor's elder justice  
5 priorities, and why is this council needed?

6 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, this  
7 council, Assemblyman, is huge. So you know  
8 we are the only state in the country to have  
9 an E-MDT. Certainly Ann Marie can speak to  
10 that if you have a round of questions next  
11 time.

12 But what this will do is really help  
13 us create at the state level a similar  
14 structure at the local level. There are a  
15 lot of different state agencies and partners  
16 of theirs that are also dealing with elder  
17 abuse, financial exploitation, et cetera. So  
18 that's OCFS, DFS, Victim Services,  
19 State Police, et cetera. So it will allow us  
20 to come together to set those priorities and  
21 then develop a standardized response  
22 leveraging the assets of each system so that  
23 we're looking at people holistically and  
24 helping to meet their needs.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: You know, you  
2 brought up the Long Term Care Ombudsman  
3 program, and we've been focused on this, my  
4 colleagues and I, for the last several years,  
5 and I'm sure many will follow-up on that  
6 topic as well.

7 We had a slight increase last year in  
8 our budget, and with that increase we saw a  
9 slight improvement in performance of weekly  
10 visits. I think we went from like 9 percent  
11 to 12 percent, which still isn't great, but  
12 it's a step in the right direction. But why  
13 is the Executive cutting the program instead  
14 of going to invest more, since you are  
15 actually performing and going in the right  
16 direction?

17 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, and I  
18 think the agreement that you guys had with  
19 the Governor last year to add that 2.5 was  
20 huge, because as you know, as the number of  
21 volunteers goes down, it's really something  
22 where you need FTEs. And that's what the  
23 money went to.

24 You know, I think others have

1 testified to this. It doesn't -- not having  
2 legislative adds picked up doesn't mean that  
3 there's less or no value in those services.  
4 That's just kind of the way that this process  
5 runs, as you know. And I'm really hopeful  
6 because we've only now been a couple of weeks  
7 since the budget's come out, and the State of  
8 the State, that we have now until, you know,  
9 April 1st to have the dialogue about what the  
10 priorities are statewide. And I'm hopeful  
11 that this as well as EISEP will be part of  
12 that mix.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Yeah, I mean it's  
14 one of the -- I think it's one of the  
15 successful stories of us not getting  
16 everything that we wanted because we've had,  
17 I think, capacity issues to scale this  
18 program. But we've done it; we were scaling  
19 incrementally, and we're committed to working  
20 with the Executive in investing in the right  
21 amount so we can build that capacity and  
22 build the public side to oversee the nursing  
23 home and long-term-care facilities.

24 So I hope we can find the solution

1 here to continue to build --

2 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, thank  
3 you for your support.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Social adult  
5 daycares, it's been something that our  
6 committee has been focused on for the last  
7 one year. There's been rampant unchecked  
8 growth of these adult daycares. They're  
9 popping up everywhere down in New York City,  
10 unlicensed sometimes -- most of the time.  
11 And they are -- some of them are just ghost  
12 centers. They are liquidating benefits and  
13 giving kickback money for older adults  
14 without providing any breakfasts, lunches or  
15 any services.

16 And I'm hoping this year we can figure  
17 out a solution how to streamline the  
18 certification and oversight process and  
19 NYSOFA can play an active role in rooting out  
20 the bad operators. Because in the midst of  
21 all that, my constituents and our  
22 constituents desperately need places where  
23 they can tackle their social loneliness and  
24 isolation. And the successful ones provide

1           invaluable service where people are  
2           constantly socializing and feeling better  
3           about their mental health.

4                        But it only takes one bad apple, and  
5           we have a lot of bad apples that's dragging  
6           down this market. So I'm hoping we can do  
7           something together to fix this.

8                        NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I mean  
9           we're always interested in that. And  
10          Assemblyman, you know, there's two models for  
11          social adult day: There's a medical model  
12          under MLTC. That's really what you're  
13          referring to, and that's a Health Department,  
14          Office of Medicaid Inspector General. And  
15          then there's our social adult day programs  
16          which, again, we do monitor and oversight as  
17          well.

18                       But all of the SADs programs are  
19          required to use our standards at NYSOFA as a  
20          minimum base. So I think that there's a  
21          collectively larger issue with SADs, but I  
22          think what you're referring to in terms of  
23          the city is the reason we created this  
24          process at the state, because of those

1 problems that you identified.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: I'd like to close by  
3 focusing on something that you and I both  
4 enjoy talking about and tackling, which is  
5 social loneliness and isolation. I  
6 understand the administration launched  
7 something that we talked about for a while,  
8 creating an Ambassador to Loneliness in  
9 Dr. Ruth. There was major news around this  
10 last year.

11 What specific actions is Dr. Ruth,  
12 Ambassador for Loneliness, taking right now  
13 to help New Yorkers cope with loneliness?

14 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, first  
15 you have to thank Senator Krueger, who is  
16 really the brains behind that. And  
17 appreciate all your support, Senator.

18 Look, you and I have talked a lot  
19 about this, and the same with Senator Cleare  
20 and others. Loneliness and isolation is not  
21 just a huge public health problem for older  
22 adults. It certainly is for kids as well.  
23 So, you know, there are two other countries,  
24 Japan and the UK, that have identified an

1 Ambassador to Loneliness because it is a  
2 public health epidemic.

3 Having the ability to have somebody  
4 like a Dr. Ruth in New York State who can  
5 work with the Governor and can work with our  
6 agency, Office of Mental Health, and others  
7 to really raise awareness on what the problem  
8 is and that there actually are solutions that  
9 communities can engage in that are either  
10 no-cost or low-cost.

11 But if we don't have this out in the  
12 forefront all the time, we get bombarded by  
13 other things. So having a spokesperson that  
14 can really talk about this issue is what the  
15 whole goal was. So we collectively worked up  
16 a plan that we are -- you know, have just  
17 finalized to kind of work with Dr. Ruth over  
18 the next year to be able to highlight some of  
19 these things and put something -- you know,  
20 put a process in place that makes sense.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: So I only hope that  
22 we can recruit more ambassadors and create a  
23 robust program around the state, and hope  
24 that they can also play some sort of liaison

1           role between all the agencies in terms of the  
2           services available to older adults. That's  
3           something that I think is critically needed,  
4           because almost every agency touches the older  
5           population, and having an active  
6           ambassador-like program to let our  
7           constituents -- especially down in New York  
8           City, who may not actually know many of the  
9           SOFA-related services -- be aware, that would  
10          be great.

11                         Thank you for your time today.

12                         NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank you,  
13           Assemblyman. Thanks for your partnership and  
14           support.

15                         CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

16                         Senator Cleare, chair of the  
17           Aging Committee.

18                         SENATOR CLEARE: Hi, good afternoon.

19           Thank you. Thank you for your testimony and  
20           thank you for coming here today and all the  
21           work that you are doing around social  
22           isolation -- I know we had some great  
23           programs in my district -- and older  
24           New Yorkers really appreciate it. But social

1 isolation is a big problem.

2 I want to talk a little bit about the  
3 budget that we have \$44 million -- 44 million  
4 more dollars than last year. And I just  
5 wondered how come we're not using this money  
6 to increase LTCOP. Is this -- is the  
7 \$44 million figure attributable to federal  
8 funds? Or how does NYSOFA plan on investing  
9 that money?

10 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, there's  
11 not an increase of 44 million in our budget.

12 SENATOR CLEARE: It looks like it.

13 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: So we got a --  
14 you know, we're around 178 million in state,  
15 which is a little bit more than where we were  
16 last year. We got an additional 7.3 million  
17 from the federal government this year. And  
18 the counties still have almost \$50 million of  
19 unobligated ARPA funds that are available to  
20 them through September 31 {sic} of 2024.

21 SENATOR CLEARE: The only mention we  
22 have of the Master Plan on Aging in the  
23 Governor's proposed budget is that you need  
24 another million dollars to continue to fund

1           it. But can we expect the proposals under  
2           discussion to emerge in time for policy and  
3           fiscal consideration?

4                        NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: So, you know,  
5           we had -- a first interim report came out.  
6           We're expecting the second report to come out  
7           fairly soon.

8                        I can tell you, Senator, just by some  
9           of the people who are behind me or may not be  
10          here today, they're on many, many, many of  
11          the subcommittees. And I'm sure that, you  
12          know, between now and the end of the budget  
13          cycle or the end of session, they'll be  
14          communicating with you about what's been  
15          discussed and what some of the  
16          recommendations are.

17                       But in terms of the formal report,  
18          that should be out -- you know, it's  
19          forthcoming fairly soon.

20                        SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. HMH Part F  
21          makes changes to the Special Needs Assisted  
22          Living voucher programs. So why are those  
23          changes needed? I think you have to be -- in  
24          order to be eligible you have to be a

1 resident. And would this make it harder for  
2 people to qualify for the program? And are  
3 we excluding people by making that change?

4 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: I'm not  
5 familiar with that change, so if it's the ALP  
6 program, Assisted Living Program under the  
7 Health Department, that would be the  
8 Health Department.

9 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay, I'll get back  
10 to you with that one.

11 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Sorry about  
12 that.

13 SENATOR CLEARE: I'm going to go to  
14 New York City for a minute. Currently  
15 New York City's budget from NYSOFA for older  
16 adult services is 35 percent of the state's  
17 allocation, when roughly 40 percent of all  
18 New York State's older adults live in the  
19 city. Why the 5 percent gap, and what can we  
20 do to close it?

21 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I'm not  
22 sure where that figure came from. My  
23 figure's about 43 to 44 percent of our  
24 funding goes to New York City, because our

1 funding is formula-based, meaning it's a  
2 percentage of the 60-plus population in  
3 New York, which we have 4.84 million people.

4 So the city has almost 2 million  
5 people, so they're in or around 43,  
6 44 percent, not 35.

7 SENATOR CLEARE: So you're saying it's  
8 the math. I'll compare math with you.

9 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: I would love  
10 to. If I'm wrong on that, I'll be the first  
11 one to admit it. But that's been  
12 traditional.

13 Again, it's -- it's not something that  
14 we control. We have an interstate funding  
15 formula that has to be approved by the  
16 federal government, and that's how our  
17 federal and state money gets distributed  
18 across the state, is by the proportion of a  
19 county's 60-plus population as compared to  
20 the whole.

21 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. This next  
22 question is about home care and the recent  
23 55-cent-an-hour increase, which -- well, it  
24 effectively disregards the wage disparity

1 for -- within the sector, excluding home care  
2 workers funded through EISEP.

3 Are we going to -- and this happened  
4 before, I know, and the state made up for it.  
5 But we just want to know are we going to do  
6 that again to make sure that everybody is  
7 getting parity across the board.

8 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes, that's a  
9 great question. I'm glad that you asked.

10 So EISEP is just one funding stream  
11 for our home care program. It's significant,  
12 but it's 48 percent. So we use a variety of  
13 funding streams to provide personal care  
14 Level 1 and 2.

15 We have covered the rate increase for  
16 the counties, or at least directed them that  
17 they could use the COLA dollars to make up  
18 that gap, because the MLTCs received the rate  
19 increase, our network did not, and we used  
20 those COLA dollars to do that.

21 Many of our counties are providing,  
22 and they're able to negotiate their own  
23 rates. We don't dictate that. So in some  
24 parts of the state you're going to have a lot

1 higher rates in order to secure an aide to  
2 keep somebody at home and stay off of  
3 Medicaid.

4 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. Currently  
5 there's 16,000 individuals and their families  
6 waiting for non-Medicaid home and  
7 community-based care, but the Governor's  
8 proposed budget cuts the \$9.3 million  
9 legislative add from the program that  
10 delivers those services.

11 We need an additional investment of  
12 \$51 million to address the waiting lists. Do  
13 you see us restoring that money in any way to  
14 help?

15 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, as I  
16 mentioned before, legislative adds are  
17 traditionally not added. I hope that you all  
18 see the value of those types of programs and  
19 services and that, you know, between now and  
20 the end we will have a dialogue. And if  
21 those are priorities, you know, for you guys  
22 as well as they are for us, those types of  
23 things will be restored.

24 There are long-term services that get

1 really difficult to turn on when dollars go  
2 away, like the stimulus funding. But there's  
3 many things on a waitlist, like a home  
4 modification or transportation, that counties  
5 could absolutely be tapping that \$50 million  
6 that they have until the end of September.

7 But I think that's -- to your  
8 question, that's going to be a dialogue over  
9 the next couple of months.

10 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. Of all the  
11 adult care facilities, a whopping 88 percent  
12 do not get a weekly visit, which is the state  
13 goal of the LTCOP. Yet the Governor's  
14 proposed budget cuts the \$2.5 million from  
15 LTCOP, so we need an additional \$15 million  
16 to reach the LTCOP goal of one visit -- just  
17 to get one visit once a week.

18 What are the plans for us to do that?  
19 We can't cut the two and a half; we actually  
20 need much more than that.

21 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yup, so the  
22 two and a half that you all agreed to two  
23 years ago was baseline, and we are really  
24 thankful for that. This two and a half that

1 was a legislative add last year, as you know,  
2 was not covered.

3 I think that the Governor, from what  
4 she has said and what she has done since she  
5 took office on how important getting to the  
6 bottom of quality-of-care issues in nursing  
7 homes, has made that a priority. So again, I  
8 think between now and the end of the budget,  
9 folks like yourselves and others that  
10 recognize the value of the LTCOP program, the  
11 reduction in the volunteers and the need for  
12 FTEs, this will be a part of -- part of the  
13 budget negotiations.

14 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. And -- thank  
15 you for that.

16 We have an unfunded aging service  
17 mandate that has left area agencies on aging  
18 with a \$10 million deficit, curtailing their  
19 ability to provide service and keep up with  
20 demand. An additional \$10 million is needed  
21 to cover the deficit. We can talk about it.

22 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Senator,  
23 what's the unfunded mandate?

24 SENATOR CLEARE: Well, this is part of

1 the visits. So we have to make sure that we  
2 get the money to the agencies. Yeah, I think  
3 that's a part of the last thing that we  
4 talked about, the LTCOP program.

5 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Okay.

6 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay? And the State  
7 Office for the Aging for the last five years  
8 has been required to submit an annual report.  
9 We haven't gotten the annual report -- I'm  
10 going to shorten this question --

11 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Our general --

12 SENATOR CLEARE: -- to the State  
13 Legislature on how funds appropriated to  
14 address the waiting lists have been spent.

15 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, that --  
16 we do -- we've published that report already,  
17 and I'm drafting the next one. So I'll make  
18 sure that you get that. That went -- that  
19 was public last year.

20 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. Okay. All  
21 right. So that's all those questions that I  
22 had. Thank you.

23 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank you,  
24 Senator. Appreciate you.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.  
2 Assembly.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.  
4 Chair Jean-Pierre.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Good  
6 morning. There we go. Good morning. Thank  
7 you both for your testimony.

8 Commissioner Olsen, I would love to  
9 hear more about the Ambassador to Loneliness  
10 program, if you can share that with my  
11 office. And my office will reach out.

12 But most of my questions are going to  
13 be directed to Commissioner DeCohen.

14 Thank you for being here. We missed  
15 you at our hearing back in December. But I  
16 have a few questions.

17 The first one is the Executive Budget  
18 proposes 1.1 million in reappropriation, an  
19 additional 500,000 for emergency and  
20 temporary housing. Can you tell me if that  
21 1.1 million has been spent? And if not, why  
22 not? And why the additional 500,000?

23 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you  
24 so much for the question, Assemblymember and

1 Chair, and for all that you do.

2 We are actually still dotting the I's  
3 and crossing the T's for that \$1.1 million,  
4 and we are going to be having the  
5 announcement in the coming weeks. We have to  
6 implement that program from scratch, as you  
7 know, and we wanted to ensure that once it is  
8 launched, that everything is going to be set  
9 for that.

10 I don't have to tell you the  
11 importance and the need of our veterans  
12 across this state for not only housing needs  
13 but housing emergencies that this can speak  
14 to. While we've been out there as well, you  
15 know, this goes a little bit beyond the  
16 housing. This goes also to those veterans  
17 who are housed who have disabilities and  
18 incur emergencies within their homes.  
19 Something like being without a washing  
20 machine is so vital and so crucial. Those  
21 who are behind in rental situations, those  
22 who are behind in mortgage situations.

23 So we're looking forward to announcing  
24 this rollout in the coming weeks.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: So how did  
2 we get to the additional 500,000?

3 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: That I'm  
4 going to have to get back to you on, because  
5 we were not on that part, we were on the part  
6 with the \$1.1 million grant for the housing.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay. So  
8 look forward to talking to you more about  
9 that.

10 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Yes.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: My next  
12 question is Section 4 of the Veterans Service  
13 Law requires that DVS prepare and submit a  
14 report on homeless veterans every three  
15 years. The report was due in June 2023. Do  
16 you know what the delay is?

17 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Yes. We  
18 had actually brought aboard a special  
19 engagement coordinator to be able to have  
20 boots on the ground to be able to get that  
21 data and those numbers. And because the  
22 person is still new, we're still new,  
23 onboarding, we're getting ready to have those  
24 numbers for you anytime now. I have to --

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Do we know  
2 a date? Do we have a date?

3 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: -- and have  
4 it pulled.

5 It should be within the next 30 to  
6 60 days. It won't be long. Within that  
7 timeline.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay. In  
9 2022, the DVS annual report indicates that  
10 the Discharge Upgrade Advisory Board did not  
11 receive any applications. Does DVS have an  
12 estimate of how many veterans have less than  
13 honorable or bad paper discharges?

14 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: I do not  
15 have those numbers. Again, we will have to  
16 get back to you on that.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay.  
18 What resources does the department use  
19 currently to reach out to veterans who may be  
20 seeking a discharge upgrade, and are there  
21 plans to improve that outreach?

22 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Currently  
23 we're still utilizing the restoration of  
24 honors. To date we have restored 50

1 restoration of honors and upgrades. Our  
2 "find and serve" method to where we are boots  
3 on the ground with our veterans benefits  
4 advisors -- you see our executive deputy  
5 commissioner and our general counsel, who are  
6 sitting next to me, our book bags and  
7 briefcases and pocketbooks have become our  
8 offices, because we are now interfacing with  
9 our veterans across the state.

10 Part of our "find and serve" has also  
11 been extended to our houses of worship for  
12 our faith-in-service, where we are finding  
13 those within the houses of worship.

14 Interestingly enough, we're finding that a  
15 lot of our pastors and our bishops and rabbis  
16 are themselves people who served who were in  
17 need of upgrade discharges within their  
18 houses of worship, and for themselves. So  
19 this has also allowed us to extend our  
20 offerings of upgrades and the restoration of  
21 services.

22 And again, we're no longer putting the  
23 restoration of services in the mail. We are  
24 now parlaying, we're calling them over the

1 phone to let them know that they have been  
2 upgraded and to congratulate them. Or we are  
3 giving them in person. So glad to say that  
4 I've met with a good dozen or more of them in  
5 their homes to deliver the restoration of  
6 honors in person from New York City, Bronx,  
7 all the way to Buffalo.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay,  
9 awesome. Just for the sake of time, I'm just  
10 going to keep going. How many applications  
11 have been received for grants under the  
12 Veterans Nonprofit Capital Fund Program?

13 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We're so  
14 glad to say that currently we've done the  
15 first round: 39 veteran organizations have  
16 received the grantee award to allow for a  
17 capital grant for improvements for their  
18 organization.

19 The second round is now in effect, and  
20 the deadline is going to April 19th. And so  
21 we're hoping that those that were not in the  
22 first round can get in the second round so  
23 that we can distribute that second part of  
24 the 2.6 million.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Sorry,  
2 just want to stop you. What outreach methods  
3 are you using in order to get it out for  
4 April 19th?

5 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Good.  
6 Good. We've already utilized all of the  
7 social media platforms. We utilized our  
8 distribution list, and we've reached out to  
9 all of our county partners to get on their  
10 listserv as well.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay. And  
12 the kiosks. Can you quantify how many  
13 veterans actually have been served in --  
14 under utilizing the kiosks.

15 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Good.  
16 Good. We're still in the portion of  
17 gathering data because we have actually  
18 upgraded our kiosks to become digitalized.  
19 And so now we -- instead of nine kiosks we  
20 have now deployed 13 kiosks and counting. We  
21 have more money that has been allocated for  
22 additional kiosks, and we've had much more  
23 requests.

24 I have to tell you we're excited now

1 to have these not only roll out in places  
2 like here in the Concourse where they can now  
3 be utilized and digital by our state  
4 partners, but we're now getting requests and  
5 we're hopeful to now see them in places like  
6 the Jacob Javits Center in New York City,  
7 Grand Central Station, and some of the  
8 airports.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay. And  
10 my last question is in your testimony you  
11 said that the "Veterans Benefits Advising  
12 Program secured a remarkable \$68.47 million  
13 in monthly" -- and that is an almost 8,000  
14 increase of claims reported from 2022.

15 How is DVS maintaining quality and  
16 responsive representation to fill these  
17 almost 8,000 more claims from last year?

18 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Well, this  
19 is what we've done with boots on the ground.  
20 That "finding and serving" has been so  
21 instrumental, our Governor has given us an  
22 additional 1.25 million for additional  
23 veteran benefits advisors. I want you to  
24 know now that our veteran benefits advisors

1 are sitting with our veteran in a holistic  
2 approach, taking care of everything that they  
3 need within their claims and beyond, for  
4 their households.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay.  
6 Well, that's all I had. Thank you so much.

7 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you.  
8 Thank you.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very  
10 much.

11 Next up is our chair for Veterans,  
12 Senator Scarcella-Spanton. Ten minutes.

13 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you,  
14 Chair.

15 And thank you so much, Commissioner,  
16 for all the work you do and for your service.

17 One of the first things I wanted to  
18 ask about and bring to your attention is the  
19 Comptroller recently laid out a report of the  
20 personal income tax checkoff. There is close  
21 to three -- there's a little over  
22 \$3.4 million of that money that has not been  
23 disbursed yet in the last six years. So it  
24 goes for veterans remembrance and cemetery

1 maintenance and operation, homeless veterans  
2 assistance, Veterans Home Assistance Fund,  
3 and military family relief.

4 Specifically for the cemetery  
5 maintenance, they actually saw the biggest  
6 increase of any tax checkoffs of over  
7 \$950,000. And with interest, it has  
8 \$1.5 million sitting waiting to be disbursed.

9 So my question would be, is why hasn't  
10 this money gotten out yet and what can we do  
11 to help you get it out the door to the groups  
12 who need it?

13 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you  
14 for your question, Senator. Thank you for  
15 all the work that you do as well.

16 As you know, we recently took over the  
17 cemetery, and we're still in the writing  
18 phase and still dotting all the I's and  
19 crossing all the T's to ensure those things  
20 as well. Right now we wanted to ensure that  
21 it continued to run at the same high-quality  
22 level that it was serving, and to ensure that  
23 they have all the staffing and the needs to  
24 be able to maintain it at that high standard.

1                   But these are things that we are  
2                   working on diligently, and we're checking  
3                   them off one by one.

4                   SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Okay. And  
5                   so what will the mechanism be for -- let's  
6                   say for homeless veterans assistance? That  
7                   has close to \$1.4 million sitting waiting to  
8                   be drawn down. Will you create something for  
9                   organizations to request that funding? How  
10                  will you get that funding out?

11                  DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We can get  
12                  back to you on that so that we can have a  
13                  solid answer for you.

14                  SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Okay,  
15                  perfect.

16                  DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you  
17                  so much.

18                  SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: That  
19                  brings me to my next question. We had -- the  
20                  budget has 1.1 million for Homeless Veterans  
21                  Housing Program. And this year we have --  
22                  the Governor's recommending 600,000 in  
23                  funding for this program. Can you provide  
24                  more of the details on this funding?

1                   DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN:  Again,  
2                   we're going to be getting this out within the  
3                   coming weeks.  But just to let you know,  
4                   again, it will be for our veterans who have  
5                   emergency needs, those who may be behind in  
6                   their rent, in their mortgage.  We're even  
7                   getting phone calls -- and again, we want to  
8                   ensure that the needs of all our veterans are  
9                   met.  Things like emergency refrigeration and  
10                  things of that nature that we're looking to  
11                  put in there.

12                  Again, just dotting the last I's and  
13                  crossing the last T's.  So when I say the  
14                  coming weeks you're going to hear this  
15                  announcement, the coming weeks you'll hear  
16                  this announcement and all the criteria for  
17                  our veterans to be able to utilize this.

18                  SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON:  Perfect.  
19                  I think it will be a great addition if we're  
20                  able to figure out in the next couple of  
21                  weeks how to draw down those additional funds  
22                  that have been sitting.  I think that will go  
23                  a really long way.

24                  DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN:  Absolutely.

1                   SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: And do you  
2 know how many veterans received homes through  
3 the use of last year's funds and how many  
4 homes would be provided in this year's funds  
5 with that \$600,000 allocation? Or is it not  
6 just for homes, it's for homeless veterans,  
7 so it's different serv -- it's like the  
8 refrigeration --

9                   DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: That's  
10 correct.

11                   SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Okay. How  
12 many veterans does New York State Department  
13 of Veterans' Services serve annually? And  
14 essentially how many veterans reach out to  
15 the office monthly? Are you keeping track of  
16 that number?

17                   DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: As you  
18 know, we serve over 688,000 veterans -- let  
19 me say this, because this is something that I  
20 want us to have a clear understanding of.  
21 When we say "veteran" -- and now that I am  
22 going across this entire state, that is not a  
23 good representation of those who have served.

24                   And, you know, Senator Ashby, you

1 know, thank you for your service.

2 We are now utilizing the term on our  
3 flyers and advertisements and working with  
4 even our county veteran officers, who know  
5 all of the veterans within their town. Now,  
6 when we sit and we say for those who've  
7 served, and we're setting up a table, a  
8 totally different population is coming forth  
9 to say I served, I was in the Army for four  
10 years, but I was just a photographer, I did  
11 this or that. That number is not a good  
12 representation.

13 But because we are doing the "find and  
14 serve" and we are approaching this for those  
15 who have served, in the smallest of towns  
16 where they're saying there's maybe one or two  
17 women veterans, 50-plus came out in a small  
18 town.

19 So, you know, we say 688,000; we know  
20 that there's much, much more -- many more  
21 than we have served. Twenty-four percent  
22 being served in the national average, because  
23 17 percent are for those with the  
24 disabilities.

1                   What we're seeing now -- and again,  
2                   we're not waiting for anyone to come inside  
3                   the building. People may not know that you  
4                   exist. We want them in front of us. The  
5                   difference of having them in front of us --  
6                   and I can testify as a veteran who's done  
7                   this and gone on a website to get a resource,  
8                   I have my VA Health card. For years I did  
9                   not know of any other resources. Now we have  
10                  the testaments and the letters of people that  
11                  are sitting in front of our veteran benefit  
12                  advisors -- not in the office, but when we're  
13                  at the supermarket, when we're in the  
14                  laundromat, when we're now involved in the  
15                  houses of worship and their health and  
16                  wellness days, to be able to let them know to  
17                  do a benefits check for those who served.  
18                  The numbers have quadrupled.

19                  And again, we are now bringing in over  
20                  \$800 million in the past year. That's data  
21                  and that's a quantitative number that we can  
22                  say doing the qualitative work, the  
23                  phenomenological of allowing the veteran  
24                  their voice to tell us what it is that they

1           need, and to meet those service needs. And  
2           this has been with your help as well in the  
3           past year that has made the difference.

4                        To ask the veteran not just about  
5           their claim but everything that's going on in  
6           their life, in their home, has made the  
7           difference.

8                        We just did a Fabulous Friday where we  
9           highlighted one of our veteran benefits  
10          advisors because the gentleman wrote a letter  
11          and said that if he did not sit with her and  
12          if she did not ask him about the ideation of  
13          suicide and do the Columbia protocol, then  
14          that would have been his last day. So he  
15          wrote a letter because she asked him those  
16          questions and traded off to our partners, and  
17          he was able to get the services that he's  
18          still here.

19                       The other letters talk about going in  
20          to find one resource and leaving with five  
21          more.

22                       And to let you know, our partners  
23          across the state, we no longer have to send  
24          them across the water or across the road to

1 get these resources. Now they can go home  
2 and furniture is being delivered. Baby  
3 items, through Operation Babies, is there.  
4 Diapers, the diaper program that we're  
5 getting ready to roll out. A baby crib.  
6 Book bags for their children. This has all  
7 been because of your assistance across the  
8 state, and we see the difference.

9 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Yeah, and  
10 being mindful of time, I know -- thank you.  
11 I really appreciate the great work you guys  
12 are doing, and I think those mobile service  
13 vans have gone a long way.

14 How many mobile service vans were you  
15 able to obtain last year with the \$300,000  
16 allocation?

17 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We're  
18 getting ready to roll out three. We actually  
19 put the bid through twice; we didn't get any  
20 takers. This time we put the bid through  
21 again and we were specific with letting them  
22 know the accessibility and the technological  
23 services that we want on them. We're looking  
24 forward to having them out. When they roll

1 out now, we can literally do the "Sock It to  
2 Me" across the state with the socks on there.  
3 Hopefully the diapers will be on there.

4 But also just to let you know, you  
5 know, VBA reps are there also. They can get  
6 the FreshConnect tickets and services for  
7 food. They can also be told about the legal  
8 services, free legal services through our  
9 partners like the New York State Bar  
10 association that's now helping our veterans  
11 with everything with -- from their life, from  
12 adoption, which we're helping a couple right  
13 now, to divorce, all the way down to wills.

14 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: That's  
15 great.

16 You know, one of the things we've  
17 discussed in detail -- and again, I really  
18 thank you for your partnership. We always  
19 try to make sure we bounce ideas, and you've  
20 been fantastic with that. You know, I think  
21 it's really difficult for veterans returning  
22 home to figure out what services they are  
23 qualified for. What do you do to encourage  
24 veterans or those who served -- I will change

1 my language too -- to get enrolled with the  
2 VA or let them know what New York State  
3 offers?

4 And we've spoken about a lot of ideas,  
5 but would love to see that, being mindful of  
6 time.

7 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Yeah, thank  
8 you, Senator.

9 As you know, again, Executive Deputy  
10 Commissioner Joel Evans and myself have now  
11 signed I think 10,000-plus "welcome home"  
12 letters that have gone out. We've been able  
13 to do this with the Department of Defense and  
14 working now with so many of our military  
15 installations to be able to capture those  
16 folks when they're getting home. The  
17 difference is now it doesn't say call an 888  
18 number. It now has the name of one of our  
19 veteran benefits advisors on there. They can  
20 now call Susie and Donna. And we're doing  
21 the handhold with them of all of their  
22 benefits.

23 Again, we're no longer just claims.  
24 We've expanded beyond that. We can get your

1           claims, do you have a family, does your  
2           spouse need employment. Everything from A to  
3           Z. And that's because of your help, so thank  
4           you so much.

5                         SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you.  
6           Thank you, commissioner.

7                         DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you.  
8           Thank you.

9                         CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you, Chair.  
10          Assembly.

11                        ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.  
12          Assemblymember Jones. This time I  
13          mean it.

14                        (Laughter.)

15                        ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Thank you. Don't  
16          start to clap yet.

17                        Thank you for being here,  
18          Director Olsen.

19                        Commissioner DeCohen, thank you for  
20          your service. I see we have a few of our  
21          local veterans up there. Thank you for your  
22          service as well. My questions -- and thank  
23          God for the Dwyer funding, getting that  
24          statewide was an initiative that many of us

1 here worked on a couple of years ago, and we  
2 have it.

3 My questions will probably be to  
4 Director Olsen, but I think they're very  
5 relevant with both of you here, since -- what  
6 is it -- over 440,000 of our over-60 are  
7 veterans.

8 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Unbelievable.  
10 Many in my area as well.

11 So I have to drill down -- I'm going  
12 to ask you a couple of questions; I have to  
13 drill down on the budget. Okay, I see a  
14 little discrepancy, it must have been an  
15 oversight. I see we have less money in our  
16 Office for the Aging budget than we did last  
17 year. And I say that because I'm looking at  
18 EISEP. We'll drill down on that. I know the  
19 chair talked about it as well.

20 I see the 9.3 million add is gone. I  
21 see other funds down. We're talking about  
22 that non-Medicaid-eligible list. All right?

23 I hate to talk about return on  
24 investment when we're talking about our

1 veterans, our loved ones, our neighbors, our  
2 family members. But unfortunately this is  
3 one of the few areas we have to talk about in  
4 human services. We have to talk about return  
5 on investment when we're talking about our  
6 neighbors, our loved ones, our veterans. We  
7 have to talk about it because we're so  
8 severely underfunded every year.

9 Okay, let's talk about return on  
10 investment. Director Olsen, is directing  
11 money towards EISEP and other programs on  
12 this list a good investment? Do we get a  
13 good return on investment?

14 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, I think  
15 we do get a good return on investment.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Does it save  
17 Medicaid dollars?

18 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: I believe it  
19 does, because the average person is an  
20 83-year-old low-income female, lives alone,  
21 four to 10 chronic conditions, three ADL  
22 limitations, six IADL limitations. They're  
23 on our caseload between five and seven years,  
24 for under 10,000.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: When is New York  
2 State going to wake up and realize that this  
3 is a good ROI in actually servicing our loved  
4 ones, our veterans, our neighbors? When are  
5 we going to wake up? That's a rhetorical  
6 question, when are we going to wake up.

7 Second -- I only have 30 seconds left,  
8 time clock -- is the Master Plan on Aging  
9 released?

10 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: There's a  
11 first interim report, there's a second report  
12 that's going to be coming out shortly, the  
13 final in '25.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: And is there any  
15 funding in the budget as it sits right now to  
16 implement anything in the Master Plan for  
17 Aging?

18 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: The money in  
19 the budget for the Master Plan is to continue  
20 the process that will end at the end of '24.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Nothing to  
22 implement the plans.

23 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Not at this  
24 point, because the recommendations are just

1 being put in.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Thank you.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

4 Ranker Senator Ashby.

5 SENATOR ASHBY: Thank you, Chair.

6 Commissioner DeCohen, thank you for  
7 being here.

8 In 2022 the division was upgraded,  
9 elevated to a department. Right? And that  
10 gives a higher status -- you're a  
11 commissioner now, right -- and also allows  
12 for an increased budget, you would think, and  
13 access to federal funding. Have you seen an  
14 augmentation in your staff since then?

15 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you  
16 for that question, Senator Ashby.

17 I don't have to tell you because you  
18 see what's happening out there. As a result  
19 of the Governor's 2022-2023, we know that  
20 just even our veterans service organizations  
21 had received 150 percent increase from the  
22 10,000 to 25,000 --

23 SENATOR ASHBY: Commissioner DeCohen,  
24 have you seen an -- have you augmented your

1 staff?

2 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Yes. Thank  
3 you. The 1.25 million that the Governor has  
4 just given us to increase our veteran  
5 benefits advisors is allowing for an increase  
6 across the state to be able to do that.

7 But I don't have to tell you that we  
8 are standing on a beach with sand, and what  
9 we have done with this sand is not to ask for  
10 more sand. But what we've done, showing in  
11 the dollars that we brought in for the past  
12 year, of over \$800 million, speaks for  
13 itself.

14 We've done together incredible work  
15 across this state with what the Governor has  
16 given us.

17 SENATOR ASHBY: Have you seen an  
18 increase in maybe federal partnership, being  
19 now a department that allows you to garner  
20 federal funding? What federal partnerships  
21 have you had?

22 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Right.  
23 Well, I have to tell -- I have to tell you  
24 that now what we've done is we've been called

1 to Washington to be able to participate in  
2 things like the Women Veterans Center of  
3 Excellence and the meetings with the  
4 Honorable --

5 SENATOR ASHBY: Has any of this  
6 resulted in an increase in your budget as a  
7 department?

8 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: This --

9 SENATOR ASHBY: Because what I'm  
10 looking at now is a \$2.4 million cut. So  
11 you're a department now, you're a  
12 commissioner, and you're seeing a cut.

13 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: No, what --  
14 let me tell you what you don't see. What you  
15 don't see are the initiatives that we were  
16 already working on where we already had the  
17 money set aside in our budget. Things like  
18 the Women Veterans Trail that's coming on,  
19 the health pocket card that we have, the  
20 toolkit and all of the programs that we have  
21 for the suicide prevention. Those were  
22 already allocated in the budget with what  
23 we've had.

24 Listen, we have our veterans at the

1 table, and they are all being fed. And  
2 again, who dares to be on the beach and say  
3 we don't have enough sand? We have beach.

4 And again, the 1.25 million that's  
5 been given to us to add additional veterans  
6 benefits advisors, the partnerships that we  
7 now have -- because we are a department --  
8 with our intrastate agencies, people like  
9 Greg Olsen that we're now having caregiver  
10 programs -- we have expanded tremendously.  
11 Our arms are stretched.

12 SENATOR ASHBY: Now that you're seeing  
13 a cut, \$2.4 million cut, what programs do you  
14 anticipate cutting?

15 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We have not  
16 seen -- see, it looks like a cut. Let me --  
17 let me be clear --

18 SENATOR ASHBY: It does, because  
19 that's the arithmetic, that's the math. It's  
20 a cut.

21 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: The math --  
22 the math -- the math is equated to our work  
23 bringing in over \$800 million in tax-free  
24 federal benefits back into the pockets of our

1 veterans and families. And that's what we  
2 want, increase for our veterans, and that's  
3 what we have. We have increased -- we have  
4 sand on the beach.

5 SENATOR ASHBY: Commissioner DeCohen,  
6 that's -- I mean, that's just not true. It's  
7 a cut. It's a \$2.4 million cut. And in --

8 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Senator --

9 SENATOR ASHBY: In the last six years,  
10 we've neglected to disburse over \$3 million  
11 to veterans nursing homes, to burial  
12 services.

13 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Senator  
14 Ashby --

15 SENATOR ASHBY: This is a department  
16 now, right?

17 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you,  
18 Senator Ashby. It's a --

19 SENATOR ASHBY: This is a department.  
20 We're supposed to be getting new resources.  
21 What in your communications to the Governor  
22 or even the federal government has led to an  
23 augmentation of this department? Can you  
24 tell me?

1                   DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN:  Senator  
2                   Ashby, as the boots on the ground going  
3                   across this entire state, we are seeing all  
4                   of the funds that this Governor and this  
5                   administration again has given to our  
6                   veterans service officers and our counties.  
7                   We are going in, they have acquired, with the  
8                   money given --

9                   (Overtalk.)

10                  SENATOR ASHBY:  Commissioner DeCohen,  
11                  I understand that.  I've been to Niagara  
12                  County and Nassau County as well on behalf of  
13                  our veterans, advocating for the  
14                  Dwyer Program, advocating in fact for your  
15                  division to be elevated to a department.  And  
16                  what are we seeing as a result of that?

17                  DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN:  We are  
18                  seeing an increase in services for our  
19                  veterans across the state, the veterans, the  
20                  very homes that I have been to and gone into,  
21                  we have seen increase there, especially with  
22                  our amazing veterans --

23                  CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER:  Thank you,  
24                  Commissioner.

1                   DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN:  -- service  
2                   officers.

3                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER:  We're going to  
4                   cut off this line of questioning.

5                   DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN:  Thank you.  
6                   Thank you.

7                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER:  But thank you.  I  
8                   think you were clear with your answers.

9                   DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN:  Thank you,  
10                  Senator.

11                  CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER:  Next up is  
12                  Senator May --

13                  Oh, I'm sorry, Assemblymember.  
14                  Assemblymember.

15                  ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI:  Outrageous.

16                  (Laughter.)

17                  ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI:  Assemblymember  
18                  Clark, please.

19                  ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK:  Excellent.  
20                  Thank you.  I am going to stick to Aging for  
21                  now, so you are on the hot seat.  Thank you,  
22                  Director.

23                  Quick questions, first on the Long  
24                  Term Care Ombudsman Program.  Obviously we've

1 heard it. You know, we see what the Governor  
2 did on elder abuse; we understand that she  
3 kept the dollars in her budget proposal to  
4 continue the expansion of the work Lifespan  
5 is doing on elder abuse. You know, I think  
6 what our colleagues here are confused by is  
7 why she didn't do that on the Long Term Care  
8 Ombudsman Program, understanding that we are  
9 trying to professionalize it.

10 Do we have a current understanding of  
11 where we are with FTEs, how many were hired  
12 last year? And do we sort of have the buy-in  
13 from the Office for the Aging that getting to  
14 the point where we have the needed dollars to  
15 make sure it was fully professionalized, to  
16 ensure we are getting the visits that we need  
17 into these facilities happen?

18 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, thanks,  
19 Assemblywoman. We absolutely can provide  
20 that data for you. The number of FTEs we  
21 hired, the increase in those places visited.  
22 You don't have to question on whether we have  
23 buy-in in this program or not. I think that,  
24 you know, in prior administrations it hasn't

1 always risen to the top as the value that it  
2 is.

3 I think that this chamber and this  
4 Governor think differently, which is why we  
5 see the increases. And again, you know, not  
6 to mimic what everybody else has been saying,  
7 we do have a \$4 billion deficit, tough  
8 choices need to be made, but this is the  
9 start of the process and I'm hopeful that  
10 we'll end -- you know, this will be discussed  
11 in the next couple of months.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Okay. And on  
13 the critical question, what is the budget  
14 number to remove everybody from waiting  
15 lists?

16 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: It's not as  
17 easy to say. So if you had a workforce that  
18 was available, and includes PC aides or what  
19 have you, it would probably be between 40 and  
20 \$50 million.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Okay. I mean, I  
22 just think these are -- as we see the  
23 population aging -- it's probably one of our  
24 most increasing; we've seen the reports that

1           it's also the most growing in poverty -- I  
2           just think putting a concerted effort to get  
3           people off waiting lists for literally basic  
4           needs is something we really need to think  
5           about.

6                        My last thing -- and it's less of a  
7           question but more of a sort of plug to put in  
8           your mind as we look at the 1115 Medicaid  
9           waiver and understand the social determinants  
10          of health.

11                       And understanding a program like  
12          Community Care Connections and what we've  
13          seen it do with Medicaid dollars to keep  
14          people out of our health systems and instead  
15          care for our aging New Yorkers, I just want  
16          to add -- or just throw it out there that I  
17          really think as we look at what to fund  
18          through social determinants of health, we  
19          really look at that program, we look at  
20          expanding it across the state and  
21          understanding its effectiveness to really  
22          help our older New Yorkers.

23                       NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN:   Could not  
24          agree with you more.   The CCC program is one

1 of several initial BIP Innovation Grants that  
2 have shown a great ROI, and the 1115 waiver  
3 actually does have 1.75 million that we've  
4 worked with Ann Marie to expand.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

6 We'll try Senator May now.

7 SENATOR MAY: Thank you,  
8 Chair Krueger.

9 And hi, Director Olsen.

10 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: How are you,  
11 Senator?

12 SENATOR MAY: I'm going to follow up  
13 on the Long Term Care Ombudsman question.  
14 And just what percentage of the visits are  
15 being made by volunteers right now, do you  
16 know?

17 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Are you just  
18 looking for volunteers or are you looking for  
19 everybody?

20 SENATOR MAY: Well, we want to move  
21 away from the volunteers. That was part of  
22 the goal, was to professionalize it.

23 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, so we  
24 can get a breakdown for you. I don't think

1 we want to move away from volunteers. I  
2 think what we want to do is have a robust FTE  
3 and volunteer, because we've lost 600 of them  
4 over the last decade.

5 SENATOR MAY: Okay. But you -- are  
6 you confident that we're moving in the right  
7 direction on this?

8 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, I think  
9 the resources that, you know, the Governor  
10 and the Legislature provided us, you know,  
11 that's what that money goes to.

12 So, yeah, we can absolutely show you a  
13 pre and post, where we are because of those  
14 resources. And, you know, we're not all the  
15 way. We can always do better. But we have  
16 significant improvement, and I think that's  
17 exciting.

18 SENATOR MAY: Okay. And then we  
19 passed the Reimagining Long-Term Care Task  
20 Force bill a couple of years ago, and you're  
21 one of the statutory cochairs. Has -- have  
22 there been any meetings? Are there plannings  
23 for meetings? Do we need to do an extender  
24 for --

1                   NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Not all the  
2                   appointments have been made yet. So we are  
3                   waiting for those appointments to be made. I  
4                   believe they're on the Legislature's side.  
5                   And then we are eager to get going with our  
6                   partners at the Health Department.

7                   SENATOR MAY: Okay. Thank you.

8                   And then more of a comment, but  
9                   Commissioner, I hope that you're aware of the  
10                  program we have in Syracuse for the Tiny Home  
11                  for Good, which is building tiny homes for  
12                  homeless veterans. I would love it if you  
13                  would come up and -- if you haven't seen that  
14                  and seen what's happening there, it's a  
15                  pretty exciting program too.

16                 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you  
17                 so much. I would love to see it. I actually  
18                 know the developer of that program prior to  
19                 coming aboard.

20                 SENATOR MAY: Oh, great. Well, we'll  
21                 look forward to seeing you in Syracuse.

22                 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you  
23                 so much. Thank you.

24                 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Do you mind if

1 I tag along on that one?

2 SENATOR MAY: Absolutely.

3 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: I'm a big fan  
4 of micro homes.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

6 Assemblymember Manktelow.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Thank you,  
8 Chair.

9 Good afternoon, everyone.

10 And Director Olsen, I heard you say  
11 earlier that -- your partnership with our  
12 veterans. And I know that as our veterans  
13 are getting older, we have our Vietnam  
14 veterans, we have our Korean War veterans,  
15 we have our -- we even have some  
16 World War II veterans. And I know  
17 Senator Ashby and myself, we have legislation  
18 to look at senior -- or veterans nursing  
19 homes across the board.

20 Is that something that your office  
21 could help us get across the finish line?

22 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: You know, I'm  
23 not sure. I'd be happy to talk with you more  
24 about that.

1                   We are identifying veterans in the  
2                   community, and that's why we have such a  
3                   great partnership, because we literally  
4                   screen for veteran status so that we can make  
5                   a soft referral to DVS and their partners to  
6                   access the 105 federal, state and local  
7                   benefits.

8                   But I'd love to talk to you more about  
9                   that.

10                   ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: All right.  
11                   You know, as we talked about the budget, I  
12                   believe that \$2.4 million cut, you know, that  
13                   would go a long way towards nursing homes for  
14                   our veterans long term. And I'd love to work  
15                   with both of you on that, because I think  
16                   it's a very important initiative.

17                   And thank you for partnering with our  
18                   commissioner, and I appreciate that.

19                   Commissioner, good afternoon. Semper  
20                   fi, my friend.

21                   DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Good  
22                   afternoon. Good afternoon. Semper fi.

23                   ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Thank you for  
24                   your service.

1                   Back to talking about the budget. I  
2                   had spoken with some of our county veterans  
3                   officers out in the counties, and we actually  
4                   have one up here behind you. And one of  
5                   their issues is with funding about getting  
6                   vehicles to have vehicles that they can drive  
7                   around within their county to help service  
8                   the veterans at the same time as well.

9                   Is that something your office could  
10                  help push forward with the Governor's office  
11                  as far as helping to create funding for them  
12                  to have vehicles to accomplish that?

13                 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you  
14                 for that question, first of all. And thank  
15                 you for your work as well and your service.

16                 That's a question that I would refer  
17                 them to our county veterans officer in one of  
18                 the counties, because he actually utilized  
19                 that increase in budget to purchase a vehicle  
20                 to -- for his county to be able to service  
21                 their veterans better.

22                 As you know, that amount had a  
23                 150 percent increase, went from the 10,000 to  
24                 25,000. And that was one of, again, our

1 county veteran service officer in Tioga  
2 County who was able to acquire and purchase a  
3 vehicle. In fact what he did with that  
4 amount of money just within his organization  
5 has been remarkable.

6 And so many -- let me just say that so  
7 many, all of our 60-plus counties have done  
8 remarkable this past year in serving our  
9 veterans. And because I'm there, I'm able to  
10 see it firsthand, those who are outdoors  
11 without services that now have a 100 percent  
12 claim, and their lives are better. And  
13 again, the many letters that we have, I wish  
14 we could bring the letters. And I wish we  
15 could bring those veterans themselves, who  
16 can attest to the great work that's being  
17 done throughout New York State.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: All right. I  
19 appreciate the answer. And thank you for  
20 that answer.

21 Another question. Years ago, back in  
22 I believe 2019 was the last year that the  
23 Boys State -- are you familiar with Boys  
24 State, put on through the Legion? That was

1           actually a line item in the budget. It was  
2           appropriated I believe at \$150,000 back in  
3           2019. I believe that hasn't happened since  
4           then.

5                       And I was wondering what your comments  
6           are about getting that funding back, getting  
7           that funding back to the Boys State program.  
8           Do you have a comment on that?

9                       DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Oh, that's  
10          something that we can definitely talk about.

11                      ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Because I  
12          think it's a great program that brings a lot  
13          of young people forward, and I think we need  
14          to do that.

15                      I've only got a little bit of time.  
16          Back to the Veterans Cemetery. It was great  
17          to see you out there last Memorial Day. It  
18          was good to see you there, New York State  
19          Veterans Cemetery out in West Sampson State  
20          Park back then.

21                      I know that there's \$4 million,  
22          1 million for capital improvements and  
23          another 3 million for a maintenance facility.  
24          It's my understanding, speaking with the

1 director out there and the head of the  
2 grounds crew, that the equipment that's being  
3 used is actually leased through a private  
4 contractor. Do we foresee the state taking  
5 that over and providing that equipment for  
6 that cemetery?

7 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Well, we  
8 were happy to actually keep the grounds --  
9 the groundskeeper on contract because he was  
10 happy, he's been doing this for years. It  
11 was his desire to stay on. And so when he  
12 allowed us to know that he already has his  
13 own equipment, he's familiar with that  
14 equipment and the usage, we were happy to  
15 take him on as well as allow him to continue  
16 on with the use of that. Everything's been  
17 going well on that.

18 And should we ever have to, then we  
19 know that the money is there to do that.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Okay, thank  
21 you. So I just want to be sure that money is  
22 there, because that's not going to last  
23 forever.

24 And my time is up. Thank you both.

1 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you.

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

3 Senator Rolison.

4 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you, Chair.

5 For Director Olsen, I am interested in  
6 knowing a little bit more about the Elder  
7 Justice Coordinating Council, as a former  
8 police officer involved in cases involving  
9 elder abuse.

10 What is the time frame for that  
11 report? I just don't see it in my notes. Is  
12 there one?

13 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: I think that  
14 there is. I don't have that in front of me.  
15 I can get back to you.

16 But both -- there's a couple of  
17 existing committees at the state level that  
18 this is not going to eliminate. But we work  
19 extensively -- and again, Ann Marie's a great  
20 person to ask the same question to -- State  
21 Police, Sheriffs Association, DAs --

22 SENATOR ROLISON: Will they be, you  
23 know, brought into this --

24 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: State Police

1 is actually named in that.

2 And there's a coordinating council --  
3 and I always mess up the name, it's really  
4 long -- that I sit on with -- it's run by  
5 DCJS and the State Police. And so all of  
6 those, you know, folks that have already been  
7 meeting on things like this for years can  
8 help influence this new council by bringing  
9 in all the various players that deal with  
10 this issue, from law enforcement to service.

11 SENATOR ROLISON: Do you -- and again,  
12 because this part is new to you, do you see  
13 any short-term goals of this council that  
14 would be able to advise and give the  
15 Legislature, you know, guidance on  
16 potentially strengthening laws against  
17 elder abuse and holding people accountable  
18 for it in a different way than we are right  
19 now?

20 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I think  
21 that will be part of, frankly, the  
22 deliberations.

23 I think the earliest short-term thing,  
24 frankly, Senator, is connecting the dots.

1           And what I mean by that is too often a lot of  
2           agencies don't work that closely together  
3           because they're -- you know, they're focused.  
4           And we work with everybody that's been named  
5           in there -- Office of Court Administration,  
6           et cetera.

7                         So this will be a really good  
8           opportunity to understand what everybody  
9           does, what our assets are, what we need to do  
10          together. And I can't imagine things like  
11          that aren't going to come out of this, is  
12          what can we do better, what statutory changes  
13          may be needed, other types of enforcement  
14          actions.

15                        SENATOR ROLISON: Good. And you had  
16          said, director, that you, you know, currently  
17          are sitting on some of these groups that are  
18          meeting --

19                        NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes.

20                        SENATOR ROLISON: And what -- just in  
21          my last 50 seconds, what do you see, as  
22          director of Office for the Aging, how that  
23          information from the professionals who are  
24          doing the work every single day will be able

1 to advise this interagency council to make  
2 concrete recommendations to the state, to the  
3 Governor, and to the Legislature? Do you see  
4 that happening?

5 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I do.

6 I think we specifically have to reach  
7 out to existing coordinating councils and  
8 then we -- you know, out of our 62 counties,  
9 we currently have 60 with an E-MDT program,  
10 two more coming. And that is everybody at  
11 the community level, from a geriatric  
12 psychiatrist to a forensic accountant to a  
13 district attorney, law enforcement,  
14 et cetera.

15 You know, I've been doing this work a  
16 long time, and not at the macro level, at the  
17 micro level. If we are not getting the  
18 advice and guidance from people at the  
19 ground floor, then we're not doing our job.  
20 So I am fully in lock step with your  
21 questioning.

22 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you for that.

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

24 Assembly.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

2 Assemblymember Eachus.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Thank you.

4 Mr. Olsen, I love your exuberance when  
5 you show up here.

6 I'm going to make more statements than  
7 questions because there's so much and so  
8 little time.

9 Ombudsman program. I'd like to hear  
10 in the future about what you're doing to  
11 recruit volunteers and whether we still have  
12 that requirement where the volunteers can  
13 have no relatives in the actual facility that  
14 they're checking. You know, that's not  
15 helping you to get the volunteers in.

16 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: We'll get that  
17 for you.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Yeah. And then  
19 the other thing that we discussed was the  
20 reporting of the ombudsman and how it kind of  
21 just is choppy and doesn't come back and all.

22 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Okay.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: And then the  
24 final thing is the ElliQ AI companion

1 program. Nine hundred units are nothing. If  
2 they're being successful, you know, let us  
3 know what kind of money you need for the  
4 future to hopefully bring more of those  
5 on board.

6 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I  
7 appreciate all those questions. We'll get  
8 the first two answers to you. I have folks  
9 here helping to take notes.

10 You see some of the outcomes data that  
11 we have for ElliQ. It's only 900, but we're  
12 the first state in the country, at least from  
13 a state agency perspective.

14 And then one final thing. I'm Greg.  
15 My dad's watching; he's Mr. Olsen.

16 (Laughter.)

17 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: And I want to  
18 thank our chair, Mr. Kim, because I think he  
19 was the one that really kind of started with  
20 the ElliQ program and brought us aware of it  
21 and all, so --

22 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah. And the  
23 Assemblyman has another project that we're  
24 working on with another tech, out of

1 South Korea. So we're excited about that.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Thank you.

3 Commissioner DeCohen, thank you for  
4 your service. And again, just some more  
5 statements, probably.

6 First of all, Boys State/Girls State.  
7 I am making requests for money from -- for  
8 those of 150,000 each. The last time we did  
9 the money for Girls State they turned it  
10 back. I don't know why.

11 The second thing is, you mentioned  
12 diapers and helping veterans. There is such  
13 a thing as a diaper bank. You might want to  
14 check into that and see if you can work  
15 together to do that.

16 The question I do have is the capital  
17 grants. You said the second round is  
18 April 19th, to apply for those capital  
19 grants?

20 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: That's  
21 correct.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Where do they go  
23 to apply for them?

24 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Everything

1           they can -- to get the information -- well,  
2           they can get the information on our website  
3           now, and that will direct them to go through  
4           the grants gateway.

5                     ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS:   Okay, thank you.

6                     And then the digital kiosks, I know  
7           you mentioned those.  I would hope that you  
8           take and -- you consider counties, various  
9           different counties, that have a large number  
10          of veterans in it and maybe a county center,  
11          you know, government centers and so on like  
12          that.

13                    And then also once the mobile veterans  
14          centers come online, I hope you use us to  
15          maybe ask if we can bring those mobile  
16          centers into our districts.  I know we would  
17          all love to share them, but we would love to  
18          have them there too.

19                    So -- and then the final thing that I  
20          have is you mentioned about 10,000  
21          welcome-home letters.  I'm surprised you're  
22          able to get that information, because usually  
23          the Defense Department doesn't let that  
24          information out.  And some of the county

1 departments would love, if possible, to have  
2 that information to make contact with those  
3 veterans.

4 Thank you.

5 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you,  
6 sir.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

8 Next is Senator Weik.

9 SENATOR WEIK: Thank you.

10 Thank you, Commissioner, for your  
11 service to our country, and thank you for  
12 being here today and for your testimony.

13 I represent Nassau County and part of  
14 Suffolk County, home to the most veterans in  
15 all of New York State. So a kiosk in Suffolk  
16 County would be very welcome.

17 But we also represent so many  
18 veterans, and we're always looking for more.  
19 And it looks like we're getting significantly  
20 less. So when we look at the Dwyer Program,  
21 we've only got an increase of about a  
22 million, which really doesn't do much for the  
23 Dwyer Program.

24 We're also looking for more capital

1 improvement money. Because of COVID, so many  
2 of our American Legions and our VFWs were  
3 shut down. They were unable to raise funds  
4 to do things like repair their roof, update  
5 their bathrooms and so on. And that's really  
6 usually where the Dwyer programs take place.  
7 These centers are essential for our veterans.

8 And then of course the money that was  
9 collected from the income tax not being  
10 distributed and just sitting there, not  
11 available to our veterans, not being used for  
12 our veterans.

13 You seem to be okay with the  
14 status quo with the Governor cutting your  
15 budget. I'm just curious, are you planning  
16 on asking for more Dwyer money, and are you  
17 going to be asking for more money in the  
18 budget this year?

19 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you  
20 so much for your question. And thank you,  
21 Senator, for your service as well.

22 Again, what's not seen is that the  
23 Governor has doubled her money to Dwyer.  
24 They'll be getting about \$8 million in their

1 program. We've been happy to continue to  
2 work with Dwyer, which has been a magnificent  
3 program from the incep, working with them  
4 with, now, partners like OMH and SUNY, who  
5 have developed the toolkit and the question  
6 and answering.

7 Again, the 24 million and the cuts  
8 that everyone is talking about, those are  
9 legislative adds that are not expressed in  
10 the Executive Budget. That looks like a cut,  
11 but they will be put back in through your own  
12 negotiations for the final budget enactment.

13 SENATOR WEIK: So I appreciate your  
14 rose-colored glasses approach to this, but  
15 it's still a cut. And we still need more  
16 money. Our veterans have been neglected and  
17 underfunded for a very long time.

18 And I appreciate that you've formed  
19 relationships with our federal partners in  
20 order to bring in more of those federal  
21 dollars for our veterans. But we need you to  
22 be asking for an increase in Dwyer. And we  
23 need you to be asking for an increase to the  
24 budget this year. And we're not going to

1 accept no for an answer.

2 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you  
3 so much for that.

4 And again, there has not been any cuts  
5 for our veterans. This Governor is very well  
6 aware of the dignity and what our veterans  
7 have earned and deserve. We have gotten that  
8 money for Dwyer. Dwyer has more money.  
9 Again, the 150 percent increase for our  
10 veteran service officers across the state;  
11 the testimonies and the changed lives of our  
12 veterans, whose homes I'm now going in from  
13 New York City, Bronx, to Buffalo, is a  
14 testament, as well as the money that we're  
15 bringing in, testament to what this Governor  
16 has done.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very  
18 much, Commissioner.

19 Assemblymember Alvarez.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN ALVAREZ: Thank you all  
21 for your testimony today.

22 I'm honored to serve in the Assembly  
23 Committee on Aging. I have a couple of  
24 questions for each one of you. I'm going to

1 speak with the commissioner of Veterans'  
2 Services first.

3 What if any services are available for  
4 our veterans, our heroes, at the New York  
5 State Division of Veterans' Services office  
6 in the Bronx, which is located in my district  
7 at the VA Medical Center in the Bronx.

8 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: I'm sorry,  
9 could you repeat the question? I missed a  
10 portion of it.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN ALVAREZ: Yes. What if  
12 any services at the DVS offices in the  
13 Bronx -- in the Bronx, located in my  
14 district. What if any services are available  
15 in that division?

16 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you  
17 for that question, Assemblymember Alvarez.

18 And again, thank you for your service.

19 We've been happy to say we have been  
20 working with the Bronx, the J.J. Peters and  
21 the Bronx, period. We have veterans benefits  
22 advisors that are on-site there. We are part  
23 of the food distribution program. We are a  
24 part of the Operation Baby, where baby

1 clothes are coming out of that office. We  
2 just did movies across the state, and the  
3 Bronx was one of those sites where we had the  
4 movies for our veterans for Veterans Month.  
5 The FreshConnect checks are being given out  
6 that our Governor increased from \$20 to \$50,  
7 and a host of other services.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN ALVAREZ: How the cuts  
9 that we are right now discussing on the  
10 Governor's budget is going to impact the VA  
11 office in the Bronx, if any?

12 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: I'm sorry,  
13 say it --

14 ASSEMBLYMAN ALVAREZ: So we're talking  
15 about the cuts, right, the Governor is  
16 proposing for the Aging Department {sic}. So  
17 the question is, what of those cuts is going  
18 to affect my veteran office in the Bronx?

19 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you,  
20 Assemblymember Alvarez.

21 Let me say again, just so that you  
22 know, there is no cut. What we're -- when  
23 we're saying cuts, people are referring to  
24 what's known as legislative adds that are not

1 in the Governor's Executive Budget. But  
2 those are the things that would be formulated  
3 that are being discussed now to be in the  
4 final -- final budget. They look like a cut  
5 to you; there are no cuts to our veterans.  
6 Their services, especially in the -- I'm a  
7 Bronx girl, the boogie-down Bronx -- to  
8 Buffalo is secure with all of the services  
9 being given to veterans.

10 We are working with folks like the  
11 diaper banks. Just to let you know, some of  
12 our diaper banks where we were volunteering  
13 are running out of diapers themselves, and  
14 this is why it's important that this clarion  
15 call be given now, because we have  
16 active-duty servicemembers who are coming to  
17 us requesting diapers because the diaper  
18 banks are running low.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN ALVAREZ: Thank you.

20 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you,  
21 sir. Thank you, sir.

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

23 I think it's my turn. I think the  
24 first question will be for both

1           commissioners.

2                       So yesterday we had the Workforce  
3           Hearing and we had the various state  
4           agencies, Civil Service and Labor and others,  
5           and quite a few unions all saying we  
6           desperately need people to apply for state  
7           jobs. And I must admit, I was thinking,  
8           well, are we reaching out to older  
9           New Yorkers and making sure they know that  
10          there are state jobs? Because I'm an older  
11          New Yorker, and I have a great job working  
12          for the state, just for the record, and I  
13          think there are a lot of older New Yorkers  
14          who would actually love the opportunity. I  
15          hear from them all the time. They were laid  
16          off in their fifties, they can't seem to get  
17          back into the labor market, they need to.  
18          They have great skills, great experience.  
19          And the same story for veterans, whether or  
20          not they are older veterans or younger  
21          veterans.

22                      So what are both of your agencies  
23           doing to help support New Yorkers who happen  
24           to be veterans or older or both to know about

1 and be encouraged to apply for state jobs?

2 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: You mind if I  
3 go first?

4 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: No problem.

5 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, thanks,  
6 Senator. I'm an older worker in a state job  
7 too.

8 Senator Cleare's going to be thrilled  
9 with your question and my answer. So  
10 Senator Cleare's had a bill two years in a  
11 row that has passed to create an older worker  
12 workforce development project. That bill is  
13 now being implemented administratively  
14 between -- in the Labor Department, which is  
15 the right place to do that, in consultation  
16 with us.

17 So we have met twice, we're developing  
18 our action plan. And I'll tell you the three  
19 general things and then a couple of other  
20 things, and I'll turn it over to the  
21 commissioner.

22 You know, with the one-stop shops we  
23 oversee the Title 5 program, the federal  
24 workforce program for 55-plus. There's

1 obviously a recognition that older adults,  
2 whether you're 50 or over, experience  
3 discrimination. So part of this office is  
4 going to address workforce discrimination.  
5 We have a lot of data on what the positives  
6 are for hiring an older worker. But we live  
7 in an ageist society, so we've got to deal  
8 with that.

9 It would be the ability to skill,  
10 re-skill or up-skill older workers. That  
11 absolutely can use technology. I know Beth  
12 is following me from AARP, and one of the  
13 things I love about them is their data. For  
14 the first time in history, a report just came  
15 out from them that older adults use  
16 technology at the same rate as everybody  
17 else. We shouldn't be surprised -- I see  
18 everybody here who's over 50 using technology  
19 just like I do, exactly. So we're excited  
20 about that.

21 One of our partnerships is with the  
22 GetSetUp, and they have a national  
23 partnership with Easter Seals, who is one of  
24 the national Title 5 providers. So what

1           they've been able to develop is 83  
2           different --

3                       CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Mic off;  
4           inaudible.)

5                       NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Sorry. Oh,  
6           I'm sorry. GetSetUp has a workforce training  
7           platform we want to expand. Sorry about  
8           that, Senator.

9                       CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Inaudible.)

10                      DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you,  
11           Senator Krueger.

12                      We've been working also with our civil  
13           service to get the information out about our  
14           55-c program. We actually just had a  
15           LinkedIn event for our 55 and over,  
16           Staying Alive and Rocking Your Profile, in  
17           which they were able to learn about the many  
18           jobs and opportunities and the testing  
19           requirements for that.

20                      In that wise also, our veteran benefit  
21           advisors, because DOL has been such a  
22           wonderful partner in giving us the available  
23           list on an ongoing weekly basis of jobs that  
24           are provided, we're able to work with them.

1                   Also going back into our houses of  
2                   worship with our Faith in Service, where our  
3                   older population is, this is the information  
4                   that we've also been getting out to them that  
5                   many of them were not aware about with this  
6                   55-c program. And they're now taking that  
7                   opportunity, because one of our veterans who  
8                   hadn't worked in 35 years is now employed.

9                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Exactly. That's  
10                  great. Thank you.

11                  So back to you, Greg.

12                  NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Sorry.

13                  CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: That's okay.

14                  So Assemblyman Hevesi brought this up  
15                  before with social services. But with the  
16                  previous Governor, I forget his name --

17                  NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Me too.

18                  CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: -- he didn't like  
19                  the previous mayor, and so New York City kept  
20                  getting cut. So I don't feel that way about  
21                  the current Governor's attitude towards my  
22                  home city.

23                  But 40 percent of older New Yorkers  
24                  live in New York City, but we're only getting

1           35 percent of SOFA funds in New York City.  
2           Is that like just an accident we haven't  
3           fixed yet?

4                        NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN:   Senator Cleare  
5           had raised that before, and that is not my  
6           understanding.  And I've been around a long  
7           time.  It's usually 43, 44 percent.  I will  
8           verify that and get back to you both.

9                        CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER:  Will you, please?  
10          Okay, because that's -- I'm getting different  
11          messages even after Senator Cleare asked the  
12          question.

13                       Do we know the numbers of people on  
14          county by county EISEP waitlists?

15                       NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN:  Yes, we do.  
16          But it's not EISEP.  Again, we have an  
17          in-home program that EISEP is one funding  
18          stream.  So the answer to that is yes.

19                       CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER:  Okay.  Can we get  
20          that, then, from you?

21                       NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN:  Sure.

22                       CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER:  Thank you.

23                       And same question for case management  
24          services for older New Yorkers by county.

1 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yup.

2 Absolutely.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. Do we  
4 also have a home meal waitlist?

5 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So I'd love all  
7 those waitlists.

8 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: You got it.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

10 Oh, my goodness, I finished my  
11 questions early. I should have let you go on  
12 about the --

13 (Laughter; overtalk.)

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: The Assembly will  
15 take my time. Thank you very much, both of  
16 you.

17 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: You've known  
18 me; you know you had to cut me off.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes. No, thank  
20 you for your work.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,  
22 Senator.

23 Assemblymember Buttenschon.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: Good

1           afternoon, Commissioner and Director.

2                       Commissioner DeCohen, thank you for  
3 your service and to all the veterans here,  
4 and those listening today.

5                       Commissioner, the demographics of my  
6 district in the Utica-Rome area have many  
7 veterans with children. So as you look at  
8 the housing initiatives, I wondered if  
9 children -- or families with children are  
10 considered within the rubric as you are  
11 looking at this money and its being  
12 allocated.

13                      I also -- I'll put in all my questions  
14 because I think you're probably going to have  
15 to answer in writing, so thank you to both of  
16 you.

17                      Regarding the capital funding program  
18 that was initiated last year, many of the  
19 nonprofits that I work with struggle because  
20 there's working boards and possible issues  
21 with some of the information that they've had  
22 through transfers of those working boards.

23                      So how much money have you actually  
24 allocated out or secured to those different

1 individuals that have requested capital  
2 funding? And do you have staff directly  
3 working with these nonprofits to help support  
4 their efforts, as this is new territory for  
5 many of them.

6 And Director Olsen, regarding  
7 long-term care, is there a clear discrepancy  
8 across the State of New York in regards to  
9 the reimbursement rates, or is that a  
10 standard rate across the state?

11 And finally, as you look at the budget  
12 that has been presented to both of you, can  
13 you identify what's missing and what you  
14 think is needed to ensure that you can  
15 provide for those that you serve?

16 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you  
17 for those very thought-provoking questions.

18 First of all, family members of our  
19 veterans have always been a part. That's why  
20 it's always been veterans and their families.  
21 And again, because we have expanded into a  
22 department, when our veteran is sitting in  
23 front of us, our veteran and their families  
24 are sitting in front of us.

1                   And so we've been able to extend the  
2                   questions as far as the needs of the family  
3                   members: Do you have school-age children?  
4                   Do they need book bags? Could they utilize  
5                   clothing?

6                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: I'm sorry,  
7                   I just want -- I'm referring to housing with  
8                   our homeless veterans. That in my community,  
9                   they're coming to us with concerns that the  
10                  housing is needed not only for them but their  
11                  children.

12                 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Oh. Yes.  
13                 Yes. In fact we've been supporting those  
14                 supportive housings that have already been  
15                 going up for our veterans and their families.  
16                 This includes our veterans who are dads with  
17                 children as well.

18                 And then working to your other  
19                 question, 39 veteran organizations have been  
20                 awarded. The 2.6 million -- we have the  
21                 other 2.6 million to be given out. And this  
22                 will be in increments from 25,000 to 75,000.  
23                 And they're able to utilize the grants  
24                 gateway that has a revolving video on there

1 with step-by-step questions to them.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,  
3 Commissioner. I appreciate it.

4 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Can I just let  
5 the Assemblywoman know I'll follow up in  
6 writing on her question to me?

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: Thank you  
8 very much.

9 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: You're  
10 welcome.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And all questions  
12 in follow-up should come to Ways and Means  
13 and Finance for distribution to everyone.  
14 Because even if we didn't individually ask,  
15 we all want to know.

16 Okay, Senator Stec.

17 SENATOR STEC: Thanks, Madam Chair.  
18 Good afternoon.

19 A question for Commissioner DeCohen.

20 There's about 700,000 veterans living  
21 in New York State, and your budget is looking  
22 at a \$2.4 million reduction at the same time  
23 we're -- the same budget proposes sending  
24 \$2.4 billion to New York City for illegal

1 immigrants.

2 How does that jibe for the veterans,  
3 the 700,000 veterans? What kind of message  
4 do you think that sends to our veterans?

5 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Once again,  
6 you know -- please forgive me, but again, the  
7 2.4 million is not a cut. We're responding  
8 and referring to legislative adds that again,  
9 once you come together and formulate, will be  
10 in the final -- the final budget.

11 SENATOR STEC: If I could talk about  
12 those legislative adds. So the spreadsheet  
13 that I have in front of me, I count 18  
14 legislative adds that have been zeroed out,  
15 all over the state, some having to do with  
16 Helmets to Hardhats; one in particular  
17 relevant to my district, North Country  
18 Veterans Association; Vietnam Veterans of  
19 America; the Outdoor Rx Program; VFW. You  
20 know, these are all legislative adds that  
21 total \$3.4 million.

22 Why were they all zeroed out?

23 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Right.  
24 Those are the ones that are initially zeroed

1 out, again, because they don't go into the  
2 Executive Budget. But those are the ones  
3 that are always renegotiated -- I know you're  
4 going to do a great job in doing that, to  
5 bring them into the final budget.

6 SENATOR STEC: Why do we have to fight  
7 with the Executive to get this funding put  
8 back in? What game is this that we're  
9 playing?

10 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: There's no  
11 fighting. And, you know, again, we know that  
12 once the final budget comes out, you're going  
13 to do a great job of, you know, getting those  
14 back in. As you always do.

15 SENATOR STEC: All right, so homeless  
16 veterans' housing. In the enacted 2024  
17 budget there's \$1.1 million for homeless  
18 veterans. Again, this is near and dear to my  
19 heart, because we're talking about  
20 \$2.4 billion to New York City for illegal  
21 immigrants' housing. One-point-one million  
22 dollars in the enacted budget, and the  
23 Executive's proposed cutting that more than  
24 half, to 500 million {sic}. Did we solve

1 veterans' homelessness in New York State?

2 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Again,  
3 that's -- that's not being cut. We're  
4 getting the --

5 SENATOR STEC: It's a cut. The 2024  
6 enacted budget is 1.1 million, and the  
7 Governor's proposed 2025 budget is 500,000.  
8 How's that not a cut?

9 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Again,  
10 these are -- again, these are the legislative  
11 adds that are usually -- usually cut out of  
12 there. The one -- the one --

13 SENATOR STEC: Who cut it? Did the  
14 Legislature cut that? This is the Governor's  
15 budget. This is your department's budget  
16 that a lot of us fought to create this  
17 department, and I think a lot of us are a  
18 little disappointed in what we're seeing from  
19 it.

20 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: You should  
21 not be disappointed. You should be very  
22 elated with the work that's been done across  
23 this great state with what this Governor has  
24 given.

1                   And again, when we're talking about  
2                   qualitative, forget that. The quantitative  
3                   numbers are proving themselves. What this  
4                   Governor has given under this administration,  
5                   you have not seen these numbers before.

6                   SENATOR STEC: Thank you, Madam Chair.

7                   DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We're on a  
8                   beach with sand, and we don't dare say the  
9                   beach doesn't have enough sand. We have  
10                  enough sand.

11                  CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

12                  ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very  
13                  much.

14                  CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: In case anybody's  
15                  missed it, I believe you've answered that  
16                  question four times now.

17                  DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Yes.

18                  CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So no more asks  
19                  of that question. Thank you.  
20                  Assembly.

21                  ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember  
22                  González-Rojas, please.

23                  ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Thank  
24                  you so much.

1                   Thank you both for your service and  
2                   for being here.

3                   Director Olsen, I just want to share  
4                   that I'm personally navigating a system which  
5                   feels disconnected even as a member of the  
6                   Legislature, to try to get home health  
7                   service for my mother, whose cognitive  
8                   function is rapidly declining, but she does  
9                   want to stay in her home. So I really want  
10                  to give a shout out to the wonderful folks at  
11                  the Association on Aging in New York that  
12                  have been a lifeline to help me navigate it.  
13                  It is very difficult to understand the  
14                  patchwork of support that exists.

15                  Can you talk about -- I understand  
16                  that older people make up and spend about  
17                  \$72 billion in this state, right, contribute  
18                  to our economy. And I just think about the  
19                  waiting lists and the challenges and the  
20                  barriers that they often have to face in  
21                  getting care.

22                  I also understand that the Aging  
23                  budget is less than 8/10ths of 1 percent of  
24                  the entire New York State budget.

1           I just want to make sure that we're  
2           doing our job to advocate for our older  
3           New Yorkers. So can you talk about how --  
4           what kind of clients are served by NYSOFA and  
5           what is the cost of that care versus Medicaid  
6           or nursing home placement? Because most  
7           people want to age at home.

8           NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, no  
9           question people want to age at home. And,  
10          you know, none of this is our fault, but we  
11          have to recognize we live in an ageist  
12          society. And we keep talking about "them" as  
13          they're not going to be us with 10 years,  
14          right?

15          So, you know, just getting that  
16          through my head, it's been difficult. We've  
17          been -- you know, some of the data you cited  
18          is data that we've aggregated to really make  
19          that case, that 75 percent of older adults  
20          consider themselves very healthy, they're  
21          active, engaged, volunteering, working.

22          It's that 25 percent. We don't really  
23          have a system. We have a crisis-driven --  
24          you know, when somebody needs something, it's

1 usually in a crisis, because as families,  
2 you're talking about your mother, you know,  
3 you're going out of your way to do what you  
4 can do until you can't do it anymore. Right?

5 So, you know, the cost of our services  
6 are cheaper because we intervene earlier, and  
7 that's the key. So I think what we want to  
8 do, in addition to our private pay for  
9 individuals that can afford it, or people  
10 like me that can buy it on behalf of my  
11 parents -- which we're the only state in the  
12 country that has to implement that -- to  
13 develop a front-end system that focuses on  
14 prevention so that Medicaid,  
15 hospitalizations, rehab, nursing homes are  
16 the last resort. I think that's what we're  
17 trying to get at with the Master Plan as the  
18 mechanism to get there.

19 Growing older is not the problem. How  
20 we've organized our caring economy is the  
21 problem. And that's what needs to -- that's  
22 what we need to fix.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: And  
24 back to the Master Plan -- and my colleague

1           asked about dedicated funding for it, and you  
2           said it's about the implementation. At what  
3           point do we imagine that we're going to have  
4           to ensure allocation for not just the process  
5           but the implementation?

6                    NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, so the  
7           funding now, our 2.5 million if that million  
8           goes through, and then the recommendations  
9           are going to come to everybody, and then  
10          there's decisions that are going to have to  
11          be made --

12                   ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

13                   NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: -- above my  
14          pay grade.

15                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Thank  
16          you.

17                   ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.  
18          Senate.

19                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.  
20          Senate Ranker Tom O'Mara.

21                   SENATOR O'MARA: Good afternoon.  
22          Thank you for your time today and your  
23          testimony. I want to thank Commissioner  
24          DeCohen and Counselor Fishbein for coming to

1 New York State's first and only  
2 Veterans Cemetery, in Seneca County at  
3 Sampson, for the Wreaths Across America. It  
4 was a great event, and your recognition of  
5 that and being there was very important. So  
6 thank you for that.

7 And in regards to -- I wasn't going to  
8 have any asks for you, but since we've  
9 confirmed that there is no cut to the budget,  
10 we'll -- there is a need at the State  
11 Cemetery for grounds personnel and equipment.  
12 Currently right now I believe they're relying  
13 on a private contractor for burials, which  
14 should that not be available, then burials  
15 would have to stop.

16 So if you could look at that and  
17 prioritize there's some personnel and  
18 equipment there, now that we're proud --

19 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: It's  
20 already in the works.

21 SENATOR O'MARA: -- the proud owners  
22 of -- it's already what?

23 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: It's  
24 already in the works, Senator.

1                   SENATOR O'MARA: Excellent. Good to  
2                   hear.

3                   Next on PTS and treatment of PTS.  
4                   I've been a champion for years of the  
5                   Research and Recognition Project, which is a  
6                   RTM protocol. It's accepted nationwide. The  
7                   New York State and national American Legion  
8                   is advocating for this. And the New York  
9                   State Legion put up \$100,000 to train I think  
10                  30 counselors for that. And they're  
11                  dispersed around the state.

12                  The Research and Recognition Project  
13                  needs help with referrals, getting veterans  
14                  to take that step to come into treatment. I  
15                  know there's been efforts underway to get  
16                  more funding for that.

17                  But what can you do with the current  
18                  programs you have going on -- you mentioned  
19                  mobile services here -- to highlight that  
20                  program and those options? Because that  
21                  really is an effective treatment and puts PTS  
22                  in remission for many, many veterans and  
23                  other PTS sufferers.

24                  So what do you have in the works to

1 help foster funneling veterans that need that  
2 to it?

3 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you  
4 for that question, Senator O'Mara.

5 We've known Dr. Bourke now -- I think  
6 I've known him, oh, gosh, for 10-plus years,  
7 and his work is widely known.

8 Since we've become a department, you  
9 know, we've been working more heavily within  
10 our partners or with OMH and SAMHSA and we've  
11 had several virtual programs that we've had  
12 with our partners. We just recently had one  
13 for the PTS with one of our women veterans  
14 program organizations. It was a "lunch,  
15 learn and laugh" program where information  
16 was given with that.

17 And again, just working more closely  
18 with our state partners to ensure that those  
19 things are built in. That's part of what's  
20 on our form now when our veteran is sitting  
21 in front of us, to ascertain the need and to  
22 stem the tide of loneliness and things from  
23 PTS.

24 SENATOR O'MARA: You know, I've worked

1 with this for a long time. There's certainly  
2 a reluctance of many veterans to engage in  
3 the treatment, and I think it needs to be  
4 fostered a little more to encourage that,  
5 because we have trained these counselors  
6 around the state, and I believe they're in  
7 the major areas of like Buffalo, Rochester,  
8 Syracuse -- 30 of them that have been  
9 trained, and they're providing services for  
10 PTS patients. Not so much veterans at this  
11 point, but other causes of PTS, and it's  
12 effective.

13 So please put that into your arsenal  
14 of referring people to these things.

15 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Absolutely.  
16 Yes, sir, we'll certainly look into it,  
17 Senator.

18 SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you very much.  
19 And just to follow up on federal aid,  
20 following up on Senator Ashby's -- you know,  
21 what are -- what is the department doing to  
22 try to leverage federal aid for many of these  
23 programs for veterans, whether it's suicide,  
24 whether it's PTS?

1                   I mean, what's in the works to seek  
2                   out those funds to bolster the budget of the  
3                   New York State Department of Veterans  
4                   Affairs?

5                   DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: You know,  
6                   right now we're still in continued  
7                   conversations. We've had a couple of them  
8                   personally with the Honorable Denis  
9                   McDonough. We have a return visit back next  
10                  month as well, to foster these things.

11                  We know that there's also a backlog in  
12                  the claims being processed for our veterans.  
13                  And we know that also so many of our veterans  
14                  don't have access to their medical records;  
15                  that's causing them even more stress and PTS.  
16                  So ascertaining those records and ensuring  
17                  that we have a high-quality claim, as well,  
18                  you know, as continuing talks with  
19                  Washington.

20                  SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you very much.

21                  CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.  
22                  Assembly.

23                  ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,  
24                  Commissioner.

1 Assemblymember Burdick.

2 ASSEMBLYMEMBER BURDICK: Thank you.

3 And for the Commissioner of Veterans  
4 Affairs, thank you for your work.

5 There's some interest in a veterans  
6 cemetery in Westchester County, and I'd  
7 appreciate your letting me know the process  
8 and let me know who I can email on that.  
9 That would be terrific.

10 Second thing, a situation was brought  
11 up with a woman veteran who's on an advisory  
12 committee of mine, about the VA in Montrose.  
13 And it was brought to my attention that  
14 there's really no woman doctor, no  
15 obstetrician, gynecologist there. And I  
16 would just ask that you take a look at it.  
17 It just to me is not serving the needs of  
18 women veterans.

19 Last, homeless veterans housing. And  
20 while I recognize the additional 500,000  
21 that's mentioned, I'm still quite concerned  
22 about the adequacy of the appropriation for  
23 homeless veterans. And to what extent are  
24 you working with OTDA on this and feel that

1           that need is being addressed there instead?

2                       DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Well,  
3           again, that's the program that's being rolled  
4           out.

5                       I do want to also go back to let you  
6           know that I just had a meeting with  
7           Director Ryan Ashe and Deputy Director  
8           Kevin King for Montrose, for the veterans  
9           housing. And this was one of the topics that  
10          we spoke of, and they are on that program.

11                      And we are going to be working more  
12          closely with them as well to have seminars on  
13          boards and lunch-and-learns for them as well,  
14          to be able to ensure that our veterans across  
15          the state -- but that was one of the topics,  
16          just so you know. We just met a week ago,  
17          and we're going to be hand in hand helping  
18          them the more to increase our leverage for  
19          the veterans and their families throughout  
20          all of the state homes -- St. Albans,  
21          Montrose, all of them. Batavia.

22                      (Overtalk.)

23                      ASSEMBLYMEMBER BURDICK: And in  
24          particular as well is addressing the needs of

1 women veterans, correct?

2 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: That's  
3 correct.

4 And just to let you know,  
5 Assemblymember, we were one of the people  
6 that were on the original focus group --  
7 before Assemblymember Alvarez left -- for the  
8 Bronx, where there were no women's services  
9 prior to that. Now there's women's services,  
10 there's a mammogram machine, there's women's  
11 health with GYN and all of those same things.

12 That was why we were able to step up  
13 and say that this is something that we can  
14 certainly assist with, because we've done it  
15 before and the needs for women veterans  
16 continue to be a concern.

17 ASSEMBLYMEMBER BURDICK: I appreciate  
18 that. And if I could, you know, offline,  
19 send you some additional questions on that,  
20 I'd very much appreciate that.

21 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you  
22 so much.

23 ASSEMBLYMEMBER BURDICK: Thanks so  
24 much.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

2 We have a follow-up three minutes from  
3 Chair Cordell Cleare.

4 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

5 I want to go back to the Aging and  
6 talk about a very important topic. I see it  
7 here in your testimony, and I'd like you to  
8 expand a little bit on senior housing. They  
9 are the fastest-growing population. Rents,  
10 particularly in New York City, are  
11 unaffordable to the young, the middle-aged,  
12 and definitely to the older New Yorkers.

13 What are we doing for seniors in  
14 housing?

15 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I mean,  
16 housing in general is a huge issue. The  
17 Governor has a \$25 billion, five-year  
18 Housing Plan. It's equally as important to  
19 our population. I mean, whether in the city  
20 or upstate New York -- the housing stock  
21 upstate is 60 years old. You could be  
22 evicted because of frailty or a shut-in  
23 because of that. It wasn't designed for  
24 older adults. It was designed for men in

1           their twenties.

2                       So we need the 800,000 housing units.  
3           A lot of those decisions, as you know, as a  
4           home-rule state are local decisions. And  
5           hopefully, you know, this body and the  
6           Governor's office and others can come to an  
7           agreement and start building safe, affordable  
8           enabling housing stock. We need it.

9                       SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. And also you  
10          mention here expanding access to oral health  
11          and dental care. I have a bill calling for  
12          the state marketplace to offer a dental plan,  
13          which it does not currently.

14                      I also have a bill saying that seniors  
15          should have free dental.

16                      What is -- how are we expanding --

17                      NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: So that  
18          proposal's in the Medicaid budget. I can  
19          follow up with you on that.

20                      But you're absolutely right. In terms  
21          of all older adults, it's dental, it's  
22          hearing and it's vision.

23                      SENATOR CLEARE: Yeah. Well,  
24          particularly with the dental, because, you

1 know, that affects them eating, getting  
2 proper nourishment. Oral health is related  
3 to so many other parts of senior health.

4 If I could just go back to, you know,  
5 this math problem we have between each other.  
6 I think that -- you know, I got a question  
7 from DFTA: "Why is the administration  
8 supplanting state funding commitments for  
9 older adult services with federal dollars,  
10 rather than increasing state funding to meet  
11 the growing older adult population in  
12 New York?"

13 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: So this is  
14 a -- there's a question from DFTA to me?

15 SENATOR CLEARE: Well, it's a question  
16 to me, to --

17 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: To ask me.

18 SENATOR CLEARE: Yes.

19 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: And so the  
20 question is why are we going after federal  
21 funding?

22 SENATOR CLEARE: Apparently we are  
23 supplanting state funding commitments for  
24 older adult services with federal dollars.

1                   NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: No, that -- I  
2                   mean, that could not be so off.

3                   So there are four funding streams for  
4                   our suite of services. The federal, which is  
5                   the least amount of money we get, which is  
6                   why we literally -- our office, with the  
7                   association, organized the nation to try to  
8                   get a \$1.8 billion increase because we get so  
9                   little from the feds --

10                  SENATOR CLEARE: We've got 10 seconds,  
11                  so I think that you are --

12                  NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Then you've  
13                  got the state, then you've got the counties,  
14                  and then you've got the individuals  
15                  themselves.

16                  We do not supplant anything. A  
17                  hundred percent of our funding goes to the  
18                  counties by population. Period.

19                  ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. Thank  
20                  you, Commissioner.

21                  CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.  
22                  Assembly.

23                  ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember  
24                  Simon.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Yes, I'm over 50  
2 and using technology.

3 (Laughter.)

4 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: I know, crazy,  
5 right?

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: I would really  
7 love that report, because I can't get my  
8 husband to text, and he's like way older than  
9 me, so.

10 Thank you.

11 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: You're  
12 welcome.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Yeah, it would  
14 be very helpful. I have to --

15 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Sure, happy to  
16 do that.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: -- shore it up a  
18 bit. So -- thank you.

19 So, Commissioner, thank you for your  
20 service as well. And let me just ask a quick  
21 question about World War II veterans.

22 What are we doing to identify them, to  
23 recognize them, to help their communities  
24 know who they are, what they've done? You

1 know, we've done a small level in my  
2 district. We have the one World War II  
3 Veterans Memorial in the city in my district,  
4 and quite a number of World War II vets still  
5 with us, although fewer and fewer. What is  
6 your office doing in that regard?

7 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you,  
8 Assemblymember Simon, for that question.

9 I am also wearing a bra that is older  
10 than a lot of people on this panel today.

11 (Laughter.)

12 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: And so I  
13 think you know that my background is also in  
14 gerontology. And so this is one of the  
15 reasons that our "find and serve" program,  
16 but also our Faith in Service, which goes  
17 back to the houses of worship. Pew Research  
18 shows that our houses of worship are occupied  
19 by this generation. And so our Faith in  
20 Service has gone back to these houses of  
21 worship to identify them.

22 We've been ensuring a few things that  
23 I'm very proud of, ensuring that those who  
24 are Purple Heart recipients have been



1                   What about women? You know, women  
2 veterans in that era weren't really military  
3 in some ways -- but --

4                   DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We'll get  
5 back to you.

6                   ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. Thank  
7 you both.

8                   Senate.

9                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: -- you can tell  
10 us about that.

11                  CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

12                  And Senator Scarcella-Spanton for her  
13 three-minute follow-up as chair. Thank you.

14                  SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you.

15                  And thank you for answering all the  
16 questions today.

17                  My question is -- and we've discussed  
18 this before -- about a veterans resource  
19 registry. It's unfortunate to say, but it's  
20 true; I've learned more sitting on this side  
21 than on the other side when my husband got  
22 out of the military and we transitioned back  
23 to civilian life.

24                  Everything is not in one neat way as

1           it should be. That means jobs for veterans  
2           and their spouses, housing opportunities,  
3           housing incentives. That's not always clear,  
4           even pointing to -- and I would encourage you  
5           guys to move this maybe front and center,  
6           because a lot of times ways that veterans get  
7           help are through their family members.

8                     And I think the word about a veterans  
9           program sounds wonderful. I would be more  
10          interested in how you connect that veteran or  
11          the family member of that veteran to  
12          services. And also I would encourage you to  
13          maybe bring that more front and center to the  
14          website so people are aware of it.

15                    But I think it's really important to  
16          have that available for family members. And  
17          I would just want to hear more about that  
18          program and what it does to connect those  
19          veterans and their family members to services  
20          they need.

21                    DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you  
22          so much, Senator.

23                    You know, we look forward and we're  
24          grateful for being able to work with you on



1 would be to implement a veterans registry on  
2 the New York State DVS website so everything  
3 is in one spot? That's something we really  
4 want to advocate for and help you obtain.

5 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We're still  
6 formulating those numbers from our last  
7 meeting, so we'll have that to you very  
8 shortly. Excited to work with you on that.

9 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you  
10 so much.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

12 Assemblymember De Los Santos.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you  
14 for your time here today. I have a few  
15 questions related to funding support.

16 On the 2.4 billion allocated to  
17 migrant funding, how much of that funding has  
18 been allocated to the National Guard? And  
19 can you tell us what that covers and what the  
20 National Guard is exactly doing with the  
21 funding?

22 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: I have to  
23 get back to you on that, sir --  
24 Assemblymember.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN DE LOS SANTOS: Okay.

2 And in terms of funding for nonprofit  
3 organizations, how much of the funding will  
4 be provided to the nonprofit organization for  
5 legal services and transportation services?

6 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Which --

7 ASSEMBLYMAN DE LOS SANTOS: From the  
8 2.4.

9 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Are you  
10 talking about the legislative adds and the  
11 allocation of those dollars?

12 ASSEMBLYMAN DE LOS SANTOS: Correct.

13 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Again, that  
14 will be part of, you know, your determination  
15 in the allocation for the final budget.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN DE LOS SANTOS: All right,  
17 thank you.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,  
19 Commissioner.

20 I have two more, but I'm going to ask  
21 one quick question myself. The legislative  
22 add process -- I've been here for 19 years.  
23 Almost every year Governors have zeroed out  
24 the legislative adds. It's par for the

1 course. Am I correct?

2 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: That's  
3 correct.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: So there's no  
5 reason to believe why the numbers being at  
6 zero in the Executive Budget is going to  
7 translate into any kind of cut at the end of  
8 the process. Is that correct?

9 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: That's  
10 correct, Assemblyman Hevesi.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: All right. Thank  
12 you very much, Commissioner.

13 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you,  
14 sir.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember  
16 Chandler-Waterman.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN:  
18 Thank you so much. I like the details and  
19 the wit, and the outfit.

20 I have -- my father-in-law, my father  
21 all served, and I have a lot of young people  
22 as well that's veterans in my district. And  
23 a lot of questions that come up -- and I know  
24 it's been echoed here by my colleagues a

1 lot -- about the housing for senior veterans  
2 and non-seniors, and then where the  
3 Department of Aging and also the Veterans  
4 Department, they work together to support  
5 them so they don't fall through the cracks.

6 And then also with the non-seniors,  
7 making sure they don't fall into the cracks.  
8 Because they could be 20-somethings coming  
9 home, and then sometimes they're overlooked.

10 And then of course we've got to talk  
11 about the mental health services, the  
12 wraparound services. We have older adults'  
13 centers where we could also capture and maybe  
14 work in partnership with.

15 So like where's the collaboration?  
16 And then the housing situation is such a big  
17 deal, as we talked about, and the mental  
18 health services and supportive housing too,  
19 right, where we have those built into those  
20 housing for the senior veterans and  
21 non-senior veterans.

22 I know I said a lot, but it's all  
23 entangled and works together.

24 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Good.

1           Good. I do -- I do want you to know that we  
2           have our veteran benefits advisors that are  
3           inside many of our supportive houses now, our  
4           SSSV housing.

5                     As you know, all of our veterans,  
6           those who served don't always check the  
7           box when they're coming in. And again, it's  
8           educating on and going in and saying "for  
9           those who served" so we are capturing them  
10          right there so that they can get the HUD  
11          voucher and they can get all of the  
12          resources.

13                    Also now we're working with our  
14          schools where we're going back in, because  
15          not only do women -- are the ones who  
16          incentivize their husbands to go and get the  
17          benefits, but also children, we have  
18          children. So now we're working with our  
19          boards of education to get back into the  
20          schools to ensure that our children know  
21          about resources that they're taking home in  
22          their book bags to their family members. And  
23          the response has been wonderful, wonderful  
24          with this.

1                   NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Did you want  
2 me to respond?

3                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN: Yes,  
4 the older adult centers, is there any  
5 partnership --

6                   NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I think  
7 you're spot on. That's exactly right, is all  
8 of this stuff is connected. There's not one  
9 system, and it's an all-hands-on-deck, right,  
10 to leverage the resources that we had.

11                   With DVS we've done a lot of  
12 cross-training of our case managers with  
13 their folks, knowing what we do, what they  
14 do. As I mentioned earlier, we screen for  
15 veteran status, we could make that handoff.

16                   I think the challenge we have, whether  
17 we're in New York City or anywhere else, is,  
18 you know, you have 59 triple As, area  
19 agencies on aging, New York City being the  
20 biggest one, and then another 1,200  
21 community-based organizations that we work  
22 with. And that doesn't include towns,  
23 municipalities, 5500 faith organizations. So  
24 there's a lot more that we all could be doing

1 to make sure that whether you're a veteran or  
2 a child or a family, there's a ton of  
3 resources out there that are desperate, and  
4 how we pull those things together to help.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,  
6 Commissioner.

7 We have two more Assemblymembers. I'd  
8 like to return to Chair Jean-Pierre for her  
9 second.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay. I  
11 just want to thank you again and just clarify  
12 what I said earlier.

13 So from the veterans benefit advising  
14 program, last year the agency reported 7,656  
15 benefits being -- payments. And this year,  
16 35,034. So that's just a huge difference in  
17 allocations. So I just want to know if you  
18 can just jot it down, just to clarify, when  
19 you get the answers back to me -- back to all  
20 of us.

21 And the next question I have is in how  
22 many of DVS's 111 FTEs are veteran benefits  
23 advisors, and how many claims does each  
24 advisor actually work on? And how has DVS

1           been able to ensure that the claims are being  
2           handled in a timely and efficient manner,  
3           given the increase in the number of  
4           PAC-related claims? PCAP claims, sorry.

5                   DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Yeah, we  
6           can get back to you on that as well.

7                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay,  
8           perfect.

9                   And with the increase of women  
10          veterans -- we've seen an increase of women  
11          veterans, and unfortunately women of color  
12          have been disproportionately receiving lack  
13          of -- connected to lack of resources. How --  
14          what mechanisms, what outreach, what boots on  
15          the ground is DVS doing to reach out to women  
16          veterans?

17                   DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you.  
18          Thank you so much --

19                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE:  
20          Particularly women of color, too.

21                   DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Yes, thank  
22          you so much for that question.

23                   The Governor's budget has allowed us  
24          to hire a veterans -- women veterans

1 engagement coordinator. We currently have a  
2 women veterans virtual systems across the  
3 state with our women veterans organizations  
4 and the foundations, where we're bringing  
5 holistic approaches.

6 We're getting ready to have our Black  
7 History Program coming up this month, and we  
8 have our Governor's appointee for our  
9 faith-based, Pastor Cora Washington, who is  
10 going to be on that program along with  
11 Minister Conrad Washington from D.C.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Perfect.  
13 I saw that program.

14 Just for the lack of time, what is the  
15 current percentage of veterans across New  
16 York State utilizing programs within the  
17 department? Because we went from a division  
18 to a department.

19 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Yes. Yes.  
20 Currently we can get back to you with that as  
21 well.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay,  
23 please. Those numbers are critical to the  
24 budget process. Thank you.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

2 And Assemblymember Chair Kim to close  
3 for his second.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Greg, do you have  
5 the updated -- any updated data on the unmet  
6 needs?

7 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes. We  
8 started a formal process, so every September  
9 we're collecting electronically, and that's  
10 public information.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Do you have like a  
12 general lump-sum number of people on the  
13 waiting lists?

14 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: It's not  
15 people, Assemblyman, it's services waiting  
16 for. Because we have many people that get  
17 multiple services.

18 So we have services. I believe it's  
19 about 18,500.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Eighteen thousand  
21 five hundred, okay.

22 Yeah, I just want to close by saying,  
23 you know, when I was driving up here I was on  
24 a call with a local constituent, her name is

1 Martha, a 75-year-old, lives in my district.  
2 And she qualifies for Medicare, but she's not  
3 qualified for Medicaid. And she is living by  
4 herself and is actively looking for some  
5 solutions around home care.

6 And, you know, if she were to call  
7 NYSOFA or any of the affiliate providers and  
8 programs, what is the most likely outcome for  
9 a 75-year-old non-English-speaking immigrant  
10 woman living by herself, Medicare but  
11 non-Medicaid, looking for some sort of  
12 community and home care solutions in the  
13 State of New York?

14 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, so what  
15 we would recommend, Assemblyman -- I'll get  
16 this for you -- is our Queens, New York,  
17 Connects Coordinator. I have one in each  
18 borough. What this individual will be able  
19 to do, using the language of the  
20 individual -- we require a language line for  
21 all the counties, including our agency as  
22 well, so we can communicate with people that  
23 aren't English-speaking -- and start going  
24 through a screening process, see what the

1 individual needs.

2 If she needs, you know, PC Level 1 or  
3 a home-delivered meal and is eligible for  
4 those types of things, then they can work  
5 within the local resources in Queens to try  
6 to identify that service.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Okay. But at this  
8 point, with the lack of the fully funded  
9 program, or of all the services and people on  
10 the waiting list, the likely outcome of this  
11 person -- she's not entitled. This isn't a  
12 right that she has, right? So --

13 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes. Our --

14 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Unless we, you know,  
15 as advocates, as elected officials, do  
16 whatever we can to lift any layers and try to  
17 connect them, most likely, as a consumer, if  
18 she's making all these calls, taking all  
19 these steps, as you said, she's going to be  
20 put on a waiting list for services.

21 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Not  
22 necessarily. So it depends on where we are  
23 in the state. There's more home care aides  
24 in the city. Obviously it's a nationwide

1 crisis; I'm not debating that.

2 But the nuances of the people that we  
3 serve -- we have people coming on and off  
4 programs all of the time. Because of their  
5 age, their frailty maybe changes. So I  
6 wouldn't necessarily say, you know, she's  
7 automatically going to go on a waitlist,  
8 because I can't say that that's true at all.

9 But that's the process. And I'll make  
10 sure that I get you the right place to go,  
11 Assemblyman, to help this woman. And if you  
12 need help from me, let me know.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. That  
15 is it for this panel. I'd like to thank both  
16 commissioners and everybody in your agencies  
17 for all the work you do on behalf of our  
18 seniors and veterans. Thank you very much.

19 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank you  
20 guys, and thanks for your longstanding  
21 support. I really appreciate it.

22 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you.  
23 Thank you so much.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Again, anyone who

1 wants to ask questions of these commissioners  
2 as they leave, please take your conversations  
3 outside so the next panel can be called down.  
4 Thank you.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: And at this time  
6 I'd like to call Panel C. From AARP  
7 New York, Beth Finkel, the state director;  
8 New York StateWide Senior Action Council,  
9 Gail Myers, the deputy director; Essential  
10 Care Visitor, Marcella Goheen; and Lifespan  
11 of Greater Rochester, Ann Marie Cook,  
12 president and CEO. Thank you all.

13 (Pause.)

14 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. I'd like  
15 to remind everyone, both members of our panel  
16 and our elected officials here, that we all  
17 get three minutes. In a moment, when we are  
18 settled, we'll get started.

19 (Laughter.)

20 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I've got to  
21 remember that one. That's pretty good.  
22 Okay. All right. We're ready to go with  
23 this panel. I think we should go in order.  
24 Ms. Finkel, if you are prepared to go.

1                   Yeah, you've got to hold it down.

2                   MS. FINKEL: Okay. Thank you so much.  
3 Thank you, Senator Krueger, and thank you so  
4 much, Assemblymember Hevesi, and I want to  
5 tell Senator Cleare -- who I see has stepped  
6 out for a second -- but I want to thank her  
7 and I want to thank Assemblymember Kim, the  
8 Aging Committee chairs. And they're just  
9 really outstanding.

10                  New York's aging population is  
11 exploding. We all know that. Between 2010  
12 and 2020, 65-plus went up over 30 percent.  
13 And we have to really be cognizant of those  
14 numbers and how they're changing so rapidly.

15                  Right now, as everybody heard, there  
16 is waiting lists. That number varies because  
17 there are questions about how that gets --  
18 the numbers come in aggregate, and so you're  
19 going to hear different numbers. The numbers  
20 I have, we believe, is 16,000 individuals.  
21 But I think it's back to that service number  
22 that's important that Greg mentioned.

23                  So there are -- those families are  
24 waiting for non-Medicaid home and

1 community-based services, and those services  
2 obviously include transportation, adult day  
3 home, delivered meals and respite. And where  
4 all these families are waiting on waiting  
5 lists, we have -- we do not have the public  
6 information down to the county level of these  
7 people that are waiting for EISEP services.

8 So I really appreciated that question  
9 about getting the county data in, because  
10 that's what can help us determine where we  
11 need to go. There are 2.2 million family  
12 caregivers in New York State statewide. And  
13 you know that if they're not in place and  
14 supported, then those people are going to end  
15 up on Medicaid and end up in institutions  
16 which we all pay so much money for.

17 So AARP is asking for \$51 million.  
18 That is the 42 million that we need to get  
19 rid of the current -- the waitlist, plus we  
20 have to make up the 9 million that we got cut  
21 from last year. So that's where we are at,  
22 the 51 million.

23 I also just want to second -- on the  
24 Long Term Care Ombudsman, I know we've been

1 talking a lot about that. You all know about  
2 it, so I'm not going to go into detail. But  
3 we know that's where our most vulnerable  
4 older adults are, in these institutions, and  
5 we learned the hard way during COVID that we  
6 can't ignore their needs.

7 So the Governor's budget cut  
8 2.5 million. We were saying we need  
9 15 million for long-term-care ombudsmen to  
10 get that one visit per nursing home every  
11 single week, which is exactly what CMS  
12 recommends. We are so far from that, as the  
13 data just came out earlier, with only  
14 12 percent getting a visit.

15 And the only way we can get that --  
16 and so agree with the director that we need  
17 to professionalize it. We value our  
18 volunteers. We always want our volunteer  
19 component, but we can't be totally reliant  
20 upon it. So the FTEs and the proper training  
21 are absolutely crucial. And we can't be  
22 stepping backwards, which is what it seems is  
23 happening. So again, 15 million for that.

24 I want to talk about data matching.

1 Last year we got data matching on utilities  
2 and EAP, and we were thrilled about that.  
3 Now we're going to the next increment. We  
4 want to see data matching on EPIC and  
5 HEAP data so that people can get help paying  
6 for their pharmaceuticals.

7 And we know that --

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. I  
9 apologize.

10 MS. FINKEL: Oh, okay. One more plug  
11 for the food stamps increase on -- that  
12 Representative Rojas mentioned, because AARP  
13 is very much in favor of that \$100 amount.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very  
15 much. I appreciate it.

16 MS. FINKEL: Thank you.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Ms. Myers.

18 MS. MYERS: Thank you for the  
19 opportunity to testify today on behalf of  
20 New York StateWide Senior Action Council.

21 We have a number of requests, the  
22 first of which is to restore the funding for  
23 our Patients' Rights Helpline. That program  
24 had a \$200,000 legislative add over the last

1 several years. We ask you to do that once  
2 again; otherwise, we are facing a cut.

3 We also are asking you for an  
4 expansion of funds for the Managed Care  
5 Consumer Assistance Program to reach more  
6 eligible New Yorkers who have not yet applied  
7 for the Medicare Savings Program, when you so  
8 well increased that.

9 All that has been said about the need  
10 to reduce waiting lists and to improve the  
11 capacity for the future. I also wanted to  
12 point out to you, however, that the State  
13 Comptroller just issued a report on the  
14 personal income tax, monies from the  
15 checkoffs that have not been allocated  
16 throughout state agencies, and for NYSOFA the  
17 Senior Wellness and Nutrition Program has  
18 accumulated a fund balance of \$341,886. So  
19 let's please put that into meals for the  
20 elderly.

21 On the EISEP program, I implore you to  
22 consider the impact of the cuts that are  
23 going to happen in Medicaid because of the  
24 previous MRT's recommendation that went into

1 statute that changed the number of ADLs and  
2 changed the community Medicaid lookback.  
3 That will be going into effect shortly. And  
4 we would like you to say, Get rid of that.

5 There will be an impact if Medicaid  
6 stops providing the services for future  
7 eligible people on the EISEP program, which  
8 is 100 percent state-funded. Wouldn't it be  
9 better to have that funded under Medicaid  
10 appropriately? Also because that cut is  
11 going to eliminate, in many cases,  
12 housekeeping services which the EISEP program  
13 would otherwise provide. So please look into  
14 that.

15 On the EPIC program, we have a couple  
16 of recommendations for you. One is our bill  
17 that the chairs have introduced on improving  
18 benefits and transparency. But we also  
19 support the bill to increase -- to allow the  
20 EPIC program to provide people with credible  
21 coverage, not a Part D plan.

22 And then a new piece. The Governor  
23 has done a good job in eliminating -- if you  
24 agree -- the copayment for diabetes. We

1           would recommend that the EPIC program also  
2           guarantee a zero copay for people under EPIC  
3           for that -- for insulin, excuse me.

4                         There are a number of cuts in the  
5           Medicaid budget that we are incredibly  
6           disturbed about -- not even having seen yet.  
7           But we also would encourage you to remove the  
8           asset test for the non-MAGI adult who's  
9           applying for Medicaid. And we support the  
10          Home Care Savings and Reinvestment Act.

11                        On quality of care, we do not support  
12          allowing nursing home aides to administer  
13          medications and we do not believe in the  
14          change in oversight for the assisted living  
15          facilities.

16                        Three quick things on economic  
17          security. We support the SNAP benefit  
18          increase to the minimum SNAP benefit. We  
19          applaud the medical debt positions in the  
20          Governor's budget; we'd ask for a few extra  
21          changes to that.

22                        ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

23                        MS. MYERS: And we love the dental  
24          care provision that Senator Cleare has put

1 out.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very  
3 much. I appreciate it.

4 Ms. Goheen.

5 MS. GOHEEN: Hi, I'm Marcella Goheen,  
6 wife of Robert Victor Viteri, who's entering  
7 his eighth year of aging in place in a  
8 nursing home. It's good to see some familiar  
9 faces who were helpful to us during COVID.  
10 So thank you, Senator May and Ron Kim.

11 We executed care for two years prior  
12 to this at home to medicate his rare  
13 neurodegenerative disorder. There was a  
14 crisis point where I had to surrender him to  
15 a long-term-care facility. During this time  
16 at home I spent \$30,000 a year on private  
17 caregivers just to keep him safe, because we  
18 didn't qualify for anything.

19 I founded essentialcarevisitor.com as  
20 a platform in Robert's name to help families  
21 advocate during COVID to best advocate for  
22 their loved ones that we were separated from.  
23 Today we triage emotional trauma, confusion,  
24 loss and grieving that a caregiver might go

1 through when they have to make that decision  
2 to institutionalize their loved one.

3 We are a peer-to-peer model. We offer  
4 two care jobs a week, and with service to  
5 family caregivers statewide and nationally.

6 Robert -- what I really want to  
7 testify about is Robert and the over 100,000  
8 vulnerable New Yorkers aging in long-term-  
9 care facilities are living under disastrous  
10 limitations of the care system right now. In  
11 his own words, before disease took his  
12 speech -- he's nonverbal now -- he told me "I  
13 never want to be a burden." I remind him to  
14 this day that his aging and illness is not  
15 his fault and as his wife I will honor my  
16 oath to serve him. I wish New York State  
17 would feel the same about the members of this  
18 population.

19 Robert and I are not anecdotal  
20 evidence. We are two people of nearly almost  
21 10 million folks in New York, 5 million over  
22 60, and 4.1 million caregivers to New Yorkers  
23 who are aging and identify as a caregiving  
24 family, whereby the five to seven hours a day

1 represents a portion of over \$4.1 billion of  
2 uncompensated care. This data is reflected  
3 in the Aging Association of New York's  
4 testimony that cites also that my husband is  
5 one of those contributing to the \$72 billion  
6 a year that this aging population contributes  
7 to both city and state taxes. So where's the  
8 money?

9 I'm currently -- I'm freaked out.

10 (Laughter.)

11 MS. GOHEEN: They may call it  
12 caregiver stress, but I'm not understanding  
13 the budget proposals that reflect random  
14 allocated cuts to Medicaid that will impact  
15 the lifeline of my husband's services and  
16 supports.

17 I have 50 seconds. I've never  
18 understood the litigation of how we can't  
19 serve care when the dollars and the money  
20 keeps flowing. And the solution, I believe,  
21 is what has happened with my husband is we've  
22 developed a person-centered care system  
23 around him that includes a holistic approach  
24 whereby, over the past eight years of him

1           being in a long-term-care facility, he's been  
2           to the hospital two times. And that's during  
3           COVID.

4                        So what does that tell you? That  
5           New York State must invest in the aging  
6           population that's only going to get more and  
7           more dense, and that we need to provide  
8           overhauled programmatic innovative  
9           transformation. I sit on three subcommittees  
10          of the Master Plan on Aging. We need to  
11          invest in that plan when it's finished, and  
12          invest now -- not wait till 2026, not wait  
13          till 2025. But there are 400 members of  
14          talented individuals who are amazing at this  
15          work and who need to be heard.

16                        Thank you.

17                        ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you for the  
18          testimony, and perfect timing as well.

19                        (Laughter.)

20                        ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

21                        Ms. Cook.

22                        MS. COOK: Yeah, good afternoon. I'm  
23          Ann Marie Cook. I'm president and CEO of  
24          Lifespan of Greater Rochester.

1                   We serve a lot of older adults each  
2                   year, but really what I am, I'm just an aging  
3                   service provider. I've been at Lifespan over  
4                   28 years, and I've seen this new convergence  
5                   of issues unlike I've ever seen before. And  
6                   I'll run through these briefly, but they're  
7                   all important: Dramatic increase in the  
8                   older adult population; dramatic increase in  
9                   poverty of older adults. I heard you talk  
10                  about childhood poverty -- no one talks about  
11                  older adult poverty.

12                 The workforce shortages that are going  
13                 on today. The dramatic increase in scams,  
14                 almost always targeted toward older adults.  
15                 Workforce shortages, and I would say the  
16                 stress on the family caregivers. It is  
17                 incredible, as families have become smaller  
18                 and more geographically dispersed, what it's  
19                 doing to those family caregivers that remain  
20                 today.

21                 So when I looked at the proposed  
22                 Executive Budget, I have to be honest with  
23                 you, what I said is this budget in no way  
24                 will meet the needs of older adults who need

1           our help right now. And I was very  
2           disappointed.

3                   I just want to reiterate one thing  
4           Director Olsen said. Our aging service  
5           network saves Medicaid dollars. On average,  
6           we serve people 6.5 years, less than \$10,000  
7           per person per year. If they were in a  
8           nursing home it would be \$140,000 per person.

9                   Most of our clients are over the age  
10          of 80, and almost all of them have multiple  
11          needs for activities of daily living help.  
12          And we're supporting them in the community.

13                  The other thing I have to say -- I  
14          talked about scams, but elder abuse is alive  
15          and well but still a very hidden problem in  
16          this community.

17                  They talked about -- I'm so thrilled  
18          about the focus on enhanced multidisciplinary  
19          teams, but in the process both the Senate and  
20          the Assembly have always supported direct  
21          intervention for older adults being abused.  
22          That legislative add was cut from the budget,  
23          and I respectfully request that that get  
24          added in too. That's how we get the cases to

1 the enhanced multidisciplinary teams so those  
2 social workers are out there working.

3 And finally I also want to talk about  
4 the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program. I  
5 think it's a travesty, quite frankly, that we  
6 don't support the Long Term Care Ombudsman  
7 Program and have those advocates in every  
8 long-term-care facility here so that those  
9 individuals receive the quality of care and  
10 quality of life we have promised.

11 And finally, I will just have to say  
12 one of my dear friends, Becky Preve, who  
13 isn't here today -- but she said to me, "At  
14 what age do you think older New Yorkers  
15 become irrelevant and we don't care?" And I  
16 said, "We have to make sure that answer is  
17 never."

18 Thank you so much for all of your  
19 support and for allowing us to speak today.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

21 Any Assembly?

22 (Discussion off the record.)

23 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Senator May.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Rachel May.

1                   SENATOR MAY: Sorry. Hi. Hi,  
2                   everybody. Wonderful to see you all, and  
3                   thank you for your persistent and creative  
4                   attention to these issues, and Marcella, for  
5                   your just -- everything you do.

6                   I guess I wanted to follow up about  
7                   the LTCOP program with you, and we heard from  
8                   Greg Olsen that there's progress happening.  
9                   Is that your sense? And it sounds like you  
10                  don't feel like it's happening fast enough,  
11                  if --

12                 MS. COOK: I don't know if it's  
13                 happening fast enough, Senator. But the  
14                 \$2.5 million from last year made a huge  
15                 difference in our ability to not only recruit  
16                 additional volunteers but also hire  
17                 additional staff, and that's what we need to  
18                 professionalize this. It was a great first  
19                 step -- I would say a first step of several  
20                 steps we need to take.

21                 But it was very disheartening, quite  
22                 frankly, to see that 2.5 million eliminated.

23                 SENATOR MAY: Thanks.

24                 And then talking about poverty, as

1           many of you did, I do carry a bill to raise  
2           the minimum SNAP benefit from \$23 to \$100.  
3           My understanding is it's mostly older  
4           New Yorkers who are at that minimum. Do you  
5           have a sense of how many people that you work  
6           with would benefit from the increase?

7                     MS. COOK: I'd have to get back to  
8           you. But that bill would be huge for us.

9                     And we can even see in our senior  
10          centers the last week, last 10 days of the  
11          month, they have to come in and take bags of  
12          food with them because they've run out of  
13          food for the month.

14                    MS. FINKEL: I would just add, a lot  
15          of older adults don't bother to even apply  
16          because it's not easy applying for SNAP. And  
17          one of the reasons they don't apply is  
18          because the benefit is so low.

19                    And I would say one more thing is yes,  
20          and it's particularly for older adults it  
21          really hurts.

22                    SENATOR MAY: Yeah. Okay. Thanks.

23                    And then I guess my last question was  
24          about the Medicare Savings Program that we --

1           AARP especially worked to put in place. Can  
2           you tell us how that's going? Are people  
3           participating?

4                   MS. FINKEL: Yes. The numbers are  
5           significantly going up. But there's still a  
6           lot of room for improvement. We've been  
7           working with DOH to get the word out more  
8           and also with New York City. And we'd like  
9           to do more of that. So yes.

10                   SENATOR MAY: Do you need help? Is  
11           there anything we should be doing to help you  
12           with that?

13                   MS. FINKEL: Well, I think, you know,  
14           absolutely more publicity about it. And then  
15           the basic thing is the data matching. Right?  
16           And that's what we've been talking about. We  
17           got the data matching last year on utilities.  
18           This year we're looking for it on EPIC,  
19           against HEAP, because the benefit is similar.

20                   And I think you're hearing that again  
21           and again. So often we're hearing -- looking  
22           at providing these services for women and  
23           children, which is absolutely needed, but why  
24           are older adults being asked to wait? And we

1 keep asking ODTA, what can't you do what  
2 you're doing for family and children, do it  
3 now for older adults?

4 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

5 SENATOR MAY: Thank you.

6 MS. FINKEL: Thank you.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

8 Assembly.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Chairman Kim.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you.

11 I just want to say, Marcella, I just  
12 find your journey and just being here just  
13 very inspiring, and turning so much of your  
14 pain as a caregiver into finding a purpose in  
15 your advocacy to be very inspiring.

16 Unfortunately, I think there are so  
17 many other caregivers that are sandwiched  
18 between older adults and their own families  
19 that have given up, that are completely  
20 traumatized and feeling unproductive, don't  
21 want to participate in anything.

22 And I'm just -- do you -- I just  
23 wonder, do you also see that in your own  
24 communities? Because there's something --

1           there's a phenomenon that's happening, I feel  
2           like, with productive members of our  
3           community all of a sudden just tapping out,  
4           saying, I'm not -- I just don't want to work,  
5           I can't do this, I feel paralyzed. And I  
6           wonder what the impact of that is to our --  
7           not only our society but to our economy.

8                         And I bring this up because we framed  
9           the investments of your services as a moral  
10          duty, but I really think there's a huge  
11          economic impact of underinvesting and  
12          allowing working middle-class families to  
13          say: You're on your own taking care of your  
14          older adult. What does that do to our  
15          morale? What does that do to our  
16          productivity?

17                        MS. GOHEEN: So I love the question.  
18          And I didn't get to my paragraph about the  
19          PTSD and the trauma of caregiving and the  
20          post-COVID experience that we're seeing with  
21          formal caregivers on the frontlines, in  
22          collaboration with the informal caregivers --  
23          where there's a disassociation. There's four  
24          responses to trauma: Disassociation, numb,

1 and perfectionism and then hypervigilance.

2 Which is me.

3 (Laughter.)

4 MS. GOHEEN: But on the front lines  
5 right now there's a disassociation in nursing  
6 homes whereby the caregivers formal are  
7 actually not taking people out of bed. And  
8 their rationale is, Well, we can't take one  
9 person and not the other, that's not fair, so  
10 we're not going to take anybody out of bed.

11 So that's the conditions of the  
12 nursing homes right now.

13 In terms of family caregivers, we're  
14 mortified. I keep advocating for them to  
15 Zoom out and be there five -- as much as they  
16 can in order to collaborate with the care.  
17 But there's a big missing gap that's not  
18 being treated. I don't know where it might  
19 be in the budget for Governor Hochul. But  
20 there needs to be addressed the PTSD of what  
21 happened during COVID for both the formal  
22 caregivers, the families, in order to  
23 recalibrate. That's a scientific fact.

24 Like if you don't take that space --

1           just like veterans coming back from war --  
2           then there's no place to start. And the way  
3           it is manifesting is in terms of family  
4           advocates like you mentioned. If they've  
5           lost their loved ones during COVID, they  
6           don't want anything to do with it, but they  
7           know there's still not a resolve. Because  
8           there's people aging in New York that are  
9           going to need these long-term-care services  
10          in nursing homes.

11                    Aging in place in a nursing home is  
12          aging in place. That's what it is for my  
13          husband. That is his home. And we need to  
14          do the work to serve them where they are.

15                    ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you.

16                    (Off the record.)

17                    CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

18                    ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great. Thank  
19          you.

20                    I'll use my three minutes, and I  
21          believe I'm the last of the Assemblymembers  
22          to speak.

23                    So first, Ms. Goheen, thank you for  
24          your testimony. I really do appreciate it.

1 I'd like to share that my father  
2 recently passed away. Over the last couple  
3 of years of his life he had Lewy body  
4 dementia.

5 So the difficulty for caregivers, I  
6 believe, even as dramatic and poignant as  
7 your testimony was, is even understated. It  
8 is brutal to see a family member slowly being  
9 stripped away from you, and then you look at  
10 the resources that are available to you --  
11 almost nonexistent. So I hear you, and I  
12 appreciate it.

13 And thank you for all the programs you  
14 do for caregivers. That means a ton to me  
15 and many of my colleagues.

16 And I do want to touch on one other  
17 point -- with the limited time I have -- as  
18 well, about the Long Term Care Ombudsman  
19 Program.

20 So I've been to a lot of facilities  
21 over the last couple of years. That's just  
22 part of the process. And while we have a  
23 sign on the wall on every one saying "Call  
24 the Long Term Ombudsman," the fact that we're

1 not funding this program -- and it's at  
2 12 percent, it's -- they're able to hit  
3 12 percent of the nursing homes in the state?  
4 You're right, that is a disgrace.

5 And particularly when you're talking  
6 about people who are in desperate need,  
7 desperate need of advocates on the ground. I  
8 can't get this. I need that. You need the  
9 Ombudsman Program.

10 I am so grateful for all of your  
11 testimony and all of the work that you do.  
12 It's just greatly appreciated. I don't have  
13 a question, I just wanted to opine for a  
14 minute. So thank you for all your work and  
15 your testimony here today. Thank you.

16 MS. GOHEEN: Thank you.

17 MS. MYERS: Can I just take 30 seconds  
18 on that point? The Ombudsman Program is  
19 vital, and it is not in every facility.  
20 Generally for our Patients' Rights Helpline,  
21 we tell people what their rights are and then  
22 we tell them to call the ombudsman to be  
23 on-site and help them uplift their rights.  
24 And they call us back and they say, they just

1 are not available for -- and, you know, great  
2 programs, but they're not available.

3 Three weeks ago I had that happen in  
4 Albany County, and someone was being denied  
5 coverage for an extended stay that was within  
6 Medicare, and told to apply for Medicaid,  
7 which she's not eligible for, in order to get  
8 services. And we had to spend hours to tell  
9 them that they were using the wrong standard  
10 to tell her she was no longer eligible for  
11 Medicare. Hours of time doing that, saving  
12 her tens of thousands of dollars, and she  
13 finally, successfully, was able to transition  
14 to home.

15 So people are not being able to hold  
16 up their rights because the ombudsmen --  
17 because there's not enough of them there to  
18 be present. And also because, you know,  
19 we're all stretched as thin as we can be.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I wholeheartedly  
21 agree. Thank you very much.

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Ashby.

23 SENATOR ASHBY: Thank you for being  
24 here.

1                   In regards to previous comments for  
2                   staff and mental health and nursing homes,  
3                   are you aware of any peer-to-peer programs  
4                   that are going on, whether they're internally  
5                   driven through the setting or from a larger  
6                   stature?

7                   MS. COOK: I mean, our ombudsman  
8                   region's a nine-county region in the  
9                   Finger Lakes. And oftentimes in several  
10                  homes there are, you know, resident councils  
11                  and those kind of things, those kind of  
12                  informal peer-to-peer helping, if that's what  
13                  you mean.

14                  But on a statewide basis, no.

15                  SENATOR ASHBY: How about from a  
16                  staffing level?

17                  MS. GOHEEN: Oh, can I?

18                  MS. COOK: Yeah, go ahead.

19                  MS. GOHEEN: So I just -- how do I do  
20                  this?

21                  So we actually, at our home, we have a  
22                  150-member family council and we have a  
23                  family essential program that we'd love to  
24                  get funded, whereby we have a peer-to-peer

1 model where we collaborate with the formal  
2 caregivers. We have social workers giving  
3 them our phone number, family caregivers who  
4 can't navigate the system. And it's amazing  
5 because it is a Me Too movement where --  
6 forgive that word -- that, you know, you  
7 know, coming from another family member,  
8 exactly where that particular consumer is,  
9 whether they're in the first three months of  
10 admitting their loved one in a long-term-care  
11 facility, or they're in their six-to-12  
12 month, or when they're a month and leaving or  
13 a year and leaving, or whether they're going  
14 to be a long-term stay like my husband, who's  
15 been there for eight years.

16 So we have an informal program going  
17 on, and it works magically, especially during  
18 this disastrous staffing crisis where nursing  
19 homes aren't even answering their phones, but  
20 yet they're still getting reimbursed  
21 Medicare, Medicare dollars every day, which  
22 we don't understand.

23 SENATOR ASHBY: And you've seen that  
24 as effective?

1 MS. GOHEEN: It's amazing. And we  
2 have just started shopping the program to  
3 various people in New York State because we  
4 want it to be funded.

5 It stands before the ombudsman  
6 program. We're not professionals. But it  
7 actually deescalates a lot. And we have a  
8 system where we're going to try to work with  
9 the social workers on how to formalize it and  
10 document it so that family caregivers within  
11 long-term-care institutions never have to be  
12 alone.

13 You're talking about people being  
14 dropped off from the hospital and you have a  
15 stack of papers and you have nowhere to go.  
16 And we do see those signs of the ombudsman  
17 program, but we didn't -- I didn't know where  
18 our ombudsman was during COVID, had no idea.  
19 No disrespect.

20 But that's very real, and we need the  
21 systems and support on the frontline.

22 SENATOR ASHBY: Thank you.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember  
24 Eachus.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Thank you, Chair.

2 I just wanted to comment also about  
3 the ombudsman program. I think we need  
4 education. We especially need education in  
5 these nursing and caring facilities. This is  
6 the least punitive way that we can  
7 communicate with the folks that run that and  
8 those programs, and they don't understand  
9 that.

10 I think they think that, you know,  
11 everybody's there just to pick at them and  
12 point things out. And yet, you know, what --  
13 what comes after this? After this is the  
14 Department of Health that comes and slams you  
15 with penalties and fines and so on like that.

16 So on my committee, with Aging, I will  
17 talk with them about, you know, if there's  
18 some program we can't get out there,  
19 informing the nursing homes -- because  
20 there's a limited number of nursing homes out  
21 there -- that they should understand that  
22 this program benefits them. And it really  
23 does.

24 MS. COOK: No, I agree. And I do

1 think the name, a lot of people don't even  
2 know what that word means, "ombudsman." So  
3 we need to be there. That's when you really  
4 begin to pick up the quality of care and  
5 quality of life issues, is when you're there  
6 all the time. And that's why we need this  
7 critical program to ensure we're in every  
8 facility in New York State every single week.

9 (Off the record.)

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Cordell  
11 Cleare.

12 SENATOR CLEARE: Come on now. All  
13 right. Thank you. Thank you all for your  
14 testimony.

15 You heard me ask the commissioner  
16 questions related to the 16,000 waitlist.  
17 And you heard his response. And I want to  
18 know what -- your thoughts are on that, as  
19 well as -- I'm sorry, I just came back from  
20 getting something. I know you all spoke  
21 about the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program.  
22 If there's anything you have to add to that,  
23 let me know.

24 And also he talked about the report

1           that was due to the State Legislature and  
2           that it has been filed already, so if you  
3           could confirm or --

4                     MS. FINKEL: I'm sorry, could you --  
5           I'm having trouble hearing you.

6                     SENATOR CLEARE: The State Office for  
7           the Aging, there's a report that's due to the  
8           Legislature.

9                     MS. FINKEL: Right.

10                    SENATOR CLEARE: And I know some of  
11           you had asked about that report.

12                    MS. FINKEL: Yes.

13                    SENATOR CLEARE: And I just -- you  
14           heard his answer to that question, so I just  
15           want to know.

16                    MS. FINKEL: Thank you. Thank you for  
17           giving me that opportunity to clarify that.

18                    So he's giving you aggregate numbers.  
19           He's not giving you those numbers by county.  
20           What we need is to understand it by the  
21           county. And so that would be very, very  
22           helpful. And -- yeah, so we can all  
23           consistently have the same numbers that we  
24           can all understand, and then we can all plan

1           appropriately that way.

2                   MS. COOK:  Senator -- oh.

3                   MS. MYERS:  If I may.  I'll be fast.

4                   We also need to know what are the  
5           barriers.  Are there capacity issues?  Why  
6           can't -- if the money isn't being spent on  
7           one thing and it's moving to something else  
8           where there's a need, that's -- that's a good  
9           thing.  But it keeps hiding what the barrier  
10          is to why it isn't being spent.

11                   So if it's EISEP home services, what  
12          is the barrier?  That the money might be  
13          going to congregate meals or transportation,  
14          that just shows more money is needed there.  
15          But what are the barriers?

16                   So if you can add that into your  
17          request for a report -- sorry, one minute.

18                   MS. FINKEL:  So can I add one more  
19          thing?

20                   We've been actually -- AARP has been  
21          starting to ask county execs individually,  
22          what is your -- because we want to get the  
23          information.  And we did hear Nassau County  
24          is now moving from a five-day-a-week home

1 delivery to a four-day-a-week home delivery.  
2 What does that mean? It means that they have  
3 to deal with the budget that they have, and  
4 that's their solution, which we all know is  
5 probably the worst possible solution.

6 I know you all talked about isolation  
7 quite a bit. And sometimes that's the only  
8 person that those people see at their door,  
9 and that's the only person who can check and  
10 say, Mrs. S. is not looking so good today,  
11 we'd better get, you know, some help out here  
12 for her.

13 So I think that's important. And  
14 that's again why we have to get this  
15 county-specific data, so there's total  
16 transparency.

17 MS. COOK: I will have to say I think  
18 Director Olsen was correct. There's about  
19 18,000 older New Yorkers waiting for  
20 services, and we estimate it would take about  
21 \$51 million to serve them.

22 SENATOR CLEARE: We said those  
23 numbers, too.

24 Thank you.

1                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. I  
2                   think I'm the last questioner, and just one  
3                   question. And it's controversial, I get it.  
4                   I'm exploring whether we should have the  
5                   Justice Center oversee nursing homes.

6                   Some people love it, some people hate  
7                   it. See, I got a yes and a no just on this  
8                   panel. And so it's not going anywhere very  
9                   quickly. But when we originally proposed the  
10                  Justice Center years ago, there was a  
11                  discussion about including nursing homes. It  
12                  was to address people in vulnerable  
13                  institutional settings not being watched over  
14                  carefully enough -- or for us, the  
15                  government, to be doing something since we  
16                  were paying for it.

17                  So I'm going to embrace it again at  
18                  the Mental Health Hearing where the Justice  
19                  Center comes. But -- I don't even know if  
20                  there's time for any of you to jump in and  
21                  answer, but I just wanted to throw that out  
22                  to you for now.

23                  MS. GOHEEN: I'll answer that. I've  
24                  worked with the Domestic Violence Justice

1 Centers with Michael Bloomberg. I wrote some  
2 curriculums for them way back. And in terms  
3 of it being borrowed to a structure in a  
4 long-term care facility, I think it's  
5 brilliant for a lot of reasons.

6 Because on the frontlines, especially  
7 now, post-COVID -- and I want to remind the  
8 State Legislature that we're in a post-COVID  
9 environment, which is very different. These  
10 caregivers are stressed, dissociated, numb.  
11 The administrators are numb. They're not  
12 here right now. So in order to put a  
13 structure, any structures on the frontline  
14 that would have justice systems and supports,  
15 is what I'm going to say, for the vulnerable  
16 New Yorkers that -- Bob has me, my husband  
17 Robert Viteri has me to the day he takes his  
18 last breath. But there are, you know,  
19 684 other people in my husband's nursing home  
20 that don't have a Marcella.

21 So I think that those checks and  
22 balances, the way Safe Horizons works, a  
23 center would be brilliant. Because it would  
24 be interdisciplinary, it would be

1           multigenerational. It would also open up  
2           space for people to get into this kind of  
3           workforce.

4                         Thank you.

5                         CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

6                         MS. COOK: Senator, I just wanted to  
7           comment. I obviously shouldn't play poker,  
8           because you read my face immediately.

9                         (Laughter.)

10                        MS. COOK: But I would really have to  
11           think about it. I have seen the  
12           Justice Center as we work with older adults  
13           with developmental disabilities. And of  
14           course those situations go there and,  
15           honestly, get bogged down in a lot of  
16           bureaucracy.

17                        So I do think we need to do something  
18           with nursing homes and really investigate  
19           quality-of-care issues better than we do  
20           today. But let me think about your  
21           suggestion --

22                        CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Please.

23                        MS. COOK: -- and get back to you.

24                        Thank you.

1                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Please. Thank  
2                   you. Thank you.

3                   ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. I believe  
4                   that's it. Thank you to this panel for your  
5                   testimony. It's greatly appreciated.

6                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very  
7                   much.

8                   ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I would like to  
9                   call up Panel D. From ECE On The Move,  
10                  Shanita Bowen, the chief operating officer.  
11                  From the Chinese-American Planning Council,  
12                  Jessica Hsieh -- I hope I pronounced that  
13                  right -- respite coordinator. From the  
14                  Early Care and Learning Council,  
15                  Meredith Chimento, the executive director.  
16                  And from All Our Kin, Steve Morales, New York  
17                  State policy director.

18                  Please come on down.

19                  Thank you. Thank you all for coming.  
20                  Let's go in order, if we can.

21                  Ms. Bowen, the floor is yours.

22                  MS. BOWEN: Thank you to the Senate  
23                  and Assembly chairs for the opportunity to  
24                  testify, and especially to Senator Brisport

1 and Assemblymember Hevesi for their  
2 outstanding leadership in childcare.

3 Good afternoon. I'm Shanita Bowen,  
4 16 years as a family childcare provider and  
5 chief operating officer of ECE On The Move,  
6 representing the voice of the family  
7 childcare workforce in New York City.

8 Family childcare is a childcare  
9 business in residential settings, the second  
10 largest modality of care, second to legally  
11 exempt, and among small businesses that are  
12 systemically set up to fail financially.

13 We are paid by a faulty market rate  
14 system that is so low, it paints the picture  
15 of Black and brown women working for pennies  
16 on the dollar to take care of children in her  
17 neighborhood while miraculously offering  
18 quality service, and knowing full well that  
19 she is juggling the usual small business  
20 expenses like worker's comp, taxes, business  
21 supplies -- the list goes on.

22 And now, effective this month, the  
23 minimum wage just went up, which means that  
24 her assistants' pay goes up.

1                   Family childcare in New York City will  
2                   continue to do what they've been doing, which  
3                   is go without or go with little.

4                   Gladys Jones, founder of ECE On The  
5                   Move, says that childcare should be as  
6                   effortless and accessible as breathing: We  
7                   have it for all who need it without  
8                   consideration. Which is why family childcare  
9                   providers and parents care about universal  
10                  childcare and being paid by the true cost of  
11                  care model.

12                  We want fair, equitable wages fit for  
13                  early care educators who are proud of their  
14                  work, their resources, their pay, all  
15                  resulting in children who go on to be  
16                  autonomous citizens who give back, such as  
17                  you all as Senators and Assemblymembers.

18                  But once again, early care educators  
19                  in residential settings are not among those  
20                  to be let into the middle-class door,  
21                  forgetting that childcare is the cornerstone  
22                  of economic development. Accessible and  
23                  affordable childcare enables parents,  
24                  particularly mothers, to participate fully in

1 the workforce. This, in turn, boosts  
2 productivity, increases tax revenues, and  
3 reduces dependency on social assistance  
4 programs.

5 Also forgetting that a strong  
6 childcare system reduces the reliance on  
7 social assistance programs as families become  
8 more self-sufficient. Moreover, with parents  
9 actively participating in the workforce,  
10 there is an increase in tax revenues,  
11 providing additional resources for public  
12 services and infrastructure.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

15 Ms. Hsieh.

16 MS. HSIEH: Okay. Thank you for the  
17 opportunity to testify today. My name is  
18 Jessica Hsieh, and I'm speaking about the  
19 Chinese-American Planning Council today --  
20 CPC.

21 CPC provides vital resources to more  
22 than 80,000 people per year in the five  
23 boroughs, from daycare to afterschool  
24 programs to senior services and home care. I

1 used CPC service as a child with immigrant  
2 parents. I used CPC service as a teenager  
3 for the Summer Youth Employment Program. And  
4 as an adult, I joined the Undo Poverty  
5 Initiative, a community-led plan to combat  
6 poverty and promote economic mobility in  
7 Flushing.

8 Through my participation in this  
9 group, I was able to secure a full-time job  
10 at CPC as a respite coordinator, where I work  
11 directly with community members with  
12 developmental disabilities. And I allow them  
13 to socialize and have, like, a social hour.

14 As you can see, CPC has been an  
15 integral part of my life, as being on the  
16 side of providing the service to me and me  
17 providing back to the community members who I  
18 serve.

19 Human service workers make 70 percent  
20 of what government employees make for the  
21 exact same role, which we do in more  
22 languages, in a culturally responsible way.  
23 Fifty percent of my colleagues in the home  
24 care sector are eligible for SNAP and other

1 public benefits.

2 Each year you hear from providers who  
3 struggle due to the underfunding of  
4 governmental budgets balanced on the backs of  
5 low-income neighborhoods and BIPOC  
6 communities. Yet each year the state  
7 perpetuates poverty-level wages for human  
8 service and home care workers, who are  
9 predominantly immigrant women of color like  
10 myself.

11 As federal COVID-19 relief funding is  
12 quickly running out, our community members'  
13 needs have only continually grown. The food  
14 lines are longer, not shorter. Half of the  
15 Asian households in New York are  
16 rent-burdened. One-third of AAPI seniors  
17 live below the poverty level and cannot get  
18 home care and other supports needed to stay  
19 in their homes safely.

20 The state must invest in our social  
21 net by allocating a 3.2 percent COLA for all  
22 human service workers and passing the wage  
23 board bill; expanding the AAPI equity budget  
24 to provide long-term healing for our

1 community; investing in the home care  
2 workforce through Fair Pay for Home Care and  
3 the Home Care Savings and Reinvestment Act;  
4 uplifting our immigrant communities through  
5 the Unemployment Bridge Program; addressing  
6 the housing crisis by passing good-cause  
7 eviction and the Housing Access Voucher  
8 Program; increasing SNAP benefits; and  
9 tackling the climate crisis by making our  
10 public transportation accessible and  
11 affordable.

12 Thank you.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Ms. Chimento.

16 Good to see you.

17 MS. CHIMENTO: Nice to see you. Nice  
18 to see all of you.

19 There's the microphone.

20 The Early Care & Learning Council is  
21 the membership organization for the 35  
22 childcare resource and referral agencies  
23 located throughout New York State. You heard  
24 a lot about them today.

1 I'm here to thank you. For the first  
2 time in close to 15 years, CCR&Rs will  
3 realize a 20 percent contract increase. It's  
4 incredible. We are grateful. I have sat  
5 here for six years saying, please, have  
6 this -- you know, make sure this takes place,  
7 and it did.

8 We are beyond thrilled about some of  
9 the investments in childcare. There's still  
10 a need for more, of course. We support the  
11 addition of after-school funding, \$5 million  
12 for Staffed Family Child Care Networks to  
13 expand the business supports for family and  
14 group family childcare providers, and of  
15 course the liquidation of the unspent  
16 Workforce Retention Grant funding.

17 We of course have an ask. We are  
18 looking to increase -- we're looking for an  
19 increase with our Infant Toddler Mental  
20 Health Services, \$4.5 million annually.

21 Infant Toddler Mental Health  
22 Consultation was launched in 2019. We have  
23 42 consultants around the state that provide  
24 critical supports to childcare providers,

1 looking at the social-emotional supports  
2 necessary to run quality childcare. There's  
3 not enough consultants.

4 We are asking with that additional  
5 4.5 million to focus on New York City, an  
6 addition of 12 Infant Toddler Mental Health  
7 Consultants. Over 50 percent of children  
8 under 5 are located in New York City, and  
9 four Mental Health Consultants are not  
10 enough. We're asking for 14 in the rest of  
11 the state, so that would be Long Island and  
12 throughout the rest of New York State.

13 Mental Health Consultants look at  
14 reducing the expulsion and suspension of  
15 Black and brown boys in childcare, who are  
16 suspended and expelled at a rate much higher  
17 than their white counterparts.

18 Coupled with that increase in mental  
19 health funding, we request \$1.5 million  
20 annually to start to add seven equity  
21 positions, or equity officers, located in the  
22 seven OCFS regions. This program will create  
23 anti-racist curricula, culturally responsive  
24 early care in education, and work closely

1 with the Office of Children and Family  
2 Services' DEIA committees to eradicate  
3 systemic and institutionalized forms of  
4 discrimination.

5 Mental health consultation, coupled  
6 with these DEIB positions, will ensure that  
7 the early childhood field will provide  
8 much-needed support programs to ensure that  
9 the sizeable federal investments made  
10 throughout the pandemic are not wasted.

11 We must continue to enhance the social  
12 emotional supports that educators and  
13 children desperately need. To me, Infant  
14 Toddler Mental Health Consultation, coupled  
15 with DEIB programming, will move mountains in  
16 increasing the quality of early care and  
17 education.

18 As a member of the Empire State  
19 Campaign for Child Care, Raising New York,  
20 and the Child Care Availability Task Force,  
21 we ask you to prioritize continued investment  
22 in the childcare sector, raising wages for  
23 our educators who struggle immensely just  
24 meeting their most basic needs.

1 Thank you.

2 MR. MORALES: Honorable Senators,  
3 members of the Assembly, my name is Steven  
4 Morales. I'm the New York policy director at  
5 All Our Kin.

6 All Our Kin is a nonprofit  
7 organization that trains, supports and  
8 sustains home-based family childcare  
9 educators in New York City, and we are also  
10 proud members of the Empire State Campaign  
11 for Child Care.

12 I want to talk a little bit about what  
13 family childcare is, though my colleague  
14 Shanita said it really well. Family  
15 childcare is paid care that takes place in  
16 the home of a licensed childcare  
17 professional, and it is one of the most  
18 common childcare arrangements in our state.

19 There are roughly 10,500 providers  
20 across the state with the capacity to care  
21 for over 140,000 children. Family childcare  
22 programs offer not only family stability, but  
23 they offer children opportunity: the  
24 opportunity to explore, the opportunity to

1 build strong relationships and develop skills  
2 that will remain with them for the rest of  
3 their lives.

4 I encourage each of you to think for a  
5 moment about your early childhood, about the  
6 caregiver who you knew you could trust. I  
7 hope that we all have fond memories of that  
8 person or many people in our lives who helped  
9 us grow into the people we are today, and  
10 that is what childcare offers. And that is  
11 what this essential workforce means to our  
12 children.

13 The reality is that educators are  
14 taking money out of their own pockets to make  
15 up for our state's broken childcare system.  
16 According to a New School study, family  
17 childcare educators in New York City earn  
18 only \$10.61 per hour. And I worry that  
19 because many educators have managed to hold  
20 on by the skin of their teeth, that we are  
21 taking their sacrifices for granted.

22 If the pandemic taught us anything, it  
23 taught us that childcare is essential for  
24 working families, for our economy. And over

1 the last few years, the Governor and the  
2 Legislature have stepped up and expanded  
3 childcare access, and that's great. But  
4 unfortunately, pandemic emergency funds are  
5 expiring and the Executive Budget offers no  
6 new investments in the childcare workforce,  
7 which is going to put all of the progress  
8 we've made at risk.

9 That is why we are calling for an  
10 investment of \$1.2 billion in a permanent  
11 Childcare Workers Fund. This is the most  
12 crucial investment that we can make to ensure  
13 that this essential workforce can continue to  
14 serve our communities. Without it, educators  
15 will continue to be forced to leave the field  
16 for more reliable jobs in retail and food  
17 services, and that will mean families lose  
18 access to the care that they need.

19 We also call on the state to fund the  
20 bipartisan childcare decoupling legislation  
21 that passed overwhelmingly last year but was  
22 vetoed. I think we can all agree that making  
23 sure families can access care when they need  
24 it is a commonsense reform for our modern

1 economy.

2 And finally, we're encouraged by the  
3 Governor's proposal to pilot family childcare  
4 networks, which are the gold standard for  
5 supporting family childcare educators. We  
6 want to see those funded and implemented  
7 well.

8 In conclusion, we all know the  
9 importance of childcare. It's time to  
10 permanently invest in the childcare workforce  
11 so that they and families across our state  
12 know that they can stay here to thrive.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Brisport.

14 SENATOR BRISPORT: Well, thank you,  
15 Madam Chair.

16 And thank you to our panelists for  
17 coming here today, but also for the great  
18 work you do.

19 My questions are for ECE On The Move  
20 and All Of Our Kin. They're about the  
21 stabilization grants. You can answer all of  
22 them or whichever ones you want. But have  
23 you observed any difficulties in accessing  
24 those workforce grants? Were they enough to

1 stabilize the childcare sector? And would  
2 you consider the childcare sector stable now?

3 MS. BOWEN: We are very grateful for  
4 the stabilization grants. They help keep  
5 doors open. That is now over. So childcare  
6 providers are facing decisions on whether to  
7 take work in retail or work in fast food. So  
8 people are making decisions right now as to  
9 whether -- stabilization is a band-aid. It's  
10 just a temporary fix on a very long-standing  
11 problem. And so we need a permanent  
12 solution.

13 And I meant to mention -- I didn't  
14 know about the buzzer -- but ECE On The Move  
15 supports Empire State Campaign for Child Care  
16 in the ask for a permanent workforce fund to  
17 stabilize the family childcare sector and all  
18 childcare sectors. We don't need to worry  
19 about instability in receiving pay and taking  
20 care of children.

21 MR. MORALES: I don't have much to add  
22 to that. Absolutely. The stabilization  
23 grants were good for what they were supposed  
24 to be, and they're gone. And we need a

1 permanent solution.

2 SENATOR BRISPORT: Great. And with  
3 the remaining time, we also heard a bit about  
4 reimbursement rates. Do you think the  
5 practice of reimbursing at 80 percent of the  
6 market rate is sufficient? And if not, why  
7 not?

8 MR. MORALES: I think it's pretty well  
9 documented. There have been a series of  
10 studies how the market rate does not  
11 reimburse nearly enough, up to ten to \$15,000  
12 a year per child less than it actually costs  
13 to an educator to provide that childcare.

14 So increases are always good, but if  
15 we're not paying that full cost, educators  
16 are taking that money out of their pockets.

17 MS. BOWEN: Family childcare providers  
18 would like to be paid for what it costs to  
19 offer care. They must be able to pay their  
20 assistants good rates for educating young  
21 children and then have a salary for  
22 themselves. Right now they're not taking  
23 home pay. Right now they're paying their  
24 assistants and they're doing above and beyond

1 to assure quality in their programs and they  
2 are not pocketing any money for themselves.

3 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. No  
5 more Senators? Okay.

6 Hi, everybody. Thank you for your  
7 testimony today, all of you. One quick  
8 question, I guess, or a question for all of  
9 you.

10 Is there any way in New York State  
11 that our childcare system would be successful  
12 without a permanent workforce fund?

13 MS. CHIMENTO: No.

14 MR. MORALES: No.

15 MS. BOWEN: Absolutely not.

16 MS. HSIEH: Definitely not.

17 (Laughter.)

18 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Cool. Great. I  
19 appreciate that. And that's what we need to  
20 remember -- we'll get to -- that's what we  
21 need to remember going forward. And I think  
22 you'll notice that some of the questions for  
23 the commissioners earlier -- we started with  
24 the workforce, we're going to end with the

1 workforce, this is all about the workforce.

2 So we totally agree.

3 I do want to say thank you to  
4 Ms. Hsieh for her testimony for CPC, which is  
5 really powerful in that you were receiving  
6 services and are now helping others to  
7 receive services. And I wholeheartedly agree  
8 about the COLA, the cost of living for the  
9 human services workforce. Not only do we  
10 need to increase the COLA, but first we need  
11 to make sure that everybody's in the COLA.

12 I am -- I'll opine for two seconds.  
13 I'm tired of having COLAs get done in the  
14 New York State budget and then 50 people  
15 coming to me after and saying, But you forgot  
16 about us. It is bad government.

17 And I guess my questions are -- only  
18 for Ms. Chimento, if I can -- the Governor  
19 did put in some money for the infant and  
20 toddler mental health, which I thought was a  
21 very good start. Am I right that that's a  
22 good start, or are they off-topic? How can  
23 we do it? Please.

24 MS. CHIMENTO: Sure. Thank you, yes.

1                   So it's \$1.7 million for the seven  
2                   Infant Toddler Mental Health Resource  
3                   Centers, which have been flat-funded since  
4                   2019, since the inception. That 1.7 million  
5                   will allow for cost-of-living adjustments for  
6                   the 42 mental health consultants; travel;  
7                   professional development; overhead for the  
8                   organizations that operate them.

9                   ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: But this is not  
10                  the addition of any new -- of these workers.

11                  MS. CHIMENTO: No. What was  
12                  referenced in the State of the State -- which  
13                  was a doubling of Infant Toddler Mental  
14                  Health Consultants -- was not accurate. It's  
15                  actually just the addition of 1.7 million.

16                  Which is why we're asking for the  
17                  additional 4.5 million, to add more Mental  
18                  Health Consultants.

19                  New York State is a model state with  
20                  Infant Toddler Mental Health Consultation.  
21                  We should be very proud of this program. We  
22                  need more consultants. We need more  
23                  consultants in New York City to serve  
24                  50 percent of the children, but we need them

1           around the rest of the state. And that's  
2           what the request is for.

3                     ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: That's  
4           exceptionally helpful. Because I actually  
5           briefed my colleagues and said that the  
6           Governor had taken a first step towards the  
7           asks from the CCR&Rs, and apparently I was  
8           wrong. So this is very helpful --

9                     MS. CHIMENTO: There is -- there is an  
10          increase, yes.

11                    ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: No, no, no.  
12          There is an increase, but not for what we're  
13          looking for out of this budget.

14                    MS. CHIMENTO: Absolutely.

15                    ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: So we appreciate  
16          the increase. So --

17                    MS. CHIMENTO: Exactly. We're on the  
18          same page.

19                    ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: We're on the same  
20          page.

21                    MS. CHIMENTO: Absolutely.

22                    ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I think we're  
23          talking a weird language, but we get it.

24                    MS. CHIMENTO: Yup.

1 (Laughter.)

2 MS. CHIMENTO: We're always in sync.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. And then I  
4 guess with the two seconds I have left,  
5 Mr. Morales, if you could tell us, at some  
6 point in the future --

7 (Laughter.)

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: -- how the  
9 Governor's pilot for family and group  
10 childcare would -- is being rolled out. And  
11 if you think it's a good use of that  
12 \$5 million.

13 With that -- is it 7 or is it 5?

14 MS. CHIMENTO: Five for staffed  
15 networks.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Five for  
17 staffed -- that's correct.

18 Okay, thank you all. We very much  
19 appreciate your testimony.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Oh, I'm sorry.  
22 We're not done yet. My bad.

23 Ms. Mitaynes, Assemblymember Mitaynes.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

1                   We keep talking about the need for  
2                   revenue to fund our very important programs.  
3                   So the question is for all of you. Do you  
4                   support revenue-raising proposals to finance  
5                   public goods and services that improve the  
6                   quality of life for New Yorkers? Do you  
7                   support taxing the rich?

8                   Mr. MORALES: I will let you all  
9                   handle the politics for how you raise the  
10                  funding. But I -- what our -- my perspective  
11                  and our perspective is that we have to find  
12                  the funding. So that could take whatever  
13                  shape it takes.

14                  But there is an essential need to fund  
15                  this childcare workforce and to make sure  
16                  that every child and family in this state who  
17                  needs childcare can access it. And so that  
18                  takes money, and I'm happy to help, you know,  
19                  think of ways to find that money.

20                  MS. HSIEH: Yes. Because it's only a  
21                  portion out of their money that's coming back  
22                  into the communities that we serve, the  
23                  under -- the low-income population that we  
24                  serve.

1                   Why not? We're all people. At some  
2 point of life, tomorrow you can go bankrupt  
3 and need that service. So why not help  
4 today? Thank you.

5                   MS. BOWEN: Family childcare believes  
6 that childcare should be a public good. So  
7 by any means necessary, however you can get a  
8 great quality education for our young ones,  
9 pursue it. It is a public good. It should  
10 be available to all who need it.

11                  MS. CHIMENTO: Yeah, I agree. I think  
12 there's got to be creative ways to generate  
13 revenue. We talked about it with the launch  
14 of the \$4.8 million Tri-Share program, which  
15 would be the public-private partnership to  
16 invest in childcare.

17                  I think there is a new project, it's a  
18 million-dollar Business Navigator project, to  
19 speak to businesses about underwriting the  
20 cost of childcare.

21                  Increased taxes always work too.

22                  ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay, thank you.  
23 I think that is the end of the questions for  
24 this panel. Thank you all. I very much

1 appreciate your testimony today.

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

4 I'd like to call down Panel E. We'll  
5 keep rolling right along. From the Schuyler  
6 Center for Analysis and Advocacy, Dede Hill,  
7 policy director. From the Cornell ILR  
8 Buffalo Co-Lab, Steve Peraza, who's a senior  
9 research and policy associate. From the  
10 New York Association of Training and  
11 Employment Professionals, we have  
12 Therese Daly, the interim executive director.  
13 And from COFCCA, the Council of Family and  
14 Child Caring Agencies, Michelle Newman, the  
15 associate executive director.

16 Thank you all.

17 Which one of you is from Cornell?

18 (Laughter.)

19 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Sorry. It was  
20 just too easy. Sorry.

21 (Laughter.)

22 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Sorry. Ms. Hill,  
23 please, get us started.

24 MS. HILL: (Mic issue.) It's not --

1 Oh, there I go. Thank you.

2 Thank you for the opportunity to  
3 testify today. I am policy director for the  
4 Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy.  
5 We are a nonprofit dedicated to improving  
6 public systems that serve low-income and  
7 disenfranchised New Yorkers, and we are  
8 laser-focused on ending child poverty and  
9 establishing universal childcare in New York.  
10 We are also proud members of the Empire State  
11 Campaign for Child Care.

12 Turning first to childcare, we welcome  
13 the Executive Budget's increased investments  
14 in the state's childcare assistance program.  
15 This is building on the historic investments  
16 New York has made over the past two years  
17 that has made tens of thousands of New York  
18 families newly eligible for assistance.

19 However, and I'm going to echo what my  
20 colleague said in the last panel, those  
21 expansions will mean nothing to families if  
22 they cannot find a childcare program with  
23 capacity to care for their child. And  
24 childcare programs are shuttering classrooms

1           and closing their doors altogether because  
2           they cannot recruit and retain staff due to  
3           low wages. And I'll join the chorus: What  
4           we need is a permanent line of funding for  
5           childcare workforce wage supplements. We  
6           also need a rate increase for family, friend,  
7           and neighbor providers.

8                       And to be very clear, the Executive  
9           Budget allocates no new funds for the  
10          childcare workforce, it just directs that  
11          leftover federal pandemic funds that were  
12          allocated in last year's budget that were  
13          intended to be paid out in full to the  
14          workforce last year. That is all that is in  
15          the budget.

16                      Also missing in the Executive Budget  
17          is funding to end the state's inequitable  
18          practice of tying childcare assistance to the  
19          exact hours a parent works, and the practice  
20          of excluding children from childcare  
21          assistance due solely to their immigration  
22          status. For any parent or caregiver who  
23          needs to work, childcare should not be a  
24          barrier.

1                   Turning to child poverty reduction, I  
2                   want to urge inclusion of the MILC pilot in  
3                   the final budget to create a cash transfer  
4                   program to parents of infants at a critical  
5                   period in their development.

6                   With respect to the Executive Budget  
7                   proposal to address concentrated poverty in  
8                   three communities, it is important -- we're  
9                   excited to learn more details. It is  
10                  important to note that the proposal is  
11                  supported by one-time funding, yet we know  
12                  that to truly turn the tide on child, family,  
13                  and community poverty requires sustained  
14                  public investment over many years.

15                  Thank you for your fortitude. I look  
16                  forward to your questions.

17                  ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

18                  Mr. Peraza, please.

19                  MR. PERAZA: My name is Steve Peraza.  
20                  I'm a senior research and policy associate at  
21                  Cornell ILR Buffalo Co-Lab. We study the  
22                  world of work, and we provide partners,  
23                  practitioners, and leaders -- like you  
24                  guys -- with actionable intel to help

1 workers.

2 I want to thank you for the  
3 opportunity to present testimony today on the  
4 2024-2025 New York State Executive Budget.  
5 I'm here to report findings from a new study  
6 published by Cornell ILR Buffalo Co-Lab, and  
7 it's called "The Status of Child Care in  
8 New York State."

9 Number one, the policy changes in the  
10 fiscal year 2021-2022 have had uneven results  
11 across New York State. In our report,  
12 Buffalo Co-Lab has shown that the initial  
13 influx of New York State funding helped to  
14 stabilize the childcare industry during the  
15 pandemic, but since the pandemic there has  
16 been little progress in the availability and  
17 accessibility of childcare across the state.

18 Our research shows an unevenly  
19 changing childcare landscape with minor gains  
20 in aggregate capacity and meaningful losses  
21 in many areas across the state, particularly  
22 in upstate counties and low-income  
23 communities where childcare deserts and near  
24 deserts already existed.

1                   Number two, childcare capacity is  
2                   ticking up, but the industry diversity is on  
3                   the decline. Data from New York State's  
4                   Office of Children and Family Services show  
5                   that statewide both the number of licensed  
6                   childcare providers and the number of slots  
7                   available through these providers increased  
8                   modestly since 2021.

9                   In the aggregate, New York State  
10                  experienced a net gain of 75 licensed  
11                  providers from 18,731 slots. The increase  
12                  was driven almost wholly by growth among  
13                  group family daycare providers, which  
14                  increased by 501 providers and  
15                  7,829 childcare slots. These trends did not  
16                  spill over to family daycare providers. This  
17                  class of providers lost 381 establishments  
18                  and 2,938 childcare slots since 2021.

19                 And number three, childcare's economic  
20                 return on investment is really high. We  
21                 found that if you invest \$1 billion into the  
22                 New York State childcare industry, you'll see  
23                 back \$1.8 billion in economic activity,  
24                 20,300 new jobs.

1                   Finally, a childcare compensation fund  
2                   would raise wages for all childcare workers.  
3                   Per our analysis, if all childcare workers  
4                   earning below \$23.55 per hour were elevated  
5                   to that level, and if those workers earning  
6                   at or above that level were given 20 percent  
7                   retention raises, then the median annual  
8                   subsidy per worker would be on the order of  
9                   \$13,000 per year.

10                  If the model called for a minimum wage  
11                  of \$23.55, then the total cost of raising  
12                  wages for childcare workers would be nearly  
13                  \$800 million per year.

14                  Thank you.

15                  ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you, sir.

16                  Ms. Daly, please.

17                  MS. DALY: Testing. Hi.

18                  Good afternoon, Chairpersons Krueger,  
19                  Feinstein, Persaud, Davila, and  
20                  Assemblymember Hevesi, as well as the  
21                  distinguished persons of the Senate and  
22                  Assembly. Thank you for allowing NYATEP this  
23                  opportunity to testify before you on this  
24                  important topic.

1                   My name is Therese Daly, and I'm the  
2                   interim executive director of NYATEP. We're  
3                   the statewide workforce development  
4                   association representing New York education,  
5                   job training, adult education, postsecondary,  
6                   and employment providers.

7                   NYATEP's members serve over  
8                   1.2 million New Yorkers annually in education  
9                   and employment services, and support  
10                  thousands of businesses in the region as they  
11                  train and employ talent. We greatly support  
12                  your -- we greatly appreciate your support  
13                  and efficacy of the fiscal year 2024 enacted  
14                  State Budget that included a one-time income  
15                  disregard for individuals completing an  
16                  approved employment program.

17                  We have some concerns, though, with  
18                  the language requiring individuals are only  
19                  eligible for those whose income does not  
20                  exceed the 200 percent federal poverty level.  
21                  We believe that this language limits the  
22                  number of people who are able to participate  
23                  because of the cap. This excludes  
24                  individuals in New York City and Long Island.

1                   We are asking the Legislature to  
2                   include in their one-house budget proposals  
3                   Senator Persaud's Bill S8374, which would  
4                   remove the federal poverty level requirement  
5                   for recipients where it concerns one-time  
6                   disregard of earned income.

7                   And as you know, Governor Hochul  
8                   launched the Office of Strategic Workforce in  
9                   2022. The office has since announced only  
10                  \$35 million in funding released to the  
11                  several projects of the \$150 million set  
12                  aside for grant funding. Despite the hope,  
13                  this funding is highly inflexible and  
14                  includes zero for the grant program. Without  
15                  a state-dedicated investment, the only  
16                  workforce funding that the state has is from  
17                  the federal Workforce Innovation and  
18                  Opportunity Act -- which has been, honestly,  
19                  on the chopping block as of late.

20                  Our success as a state will be  
21                  measured by how well we support these  
22                  New Yorkers as they recover from the  
23                  pandemic. So our ask: We urge the Governor  
24                  and the Legislature to spend down the

1           \$150 million in grants that will provide  
2           much-needed flexible funding into the  
3           workforce system.

4                       We also ask that you remove the policy  
5           barriers that make it difficult for poor  
6           New Yorkers to access good jobs.

7                       And NYATEP strongly recommends both  
8           the one-house budget proposals include S8374,  
9           as above mentioned, and it would remove the  
10          federal poverty level requirement for  
11          recipients where it concerns the one-time  
12          disregard of earned income.

13                      Thank you very much.

14                      ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

15                      Ms. Newman.

16                      MS. NEWMAN: Hi. My name is Michelle  
17          Newman. I'm the associate executive director  
18          at COFCCA. We represent over 100 nonprofit  
19          organizations providing child welfare  
20          services in New York.

21                      We were encouraged to see the  
22          Governor's State of the State highlight the  
23          significant mental health needs of youth.  
24          Her Executive Budget, though, falls short of

1 providing the immediate supports needed in  
2 child welfare, a critical component of the  
3 behavioral health system in a few key ways.

4 First, I want to strongly emphasize  
5 the sectorwide ask for additional investments  
6 in human services. The COLA, funding it at  
7 3.2 percent instead of the proposed 1.5. We  
8 also strongly encourage inclusion of the  
9 Hevesi-Persaud bill to apply the COLA  
10 equitably across the sector. For our  
11 members, that means including prevention  
12 programs and health homecare managers serving  
13 children.

14 Second, the network of providers  
15 offering behavioral health services across  
16 New York is at risk unless we take state  
17 action this year to create a Child Victims  
18 Act settlement fund.

19 In 2019, the Legislature passed  
20 monumental legislation establishing the  
21 Child Victims Act, which provided a mechanism  
22 to give victims an avenue to seek justice  
23 against their abusers. However, without  
24 state intervention, some individuals may

1 never receive their due compensation, and  
2 thousands more children will be negatively  
3 impacted due to the loss of essential  
4 services.

5 A recent independent study from  
6 SeaChange notes that child welfare providers  
7 do not have the fiscal reserves to fund  
8 awards to victims where there is insufficient  
9 insurance coverage. Unfortunately, we have  
10 found that insurance coverage cannot be found  
11 at all in almost 40 percent of the cases in  
12 this sector. The study concludes that child  
13 welfare providers are at risk of either  
14 discontinuing essential services or failing  
15 completely.

16 In addition to their child welfare  
17 programming, our members offer a broad array  
18 of programs and services designed to prevent  
19 adverse childhood experiences and to promote  
20 child safety and well-being. Those are at  
21 risk. Examples include migrant services that  
22 support over 7,000 families in New York City  
23 alone; homeless services, antiviolence  
24 programs that have had a demonstrated impact

1 in reducing gun violence in communities  
2 statewide; mental and behavioral health  
3 services like HCBS, CFTSS, and Article 31  
4 clinic services.

5 Unfortunatly, the prospect of filing  
6 for bankruptcy has now become a reality for  
7 one of our programs on Long Island, where  
8 cases are moving the fastest. We see this as  
9 a sign of things to come later this year when  
10 cases move in the rest of the state. We need  
11 a path forward in this budget cycle.

12 Finally, I want to flag a provision  
13 we've learned more about in the health budget  
14 impacting our members -- a proposed  
15 \$125 million cost savings in health homes  
16 serving children. Over 35,000 children and  
17 adolescents, primarily young people in need  
18 of support with mental health treatment, will  
19 be impacted if this goes through.

20 Thank you.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

22 Let's start with Senator Brisport.

23 SENATOR BRISPORT: Great.

24 And thanks again for being here and

1           for all the work you do. I'm not sure if  
2           I'll get all those questions in in three  
3           minutes, but I'll just start with -- one's to  
4           call back to earlier, with the decoupling  
5           bill, we heard testimony from OCFS this  
6           morning indicating they expected it to cost  
7           in the neighborhood of \$140 million. We've  
8           seen articles in the press calling that  
9           number unrealistic.

10                        Do you think that the estimates of  
11           this number look accurate?

12                        MS. HILL: I can jump in.

13                        So our understanding of the  
14           assumptions underneath that estimate is they  
15           are assuming that every child who is in  
16           part-time care now receiving childcare  
17           assistance will go to full-time care.

18                        We think that that is an  
19           overestimation, particularly given that many  
20           children are in publicly funded pre-K and  
21           they get childcare assistance for the before-  
22           and after-care. And so clearly those  
23           children will not go to full-time. And then  
24           we also know that families make different

1 decisions.

2 I would also just -- one other note,  
3 which is there is a real question as to  
4 whether it even needs to be lined out in the  
5 budget. There is a proposal to increase --  
6 to do a quality increase in rates, and that  
7 is not lined out in the budget. It's just  
8 going to come out of the 1.8 billion for  
9 childcare assistance.

10 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

11 And I have some follow-up questions  
12 for Schuyler Center and for Cornell.

13 I think I want to start by -- well,  
14 for Schuyler Center, in your 2024 State of  
15 New York's Children report, you note that  
16 childcare educators are less than 96 percent  
17 of occupations in New York State. I'd love  
18 for you to elaborate on how those low wages  
19 currently impact efforts to restore the  
20 childcare sector.

21 And for Cornell, I would love for you  
22 to elaborate on how the childcare crisis is  
23 currently impacting different populations in  
24 New York differently. I know in your report

1           you said that slots are up less than  
2           3 percent from the lowest year of the  
3           pandemic, and that you noted that in  
4           22 counties around New York the number of  
5           slots have actually declined.

6                        So I'll just have those two questions  
7           to you in the time we have.

8                        MS. HILL: I will just say really  
9           quickly that the state has expanded access to  
10          childcare assistance to a really great degree  
11          such that, you know, more than 300,000  
12          children are newly income-eligible for  
13          assistance. But we are not keeping pace as  
14          far as capacity, and that's because of the  
15          workforce crisis.

16                       MR. PERAZA: In areas where there are  
17          childcare deserts, there is an increasing  
18          loss of family daycare providers. We're just  
19          expanding a problem there.

20                        Additionally, we did find a positive  
21          note in places like St. Lawrence County,  
22          where there were increases in providers due  
23          to childcare-desert grants.

24                        SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very  
2 much.

3 Ranker Assemblyman Ra.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you. Thank you  
5 all.

6 For COFCCA, regarding the CVA fund.  
7 In addition to that, what issues are your  
8 providers having in terms of getting  
9 reasonable insurance rates now as a result of  
10 all these past claims?

11 MS. NEWMAN: So yes, there is a very  
12 significant issue in the sector with  
13 obtaining liability insurance for our foster  
14 care providers. The CVA impact is undeniable  
15 in our ability to achieve coverage in the  
16 future.

17 Most if not all of our insurance  
18 companies are really bailing on providing  
19 foster care coverage, period. It is a  
20 mandated requirement of the counties and the  
21 state that we have that insurance coverage,  
22 and it is a real struggle. We have asked in  
23 the past for the state to help us in  
24 developing a risk pool to address that issue

1 going forward.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. And then there  
3 is another issue, I know was in your written  
4 testimony that I don't think you got to, so  
5 if you want to talk a little bit about the  
6 maximum state aid rate in ensuring (A) that  
7 the COLA goes through the end of the provider  
8 year, as well as the COLAs building on top of  
9 one another.

10 MS. NEWMAN: Yes, thank you for  
11 raising that.

12 We understand language in the  
13 Executive Budget to extend the COLA through  
14 the fiscal year for our providers. Our  
15 foster care providers funded through the  
16 MSAR, that rate year goes through June 30th.  
17 However, in the past the state has dropped  
18 out the previous year's COLA, so we received,  
19 you know, 5.4 percent and then 4 percent,  
20 which inherently was a reduction after that  
21 was dropped and then the four was added.

22 So in every other sector we understand  
23 that that COLA is stacking and that it is  
24 reinvested year over year. It is intended

1 for staff, which is a year-over-year cost.  
2 We think that that should be applicable to  
3 our programs as well.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Great. Thank you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Persaud.

6 SENATOR PERSAUD: Good afternoon.

7 Thank you. I just wanted to thank all of you  
8 for your support as we are trying to -- for  
9 the income disregards. You know, we've done  
10 some of it already, and you're all so  
11 supportive in getting us -- you know, getting  
12 us to that point. I just encourage you to  
13 keep fighting with us so that we can keep  
14 removing those blockages and that families  
15 can be lifted up.

16 I also want to ask you about  
17 legislation that we've introduced, what's  
18 your thoughts about it, where we're asking  
19 for an increase in SNAP benefits, cash  
20 payments and utilities payments, and also  
21 matching it to inflation. What is your  
22 thought on that?

23 And there's also another bill that  
24 another Senator -- a couple of others have

1           where they're asking for the increased SNAP  
2           benefits just to extend to \$100 minimum.

3           What are your thoughts?

4                     Any and all of you.

5                     MS. HILL: I'm happy to start.

6                     Absolutely support all of those  
7           proposals. First of all, we know that cash  
8           supports are one of the most effective ways  
9           to reduce child and family poverty, and we  
10          need more of them, and particularly in the  
11          areas that -- you know, SNAP benefits and  
12          home heating.

13                    We also know that food insecurity is  
14          on the rise, and this is due largely to the  
15          lapse of the federal -- you know, during the  
16          pandemic there were different federal  
17          supports that expanded SNAP assistance, also  
18          dramatically increased the federal child tax  
19          credit. And as a result, now that all of  
20          these have been pulled back, what -- you  
21          know, families are having to make choices  
22          again. And we know that families typically  
23          will pay their rent before they'll fill the  
24          refrigerator. And so we're seeing food

1           insecurity through the roof.

2                       We are also really supportive of the  
3           School Meals for All, which also addresses  
4           this issue.

5                       SENATOR PERSAUD: Yeah. We also know  
6           that School Meals for All and the Summer EBT  
7           is not going to cover all of the children  
8           because of the way the federal guidelines  
9           are. And so we're asking for a way to fix  
10          that. We'll see what the federal government  
11          says.

12                      And just to be clear, SNAP is already  
13          adjusted for rate of inflation. It's the  
14          others that are not.

15                      MS. HILL: Thank you.

16                      SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you all very  
17          much. And again, thank you for your support.

18                      ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

19                      Assemblymember Maher.

20                      ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Hey, everybody.

21                      So first I wanted to ask a question  
22          for Ms. Newman. I just wanted to say thank  
23          you for your testimony, all of you. And I  
24          was curious what you thought about some of

1           our providers, our childcare providers, that  
2           have come to me, to other offices of my  
3           colleagues, to say look, there were issues  
4           with our own expenses, with how hard it is to  
5           provide childcare.

6                        They could really use waivers in terms  
7           of increasing that ratio where it is  
8           appropriate. Is that a problem that you've  
9           run into? What have your experiences been  
10          working with the agencies necessary to try to  
11          accomplish that?

12                      MS. NEWMAN: So while some of our  
13          providers do, you know, engage in, you know,  
14          and provide childcare services, I would  
15          probably defer to, you know, my other  
16          colleagues at the table to weigh in on the,  
17          you know, specific issues facing providers.

18                      I represent them on the child welfare  
19          side of the world, so it's -- I'm just not  
20          the expert there.

21                      ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: No problem.

22                      Does anybody want to touch that one?

23                      MS. HILL: I will just say that  
24          childcare in New York State is highly

1 regulated for a very good reason. You know,  
2 as a parent of children who are long past  
3 their childcare days but spent their first  
4 years there, I wanted it to be highly  
5 regulated.

6 We also know that quality is tied  
7 really closely to close interactions with  
8 your caregiver, particularly for young  
9 children. And so high ratios means much  
10 better quality.

11 Obviously we'd be interested to see  
12 some of the details, but that's generally --  
13 I just want to be clear.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Okay. No worries.  
15 Yup.

16 MS. DALY: And I was just going to add  
17 to that -- that was so beautifully said --  
18 that we found -- NYATEP issues a report on  
19 the workforce, and we just released ours  
20 today, actually, on the state of the 2023  
21 workforce. And I can tell you childcare is  
22 the biggest concern. We have childcare and  
23 transportation.

24 But the problem behind it is that one

1 of the parents ends up -- cannot afford --  
2 they can't afford childcare, so then one  
3 parent must give up a career and one parent  
4 must stay home. And if our goal is to have a  
5 more equitable workforce, it starts with  
6 childcare, it starts with transportation for  
7 those individuals to get to the jobs or to  
8 drop the children off at the childcare.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Thank you. I  
10 agree.

11 And I just want to make sure that our  
12 conference and my colleagues on both sides of  
13 the aisle just also keep in mind the  
14 providers, because we need to do more for  
15 those folks that are doing the work. But we  
16 also have to be mindful of that business  
17 model of a provider so we can encourage more  
18 individuals to own and run those businesses  
19 in the future, because we need to do that as  
20 well.

21 Thank you all for the work you do.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

23 Senate?

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

1                   Senator Murray.

2                   SENATOR MURRAY: Thank you,  
3                   Chairwoman.

4                   And thank you all for being here. I  
5                   appreciate everything you do.

6                   But I want to target this quickly to  
7                   Ms. Newman.

8                   I met with a group -- representatives  
9                   from your group earlier in the week. You had  
10                  mentioned a couple of things that are  
11                  impacting you such as Child Victims Act,  
12                  trouble getting liability insurance, things  
13                  like this. But there's another one that's  
14                  looming big as well: Labor Law 191,  
15                  regarding manual labor and frequency of pay.

16                  Many of the agencies are having suits  
17                  filed against them. There are claims being  
18                  made. And this is happening to companies all  
19                  across New York. But they're being claimed  
20                  against them saying that damages -- and they  
21                  take it back as far as six years that they --  
22                  damages were imposed, but there were no  
23                  damages. As far as the frequency of pay,  
24                  they were getting every penny they were

1           supposed to get, whether they were manual  
2           labor or not.

3                     Our problem is we have no clear  
4           definition of manual labor right now. So  
5           they were going on the site that -- yes, they  
6           were manual labor, they should have been paid  
7           weekly. They were paid biweekly. They got  
8           every penny, didn't lose anything. However,  
9           they have these massive lawsuits. And I was  
10          told that lawsuits facing some of the  
11          agencies that you represent were in the  
12          numbers of 30 million or so.

13                    What would happen -- right now the  
14          good news is the Governor put language in --  
15          our Article VII language in the ELFA section  
16          that says they won't have a private right of  
17          action, they can't file suit and get damages.  
18          The courts agreed a couple days after that  
19          language came out. Looks like that's good,  
20          but appeals have been filed.

21                    If those appeals go through, what  
22          could that do to the agencies that -- I mean,  
23          what is the damage we're looking at?

24                    MS. NEWMAN: So I would have to check

1 back in with some of our providers to get you  
2 details on, you know, the suits that they're  
3 facing and the impacts of those.

4 But I will tell you, you know, the  
5 study that was done by SeaChange has looked  
6 at the fiscal viability of the entire sector,  
7 and the surpluses don't exist. There isn't  
8 additional funding, you know, in our  
9 programs.

10 But I would have to, again, check back  
11 in with our providers on that particular  
12 issue. And we are looking at those  
13 provisions within the Article VII.

14 SENATOR MURRAY: Yeah, I've heard a  
15 number somewhere in the area of \$30 million,  
16 could be the number.

17 But if this language stays, which I'm  
18 strongly urging and hoping that the language  
19 stays, it would be okay, they wouldn't have  
20 the private right of action, because there  
21 were no damages. So -- but if that were to  
22 happen, the impact on small businesses -- but  
23 I'm concerned about your agencies and the  
24 services that are provided -- they couldn't

1 exist. So we --

2 MS. NEWMAN: Thank you for your  
3 support.

4 (Laughter.)

5 SENATOR MURRAY: Yeah, we're urging  
6 everyone, keep the language, please, because  
7 we need that protection.

8 Thank you.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

10 Assemblymember Mitaynes.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

12 The Cornell ILR survey participants in  
13 the childcare sector have indicated that  
14 providers only have half their classrooms  
15 open. Could you say a bit more about how the  
16 childcare sector is having difficulty  
17 staffing childcare slots and making them  
18 actually available?

19 MR. PERAZA: So we're finding that  
20 there just aren't enough workers for these  
21 providers to service all of the customers or  
22 parents that are coming to them. And this  
23 has been a major crisis. In a qualitative  
24 study of providers in Erie County, a major

1 crisis has been that there have been a lot of  
2 subsidized families coming. And because  
3 those subsidies aren't meeting the true cost  
4 of care, and because workers are leaving,  
5 childcare providers, to work in service  
6 industries and other local competitors, they  
7 have to leave -- our group family providers,  
8 family daycare providers are leaving spots  
9 open in order to profit. In order to keep,  
10 you know, their business balanced.

11 It's been a -- this is one of the --  
12 the number-one criticism among providers is  
13 that they're unable to actually fill capacity  
14 because they cannot pay for the workers that  
15 are -- that they employ.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Yeah, and I  
17 see the rest of you nodding your head, too.  
18 Thank you.

19 I yield the rest of my time.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,  
21 Assemblymember.

22 Assemblyman Manktelow.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Thank you.

24 What we see up in upstate New York,

1           where I'm from, we see a lot of businesses  
2           that are moving to providing childcare at  
3           their businesses as one of the perks or  
4           benefits of working there.

5                     I was just wondering, what are your  
6           thoughts on that?

7                     MR. PERAZA: I think it's a  
8           fascinating approach, one that needs to be  
9           studied carefully. Because we do see that  
10          there are other alternatives. For example,  
11          the Governor's kind of approach to Micron  
12          and -- so we really want to see -- we need to  
13          have both, I think, multiple ways of  
14          addressing this problem. Particularly the  
15          workforce is the largest one that providers  
16          are talking about.

17                    But it is particularly interesting to  
18          see what this enterprise model will yield.  
19          It's not necessarily one or the other,  
20          though. I think that's an important  
21          designation to make, that we're seeing  
22          through this research and then also from the  
23          work that our colleagues are doing at Empire  
24          State Campaign for Child Care.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Yeah, yeah, I  
2 agree. I don't think there's  
3 one-size-fits-all here, I think it's got to  
4 be from both sides, of course.

5 If businesses choose to do this, what  
6 it does is it allows the business owners, the  
7 companies, to know they have a good solid  
8 workforce. It allows the workers to know  
9 that they have a place for their children to  
10 go.

11 And my other thought is businesses  
12 that do this, would you support them having a  
13 tax break for doing so?

14 MR. PERAZA: I think that -- you know,  
15 I don't really know if I would support -- I'm  
16 not really thinking about it that way, as  
17 much as I'm thinking about multiple  
18 approaches and economic activity growing as a  
19 result of investing in workers.

20 I think the business enterprise model  
21 doesn't necessarily directly address the  
22 workforce compensation issue. It does  
23 address providers, which I think is a very  
24 important constituency in this industry. But

1 right now the number-one crisis is workforce.  
2 And so my only concern about that particular  
3 policy is that it doesn't directly address  
4 the workforce.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Well, I think  
6 part of it does, because the workforce -- if  
7 they don't have a place for their child,  
8 you're not going to have the workforce.  
9 That's what we're seeing across the board.

10 And just asking you really quick --  
11 take your hat off as who you are now. But as  
12 a taxpayer, would you support the tax credits  
13 for the businesses?

14 MR. PERAZA: Yes.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Perfect.

16 Thank you so much for your testimony,  
17 and thank you all for being here.

18 Thank you.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. Thank  
20 you very much.

21 I'm going to close with my last three  
22 minutes. Thank you to Senator Krueger.

23 Okay, very quickly, because I'm  
24 mindful of the time. Yes or no question: Is

1           there any way to have a successful childcare  
2           system in New York State without a permanent  
3           workforce fund?

4                   MS. HILL: It sounds like a double  
5           negative or something. But no, there is no  
6           way.

7                   (Laughter.)

8                   ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Say it the right  
9           way.

10                   MS. HILL: Can I be very clear --

11                   ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Did you say it  
12           the right way?

13                   MS. HILL: Yeah, I'm going to say it  
14           in the affirmative. We need a permanent  
15           Workforce Compensation Fund for the childcare  
16           workforce.

17                   ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Do you agree with  
18           that?

19                   (Laughter.)

20                   MS. DALY: Yes.

21                   MR. PERAZA: Yes.

22                   MS. NEWMAN: Who could not?

23                   ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay, great.

24                   Ms. Daly and everybody, thank you for

1           your testimony.

2                       I don't have a follow-up for you. I  
3 do have other follow-ups, so please forgive  
4 me. And I'll ask them quick. So you know  
5 what, I'm just going to list them out and see  
6 what we can get.

7                       So, Ms. Hill, if you could at some  
8 point, either during this testimony or after,  
9 explain the rate increase for family neighbor  
10 childcare, that would be very helpful.

11                      Mr. Peraza, I would like to know more  
12 about the uneven benefits and what -- who are  
13 we hitting? Is this rural, is this minority  
14 communities?

15                      And then one other thing for Cornell,  
16 if I could ask. I'd like to know,  
17 potentially long term, how many childcare  
18 workers are on public assistance? Because  
19 there's a logic to just redirecting that  
20 money and paying the darn workforce. Sorry  
21 for my language.

22                      And then, Ms. Newman -- and I'm sorry  
23 about the time -- what would happen if your  
24 agencies don't have liability insurance?

1                   Those are my questions. So, Ms. Hill,  
2                   go. Lightning round, I guess. Thank you.

3                   MS. HILL: Really fast. With respect  
4                   to family, friend and neighbor childcare,  
5                   which we -- it's also referred to as legally  
6                   exempt childcare -- they have typically not  
7                   been included -- well, they have not been  
8                   included in the stabilization grants.

9                   And when we think about a workforce  
10                  fund, the permanent workforce fund, it will  
11                  likely follow a similar model. A very direct  
12                  way to raise rates for family, friend, and  
13                  neighbor is through a rate increase.

14                 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

15                 Mr. Peraza?

16                 MR. PERAZA: Uneven benefits of that  
17                 bundle of policies, 2021 to 2022, we see  
18                 75 licensed providers that are new, 18,731  
19                 slots that are new. But we have seen  
20                 388 establishments gone among family daycare  
21                 providers.

22                 And then, look, in Erie County we've  
23                 lost providers, we've lost slots. And our  
24                 providers are saying, We need more money to

1 help our workers.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

3 And Ms. Newman, with your 26 seconds.

4 MS. NEWMAN: Oh, it's much shorter  
5 than that.

6 Without liability insurance, we can't  
7 provide services.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Which means that  
9 we're violating the law, hurting those kids,  
10 and can't provide services.

11 Good. Okay. Thank you all for your  
12 testimony. I greatly appreciate it.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Wait, you didn't  
14 let the last person answer.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Oh, Ms. Daly, I'm  
16 so sorry.

17 MS. DALY: Oh, no, I was just going to  
18 say thank you.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Oh. Well, thank  
20 you.

21 (Laughter.)

22 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. Thank you  
23 to everybody on this panel.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Panel F.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Is that me?

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes, it's you.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. Actually,  
4 it's Panel -- yup, Panel F. If I can call  
5 down Raising New York, Jenn O'Connor, the  
6 coalition lead; the New York State Alliance  
7 of Boys & Girls Clubs, Justin Reuter, the  
8 CEO. The Bridge Project, we have Stephanie  
9 Silkowski, director of policy and strategic  
10 initiatives. And the Adirondack Birth to  
11 Three Alliance, with Kate Ryan, the director.

12 Thank you for coming down.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I just got very  
14 good advice from another colleague that we're  
15 on F, but if people who are on G want to head  
16 towards the front, you can get into place  
17 more quickly once Panel F is done.

18 Not that I'm pressuring you at all,  
19 you're here. So thank you. Thank you.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Sure.

21 Ms. O'Connor, please.

22 MS. O'CONNOR: Hi. Thank you for  
23 having me. Jenn O'Connor, director of  
24 partnerships and early childhood policy for

1 The Education Trust-New York.

2 The Ed Trust-New York runs the  
3 Raising NY Coalition, and that's a diverse  
4 statewide coalition of parents, early  
5 childhood education, business and health  
6 organizations.

7 A number of our members have already  
8 testified here today, so I'm not going to  
9 reiterate what they said. But our focus is  
10 on improving long-term outcomes for infants  
11 and toddlers who are low-income, children of  
12 color, and from underserved populations.

13 I'm going to read you a number here:  
14 New York State spends \$23.9 billion on all  
15 early childhood programs, but of that  
16 \$23.9 billion, only \$5.26 billion is spent on  
17 childcare, family support, and prevention  
18 programs. So I'm going to focus my remarks  
19 to those issues.

20 We've got a couple of high points for  
21 the Raising NY Coalition. One is to invest  
22 in the childcare workforce -- you've heard  
23 that over and over again today. New York  
24 State has greatly increased capacity, but

1           increased capacity to what? Programs are  
2           closing. Providers don't want to be  
3           providers, can't be providers anymore because  
4           they're not being paid enough.

5                        So again, increasing capacity is  
6           fantastic, but it doesn't matter if there are  
7           no programs for kids to be in. We need to  
8           revisit and adopt the decoupling bill. Dede  
9           already told you it's probably not going to  
10          cost what the state thought it was going to  
11          cost, and so we need to look into that again.  
12          And we need to support a move toward  
13          utilization of a cost-estimation model away  
14          from the market rate.

15                       We have done a cost-estimation model  
16          with Prenatal to Five Fiscal Strategies,  
17          which is a national group. We have spoken to  
18          OCFS about using that cost model to influence  
19          their cost model. They seem very open to  
20          that. And so we would just like your support  
21          in again moving away from the market rate and  
22          towards a cost-estimation model.

23                       Our other big issue is home visiting.  
24          The state spends about \$46 million on the

1 Healthy Families Program, and that program  
2 serves every county in the state at this  
3 point. The state also spends a little over  
4 \$4 million on the Nurse-Family Partnership  
5 program -- that's at the Health table, so I  
6 won't bore you with that -- but I will bore  
7 you, they want a \$1.5 million increase.

8 But I'll focus my remarks on the  
9 Parent-Child Plus program, which only gets a  
10 couple hundred thousand dollars. They're  
11 asking for an increase to \$500,000 this year.  
12 And that expansion is important because they  
13 are primarily an early literacy program, they  
14 focus on reading. They hire graduates of the  
15 program, so folks who work -- who live in the  
16 community go back to work in the community.  
17 And they also, over the last couple of years,  
18 have used expansion dollars to connect with  
19 home-based childcare programs.

20 Really, really briefly, Raising NY --  
21 also it doesn't sit at this table -- but  
22 supports the Working Families tax credit,  
23 evidence-based investments in early literacy.  
24 We launched the New York State Campaign for

1 Early Literacy yesterday --

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. Thank  
3 you, Ms. O'Connor.

4 MS. O'CONNOR: -- continuous Medicaid  
5 coverage for children aged zero to six, and  
6 then an 11 percent increase in Early  
7 Intervention.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very  
9 much.

10 Please, yeah. You've just got to hold  
11 it.

12 MS. RIVENBURGH: Sorry. First time.

13 Good afternoon, Chairperson Krueger  
14 and Children and Family Chairpersons Brisport  
15 and Hevesi and the rest of the committee. My  
16 name is Lori Rivenburgh, and I'm with the  
17 Town of Wallkill Boys & Girls Club, serving  
18 Northern Orange and Sullivan counties in the  
19 Hudson Valley.

20 I'm testifying today on behalf of the  
21 New York State Alliance for Boys & Girls  
22 Clubs, to speak to you about the important  
23 role after-school plays in communities across  
24 the state, ensuring kids feel safe, valued,

1 and respected. Thank you for this tremendous  
2 opportunity.

3 The New York State Alliance of Boys &  
4 Girls Clubs represents 118 club sites across  
5 New York State serving 92,000 children  
6 annually. While this is a substantial  
7 number, the fact is every day over  
8 580,000 kids in New York leave school with  
9 nowhere to go. They risk being unsupervised,  
10 unguided, and unsafe.

11 Kids today face many challenges,  
12 including gang and gun violence, substance  
13 use and abuse and other unhealthy behaviors.  
14 Ensuring that they have a safe place to go  
15 after school where they feel protected and  
16 supported is critical to the future of our  
17 young people.

18 For more than 160 years, Boys and  
19 Girls Clubs have fostered hope and  
20 opportunity by cultivating the potential in  
21 every young person. Clubs offer homework  
22 help, career readiness, and programs such as  
23 arts, sports, and financial literacy -- all  
24 in safe and nurturing environments.

1 Everything offered at the club has an  
2 educational component which helps children  
3 and youth at school, build character and  
4 leadership skills, and engage in healthy  
5 behaviors.

6 Historically there have been two major  
7 funding streams in New York State for after  
8 school: Advantage After School Program and  
9 Empire State After-School Program. The  
10 Executive Budget proposes to combine these  
11 two funding streams into a single program in  
12 order to create efficiencies and streamline  
13 differences between the two programs.

14 We are encouraged by the news that the  
15 Executive and OCFS are working on a new RFP  
16 for this funding stream, but strongly  
17 encourage the timely release of the RFP. And  
18 also we hope to see that the RFP is fair,  
19 flexible, and allows Boys and Girls Clubs  
20 across the state an equal opportunity to  
21 apply. In addition, I hope it takes into  
22 consideration the differences in communities  
23 and size of providers across the state, as a  
24 smaller, rural Boys and Girls Club

1 sometimes -- competitive processes have been  
2 prohibitive in the past, and our rural  
3 communities still see the same challenges as  
4 our bigger metro communities.

5 Lastly, we encourage the Legislature  
6 to continue to champion additional funding  
7 for after-school. Typically the Legislature  
8 adds funding for one or two of the previously  
9 mentioned after-school programs, and we  
10 encourage you to do the same this year. As I  
11 mentioned, there are many underserved  
12 children and youth across the state who could  
13 benefit from additional funding.

14 Thank you for the opportunity to  
15 testify today, and I'm happy to answer any  
16 questions that you may have.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you so  
18 much.

19 MS. SILKOWSKI: Okay. Hello,  
20 everyone. Thank you all so much for being  
21 here. It's nice to see so many faces still  
22 here late in the day.

23 I'm Stephanie Silkowski, and I'm the  
24 director of policy for The Bridge Project.

1 We are a cash transfer program for expecting  
2 mothers. We have 1200 program participants  
3 scattered throughout the five boroughs, and  
4 have recently expanded to Rochester and  
5 Buffalo.

6 I'm really thrilled to be here to talk  
7 about the economic hardships that many of the  
8 moms in our program face, and many of your  
9 constituents. Poverty and in particular  
10 child poverty, as you know well, is high and  
11 will likely continue to worsen if economic  
12 trends continue.

13 Half of the top six cities in the  
14 entire U.S. with the highest child-poverty  
15 rates are in New York State. In Rochester,  
16 Buffalo, and Syracuse, one in two children  
17 lives in poverty -- and New York City isn't  
18 far behind, with one in four children living  
19 in poverty. Additionally, a recent report  
20 showed that almost half of New York City  
21 residents can't actually afford to live  
22 there, can't afford basic needs, and you need  
23 to be pulling in six figures to afford  
24 childcare and housing and food.

1                   And we can't talk about any of these  
2                   issues without really centering the  
3                   disproportionate impact on communities of  
4                   color. This inequity is also reflected in  
5                   New York State's really significant  
6                   disparities in maternal health outcomes  
7                   across racial lines.

8                   We can't continue to turn a blind eye  
9                   to both child poverty and maternal health.  
10                  And while some progress has been made with  
11                  philanthropically funded programs like ours  
12                  at The Bridge Project, and the now-expired  
13                  child tax credit, there is really little  
14                  progress to address the need statewide.

15                  So I'm really proud to be here in  
16                  support of the MILC bill, the Mothers and  
17                  Infants Lasting Change Allowance bill, which  
18                  would create a publicly administered and  
19                  adopted cash-transfer program particularly  
20                  for low-income moms during the last three  
21                  months of their pregnancy and throughout the  
22                  first 18 months of a child's life.

23                  There is a ton of research and data  
24                  that I could point you to on the efficacy of

1 cash transfers, particularly for such a  
2 targeted population like the one that the  
3 MILC bill addresses. And the MILC bill, I  
4 think, is particularly special in addressing  
5 two issues all at once in a relatively  
6 simple, cost-effective way.

7 If you care about solving child  
8 poverty, if you care about addressing  
9 maternal health, I would really urge you to  
10 support this bill. This would be the largest  
11 cash-transfer program of its kind to exist  
12 across the country and would really be a bold  
13 step for New York State to lead here. So we  
14 urge the Legislature and Governor Hochul to  
15 include the MILC bill in the budget.

16 And happy to answer any questions  
17 about cash-transfer policy, our program, or  
18 the bill.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Well, thank you.

20 MS. RYAN: Thank you for the  
21 opportunity to testify. My name is  
22 Kate Ryan, and I'm the director of the  
23 Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance, a  
24 coalition of childcare providers, employers,

1 community organizations, and parents across  
2 the Adirondacks and the North Country.

3 The alliance is focused on connecting  
4 resources to those in need, assisting our  
5 community, collaborative opportunities, and  
6 supporting policy and funding for young  
7 children and their families.

8 The Adirondack region is home to  
9 approximately 7,000 children three years of  
10 age or younger. Our population density is  
11 less than 1/10th of the state average. Our  
12 landscape presents unique challenges.  
13 Families often need to travel over an hour to  
14 access employment, resources, healthcare, and  
15 very often childcare. We require an array of  
16 options for care such as family, group, and  
17 center-based childcare. To do this, our  
18 region requires varied strategies for  
19 recruitment and retention of providers while  
20 also ensuring quality, affordability, and  
21 accessibility.

22 Careful consideration is needed for  
23 policy and funding to positively impact our  
24 communities. Rural regions require childcare

1           beyond our deserts. Although nearly  
2           70 percent of our region census tracts remain  
3           childcare deserts, this isn't the full story.

4                       Families often require childcare in  
5           higher-population-density areas not deemed to  
6           be deserts, as this is where parents drive to  
7           work. Unfortunately, these population  
8           centers are sometimes left out of funding  
9           opportunities. Increasing capacity in these  
10          areas is critical to community and economic  
11          success.

12                      We need investments in the childcare  
13          workforce. I would like to share our support  
14          for the Empire State Campaign for  
15          Child Care's agenda. As a member of the  
16          campaign, we too support the need to invest  
17          in the childcare workforce. There is simply  
18          not enough capacity until we recognize those  
19          in the field must be compensated for their  
20          work. We will simply never stabilize the  
21          sector decoupling childcare assistance from  
22          direct hours of parents' work.

23                      The alliance also supports fully  
24          funding the policy adopted in 2022 to do

1           this. This simple policy recognizes that  
2           family life is dynamic, and if we want people  
3           to stay in the Adirondacks, we need to help  
4           them do the simple things we all take for  
5           granted: Going to the doctor, running  
6           errands. When going to an appointment may  
7           take several hours of travel, knowing you can  
8           access childcare is a blessing and a benefit  
9           that will develop in healthier, happier,  
10          less-stressed lives.

11                        We require continued support of  
12          childcare resource and referral agencies.  
13          Because we have and require a higher  
14          percentage of home-based childcare, our  
15          community relies on our CCR&Rs to skillfully  
16          target resources to support new providers to  
17          become licensed and offer technical  
18          assistance and professional assistance to  
19          providers. It is critically important that  
20          CCR&R's funding formula recognizes the time  
21          and effort they need to build capacity in an  
22          environment relying on family and group  
23          family childcare. Yes, the federal support  
24          helped in a time of crisis, but we need

1 continued investment in access, quality, and  
2 affordability.

3 Recently the state increased the  
4 childcare assistance eligibility threshold,  
5 and this has helped families who can find  
6 healthcare. But we need to do more to  
7 recruit and support childcare providers. We  
8 can't forget that these are businesses, many  
9 owned by single mothers. We need to invest  
10 in their capacity to maintain and grow their  
11 businesses.

12 We also need to invest in  
13 QUALITYstarsNY to ensure it will provide  
14 high-quality childcare. My comments today  
15 and the specific recommendations included in  
16 my written testimony only address a fraction  
17 of the issues faced in the Adirondacks and  
18 other rural regions of New York State.

19 I appreciate the opportunity to share  
20 these thoughts and hope to work with you to  
21 identify strategies to support the families  
22 living and working in the Adirondacks.

23 Thank you.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

1                   Okay. Sorry, you guys -- oh, yes,  
2                   perfect.

3                   Assemblymember Mitaynes.

4                   ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

5                   This question is for Ms. O'Connor.  
6                   Can you tell us what sets ParentChild+ apart  
7                   from other home visiting programs?

8                   MS. O'CONNOR: So like I said, there  
9                   are three main home visiting programs in the  
10                  State of New York, and then a number of local  
11                  home visiting programs. They each serve  
12                  specific populations, so eligibility is  
13                  different for each of those programs.

14                 Like I said, ParentChild+ really likes  
15                 to hire graduates of the program to go back  
16                 and work as home visitors in the community,  
17                 so that's number one. Number two is the  
18                 focus on early literacy and language  
19                 development and reading. And number three is  
20                 their very unique partnerships with childcare  
21                 programs, with home-based childcare programs.

22                 So they have a curriculum that they  
23                 use to go into those home-based childcare  
24                 programs and work with those providers like

1           they would work with parents, which we just  
2           think is a really great model and a great  
3           continuum.

4                        So we need all of the programs, but  
5           ParentChild+ has been historically  
6           underfunded compared to the other programs,  
7           and so that's why we're asking for that  
8           increase and that expansion.

9                        ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

10                      MS. O'CONNOR: Thank you.

11                      ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Senator Cleare.

12                      Ask and you shall receive.

13                      (Laughter.)

14                      CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you, Chair.

15                      ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Sure.

16                      SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. So first of  
17           all, I have to -- I agree with -- you know,  
18           you've got to pay people. It's -- that's it,  
19           that's the bottom line. People have to get  
20           paid.

21                      But I want to know more about some of  
22           your services in particular. Are they across  
23           the state? Where are the services you spoke  
24           about? Jenn, I'm sorry.

1 MS. O'CONNOR: So I talked -- so  
2 Raising NY is a coalition. So the services  
3 that we are supporting are childcare  
4 workforce, home visiting workforce, Early  
5 Intervention workforce. When we talk about  
6 the workforce, we're really talking about the  
7 caring community as a whole.

8 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay.

9 MS. O'CONNOR: Statewide.

10 SENATOR CLEARE: All right, thank you.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great, thank you.

12 I think that's it except for me, so  
13 please put two hours on the clock for my next  
14 round of questioning.

15 (Laughter.)

16 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Sorry.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'm noticing.  
18 I'm watching.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Yeah, I know.  
20 I'll never be here again, so I'm going to  
21 enjoy it.

22 (Laughter.)

23 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: So, Ms. O'Connor,  
24 let me start with you. Can you explain the

1 importance of early childhood literacy,  
2 particularly when you focus on the "serve and  
3 return" -- that's correct, that's what I'm  
4 asking -- and how that prevents adverse  
5 childhood experiences and trauma. In less  
6 than 30 seconds, please.

7 (Laughter.)

8 MS. O'CONNOR: So when you're talking  
9 about the zero to three or zero to five  
10 population, you're talking about attachment.  
11 You're talking about language development.  
12 You're not talking about reading, right, at  
13 that point in time.

14 So "serve and return" is me talking to  
15 you, you talking to me. Me reading to you,  
16 you hearing my voice. You're learning words.  
17 And that strengthens the nurturing and  
18 strengthens the relationship. And we know  
19 that adverse childhood experiences can be  
20 mitigated by a relationship with a caring  
21 adult.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great. Thank you  
23 very much.

24 For the Boys and Girls Clubs, a quick

1 question for you. Very interesting to hear  
2 about the timely -- importance of the timely  
3 release of the RFP. Please know that we are  
4 a resource. If that doesn't come down or the  
5 RFP is not where you'd want it, please let us  
6 know and we can intervene.

7 One quick question; I think it's a yes  
8 or a no. Do you support the After-School  
9 Network's ask for ALEP, for the 219 million  
10 that is above and beyond what we've got --  
11 100 million -- in this year's budget?

12 MS. RIVENBURGH: Yes.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great. Thank  
14 you. That was easy.

15 (Laughter.)

16 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Ms. Silkowski, I  
17 just want to tell you we hear you about the  
18 bill and -- the MILC bill. I don't know what  
19 else to say about that except Senator Persaud  
20 is right again.

21 And then Ms. Ryan, could I ask you a  
22 question? Because this has been bothering me  
23 for a while. Because I had the luxury of  
24 visiting the Adirondacks; we went to an

1 outdoor childcare center. It was the coolest  
2 thing I've ever seen. But part of the  
3 problem for childcare in the Adirondacks is  
4 transportation. Can you speak to that a bit  
5 and how we address that, you know, perhaps in  
6 this budget?

7 MS. RYAN: I think the general support  
8 of building the workforce around childcare.  
9 I mean, the reality is that to break the  
10 barriers of transportation, we need childcare  
11 close to where the families are. And so that  
12 needs to be -- that's often family and group  
13 family childcare. And so we have to build  
14 the capacity, and we need the providers to do  
15 it.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: It's not easy,  
17 like, you know, buy a couple of buses to take  
18 kids -- no, you've got to fix those deserts.

19 MS. RYAN: I don't think -- yup.  
20 Nope.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Got it. I very  
22 much appreciate it.

23 Thank you all for your testimony here  
24 today. Thank you.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you all  
2 very much.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay, Panel G.  
4 From the Albany Damien Center, Perry  
5 Junjulas, the executive director. From SAGE  
6 Advocacy Services for LGBTQ+ Elders, MJ Okma,  
7 senior manager for advocacy and government  
8 relations. And from Equality New York,  
9 Erin Brigid, community organizer.

10 Thank you all for being here tonight.  
11 Feel free. Anybody who wants to jump in,  
12 thank you.

13 MR. JUNJULAS: I'm Perry Junjulas, I'm  
14 the executive director at the Albany Damien  
15 Center and also a person who's been living  
16 with AIDS since 1995.

17 I can definitively state today that I  
18 am alive today because of the investments New  
19 York State has made in HIV and AIDS services  
20 in New York State, for which I am extremely  
21 grateful.

22 I speak to you today on behalf of  
23 very-low-income persons with HIV who are  
24 homeless and unstably housed outside of

1 New York City who do not have access to  
2 rental assistance. Numerous studies have  
3 shown that housing is an evidence-based HIV  
4 health intervention that enables persons with  
5 HIV to take their medications, which extends  
6 their lives and stops the spread of HIV to  
7 others.

8 Now, since 2016 in New York City,  
9 New York State and the city have ensured that  
10 every single low-income New Yorker with HIV  
11 has had access to housing with the rate cap  
12 of 30 percent of their income. This is not  
13 the case for persons with HIV outside of  
14 New York City.

15 Now, for the past five years, the  
16 New York State budget has contained the  
17 intent to fix this issue. But the language  
18 has not housed one single person with HIV  
19 outside of New York City. This year's budget  
20 contains the same language that will not help  
21 anyone. This language allows but does not  
22 require local departments of social services  
23 to provide meaningful HIV housing assistance  
24 and provides no state funding to support the

1 cost to local districts outside of New York  
2 City.

3 To finally provide equitable statewide  
4 access to HIV housing supports, we need to  
5 correct the relevant Aid to Localities  
6 language on public assistance benefits and  
7 enact Article VII legislation to do three  
8 things: Ensure that every local department  
9 of social services provides low-income  
10 persons with HIV access to the New York State  
11 HIV Emergency Rental Allowance Program to  
12 support 100 percent of HUD fair-market value,  
13 as it is in New York City. Number two, make  
14 affordable housing protections available  
15 statewide to cap the share of rent for a  
16 low-income person with HIV at 30 percent of  
17 income. And number three, recognize the  
18 fiscal reality of counties outside of  
19 New York City and have the state pick up  
20 100 percent of the cost of providing the  
21 shelter allowances.

22 Now, providing this assistance is  
23 cost-neutral. An analysis by OTDA fiscal  
24 staff has determined the costs in the first

1 year would be 3 million, offset by Medicaid  
2 savings of 4 million. In the outyears,  
3 Medicaid savings would exceed housing costs  
4 by as much as 13 million annually.

5 Furthermore, OTDA Acting Commissioner  
6 Guinn has expressed support for this change  
7 in the budget language.

8 I thank you for listening to the  
9 testimony today.

10 MR. OKMA: Hi. Good afternoon. My  
11 name is MJ Okma, the senior manager of  
12 advocacy and government relations at SAGE.

13 SAGE has been serving LGBTQ+ elders  
14 and older New Yorkers living with HIV for  
15 over four decades, providing comprehensive  
16 social services and community-building  
17 programming through a network of  
18 LGBTQ+-welcoming older adult centers across  
19 New York City. We also engage in partners in  
20 the Hudson Valley, Long Island, Syracuse,  
21 Rochester, and Buffalo.

22 New York State ranks among the top  
23 10 states in terms of percentage of the  
24 population that identifies as LGBTQ+, and

1 one-third of LGBTQ+ New Yorkers are over the  
2 age of 50. Additionally, the number of  
3 New Yorkers aging with HIV is also growing  
4 rapidly, with 73 percent of all New Yorkers  
5 living with HIV estimated to be over 50 by  
6 2030.

7 LGBTQ+ elders and older people living  
8 with HIV rely more heavily on community  
9 service providers due to thin support  
10 networks, yet they're often distrustful of  
11 providers after a long history of stigma and  
12 discrimination. For many of those elders,  
13 New York State is their lifeline.

14 It is because of them I'm here today  
15 asking for your support in this year's  
16 budget, including a renewal of 300,000 to  
17 support LGBTQ+ residents and community  
18 members in and around New York State's first  
19 LGBTQ+-welcoming affordable elder housing  
20 developments; a renewal of 150,000 to  
21 increase our multilingual services and  
22 programming; a renewal of \$2,000 for the SAGE  
23 Veterans Program; and a new funding  
24 designation of 150,000 to help meet the

1 growing demand for services among New Yorkers  
2 aging with HIV.

3 With your support, SAGE has been able  
4 to evolve and expand to best address the  
5 widespread disparities facing these  
6 populations. We've worked with prominent  
7 developers to directly address the housing  
8 insecurity experienced by the communities.  
9 We grew the upstate footprint of the SAGEVets  
10 program. We launched food pantry initiatives  
11 to help participants in and around our  
12 centers -- that are open for all -- which  
13 further integrated them in their community.  
14 And we expanded our multilingual programming  
15 into Spanish, Mandarin, and Cantonese.

16 Additionally, our SAGEVets program  
17 supports the unique needs of LGBTQ+ veterans,  
18 aiding in their overall health and wellness  
19 and providing referrals to counsel regarding  
20 discharge status upgrades. We provide this  
21 life-changing support while saving New York  
22 significant amounts of funding by ensuring  
23 veterans access all their federal benefits  
24 instead of relying solely on state programs

1 to address their housing and healthcare  
2 needs.

3 This year we're also seeking a new  
4 funding designation to expand the  
5 SAGEPositive program that connects the  
6 growing population of New Yorkers aging with  
7 HIV to a wide range of services, including  
8 sexual wellness workshops, social events,  
9 HIV and STI testing, case management,  
10 caregiver support, educational forums, and  
11 more.

12 I also want to echo Perry's remark  
13 about the urgent call to action to end  
14 homelessness among New Yorkers living with  
15 HIV by ensuring all New Yorkers have access  
16 to the meaningful rental assistance that has  
17 been available in New York City since 2016.  
18 As currently written, the budget language has  
19 not successfully housed a single person with  
20 HIV despite being in the past five budgets.  
21 This language must be corrected.

22 SAGE also supports the inclusion of  
23 A6214 and S7663 in the active budget to  
24 increase the SNAP minimum benefit to \$100.

1 Thank you so much.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

3 MS. BRIGID: Thank you for this  
4 opportunity. My name is Erin Brigid. I  
5 serve as the community organizer for  
6 Equality New York, the only statewide  
7 advocacy organization dedicated to advancing  
8 equality and justice for LGBTQI+ New Yorkers  
9 and their families.

10 In 2023 we faced an alarming surge of  
11 over 500 anti-LGBTQI+ bills nationwide,  
12 including in New York State. This wave poses  
13 a serious threat to the progress and safety  
14 of our community.

15 Equality New York has been at the  
16 forefront working relentlessly to protect and  
17 promote the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals and  
18 their families. Our organization represents  
19 over 120 organizations and 5500 members  
20 deeply invested in direct community  
21 engagement and empowerment, and it is this  
22 diverse and vibrant community that I  
23 represent here today.

24 Recent data from the Williams

1 Institute at UCLA indicates that 5.5 percent  
2 of New York State's population, equating to  
3 approximately 853,000 people, identify as  
4 LGBTQI+. Our work has highlighted the need  
5 for safer environments in schools for trans  
6 and nonbinary youth, improved access to  
7 health and legal services, and the  
8 rectification of systemic issues that lead to  
9 the misgendering and disrespect of our  
10 community members.

11 Despite our progress, there remains  
12 much to be done. Through initiatives like  
13 the LGBTQI+ Advocacy Institute we have  
14 catalyzed over three dozen statewide projects  
15 tackling critical issues ranging from  
16 educational reforms to healthcare  
17 improvements. Notable achievements include  
18 the establishment of a transgender  
19 peer-support program in Rochester hospitals  
20 and the development of a gay/straight  
21 alliance in schools across upstate New York.

22 A significant challenge we have  
23 identified is the lack of specialized skills  
24 among governmental service-based

1 organizations to adequately serve LGBTQ+  
2 communities, particularly in the transgender,  
3 nonconforming, nonbinary individuals.

4 Additionally, many LGBTQ+ individuals  
5 are unaware of their rights when interacting  
6 with human services. This is especially true  
7 for TGNCNB individuals who face significant  
8 hurdles in accessing these services,  
9 particularly among BIPOC communities.

10 The Gender Expression

11 Nondiscrimination Act passed in 2019 has been  
12 a pivotal step in protecting these rights,  
13 but there's still a long road ahead.

14 Therefore, we're requesting 100,000 in  
15 funding. This amount will make a substantial  
16 impact in addressing the physical, mental,  
17 and economic challenges facing the LGBTQI+  
18 and TGNCNB communities -- 75,000 to conduct  
19 12 cultural sensitivity training sessions and  
20 25,000 to develop and disseminate a  
21 comprehensive Know Your Rights campaign.

22 Thank you so much for considering our  
23 request and your commitment to serving the  
24 people of New York.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very  
2 much.

3 Okay, you guys are stuck with me. So  
4 here goes my three minutes.

5 So first, Mr. Junjulas, am I correct  
6 in understanding that OTDA has a study saying  
7 that this is going to save money, and still  
8 we're not doing this? How is that possible?

9 MR. JUNJULAS: {Mic issue.} Sorry.  
10 We worked with OTDA fiscal staff on an  
11 analysis, and they agreed with our  
12 assumptions that showed the Medicaid savings  
13 and that we do have backup support from that.

14 So yeah, I do not understand exactly.

15 And also, too, it will prevent new HIV  
16 infections. And that's one of the big  
17 takeaways here, is that when we get people  
18 housed, we're able to take our meds, we do  
19 not pass the virus then on to others, and so  
20 therefore we can actually end the epidemic.

21 So costwise it makes sense, but also  
22 humanwise it makes sense, because we're going  
23 to be saving lives through this initiative.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: And that analysis

1 was done in what year? Just curious. I  
2 don't need to know this, I'm just curious.

3 MR. JUNJULAS: What's -- I'm sorry?

4 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: The analysis was  
5 done in what year?

6 MR. JUNJULAS: The analysis was done  
7 this past year.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Oh, this past  
9 year.

10 MR. JUNJULAS: Yeah, this past year we  
11 actually --

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Ah, so one would  
13 have hoped it would have been reflected in  
14 this year's budget, but not so far.

15 Okay. And the language change that  
16 you're talking about, it's just a "may" to a  
17 "shall," right? That's what you're talking  
18 about?

19 MR. JUNJULAS: It's -- it's really  
20 just the -- in the Aid for Localities, and  
21 also in the Article VII, you know, just to --  
22 right now the language cannot house anyone  
23 because local districts are not required,  
24 they can opt in. And nobody's opting in,

1 because of the money.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Very much  
3 appreciate it. We'll look to pursue that in  
4 the budget, and I will -- there were a lot of  
5 smaller asks for both of those who you gave  
6 testimony today. So we'll look to do those.

7 I do -- the one thing, Mr. Okma, if I  
8 can, that piqued my attention was the rapid  
9 increase of people living with HIV over 50.  
10 Could you expound on that? Is that going to  
11 be a problem that continues to get  
12 exponentially more difficult to handle?

13 MR. OKMA: Yes. It's definitely  
14 something that New York State has to take  
15 action to invest in now, because it is a  
16 rapidly growing population, and this is for a  
17 number of reasons.

18 One, just the population as a whole is  
19 aging, and thanks to the activism that was  
20 born right here in New York State, there's  
21 all these medical advances that are allowing  
22 people with HIV to live longer lives.

23 MR. JUNJULAS: (Pointing to self.)  
24 Alive. Alive.

1 (Laughter.)

2 MR. OKMA: But on top of that,  
3 17 percent of new diagnoses last year were  
4 among New Yorkers over the age of 50, because  
5 of the combination of ageism and -- ageism  
6 and HIV stigma means that PrEP -- PrEP, HIV  
7 testing, all of these things are not really  
8 targeted towards older adults. Which is one  
9 of the reasons why programs like SAGEPositive  
10 are so impactful.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: That's great.

12 And Ms. Brigid, I don't have a lot of  
13 time, but you did pique my interest with the  
14 fact that the BIPOC community is not familiar  
15 with their rights. Is there something that  
16 we can do besides the asks in your testimony  
17 to address that? Or it's the asks we should  
18 focus on?

19 MS. BRIGID: (Mic off; inaudible) -- a  
20 lot of things that had to be abridged because  
21 of time was the Know Your Rights campaign  
22 that we're planning encompasses both virtual  
23 platforms and social media featuring public  
24 service announcements, and the distribution

1 of over 1,000 informational posters. And  
2 these materials will focus on rights of  
3 individuals in schools, healthcare settings,  
4 and other human service entities.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great, thank you.  
6 I've run out of time.

7 No, I see Assemblymember Simon has a  
8 question.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.  
10 Thank you all for your testimony.

11 So Erin, from Equality New York. You  
12 mentioned a program that was -- if I got it  
13 correctly, was a program that helped people  
14 get gender-affirming care in Rochester. Or  
15 is that -- and I'm curious, (A) did I get  
16 that right? (B) Are there programs like that  
17 at the other sort of bigger upstate cities?  
18 Because New York being different than  
19 New York City.

20 MS. BRIGID: Well, it's a -- well,  
21 it's not a gender-affirming-care program,  
22 it's a -- the Rochester one is a transgender  
23 peer-support program.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Okay.

1 MS. BRIGID: So it's -- that would be  
2 more -- I don't have all the details on it,  
3 but we could get you more details on it.

4 But peer support is generally just --  
5 more along the lines of just like a  
6 counseling and being able to reach out to and  
7 talk to one another.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Yeah. No, I  
9 understand what it is. I just had misheard  
10 it, obviously, and I was curious about it.

11 Thank you. Appreciate it.

12 MS. BRIGID: You're welcome. Thank  
13 you.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you all for  
15 testifying. We really appreciate it.

16 And -- I'm sorry, that was outrageous  
17 and silly. Senator Cleare, I apologize.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: That wasn't  
19 outrageous.

20 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. Thank you all  
21 for your testimony and for hanging in there.

22 I'm alarmed by the rising rates of  
23 HIV, especially in the aging community. And  
24 if there's something that we can do, if you

1           could let us know what we can do to help  
2           mitigate some of that -- education-wise,  
3           testing-wise. Is there somewhere where we  
4           need to be looking to put funding? I'd love  
5           to hear it.

6                       MR. JUNJULAS: (Mic issue;  
7           inaudible) -- for the rest of state housing,  
8           to help people outside of New York City, you  
9           know, that certainly will help. Because we  
10          absolutely do have persons who are over 50  
11          living with HIV who are homeless. I see them  
12          during the day all the time at the Damien  
13          Center, and they go out to homelessness.

14                      The second thing is is that we do have  
15          an HIV testing bill to make HIV testing a  
16          routine part of care. Too many persons are  
17          visiting the ERs and some of the health  
18          clinics and they're not being tested for HIV.

19                      And so we are looking to streamline  
20          the process to make HIV testing a routine  
21          part of care. This way we can actually  
22          identify new HIV cases, but also if someone  
23          is negative, we can get them on PrEP, which  
24          can prevent new HIV infections, and also test

1 for STIs and hep C.

2 MR. OKMA: Yeah, what I would add on  
3 to that is that there's a great need of just  
4 building HIV awareness and competency at  
5 older adult centers across the state. Just a  
6 lot of people in the sector -- and we've been  
7 partnering with NYSOFA for this, and they've  
8 been -- Commissioner Olsen has been a great  
9 partner, but there is a lack of understanding  
10 of HIV in the aging sector. And also  
11 sometimes sexual health and wellness is seen  
12 as a taboo, and that type of programming is  
13 not standardly offered in these settings.  
14 And it should be.

15 I think one other thing that would be  
16 really impactful is we hear all the time that  
17 our participants have not been offered PrEP,  
18 or PrEP where they're -- it's not considered,  
19 it's not seen as an intervention for them. I  
20 think a targeted HIV prevention campaign  
21 specifically centering the images and  
22 messages for older adults would be incredibly  
23 impactful and something that hasn't happened.

24 And I would also add that the Ending

1 the Epidemic Legislative Committee also has a  
2 budget request this year for \$10 million to  
3 support these types of programs and services.  
4 They've instituted a pilot program, about  
5 \$4 million for HIV and aging services over  
6 five years. That was great. They're really  
7 thinking about this. That's not adequate for  
8 meeting the growing population.

9 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great. Thank  
11 you, Senator Cleare, and my apologies again.

12 And thank you to everyone in this  
13 panel. Very much appreciate it.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very  
15 much.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.

17 PANELISTS: Thank you.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay, Panel H:  
19 Supportive Housing Network, Stephen Piasecki,  
20 state policy manager; New Destiny Housing,  
21 Gabriela Sandoval Requena, director of policy  
22 and communications; Immigration Law & Justice  
23 New York, Reverend Paul Fleck; and Center for  
24 New York City Affairs, The New School,

1           Lauren Melodia.

2                   MR. PIASECKI:  Shall I get going?

3                   ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI:  Yeah, you want to  
4           start us off?

5                   MR. PIASECKI:  Sure, why not.

6                   Thanks to the chair.  Chair Krueger,  
7           Chair Hevesi, Chair Persaud, thank you guys  
8           for hanging in there with us.  And thanks,  
9           everybody that's still here.  This is an  
10          amazing turnout for somebody like me.

11                   (Laughter.)

12                   MR. PIASECKI:  So appreciate that.

13                   And I'm here to change the subject to  
14          something completely different -- not for the  
15          Supportive Housing Network of New York, but  
16          at least for today's testimony.  We're  
17          focused like a laser on the NYSSHP program,  
18          New York State's Supportive Housing Program.  
19          This is a legacy program that dates back to  
20          the 1980s.  And we have in the last couple of  
21          years been comparing this program with the  
22          current state program known as ESSHI, Empire  
23          State Supportive Housing Initiative.  I see  
24          Assemblymember Hevesi nodding his head,

1           because you were a big champion of that.

2                       And the comparison is actually  
3 shocking and revelatory. And so this year we  
4 formulated a proposal to make NYSSHP more  
5 like the ESSHI program, to get NYSSHP to work  
6 like ESSHI in a couple of different ways.

7                       So I'll paint the picture for you  
8 first. I am from the Supportive Housing  
9 Network of New York. We're a membership  
10 organization with 200 members that are  
11 nonprofits around the state that do a variety  
12 of different supportive housing.

13                      There's about 58,000 units of  
14 supportive housing in New York. Not enough.  
15 The state is doing a great job working on it  
16 with this new program, halfway through  
17 towards 20,000 units of supportive housing.

18                      NYSSHP also touches 20,000 units of  
19 supportive housing in a much different way.  
20 NYSSHP is funded as low as \$2700 per person  
21 per year, whereas ESSHI starts at \$25,000, so  
22 it's 10 times as large. A couple of other  
23 differences to note are that NYSSHP primarily  
24 focuses on services -- it's almost totally a

1 services program -- whereas ESSHI does both  
2 services and operating. That's really kind  
3 of a state-of-the-art new model that the  
4 state created, and it gives a lot more  
5 resources to the ongoing operation and  
6 supports of supportive housing buildings.

7 So it's complicated by the fact that  
8 NYSSHP works in a lot of different ways all  
9 around the state. So we dug deeply and we  
10 looked at, you know, what is going on. And  
11 of the 20,000 units, about half of them are  
12 in New York City, a little bit more than  
13 half. And it is a statewide program. But  
14 9,000 of the 20,000, NYSSHP is the only  
15 services funding available. And, you know,  
16 that really means that that 2700 per person  
17 is all that's going to services, which is  
18 really challenging.

19 Then we dug a little bit deeper as we  
20 were doing the comparison with ESSHI, and we  
21 saw that 7,000 units -- wow, that was fast --  
22 7,000 units are rental -- lacking rental  
23 assistance.

24 So our ask, in a nutshell, is

1           \$32 million to start a program to make this  
2           conversion and start a five-year plan to do  
3           so.

4                        ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great. Thank you  
5           very much.

6                        CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

7                        MS. SANDOVAL REQUENA: Good afternoon,  
8           committee chairs and members of the State  
9           Legislature. Thank you for holding this  
10          hearing and for sticking around and for the  
11          opportunity to testify on behalf of  
12          New Destiny Housing.

13                       My name is Gabriela Sandoval Requena,  
14          and I am the director of policy and  
15          communications at New Destiny. For those of  
16          you who may not be familiar with New Destiny,  
17          our mission is really to end the double  
18          trauma of abuse and homelessness among  
19          domestic violence survivors. And we do this  
20          by developing supportive housing for  
21          survivors, and shelter, assisting those who  
22          are fleeing abuse to obtain subsidies and  
23          find housing, and advocating for more  
24          resources.



1 services that the survivors and the children  
2 deserve.

3 New Destiny opened its first NYSSHP  
4 building in 2008, and we're still operating  
5 with service rates of less than \$4,000 per  
6 family per year. That's compared to the  
7 \$25,000 that the newer program, ESSHI,  
8 provides. Additionally, ESSHI also includes  
9 an automatic 2 percent escalator in each  
10 contract. So really the disparity between  
11 the two programs is truly indefensible.

12 Like the other 120 nonprofits  
13 participating in NYSSHP across the state, we  
14 are forced to constantly fundraise from  
15 private donors to try to bridge the shortfall  
16 and pay our staff a livable wage and provide  
17 benefits. But it's impossible, really, to  
18 make up the difference, and it's not really a  
19 sustainable solution. Our staff and our  
20 tenants really deserve better.

21 The supportive housing community  
22 proposes a five-year, phased-in approach to  
23 reach parity over -- between the two  
24 programs, and for this year we're requesting



1           abusing you.

2                   ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Oh, sorry.

3                   (Laughter.)

4                   REVEREND FLECK: No, when we were  
5           unrolling, with the New York State Council of  
6           Churches and the Interfaith Center of  
7           New York, the Covenant for Newest New Yorkers  
8           we received a heckling by one individual out  
9           in the crowd. And they said, "What about my  
10          community? What about me?"

11                   And being a load of pastors, we had to  
12          respond pastorally and say, "This isn't a  
13          question of either/or. We agree that you  
14          should be entitled to a right to shelter. We  
15          agree that you should be entitled to  
16          affordable housing. We agree that you should  
17          be entitled to stable education. We agree  
18          with all those things, as well as healthcare  
19          for all."

20                   And a conversation ensued, and we were  
21          under the impression we changed a heart and a  
22          mind at that time.

23                   But that's -- that's the core of the  
24          covenant rolled out by the Interfaith Center

1 of New York and the New York State Council of  
2 Churches, is that we shouldn't have to make a  
3 choice between providing these things to  
4 New Yorkers who have been here for years as  
5 opposed to our newest New Yorkers who've just  
6 shown up.

7 Another thing that the covenant  
8 contains is a call for transparency and  
9 accountability. We saw that here today in  
10 the hearing where Assemblyman Ra and his  
11 colleague were just hearing for the first  
12 time how the \$1 billion had been allocated  
13 and spent, and 325 million, in fact, had been  
14 spent in New York City.

15 And now we have 2.4 billion allocated  
16 in the budget. And I'll have to confess I'm  
17 in the immigration legal services business,  
18 and I don't know how that money is going to  
19 be spent.

20 So I think there is a need for  
21 transparency and accountability and how that  
22 money is going to be spent. We need to know.  
23 I, for one -- again, being in the immigration  
24 legal services industry -- would hope that it

1 would go towards the Access to Representation  
2 Act, which would provide full representation  
3 to individuals in deportation proceedings.

4 Evidence shows that people who have  
5 representation are 10 times more likely to  
6 win their case than someone who does not.  
7 That's real value. That's contributing to  
8 families, it's contributing to the economic  
9 well-being of our newest New Yorkers.

10 Thank you.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

13 MS. MELODIA: Hi. Can you guys hear  
14 me?

15 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Yes.

16 MS. MELODIA: Okay. My name's  
17 Lauren Melodia. I'm an economist at the  
18 Center for New York City Affairs at  
19 The New School. Thank you for the  
20 opportunity to testify.

21 I'm going to bring us back to  
22 childcare. We've heard a lot about the  
23 mismatch between supply and demand in the  
24 childcare sector resulting from a

1           longstanding crisis of low earnings in the  
2           sector. And I want to highlight the unique  
3           features of the industry and policies  
4           contributing to this.

5                        So with the exception of high-income  
6           households, most New Yorkers can't afford the  
7           true cost of care. And as a result,  
8           childcare programs charge parents what they  
9           can afford to pay, not what it costs to  
10          provide care.

11                       This flawed market is then codified in  
12          New York's Child Care Assistance Program  
13          voucher reimbursement methodology, the  
14          market-rate methodology. It constrains  
15          providers from offering competitive wages to  
16          their workers, and it exploits home-based  
17          providers who I've found in 2021 earned a  
18          median \$10.61 per hour in New York City,  
19          while the city's minimum wage was \$15.

20                       We've heard many workers have left the  
21          industry for higher wages elsewhere, and I  
22          want to give an example of what's going on  
23          there. In 2021, the median wage of people  
24          with a high school diploma was \$18.50 per

1 hour in New York City, which was \$5 more per  
2 hour than a center-based childcare worker was  
3 earning, and 80 percent of those people have  
4 a high school diploma or more.

5 So I'm here to ask the State  
6 Legislature to do two things this session.  
7 First, pass legislation to develop an  
8 alternative cost-estimation methodology for  
9 the voucher program, one that includes  
10 competitive wages. This is going to require  
11 a multiyear federal approval process and a  
12 lot of planning for how to actually fund it  
13 for the long term.

14 And so that's why we need you to do a  
15 second thing, which many people have  
16 mentioned today, and that is to expand the  
17 Workforce Compensation Fund included in last  
18 year's budget and make it a permanent feature  
19 of the State Budget until a new methodology  
20 has been implemented. The Workforce  
21 Compensation Fund must be sufficient to solve  
22 the problem.

23 Last year's fund distributed bonuses  
24 that were appreciated, but were too small to

1           actually address the underlying labor market  
2           issues. I've estimated that a \$12,500 wage  
3           subsidy per worker would actually do the job  
4           by incentivizing people to continue working  
5           in the industry and stabilizing the supply of  
6           childcare.

7                     For example, it would increase the  
8           median pay of home-based providers to  
9           \$18.79 per hour -- still lower than what they  
10          should be paid, but at least ending the  
11          subminimum wage that they're earning today.

12                    And, lastly, I want to say that the  
13          state is capable of investing in this  
14          adequately-sized permanent Workforce  
15          Compensation Fund this year. A report  
16          published by my colleagues just this month  
17          shows that the state has ample budget  
18          reserves, including \$13.3 billion for  
19          economic uncertainties. I think this  
20          warrants use of it.

21                    Thank you.

22                    ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: All right. Thank  
23          you very much.

24                    CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

1                   Senators? No, you don't?

2                   Okay, I do. May I?

3                   ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Please.

4                   CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very  
5 much.

6                   Thank you, all. I want to go back to  
7 the supportive housing two folks.

8                   So some of the confusion that I think  
9 happens frequently with legislators and when  
10 we're just discussing these issues at home is  
11 the fact that there are multiple categories  
12 of supportive housing in lots of different  
13 contracts, city and state, the old contracts,  
14 the new contracts -- you two know exactly  
15 what I'm talking about -- whether we should  
16 be prioritizing more for specific  
17 subcategories of people who are in the  
18 homeless system or coming out of the prison  
19 system or, or, or. Right?

20                   Does somebody actually have sort of --  
21 or could you prepare a chart showing these  
22 categories and the payment differences?  
23 Because some of the things that have always  
24 shocked me is if you were willing to go into



1           actually working on a big report, which we're  
2           calling "The State of Supportive Housing,"  
3           that is in process. But I think we can give  
4           you those details.

5                        But you're exactly right. It's all  
6           different rates at different times. Not much  
7           if any of it is funded at the rate that is  
8           really needed, given all the changes that  
9           have occurred that a lot of people have  
10          talked about today.

11                      Workforce is an issue, obviously,  
12          across the map. Workforce is particularly an  
13          issue with NYSSHP. And like I said, you  
14          know, there's all sorts of different levels.

15                      The great thing about NYSSHP is there  
16          is a kind of -- it can touch any disability  
17          group as long as you have the overlay of  
18          proximity to homelessness. And then there  
19          are all the other silos that require teasing  
20          out.

21                      So yeah, we could prepare something  
22          for you, Senator.

23                      CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I just feel like  
24          both the city and the state, even though we

1 never are where we should be on the time that  
2 it takes to build more, on the amount of  
3 money we're actually providing and keeping up  
4 with the problem -- I think half of us don't  
5 ever understand what the actual universe  
6 looks like out there, because it is so  
7 radically different for so many different  
8 categories.

9 And I know if I was running one of  
10 your agencies, the number of contracts I  
11 would have to try to balance and combine  
12 would send me off a cliff somewhere.

13 MR. PIASECKI: We used to think we  
14 were very smart by cobbling together all  
15 these different resources, and now, you  
16 know --

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: It's not working  
18 that way.

19 Anyway, my time is up. Thank you.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Do you have a  
21 Senate question?

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Is there a Senate  
23 question? Oh, Senator Murray.

24 SENATOR MURRAY: Hi. Thank you.

1                   A quick question, so -- and I  
2 apologize, I didn't -- didn't catch your name  
3 on the end.

4                   MS. MELODIA: Lauren. Lauren Melodia.

5                   SENATOR MURRAY: Lauren, yes, okay.

6                   Lauren, I agree with you completely  
7 that we need to make permanent -- we need to  
8 increase the wages of childcare workers and  
9 everything to retain the workforce. We need  
10 to do that.

11                   We had a discussion -- and I'd like to  
12 get your opinion on this. We had a  
13 roundtable discussion about that very  
14 subject -- well, childcare in general and the  
15 different crises we're facing: availability,  
16 affordability, and of course the workforce.  
17 And we had come up with an idea, what if --  
18 and I've heard the term "glorified  
19 babysitters," which I think is a terrible  
20 term, but it's how kind of the childcare  
21 workers are looked at sometimes.

22                   Are there classes or could there be  
23 classes at community colleges or something to  
24 certify -- in other words, get them more into

1 more training, where they're getting into  
2 early childhood development and things of  
3 this nature, so they're not so-called  
4 glorified babysitters but they're offering  
5 much, much more? Which in turn could demand  
6 a higher salary by the childcare providers  
7 maybe asking for a bit more because of the  
8 higher quality.

9 I mean, do you see where I'm going  
10 with this? What are your thoughts on that?

11 MS. MELODIA: I do see where you're  
12 going. And I guess I'll make two points to  
13 it.

14 One is that we already do have plenty  
15 of training. Licensed and registered  
16 programs in the state are required to do  
17 extensive training regularly. We have the  
18 CDA program, which is an accredited program  
19 that people can get this special degree to  
20 prove that they are specialized in early care  
21 and education.

22 The problem is the wages never meet  
23 those expectations. And so what I was trying  
24 to say earlier is that you can have a high

1 school diploma in New York City and get 18.50  
2 an hour, and you can have more than that  
3 working in childcare and be making \$5, you  
4 know, less per hour.

5 So I think that the only way we're  
6 going to incentivize more people getting  
7 trained -- and plenty of people have CDAs and  
8 bachelor's degrees and master's degrees in  
9 this industry -- is to actually develop a  
10 comprehensive workforce career ladder. You  
11 know, really think this through on a regional  
12 level -- occupations, you know. And it has  
13 to go along with -- with wage increases in  
14 the same way that we see in the Department of  
15 Education.

16 The last thing I'll say is that this  
17 is a very unique industry, and that's why  
18 using a market to determine price is  
19 absolutely the wrong way to go. And that is  
20 because you can choose to see if your family  
21 can afford childcare that you pay for out of  
22 the home.

23 But people often rely on rental and,  
24 you know, unpaid care within the household.

1           So that -- the reality of that, which we want  
2           people to continue to have that choice, puts  
3           downward pressure on wages in this industry.  
4           And that's why we need to make sure that we  
5           have some -- a wage floor across the sector.

6                     SENATOR MURRAY: Thank you very much.  
7           Thank you.

8                     CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

9                     Do you have any Assembly?

10                    ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: No.

11                    CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Cleare.

12                    SENATOR CLEARE: It's just a comment,  
13           but -- and I appreciate your answer to that  
14           last question.

15                    But, you know, childcare really is  
16           children being safe, children being cared  
17           for, fed, in a safe environment. And there's  
18           value to that as it is. You know, there's  
19           value just based on it.

20                    Of course I agree there should be a  
21           pathway to a greater career. But being a  
22           mother and having to look for childcare, I  
23           wanted my children to be safe and taken care  
24           of. That was the most important thing. If

1           you could teach them something else, that's  
2           great too. But really the main thing is  
3           that. And I think we have to value that, is  
4           what I'm trying to say.

5                        There's a value to that that people  
6           kind of miss and just disregard people who do  
7           that kind of work, that they're putting their  
8           heart and soul into this. Most childcare  
9           providers I know, these are their children,  
10          the way they do the job. I know the real  
11          people who do it. And my mother cared -- did  
12          a different kind of home -- she did home  
13          care. But there were children in that family  
14          who remained in touch with my mother  
15          throughout their adulthood. This is how  
16          close -- it's just not a simple thing.

17                       So I think that we just as a society  
18          don't value childcare the way we should. And  
19          the same thing with seniors. The same thing.  
20          You know, the people who care for our  
21          seniors, we say these are the important  
22          things to us, but we don't value these people  
23          like that. And they should be paid, because  
24          it's something that you can't even put a

1 price on.

2 MS. MELODIA: Absolutely.

3 And just in terms of childcare, you  
4 know, we need to boost wages in health and  
5 human services across the board. But it's  
6 really important to note that one of the most  
7 popular models of childcare is a small  
8 business that largely women of color run in  
9 their homes, family childcare. My mom ran  
10 one for 20 years.

11 These people don't have employment  
12 contracts, so they don't have any protection  
13 or guarantee that they're going to get a  
14 wage. And that's why we really need the  
15 state to intervene and establish a  
16 cost-estimation model that is paying people  
17 and guaranteeing that there's a wage floor.

18 SENATOR CLEARE: I agree.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. Thank you,  
20 Senator.

21 I think I'm going to close here. So  
22 Ms. Melodia, I hear you -- this is just a  
23 comment. But thank you for your testimony.  
24 And I hear you about the permanent Workforce

1 Compensation Fund, I hear you about the  
2 \$12,500. And there is a bill, I believe from  
3 my colleague Assemblymember Clark, to deal  
4 with the market-rate issue, which I agree is  
5 a really big problem.

6 So we'll look to push that. So thank  
7 you for your testimony.

8 Reverend Fleck, so thank you for your  
9 testimony, sir. My understanding is just  
10 generally, the 2.4 billion for immigration  
11 services -- the intent of the state is to try  
12 to be as flexible as possible. However --  
13 with that money to the city. But however,  
14 you raise a real point about the cost benefit  
15 of putting that money into legal  
16 representation.

17 So we will take that back for  
18 consideration in the one-house. Thank you.

19 And then to my two supportive housing  
20 friends, let me start with this. What the  
21 hell happened to my New York/New York  
22 agreements?

23 (Laughter.)

24 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: And why do we

1 stop funding NYSSHP? When did -- I'm like,  
2 I'm okay with ESSHI if that's the way to go,  
3 but this is a -- you know, we've been doing  
4 this -- supportive housing is a New York  
5 invention. It's one of the greatest things  
6 we provide. It solves problems, it saves  
7 money, it helps people.

8 How did we get out of the business --  
9 except for the Cuomo-de Blasio fight -- of  
10 New York/New York?

11 (Laughter.)

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I don't think  
13 this governor and this mayor hate each other,  
14 so why are we not having another  
15 New York/New York agreement?

16 MR. PIASECKI: It's a great point.

17 (Pause; laughter.)

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I think they want  
19 us to do that.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: So you want us  
21 to -- oh, okay. Of course. Of course.

22 (Laughter.)

23 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: So in the absence  
24 of any more New York/New York agreements, you

1 think this is the way to go. And it's --

2 MR. PIASECKI: Well, you know, I  
3 think, charitably, we're halfway through the  
4 ESSHI program. They've been on target at the  
5 state level. The New York City response, or  
6 the New York 1515 is also moving forward. We  
7 have some recommendations to make that better  
8 for New York City.

9 Long-run is there's not enough  
10 supportive housing to meet the demand.  
11 There's 100,000 people that are homeless in  
12 New York State at any given point in time.  
13 So, you know, the whole point of -- I think  
14 embedded in our message is we don't want to  
15 lose the existing resources when -- just to  
16 build new. And that's -- that's the trick of  
17 the trade.

18 A lot of the existing resources are in  
19 a position where they need rehab, they can't  
20 be rehabbed even though the state has funding  
21 for it because they don't have -- they  
22 can't -- they don't pencil-out on the  
23 operating side on the NYSSHP program.

24 So we want to preserve the existing,

1 we want to build new, and then we want to  
2 double it, which is your idea.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay.  
4 Understood.

5 And Ms. Requena, with the last couple  
6 of seconds, is it my understanding that most  
7 of the supportive housing for DV survivors is  
8 NYSSHP as opposed to ESSHI? Or is it a  
9 combination?

10 MS. SANDOVAL REQUENA: No, it's a  
11 combination, I would say. Right?

12 MR. PIASECKI: Yes.

13 MS. SANDOVAL REQUENA: Yes.

14 But I would just second what Steve  
15 just pointed out, that as we think of newer  
16 programs, right, we should not forget about  
17 the existing programs that are really  
18 underfunded, and the buildings. I mean, they  
19 also need that capital improvement push as  
20 well that cannot be addressed because the  
21 social part is just not being invested on.

22 MR. PIASECKI: They have -- programs  
23 that are NYSSHP, they don't have the safety  
24 measures that the new programs can put in the

1 building from the get-go, and that's a real  
2 concern. Safety is a big issue.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Very much  
4 appreciated.

5 We do have one more Assemblymember,  
6 Assemblymember Simon, please. To close.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.

8 Your -- the most recent conversation  
9 just made me want to ask a question about  
10 supportive housing. One of the things we've  
11 talked about a lot is we need more housing --  
12 how do we produce it, how much of it is  
13 affordable, where is it, and the crying need  
14 for supportive housing.

15 But who is building supportive  
16 housing, and how do we fund that? Do you  
17 have, you know, suggestions for that? It  
18 seems to me not-for-profit housing developers  
19 are better able to do that, but they don't  
20 have enough access to capital. I'm just  
21 curious what your experience is and what your  
22 thinking is along the lines of how do we  
23 actually do it. Because we desperately need  
24 to do it.

1 MR. PIASECKI: I think it's all hands  
2 on deck. We prefer, for supportive housing,  
3 that our nonprofit members are doing the  
4 development. We find that works better  
5 across the board.

6 There is a huge need for affordable  
7 housing, which supportive housing is a subset  
8 of that, of course. And it's really  
9 important that when the Housing Committee  
10 meets, that the focus is on the lowest ELI  
11 tenancy, zero to 30 percent of area median  
12 income. That's where the gap is. And if you  
13 can fill that gap, that helps everyone.

14 Much -- many resources go to higher  
15 income bands, and it's not as effective at  
16 really addressing the poverty issues around  
17 affordable housing.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.

19 MR. PIASECKI: It doesn't trickle  
20 down.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Really?

22 (Laughter.)

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Anyone else?

24 SENATOR PERSAUD: Just one quick

1 question.

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: One quick  
3 question. Roxanne Persaud.

4 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: You're welcome.

6 SENATOR PERSAUD: So this is for  
7 Reverend Fleck.

8 We're trying to figure your catchment  
9 area, if you could tell us the catchment  
10 areas.

11 REVEREND FLECK: Sure. We're unique  
12 in that we do clinics in different boroughs.  
13 So we're in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn, we're in  
14 Flushing, Queens, and we are in Chinatown,  
15 Manhattan. We do clinics on Saturdays and  
16 Monday nights, and then we take those cases  
17 back to the office.

18 And then of course we have an office  
19 in Hicksville too, where two attorneys are  
20 working as well, and do a clinic out there on  
21 Long Island. So that's --

22 SENATOR PERSAUD: Can anyone request a  
23 clinic, for you to come to a community and  
24 offer clinics?

1 REVEREND FLECK: I'd love that, as  
2 long as we had the attorneys and the legal  
3 staff. We're kind of maxed out as far as  
4 that goes. And that's part of what the  
5 Access to Representation Act is talking  
6 about, is increasing the capacity of  
7 providers like ours to hire and train legal  
8 staff. But that's the major impediment right  
9 now.

10 SENATOR PERSAUD: How many attorneys  
11 do you have on staff?

12 REVEREND FLECK: Four.

13 SENATOR PERSAUD: I just wanted to  
14 clarify that, because we did see it's four.

15 Okay. Thank you very much.

16 REVEREND FLECK: Sure.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. Thank you,  
18 everybody, for your testimony.

19 PANELISTS: Thank you.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very  
21 much. Appreciate it.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: And Panel I,  
23 please come down. From the New York State  
24 Coalition Against Domestic Violence,

1 Joan Gerhardt. From Bivona Child Advocacy  
2 Center, Dr. Daniele Lyman-Torres. Hunger  
3 Solutions New York, Krista Hesdorfer. And  
4 Hudson Valley National Center for  
5 Veteran Reintegration, Gavin Walters.

6 Good afternoon -- good evening.

7 (Off the record.)

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Ms. Gerhardt,  
9 please.

10 MS. GERHARDT: Hi.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: The floor is  
12 yours. How are you?

13 MS. GERHARDT: Thank you.

14 I'm Joan Gerhardt, director of public  
15 policy and advocacy at the New York State  
16 Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Thank  
17 you for having me.

18 NYSCADV is recognized by the federal  
19 government as the information clearinghouse  
20 and resource center on domestic violence for  
21 New York State. The Governor proposed  
22 several initiatives in the Executive Budget  
23 aimed at addressing domestic violence.

24 Most importantly, the Governor is

1 seeking to ensure the continuity of critical  
2 victim services in light of devastating VOCA  
3 cuts. She's proposed 34.4 million to  
4 maintain existing state contracts with these  
5 safety-net providers, and 100 million more to  
6 support the next round of contracts. It's  
7 critical for the Assembly and Senate to  
8 accept this funding.

9 As you know, VOCA, or the Victims of  
10 Crime Act funding enables thousands of  
11 New Yorkers to access services including  
12 shelter, advocacy, legal assistance,  
13 counseling and more. New York's federal VOCA  
14 grant has declined 121.6 million in the past  
15 five years, losing 61 percent of its value.  
16 Prior state earmarks covered only 23 percent  
17 of the shortfall. The Governor's funding is  
18 critical to ensure these providers remain  
19 available and accessible for New Yorkers  
20 experiencing crime.

21 We also urge the Legislature to accept  
22 \$5 million to provide direct cash assistance  
23 to domestic violence survivors; the  
24 \$21 million increase in the ATL budget for

1 OCFS for adult protective and DV services;  
2 and 24.5 million to fully implement last  
3 year's Fair Access to Victim Compensation  
4 legislation. All great news for DV  
5 survivors.

6 What is lacking, however, is inclusion  
7 of DV advocates into the Governor's proposed  
8 COLA. New York relies on experienced,  
9 trained DV advocates to provide lifesaving  
10 and life-changing support to New Yorkers  
11 experiencing DV, most of whom are women who  
12 live in marginalized or underserved  
13 communities. These services come at a cost,  
14 and it's incumbent on the state to value the  
15 work and fully pay for it.

16 But once again, these essential  
17 workers have been excluded from receiving the  
18 Governor's proposed COLA. This has had a  
19 disastrous impact on the ability of DV  
20 programs to retain and recruit employees. DV  
21 and sexual assault programs have lost 1200  
22 employees between 2020 and 21.

23 Numerous positions still remain vacant  
24 across this sector, which is why so many

1 victims are unable to get the services they  
2 need. In fact, on one day in 2022 nearly a  
3 thousand people sought services from DV  
4 agencies and were told they couldn't get the  
5 help they were requesting.

6 We urge the Legislature to incorporate  
7 Senator Persaud's and Assemblymember Hevesi's  
8 bill, S7793 and A8437, into the State Budget  
9 to right this wrong and include DV advocates  
10 in this year's COLA.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very  
12 much.

13 DR. LYMAN-TORRES: Thank you,  
14 Chairpersons and all members of the  
15 Legislature, for the opportunity to address  
16 you today.

17 My name is Daniele Lyman-Torres, and  
18 I'm the president and CEO of the Bivona Child  
19 Advocacy Center located in Rochester,  
20 New York, and serving a seven-county region.

21 Child advocacy centers, or CACs, were  
22 codified into law in 2006 by the New York  
23 State Legislature to serve child victims of  
24 severe physical and/or sexual abuse. Today,

1 we state that there are 47 CACs across the  
2 state. However, outside of New York City  
3 only a few CACs are more than one staff and  
4 can provide the multidisciplinary  
5 one-stop-shop model, due to a lack of  
6 infrastructure and funding in smaller  
7 counties.

8 This pushes services into the large  
9 regional centers, like the one in Rochester I  
10 represent.

11 At the time of the legislation in  
12 2006, only \$5.8 million was allocated to the  
13 Office of Children and Family Services to  
14 implement that policy. I have no idea what  
15 happened to those funds then or, nearly  
16 20 years later, now the 5.2 million that's  
17 included in the budget, but I can tell you  
18 it's not being equitably distributed to  
19 centers doing the work.

20 The CAC I represent serves more than  
21 60 percent of the children seen in the entire  
22 western part of the state, which includes  
23 Buffalo and Rochester and all the surrounding  
24 counties -- and our allocation for CAC

1 services is less than \$270,000 a year, and  
2 our operating budget is 4 million.

3 The prevalence of child abuse, severe  
4 child abuse, and fatalities has not  
5 decreased. One in seven children will  
6 experience abuse. In Monroe County alone, in  
7 the past three years our child fatalities  
8 more than doubled. Seventy percent of the  
9 children we see who have been severely abused  
10 are under the age of 12.

11 The trauma is off the charts, and  
12 here's how it's showing up. Children who  
13 experience child abuse are nine times more  
14 likely to be involved in criminal activity.  
15 About 30 percent of abused children will  
16 later abuse their own children. And  
17 two-thirds, two-thirds of the people  
18 receiving substance abuse disorder treatment  
19 were abused as children.

20 Our asks: Increase the funding to  
21 child advocacy centers to at least  
22 10 million -- heck, today, after what I've  
23 heard, I want to double that -- and  
24 specifically to ensure that the funding

1           actually reaches the Rochester region.

2                       I urge the regionalization of child  
3           advocacy centers to ensure that even the  
4           existing resources can be better aligned to  
5           serve both rural and urban areas.

6                       President Obama once said that a  
7           budget is more than just a series of numbers  
8           on a page, it is an embodiment of our values.  
9           If we can't value our children, then we don't  
10          value our future. How we treat our children  
11          is how we want our world to be. We must do  
12          better, New York.

13                      Thank you.

14                      CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

15                      ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

16                      MS. HESDORFER: Good afternoon, and  
17          thank you for the opportunity to testify.

18                      I'm here representing Hunger Solutions  
19          New York, a statewide nonprofit dedicated to  
20          alleviating hunger for all New Yorkers by  
21          maximizing federal nutrition assistance  
22          programs including SNAP, WIC, school meals,  
23          and other child nutrition programs.

24                      SNAP is our nation's largest

1 anti-hunger program, providing monthly food  
2 benefits to more than 2.8 million  
3 New Yorkers. For over 35 years, through a  
4 contract with OTDA, we've worked to maximize  
5 SNAP by providing statewide outreach and  
6 application assistance through the Nutrition  
7 Outreach and Education Program, or NOEP.

8 Recognizing the need to fully leverage  
9 federal resources to alleviate hunger in  
10 New York, last year the Legislature allocated  
11 an additional \$2 million in NOEP funding,  
12 which enabled us to add 22 new SNAP assisters  
13 in high-need and rural counties. Last year,  
14 NOEP reached more than 163,000 New Yorkers.  
15 Thank you for your advocacy for expanded NOEP  
16 services in last year's budget.

17 Unfortunately, that added funding is  
18 not sustained in the 2025 Executive Budget  
19 proposal, and if it's not restored in the  
20 final budget, NOEP will be forced to scale  
21 back when hunger is on the rise. Services  
22 would be reduced in Albany, Broome, Erie,  
23 Monroe, Nassau, Niagara, Onondaga, Rockland  
24 and Suffolk counties and in every borough of

1 New York City. Chemung, Cortland, Essex,  
2 Franklin, Lewis, Schuyler, and Washington  
3 counties would lose all local NOEP services.

4 To sustain SNAP outreach and  
5 assistance through NOEP statewide, we ask the  
6 Legislature to restore \$2 million in NOEP  
7 funding, for a total of \$5.503 million. This  
8 modest investment brings an outsized return.  
9 Every dollar the state invests in SNAP  
10 outreach is federally matched. And because  
11 NOEP draws down additional federal SNAP  
12 benefits into New York, the program provides  
13 an estimated 27-fold return on investment to  
14 the state.

15 In addition to ensuring all eligible  
16 New Yorkers can connect with SNAP, we also  
17 support efforts to make benefit amounts more  
18 adequate to meet families' food needs, and  
19 encourage the Legislature to provide a state  
20 supplement to increase the minimum SNAP  
21 benefit to \$100 per month.

22 And I must mention another  
23 far-reaching anti-hunger program outside of  
24 the Human Services budget, but of great

1 importance to your work. New York must fully  
2 fund universal school meals. We are deeply  
3 grateful for last year's historic expansion  
4 of free school meals, but with more than  
5 320,000 students left behind, it's time to  
6 close the gap and fully fund healthy school  
7 meals for all New York kids.

8 We urge the Legislature to adopt the  
9 vital anti-hunger proposals to support food  
10 security for all New Yorkers.

11 Thank you.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

14 MR. WALTERS: Hello, everybody. Thank  
15 you for having me here, and thank you for  
16 being here.

17 I think so much of what everybody says  
18 just correlates with one another because we  
19 are all advocates seeking so many things  
20 within our respective communities.

21 My name is Gavin Walters. I am a  
22 United States Air Force veteran. I received  
23 my citizenship after I served in the  
24 Air Force. I think that was the greatest

1           thing, because that's one of the reasons why  
2           I went and served in the Air Force.

3                       Now I actually facilitate the  
4           Dwyer Program in Ulster County and  
5           Greene County. I have colleagues back here  
6           that facilitate Essex, Clinton, Franklin, and  
7           Schoharie counties. So there's a lot of  
8           Dwyer programs, you know, around.

9                       And the reason why I'm here is  
10          because -- I don't have to explain about the  
11          Dwyer programs, because you guys were able to  
12          elevate it to be a 62-county program, which  
13          is really amazing. But the issue with that  
14          is that so many of the programs, the funding  
15          that they receive doesn't equate to the job  
16          that they even do day to day.

17                      And for me, that can speak about  
18          Ulster County, I can say that from our  
19          enactment in 2020, we have not had a veteran  
20          commit suicide that had went through our  
21          program. And I could bet you so many other  
22          programs can say that any veteran that  
23          entered their program received care, service,  
24          and resources.

1                   We look at the families, because we  
2                   say nine times out of 10 the families are the  
3                   ones that is reaching out to us. So we know  
4                   that part of helping the individuals is  
5                   connecting the family, caregivers, everybody,  
6                   to be a part of the process of helping that  
7                   individual.

8                   And something I always say is that,  
9                   you know, sometimes we're not around, but we  
10                  can educate the individuals that's around  
11                  that veteran, and that's one of the biggest  
12                  things that we want to help with.

13                  And unfortunately, with the funding  
14                  that so many of these programs receive -- and  
15                  I did the math, and I did so much things to  
16                  break it down, but it doesn't equate to the  
17                  things that we're seeing day to day.

18                  I work with a veteran that literally  
19                  had to decide between coming to our program  
20                  for mental health or getting gas to travel  
21                  about 25 miles to our program. And that is  
22                  just a shame where he has to decide between  
23                  mental health and getting food. So we bring  
24                  food to him.

1                   So food insecurity, housing issues, so  
2                   many different things that are affecting our  
3                   military community is just prevalent, it's  
4                   out there. We see this day to day.

5                   There's programs that have, you know,  
6                   full-time staff, part-time individuals,  
7                   volunteers. You know, we're a community of  
8                   individuals reaching out to the community to  
9                   just get help for the things that we see day  
10                  to day. And our ask is just \$2.1 million.  
11                  And that's -- and I actually equated that to  
12                  the 10 years of inflation that -- from the  
13                  program's enactment, from 2012 to this, for  
14                  last year.

15                  So we're not asking for big, but just  
16                  something small enough that we could say,  
17                  okay, we could get a \$25 gift card to  
18                  somebody just to get gas or decide to get  
19                  food.

20                  Thank you.

21                  CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

22                  Assembly or Senate?

23                  ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Senate.

24                  CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. Our Senate

1 chair of Veterans Affairs.

2 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: If I can  
3 get the mic on.

4 Thank you so much, Gavin, for your  
5 testimony. I know how important this funding  
6 is.

7 Could you piece the picture for me of  
8 how much of an increase would be beneficial  
9 for each of those 62 counties so you can  
10 continue to do that great work and fill in  
11 the gaps where you can? Because, you know,  
12 military families are incredibly important to  
13 me. I wanted to thank you for also bringing  
14 that up, that often it's the families that  
15 will connect the veterans to those services.

16 We all want to make sure that the  
17 program is funded appropriately so it can be  
18 efficient and effective. So tell me, you  
19 know, do you have a number in mind of what  
20 would be helpful with regard to inflation?

21 MR. WALTERS: Yes. So I can send this  
22 to everybody as well, but for every county --  
23 for example, I use the example of Genesee,  
24 Orleans, and Wyoming, which has 185 split

1 through three counties, and if you -- if they  
2 do a 4 percent COLA, that's like \$2,000. And  
3 then we keep breaking that down, \$2,000  
4 basically is like 80 gift cards for somebody.  
5 And if you say 80 gift cards to just split  
6 across veterans for a whole year, that -- one  
7 thing is that they don't equate veterans that  
8 we usually see, which is other than  
9 honorable/dishonorable veterans. So those  
10 numbers that we see that they count as -- I  
11 just got this data -- 580,000 veterans they  
12 say is in New York, and that's in 2022, in  
13 the Census.

14 So if people are saying 700,000, so  
15 many different numbers for veterans -- like,  
16 what is the real number in our -- you know,  
17 in New York State? So those numbers -- you  
18 know, I don't really go by those numbers, but  
19 the numbers that we see day to day is  
20 dishonorable veterans, other than honorable  
21 veterans, veterans that, you know, are still  
22 looking to get the discharge status that they  
23 deserve.

24 And a lot of -- so that's why I say

1           those numbers, you know -- I laugh at that,  
2           sometimes, when I hear like somebody say  
3           like, Oh, 22 veterans, but then they reduce  
4           the number -- like, no, are you counting the  
5           ones that's dishonorable, that's actually  
6           committed suicide, because you didn't equate  
7           them to be a part of the process of going  
8           into VA?

9                        I tell folks we're better than the VA,  
10           we do so much better work, because we are  
11           there day to day, reaching out to veterans at  
12           2 o'clock in the morning, going with them to  
13           the hospitals. Because we know that if they  
14           call the VA, nobody's going to come leave  
15           their office and get them from their house.  
16           And that's the stuff that we do.

17                       And I'm sorry that the numbers just --  
18                        SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: No, no,  
19           listen -- we want to be supportive. I think  
20           the Dwyer Program has proven to work. Nobody  
21           understands veterans like a fellow veteran.  
22           So we're going to do everything we can to try  
23           to get you there, and we'll be putting in a  
24           letter on your behalf to request that.

1 MR. WALTERS: Thank you.

2 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

4 Assembly?

5 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember

6 Jean-Pierre.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: If I can

8 get this on. It's supposed to turn green,

9 right?

10 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Yeah.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: First, I

12 want to say thank you. This -- you know,

13 it's unfortunate that this is the last panel,

14 but this is one of like -- this is the best

15 panel, because this is the

16 boots-on-the-ground panel. We've been

17 talking with agencies, but this is the boots

18 on the ground. This is the folks who are

19 connected to all of the populations, whether

20 it be families, whether it be our veterans.

21 So I just want to say, first, thank

22 you for what you do for very -- with so

23 little.

24 But my question is to Gavin. First,

1 to thank you, which you -- you're working  
2 with my office constantly on how we can help  
3 make the Dwyer Program work. The  
4 Dwyer Program doesn't come out of the  
5 Veterans Committee, it comes out of the  
6 Mental Health Committee. But we actually  
7 support and write a support letter in  
8 conjunction with the chair to make sure that  
9 we can make the Dwyer Program effective  
10 across the 62 counties.

11 But if we can get more realistic  
12 numbers, as the Senator mentioned, and if you  
13 can send that document, that would be very  
14 helpful to see how we can make -- how  
15 effective we can make the Dwyer Program. And  
16 how much dollars is needed to make it  
17 effective across the 62 counties, that would  
18 be helpful.

19 MR. WALTERS: Yeah, absolutely.

20 And I can definitely say a lot of  
21 programs will benefit from transportation,  
22 whether it's having a vehicle -- which we  
23 know is one of the hardest thing for rural  
24 counties. And I know from my colleagues over

1 here, you know, helping an individual that's  
2 in a situation and needs to get someplace,  
3 transportation can be the hardest thing for  
4 them. And trying to decide if they have to  
5 go to a doctor or, you know, just speak to  
6 somebody, and the communication as well.

7 So there's so many things that is  
8 there that could -- you know, that will  
9 definitely help when the funding actually do  
10 come to the -- especially the rural counties,  
11 just having a vehicle that can transport  
12 somebody to a hospital or to get groceries.  
13 Because that's a good way to connect with  
14 somebody within that car, just talking to  
15 them and just having a natural conversation.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE:

17 Absolutely. It's not just the rural  
18 counties. You know, I represent Long Island.  
19 So when I think of areas in my area where  
20 there's no bus transportation or it ends at  
21 6:30, how do we -- you know, how do we get  
22 veterans from one place -- but the question I  
23 have for you now is, what mechanisms do you  
24 use for outreach in the communities?

1 MR. WALTERS: Resource fairs. We  
2 actually -- I facilitate the Dwyer Coalition,  
3 so we actually ask the Reserves and  
4 National Guard representatives to actually be  
5 in our meetings. We go to the Reserves base  
6 and we go to -- we actually go to places and  
7 talk to individuals. We go to -- have  
8 events. We do so much resource fairs. And  
9 we actually put up things in the community  
10 that everybody can see us.

11 Unfortunately, we don't have the  
12 resources to actually create a website right  
13 now, but that is our goal, to create a  
14 website, so if anybody wants to look at --  
15 for the Dwyer Program or get connected to  
16 resources, like my colleagues right here,  
17 they could just go straight there and get it.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay,  
19 thank you.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Cordell  
21 Cleare.

22 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.  
23 So I have questions for two of you.  
24 Number one, we talked a little bit

1           today about a registry for veterans to know  
2           where services exist. And even inside of  
3           New York City, you know, my veteran  
4           constituents -- I don't necessarily always  
5           know all the places that they can go.

6                         Maybe -- is that something that your  
7           organization is working on or --

8                         MR. WALTERS: Yeah, we actually are.  
9           Our goal is to actually, with the help of the  
10          New York Health Foundation, who's bringing  
11          out -- who's going to have a needs assessment  
12          coming out later this year for veterans,  
13          they're going to hopefully be assisting us  
14          with actually creating a website specifically  
15          focused and geared towards having resources,  
16          whether it's looking for the VSA, looking for  
17          housing services, looking for a food pantry.  
18          Whatever it is, they click on the website,  
19          they know it's veteran-friendly -- anything  
20          and everything is going to be right there.

21                         SENATOR CLEARE: Okay, thank you.

22                         And also for Bivona, I think it is. I  
23          know you are talking about services outside  
24          of New York City, but it is certainly -- it's

1 still a concern of ours anyway. And I don't  
2 know, have you spoken to your Senator?  
3 Because she's fierce.

4 DR. LYMAN-TORRES: Oh, yeah.

5 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. All right. So  
6 I will talk to her to see how we can all be  
7 helpful with making sure that those services  
8 get to people like you who are on the ground,  
9 who are servicing our families.

10 DR. LYMAN-TORRES: Thank you.

11 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you. Thank you  
12 all for your testimony.

13 (Overtalk.)

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Don't go anywhere  
15 yet.

16 SENATOR CLEARE: No, I'm just saying  
17 thank you all. This is the last time you'll  
18 probably hear from me. But thank you.  
19 Hunger is important, and our domestic  
20 violence. Thank you.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember  
22 Ra.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

24 And thank you all for your patience

1 and sticking it out to be here and talk about  
2 very important issues.

3 Mr. Walters, thank you for your  
4 service. And to your colleagues in the  
5 audience, thank you for your service as well.

6 You know, we had a little bit of a  
7 discussion earlier, as I'm sure you saw,  
8 about whether you would consider this a cut  
9 in this budget. But putting that aside --  
10 and I think we all are very confident that on  
11 both sides of the aisle, in both houses, the  
12 advocacy is going to be there to put that  
13 money back into the budget. But I will say  
14 that what that means is getting back to where  
15 we started.

16 We don't want to be just where we  
17 started, right? We want to be above that, so  
18 that you can do the types of things you're  
19 talking about and reach out to additional  
20 veterans and do the types of things -- like  
21 you said, transportation, things to make sure  
22 that people can take advantage of your  
23 services.

24 So can you elaborate on just what some

1 additional funding would do in terms of being  
2 able to serve additional veterans? Because  
3 clearly your track record is great in helping  
4 those individuals in your community.

5 MR. WALTERS: Yeah, absolutely.

6 One thing that we will do actually is  
7 help veterans that are in housing crisis.  
8 With the little bit of funding our county  
9 receives, about \$185,000 -- which doesn't  
10 equate to nothing these days -- but we're  
11 able to at least allocate funds to help a  
12 veteran if they come with a family or by  
13 themselves and put them in a hotel until we  
14 can get them connected to Support Services  
15 for Veteran Families, which is SSVF, or any  
16 other resources that could help the  
17 individual.

18 Where if a dishonorable veteran can't,  
19 you know, receive those type of services,  
20 that we'll reach out to DSS and other  
21 services to say, Hey, what can you do to help  
22 this person? Or help someone with, like I  
23 said, gift cards, which is the biggest thing.  
24 Food insecurity is a major thing that's

1           happening for our county. You know, I focus  
2           on the rural area, because our county is  
3           pretty rural.

4                        So we say food insecurity,  
5           transportation. Oh, man. And events,  
6           different activities where -- a lot of  
7           programs actually will do things where they  
8           will take veterans out and do fishing. Or  
9           they'll pay -- every program allows a veteran  
10          to go there for free. So any veteran that  
11          goes there with their family -- we paid for  
12          events at a baseball game. We brought  
13          everybody out, but also they brought vendors  
14          of -- everybody in the community saying, Hey,  
15          listen, if you have housing issues, if you  
16          have to get connected to food, if you want to  
17          get connected to resources, they're there.

18                        Because we know veterans are not going  
19          to go look for anything. If you have a  
20          luncheon and you have resource fairs around  
21          there, a veteran will actually get some food  
22          and then go talk to somebody like at the  
23          Red Cross. They'll say, Okay, what do you  
24          have for me? Or they'll speak to someone

1 from the Office of Aging or speak to someone  
2 that they'll never call. Because you'll say,  
3 Hey, call this person because they can help  
4 you -- nope, they're too prideful. They're  
5 not going to call anybody.

6 And that's where peer-to-peer has been  
7 the absolute best thing for veterans, because  
8 so many of us will help a veteran get to the  
9 VSA or the department or -- or the VA,  
10 because the veterans don't like the VA.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'm sorry.

14 Senator Roxanne Persaud.

15 SENATOR PERSAUD: I want to thank all  
16 of you for your testimony today.

17 You know, Gavin, I hear you. We heard  
18 earlier the commissioner -- and I think  
19 everyone was pushing, saying you should have  
20 more funding, you should have more funding.  
21 So I'm pleased that you are telling us you  
22 definitely need more funding.

23 And, you know, we will fight with our  
24 colleagues to ensure that you do receive the

1 funding that you should, because no veteran  
2 should be left without.

3 So thank you for -- thank you for your  
4 service, and thank you for your advocacy on  
5 behalf of all veterans.

6 MR. WALTERS: Thank you.

7 SENATOR PERSAUD: Ms. Gerhardt, you  
8 know, we work together; I want to just thank  
9 you again for everything that you're doing.  
10 And I want us to continue to talk about the  
11 needs of the DV population.

12 I think we have gotten lax in getting  
13 our messaging across. We have a number of  
14 DV victims in shelter that -- they seem to  
15 just be languishing. What can we do to  
16 assist them? What supports can we offer  
17 them?

18 There are too many of them in our  
19 shelters right now, and we're not having the  
20 conversations that we were having like a few  
21 years ago. You know, we -- it was always DV,  
22 DV, DV, DV -- but now we seem not to be  
23 having that conversation. I think we need to  
24 get back to that, to show them that they're

1 not forgotten.

2 So if you can work with us, you know,  
3 just to get that message across --

4 MS. GERHARDT: Absolutely.

5 SENATOR PERSAUD: -- and get the  
6 services into the places where they should  
7 be.

8 And, Doctor, you know, we hear you.  
9 We were having the conversation about, you  
10 know, the needs -- the child poverty needs in  
11 your area. We would like to work with -- you  
12 know, with our colleagues to make sure that  
13 you get the resources you need.

14 But we want to also make sure that  
15 you're part of the conversation for that  
16 child poverty funding that's coming to your  
17 community. It's not -- it's great that the  
18 money is going there. But if the people who  
19 are in the know are not part of the  
20 conversation on the disbursement of the  
21 money, then we'll have some problems.

22 So I want to make sure that you are at  
23 that table when the decisions are being made  
24 on how that money is going to be funded.

1 DR. LYMAN-TORRES: Thank you.

2 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

3 (To Ms. Hesdorfer.) And I'm carrying  
4 your NOEP letter pushing for that \$2 million,  
5 and I hope my colleagues will continue to  
6 support it.

7 But all in all, I thank all of you for  
8 your advocacy. Thank you.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

10 Assemblymember Manktelow.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Thank you,  
12 sir.

13 Joan, really quick. Did you say that  
14 you lost 1200 employees? Did I hear you say  
15 that really?

16 MS. GERHARDT: Twelve hundred  
17 positions across domestic violence and sexual  
18 assault programs.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Were they  
20 filled positions and you lost that many?

21 MS. GERHARDT: Yeah.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Where did they  
23 go?

24 MS. GERHARDT: Well, that's a good

1 question.

2 I think because they're not paid as  
3 well as other human service workers, they  
4 left to go to other positions within their  
5 umbrella organization, let's say. They might  
6 have gone to a government position -- you  
7 know, maybe to the local department of social  
8 services. They might have gone to academia.

9 So I can't say where each one of them  
10 went, but the fact is we know there are so  
11 many of those positions that are still  
12 vacant. Because with the inability to pay  
13 living wages for domestic violence advocates,  
14 we just can't recruit people into those  
15 positions. They'd rather go to healthcare.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Thank you.

17 Gavin, thank you for your service.

18 I was wondering, how much interaction  
19 have you had with Commissioner DeCohen?

20 MR. WALTERS: On a -- well, I sat on  
21 the Governor's workgroup, so I'm able to  
22 speak to her representative. Yeah. Yeah.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: As we've  
24 talked about earlier -- earlier today we

1           talked about her budget and the loss of some  
2           funding there. We really need to make sure  
3           we have that funding. Because I did speak  
4           with one of the military -- or, I'm sorry,  
5           our veterans up above earlier, and he talked  
6           about transportation, as you did.

7                        Transportation for him and his office  
8           to go out, is that something we should be  
9           looking for funding for as well, as far as  
10          you see it?

11                      MR. WALTERS: Yeah, absolutely. I  
12          think transportation's one of the biggest  
13          things. And for a lot of conversations that  
14          I've had with many of my surrounding  
15          counties' colleagues, transportation is one  
16          of those things that we've always been  
17          saying, How can we address it? Where we  
18          talked about Uber and Lyft and how do we  
19          mitigate money to them to help transport  
20          veterans from Ulster County or Orange County  
21          down to the city, where they have to get a --  
22          go to an appointment. Where sometimes,  
23          unfortunately, our peers, you know, don't get  
24          paid enough to travel all that way down there

1 and then come back where it might be like  
2 8 o'clock at night, when they leave 8 o'clock  
3 in the morning. And that's a typical day for  
4 just one person getting transported, because  
5 it can be a difficult time for that person.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Yeah, I'm very  
7 familiar with it. From my district, my  
8 county, Syracuse is an hour away.

9 But I do know that transportation --  
10 who the driver is, that peer-to-peer support  
11 with that driver, is so crucial to our  
12 veterans.

13 And you have our full support. We  
14 will work on keeping that funding and see  
15 what we can do to find the funding for all of  
16 you.

17 And Daniele, thank you for coming  
18 down. I was at your place a few weeks ago.  
19 Outstanding work, and we'll be there for you  
20 as well.

21 DR. LYMAN-TORRES: Thank you.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Thank you.

23 Thank you, Chair.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

1                   Senator Murray.

2                   SENATOR MURRAY: Yes, closing it out.

3                   Mr. Walters, thank you so much for  
4 your service. And to you gentlemen as well,  
5 thank you. And to all of you for your  
6 advocacy. What you do is incredible.

7                   Ms. Gerhardt, I'd like to -- a couple  
8 of questions. One, in my district we have a  
9 workforce housing project that is starting  
10 now, some affordable housing, but they've set  
11 aside -- the developer is setting aside a  
12 certain portion for domestic violence  
13 victims, for them to start over.

14                   Is that something unique? Or is --  
15 are you seeing that, or is that collaboration  
16 happening around the state?

17                   MS. GERHARDT: We've seen that in some  
18 communities. I wouldn't say all.

19                   You know, I think the challenge of  
20 finding affordable and safe housing is a  
21 critical need for domestic violence  
22 survivors. So I think that's wonderful that,  
23 you know, there's going to be a project in  
24 your community. But we certainly need more.

1                   SENATOR MURRAY: Okay. Now, another  
2                   issue -- I've talked to some folks -- I'm  
3                   very involved with animals and rescue and all  
4                   of this. And one of the big things that  
5                   we've run into is that you have domestic  
6                   violence victims with pets or animals at  
7                   home, and they won't leave without them. And  
8                   I can understand that a hundred percent.  
9                   They're afraid if they do, they're putting  
10                  them in danger.

11                  But we have a shortage with shelters  
12                  that allow animals. Are we -- is there any  
13                  funding in the budget to improve on that or  
14                  to help with that problem? Or are you --  
15                  again, are you seeing that there are more  
16                  shelters that are allowing this? Where are  
17                  we with that?

18                  MS. GERHARDT: Well, there's a  
19                  terrific new shelter in New York City which  
20                  opened specifically for survivors who have  
21                  pets.

22                  But I will say it is an obligation of  
23                  every domestic violence program in the state  
24                  to make accommodations for an individual's

1 pet, whether at that shelter or at another  
2 community-based organization in that  
3 community.

4 So it's -- it is very troubling that  
5 abusers will, you know, take abusive behavior  
6 out on animals as well as humans. We  
7 recognize that. It is heartbreaking that  
8 survivors have to leave their home and leave  
9 so many things behind, including their pets.

10 So if they are able to take those pets  
11 with them, we want to make every  
12 accommodation for them to do that.

13 SENATOR MURRAY: I know space is a  
14 problem sometimes as far as at the shelter.  
15 Or even an issue where you have to have a  
16 separate building, if you're doing it  
17 on-site, or finding space at different  
18 shelters or rescues. So that's a challenge  
19 as well.

20 MS. GERHARDT: Absolutely. But we try  
21 to make it work.

22 SENATOR MURRAY: Yes. Yes. And I  
23 appreciate what you do, I really do.

24 And finally, Ms. Hesdorfer, I'm with

1           you 1000 percent on Healthy Meals for All.  
2           It's a shame we did not get that completely  
3           done last year. I'm praying we do this year.

4                     But thank you all for what you do.

5                     ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great. Thank  
6           you.

7                     And I'm going to use my last three  
8           minutes, I will close us out.

9                     A couple of comments. First,  
10          Mr. Walters and the gentlemen in the  
11          audience, I want to say thank you for your  
12          service and your advocacy. I learned a lot  
13          today, and I very much appreciate it.

14                    Ms. Hesdorfer, nothing aggravates me  
15          more than leaving a federal match on the  
16          table. So I appreciate your advocacy with  
17          that. And I agree with a lot of my  
18          colleagues about universal school meals.

19                    And then I'm going to ask questions,  
20          if I can, for Ms. Lyman-Torres and  
21          Ms. Gerhardt. The thing that bothers me the  
22          most, if I can, is the generational problem  
23          that we're not addressing. We just never,  
24          ever break these cycles.

1                   So, Ms. Lyman-Torres, let me ask you a  
2                   question. It was my understanding that there  
3                   was going to be a shortfall of federal money  
4                   for the CACs. Can you speak to that? And  
5                   how -- how did the Governor do it in her  
6                   Executive Budget to address that? And what  
7                   else can we do to make sure you're whole?

8                   Because I think I have a limited  
9                   understanding of just how dangerous it is for  
10                  children and families without your services.

11                  DR. LYMAN-TORRES: That was the VOCA  
12                  funding at the federal level. And the  
13                  Governor's current budget has a stopgap in  
14                  there of \$120 million to kind of protect from  
15                  that, and that's very important.

16                  All the child advocacy centers do  
17                  receive VOCA funding. It's about 10 percent  
18                  of our funding. So it is -- it's really  
19                  important.

20                  But we need to continue to press  
21                  beyond that. When I talk about the child  
22                  fatalities and the complexity of the -- you  
23                  know, the trauma that's intergenerational, it  
24                  really has to do with the fact that we aren't

1 systematically dealing with prevention. We  
2 are not dealing with high-risk parents who  
3 are in other systems, whether it be DV,  
4 mental health, substance use. They are being  
5 discharged with children without case  
6 management, without supports for those  
7 children, and the child fatality rates  
8 continue to go up.

9 I stepped out of this session today  
10 because we had another child lost in  
11 Rochester today --

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I heard.

13 DR. LYMAN-TORRES: -- another baby,  
14 from the same systemic kinds of issues.

15 And this -- it really is urgent that  
16 we put money into prevention.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I very much  
18 appreciate it. Thank you for your testimony.

19 And Ms. Gerhardt, I'm going to close  
20 with you. And I don't know if you caught the  
21 initial portion for the OCFS commissioner,  
22 but I started by asking about the domestic  
23 violence workforce. Particularly because  
24 it's egregious that we have not increased pay

1           for the workforce since 2008, is that -- is  
2           my number right?

3                   MS. GERHARDT: That's when the human  
4           service group was put together. And we were  
5           not included in 2008. So we've never  
6           received a COLA, period.

7                   ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: That's  
8           outrageous.

9                   And the fact that you've lost  
10          1200 positions -- that is devastating,  
11          absolutely devastating. And I think it's  
12          incumbent upon us elected officials to make  
13          you and all of our providers a top priority  
14          in this budget.

15                   We cannot allow not only the services  
16          not to be delivered to children and families  
17          but, again, we've got to break the cycle  
18          so -- as Ms. Torres said, we've got to make  
19          sure this doesn't get taught from one  
20          generation to the other.

21                   And I've run out of my own time. So I  
22          think that is the end of this hearing.

23                   I would like to thank all of my  
24          colleagues and this panel, and particularly

1           Senator Krueger for her leadership and  
2           allowing me to participate today.

3                     Thank you.

4                     CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'm very glad you  
5           participated.

6                     And tomorrow people can come back --  
7           9:30, the same room, the topic is education.

8                     So thank you all very much for your  
9           testimony tonight and for staying with us.

10                    PANELISTS: Thank you.

11                    (Whereupon, the budget hearing  
12           concluded at 5:45 p.m.)

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