

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 2025-2026 EXECUTIVE BUDGET ON
6 HUMAN SERVICES

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

10 February 12, 2025
11 9:43 a.m.

12 PRESIDING:

13 Assemblyman J. Gary Pretlow
14 Chair, Assembly Ways and Means Committee

15 Senator Liz Krueger
16 Chair, Senate Finance Committee

17 PRESENT:

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

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

22 Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi
23 Chair, Assembly Committee on Children
24 and Families

Senator Jabari Brisport
Chair, Senate Committee on Children
and Families

1 2025-2026 Executive Budget
Human Services
2 2-12-25

3 PRESENT: (Continued)

4 Assemblywoman Maritza Davila
Chair, Assembly Committee on Social Services

5 Senator Roxanne Persaud
6 Chair, Senate Committee on Social Services

7 Assemblyman Rebecca A. Seawright
8 Chair, Assembly Committee on Aging

9 Senator Cordell Cleare
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging

10 Assemblyman Steve Stern
11 Chair, Assembly Committee on
Veterans' Affairs

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

14 Senator John C. Liu

15 Assemblyman Khaleel M. Anderson

16 Assemblywoman Jennifer Lunsford

17 Assemblywoman Grace Lee

18 Senator April N.M. Baskin

19 Assemblywoman Jo Anne Simon

20 Senator Jake Ashby

21 Assemblyman Brian Maher

22 Senator Dean Murray

23 Assemblyman Chris Eachus

24 Assemblyman Billy Jones

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3 PRESENT: (Continued)

4 Assemblywoman Monique Chandler-Waterman

5 Assemblywoman Sarah Clark

6 Senator Bill Weber

7 Assemblywoman Emérita Torres

8 Assemblyman Andrew M. Molitor

9 Assemblyman Brian Manktelow

10 Senator Rob Rolison

11 Assemblywoman Marcela Mitaynes

12 Assemblyman Chris Burdick

13 Assemblywoman Jessica González-Rojas

14 Senator Alexis Weik

15 Assemblywoman Marianne Buttenschon

16 Senator Daniel G. Stec

17 Assemblywoman Jenifer Rajkumar

18 Assemblyman Steven Raga

19 Assemblywoman Larinda C. Hooks

20 Assemblyman Jordan J.G. Wright

21 Senator George M. Borrello

22 Assemblywoman Phara Souffrant Forrest

23 Assemblyman Harvey Epstein

24 Assemblywoman Jodi Giglio

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3 PRESENT: (Continued)

4 Assemblywoman Gabriella A. Romero

5 Assemblyman Demond Meeks

6 Assemblywoman Karines Reyes

7 Assemblywoman Mary Beth Walsh

8 Assemblywoman Judy Griffin

9 Assemblywoman MaryJane Shimsky

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12 LIST OF SPEAKERS

13 STATEMENT QUESTIONS

14 Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden
 Commissioner

15 NYS Office of Children
 and Family Services

16 -and-

Barbara Guinn

17 Commissioner

18 NYS Office of Temporary
 and Disability Assistance

13

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19 Greg Olsen

Acting Director

20 NYS Office for the Aging

-and-

21 Rev. Viviana DeCohen

Commissioner

22 NYS Department of Veterans'
 Services

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3 LIST OF SPEAKERS, Continued

4 STATEMENT QUESTIONS

5 Kristen McManus
Associate State Director

6 AARP New York
-and-

7 Gail Myers
Deputy Director

8 NY StateWide Senior Action Council
-and-

9 Barbara Baer
Director

10 New York Foundation for
Senior Citizens

11 -and-

12 Ann Marie Cook
President/CEO
Lifespan of Greater Rochester

13 -and-

14 Dora Fisher
State Policy Director
LiveOn New York

15 -and-

16 Becky Preve
Executive Director
Association on Aging
17 in New York

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3 LIST OF SPEAKERS, Continued

4 STATEMENT QUESTIONS

5	Jason Moss		
	New Government Initiatives		
6	Wonderschool		
	-and-		
7	ECE on the Move		
	Shanita Bowen		
8	Chief Operating Officer		
	-and-		
9	Alice Bufkin		
	Associate Executive Director		
10	of Policy		
	Citizens' Committee for		
11	Children of New York		
	-and-		
12	Kimberly George		
	President & CEO		
13	Project Guardianship		
	-and-		
14	Meredith Chimento		
	Executive Director		
15	Early Care & Learning Council	395	414
16	Michelle Newman		
	Associate Executive Director,		
17	Upstate		
	Council of Family and		
18	Child Caring Agencies		
	-and-		
19	William T. Gettman, Jr.		
	CEO		
20	Northern Rivers Family of		
	Services		
21	-and-		
	Therese Daly		
22	President & CEO		
	United Way of New York State	445	456
23			
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3 LIST OF SPEAKERS, Continued

4 STATEMENT QUESTIONS

5	Kate Ryan		
	Director		
6	Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance		
	at Adirondack Foundation		
7	-and-		
	Trudy Morgan Tetteh		
8	Policy Director, Capital Region		
	New York State Network for		
9	Youth Success		
	-and-		
10	Jenn O'Connor		
	Director of Partnerships and		
11	Early Childhood Policy		
	The Education Trust-New York		
12	-on behalf of-		
	Raising New York		
13	-and-		
	Dona Anderson		
14	Executive Director		
	NY Early Childhood Professional		
15	Development Institute		
	City University of New York	467	481
16			
	Nic Rangel		
17	Executive Director		
	Legal Aid Society of		
18	Northeastern New York (LASNNY)		
	-on behalf of-		
19	Legal Services Access Alliance		
	-and-		
20	Bryan J. Ellicott-Cook		
	Director of Government Relations		
21	SAGE Advocacy & Services for		
	LGBTQ+ Elders	489	495
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23			
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3 LIST OF SPEAKERS, Continued

4 STATEMENT QUESTIONS

5 Rebecca Zangen
Chief Policy Officer
6 Supportive Housing Network
of New York

7 -and-

8 Gabriela Sandoval Requena
Director of Policy Communications
New Destiny Housing

9 -and-

10 Krista Hesdorfer
Director of Public Affairs
Hunger Solutions New York

11 -and-

12 Marcella Goheen
Founder
EssentialCareVisitor.com

13 -and-

14 Ryan Healy
Advocacy Manager
Feeding New York State

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1 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Good morning,
2 everyone. I'm Assemblyman Gary Pretlow,
3 chair of the New York State Assembly Ways and
4 Means Committee.

5 Today we begin the eighth in a series
6 of hearings conducted by the joint fiscal
7 committees of the Legislature regarding the
8 Governor's proposed budget for fiscal year
9 2025-2026. These hearings are conducted
10 pursuant to the New York State Constitution
11 and the Legislative Law.

12 Today the Assembly Ways and Means
13 Committee and the Senate Finance Committee
14 will hear testimony concerning the Governor's
15 budget proposal for Human Services.

16 With us we have the chairs of the
17 relevant committees: Assemblywoman
18 Seawright, chair of Aging; Assemblyman
19 Hevesi, chair of Children and Families;
20 Assemblywoman Davila, chair of
21 Social Services; and Assemblyman Stern, chair
22 of Veterans' Affairs.

23 Also with us we have Assemblymembers
24 Rajkumar, Torres, Lunsford, Mitaynes, Burdick

1 and Eachus.

2 Assemblyman Ra?

3 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: We have with us right
4 now Assemblyman Brian Maher, who is our
5 ranker on Children and Families, and
6 Assemblyman Andrew Molitor, our ranker on
7 Social Services.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Hi. I'm
9 Senator Liz Krueger, chair of Finance, and I
10 have with us today Chairs Brisport and
11 Persaud, and Senator Liu.

12 And my guest ranker, pending
13 Tom O'Mara's arrival, will introduce the
14 Republicans.

15 SENATOR WEBER: Thank you, Chairwoman.

16 We have Senator Ashby, the ranker on
17 Veterans' Services and Aging; Senator
18 Rolison, ranker Children and Family Services;
19 and Senator Murray, ranker on Social
20 Services.

21 Good morning.

22 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: And I think I
23 neglected to mention Assemblyman Anderson and
24 Assemblywoman Clark as in attendance.

1 I'll go over some of the rules of the
2 road now. All governmental witnesses are
3 allotted 10 minutes for their testimony.
4 Nongovernmental witnesses are allotted three
5 minutes.

6 The chairs of the relevant committees
7 to each governmental witness will get
8 10 minutes to question the witness and an
9 additional three minutes at the end of the
10 first round if they so desire. Ranking
11 members of these committees will each get
12 five minutes and no follow-up.

13 All other members of the relevant
14 committees will each get three minutes.

15 To all witnesses, all written
16 testimony has been submitted to the
17 Legislature in advance, so we ask that all
18 witnesses please do not read your written
19 testimony to us. Instead, please summarize.

20 All legislators, please let myself or
21 Senator Krueger know if you wish to question
22 each witness or panel of witnesses. After
23 the witnesses' panel has been closed, the
24 request for questions will be closed.

1 To everyone. Please notice
2 conveniently placed around the room are time
3 clocks. Please pay close attention to these
4 time clocks. They will be strictly enforced.

5 When you see the yellow light, that
6 means you have 30 seconds remaining in your
7 allotted time.

8 To all legislators asking questions,
9 please be cognizant of this because don't
10 start a question when there's less than
11 30 seconds left because you will not give the
12 witness time to answer those questions.

13 Now we want to give everyone -- and
14 like I said, the time will be strictly
15 enforced because we have a lot of witnesses
16 and a lot of chairs.

17 With that, I wish to commence this
18 hearing, and I will call our first witness,
19 Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden. Oh, we're doing a
20 panel: Dr. Harris-Madden, from the New York
21 State Office of Children and Family Services.
22 And from the New York State Office of
23 Temporary and Disability Assistance,
24 Acting Commissioner Barbara Guinn.

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Begin.

OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: Good morning, Chair Pretlow and Chair Krueger, Children and Families Committee Chairs Hevesi and Brisport, and distinguished Members of the Senate and Assembly. I am Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden, commissioner of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services. I appear before this honorable body for the first time with the privilege of presenting Governor Hochul's state fiscal year 2025-'26 Executive Budget.

OCFS oversees a continuum of services across New York State aimed at promoting the safety, permanency and well-being of children, youth and families. OCFS is the steward of nearly \$5.8 billion and supports 24/7 operations and more than 3,000 employees. The agency is an epicenter of extremes, serving New Yorkers from twinkle to wrinkle -- the most innocent children to the most elderly of our communities.

OCFS is charged with the oversight and operational responsibilities that spans

1 across almost every domain. As a state
2 supervised and locally administered system,
3 our responsibilities include oversight of
4 local social services districts for child
5 welfare, domestic violence and adult
6 protective services, Youth Bureaus, foster
7 care agencies, family and child care centers,
8 and after-school settings. We also provide
9 direct services to blind New Yorkers.

10 With several months' tenure in my
11 role, I am in awe of the work that is
12 accomplished by this agency. I have seen
13 firsthand the tangible impact it has on
14 communities across the state. OCFS manages
15 upwards of 6,000 contracts for a wide range
16 of interventions and critical supports,
17 operates nine residential youth justice
18 facilities that require 24/7 supervision and
19 programming. Last year the Statewide Central
20 Register for Child Abuse and Maltreatment
21 handled over 280,000 calls, while the Human
22 Services Call Center fielded 1 million calls
23 on behalf of its 11 customer agencies.

24 I am proud to share that OCFS has

1 distributed more than 9,000 cribs across the
2 state to promote safe sleep, provided over
3 2,700 duffel bags statewide to children
4 leaving their homes and entering foster care,
5 and launched the Heartline, a prevention
6 service for youth who are currently in or
7 have recently left foster care.

8 The work that OCFS performs is far too
9 exhaustive to enumerate today. Yet it could
10 not be done without the commendable budget of
11 our Executive, Governor Hochul, and through
12 partnership with you.

13 The Executive Budget underscores
14 Governor Hochul's commitment to the most
15 vulnerable, making our great state more
16 affordable for children and families. The
17 Governor's Get Offline, Get Outside 2.0
18 initiative in this year's budget includes an
19 investment of \$15 million in increased
20 funding for youth programming, \$7.5 million
21 for Youth Sports and Education Opportunity
22 funding, and \$7.5 million to increase base
23 funding for the Youth Development Program.
24 This is just one of the Governor's many

1 proposals to better engage youth and disrupt
2 social media addiction.

3 In addition to the other educational
4 features included within this budget, there
5 is \$7 million in funding for the Dolly
6 Parton's Imagination Library program, aimed
7 at increasing literacy outcomes for children
8 ages zero to five.

9 This year's investment in Runaway and
10 Homeless Youth Services is to be applauded.
11 The \$10 million included in the Executive
12 Budget reflects a doubling of the allocation
13 over the last three years. This critical
14 funding aids vulnerable youth who need stable
15 shelter, transitional housing access, and
16 tailored comprehensive services.

17 Evidenced by the \$9.2 million increase
18 for Child Advocacy Centers, Governor Hochul
19 is committed to the protection of victims of
20 unthinkable crimes, including those involving
21 young children.

22 Since taking office, Governor Hochul's
23 Executive Budget has included a targeted
24 inflationary increase. This year's

1 2.1 percent increase will once again benefit
2 the families and voluntary agencies who care
3 for New York's children in foster care, and
4 adoptive parents.

5 The budget also includes a roughly
6 \$4.1 million increase in funding -- more than
7 \$14.1 million overall -- to raise the minimum
8 wage of employees of OCFS-funded contractors.

9 Governor Hochul has invested in
10 childcare in a way no governor has.
11 Unwavering in her dedication to expanding
12 access to high-quality care for New York's
13 children and families, there has been a
14 \$7 billion increase over four years.

15 This historic commitment has resulted
16 in the largest expansion of the Child Care
17 Assistance Program in New York State's
18 history. Now more than half of New York's
19 families are income-eligible. Under the
20 Governor's leadership, income eligibility has
21 been increased to the federal maximum of
22 85 percent state median income, which is
23 currently more than \$108,000 per year for a
24 family of four. And family copays have been

1 capped statewide at 1 percent of a family's
2 income above the poverty level. Families
3 have also been stabilized for 12 months
4 through this process.

5 Governor Hochul has more than doubled
6 the amount of funding for the Child Care
7 Assistance Program during her time in office,
8 from \$832 million in state fiscal year 2022
9 to nearly \$1.8 billion this year.

10 The Governor's comprehensive strategy
11 has also included supporting essential
12 childcare providers. New York is one of the
13 few states that sets payment rates for
14 childcare assistance at the 80th percentile.
15 In addition, market rates have been increased
16 by an average of 12 percent with the most
17 recent market rate survey, and have increased
18 by an average of 48 percent since 2019.

19 The Governor's proposal linking mental
20 health supports to after-school environments
21 expands upon last year's commitment that
22 increased childcare providers' access to
23 early childhood mental health consultants.

24 As part of the Governor's efforts to

1 increase competency, OCFS partnered with
2 DASNY to award \$50 million in capital grants
3 to create an estimated 5,500 new childcare
4 seats at 45 sites across the state. This
5 year's budget doubles that investment by
6 providing \$100 million in new capital funding
7 to further expand availability.

8 A portion of these funds will be
9 accessible to counties and municipalities for
10 childcare construction, maintenance, and/or
11 repairs. The budget also makes \$10 million
12 in federal funds available to improve the
13 safety and quality of home-based family
14 childcare programs.

15 It was an honor to serve alongside
16 Commissioner Reardon as the cochair of the
17 Governor's Child Care Availability Task
18 Force, which yielded the Roadmap for
19 Universal Child Care, a set of
20 recommendations to meet the goal of universal
21 childcare.

22 This year's budget proposal includes
23 the task force's recommendation for a
24 substitute pool in the amount of \$3 million,

1 which will afford childcare providers with
2 access to qualified individuals that can
3 cover classrooms so not to jeopardize
4 operations and daily staffing ratios. This
5 pool can also serve as a potential pipeline
6 for the workforce.

7 In furtherance of the goal for
8 universal childcare, this year's Executive
9 Budget includes the creation of the New York
10 Coalition for Child Care, which builds upon
11 the work of the Child Care Availability
12 Task Force and leverages the expertise of
13 business leaders, labor unions, tax and
14 revenue experts, providers, and other
15 stakeholders.

16 As a New Yorker, I am proud that this
17 year's Executive Budget embodies synergy and
18 innovation across multiple disciplines and
19 systems, making transformational investments
20 that will change the trajectory for many
21 children and families. We must continue to
22 advance the progress made by lending a
23 comprehensive approach to critical services
24 that span across the entire spectrum of life

1 from infancy to adulthood.

2 Under the Governor's leadership, OCFS
3 looks forward to operationalizing this budget
4 to ensure that New York is the quintessential
5 state, filled with promise and opportunity.

6 Thank you for allowing me to speak
7 today, and I welcome your questions and
8 comments.

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you, Doctor.

10 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Good
11 morning, Chairpersons Krueger, Pretlow,
12 Persaud, and Davila, and other members of the
13 Legislature.

14 My name is Barbara Guinn, and I'm the
15 commissioner of the State Office of Temporary
16 and Disability Assistance. I am pleased to
17 be here today to talk about Governor Hochul's
18 2026 Executive Budget and its support for the
19 critical benefits and services our agency
20 provides on behalf of residents of the state.

21 OTDA is responsible, in conjunction
22 with local social services districts, for the
23 delivery of benefits that provide economic
24 assistance and support to eligible

1 individuals and families. This work includes
2 helping very-low-income New Yorkers meet
3 their essential needs, such as housing, food,
4 and other basic necessities.

5 At OTDA, we are focused on improving
6 customer service and program access for each
7 program we oversee. We are dedicated to
8 making accessing social services as seamless
9 and supportive as possible.

10 We are excited about the many
11 proposals contained in Governor Hochul's
12 Executive Budget. Governor Hochul is
13 committed to helping make New York more
14 livable and affordable for all New Yorkers,
15 and she is particularly focused on families
16 and children.

17 This focus includes making sure that
18 we are taking action to help residents raise
19 a family in our state. In collaboration with
20 the Legislature, Governor Hochul has already
21 expanded the Empire State Child Tax Credit to
22 include children under the age of four;
23 provided extra food assistance to families
24 with school-aged children through the

1 Summer EBT program totaling approximately
2 \$250 million, delivered to over 2 million
3 children; significantly expanded assistance
4 to childcare, so that more families can
5 access safe childcare and benefit from
6 reduced copays; and, importantly, increased
7 the minimum wage and indexed it to inflation
8 so workers' purchasing power is not eroded as
9 prices rise.

10 With these steps and others, the
11 Governor and the Legislature have put in
12 place policies, reforms, and investments that
13 are improving families' economic security.
14 According to the expert analysis of the Urban
15 Institute, the permanent policies implemented
16 by this administration over the past three
17 budgets, when fully implemented, are
18 estimated to reduce child poverty in New York
19 State by up to 9.5 percent.

20 Governor Hochul's FY '26 budget builds
21 on this progress. The budget includes a
22 historic expansion of the Empire State Child
23 Tax Credit, a continued focus on making sure
24 families can afford safe childcare, and new

1 initiatives to improve maternal and infant
2 health, along with a variety of other
3 investments to provide a better future for
4 New York's families.

5 The proposed expansion of the New York
6 State Child Tax Credit will support more than
7 2.7 million children, giving 1.6 million
8 New York families an annual tax credit of up
9 to \$1,000 per child under the age of four,
10 and up to \$500 per child from ages four
11 through 16.

12 In addition, this proposal eliminates
13 the wage phase-in so that households with the
14 lowest incomes will now receive the maximum
15 benefit.

16 As OTDA commissioner, I also have the
17 honor to serve as the cochair of the New York
18 State Child Poverty Reduction Advisory
19 Council. In December, the council released
20 recommendations for reducing child poverty in
21 New York State. Expanding the Empire State
22 Child Tax Credit tops the list of this
23 council's recommendations.

24 Evidence has shown that the child tax

1 credit is one of the most effective ways for
2 us to lift children out of poverty. Once
3 fully implemented, the proposed expansion of
4 the child tax credit is estimated to reduce
5 child poverty in New York State by
6 8.2 percent for all children, and by more
7 than 10 percent for children under the age of
8 four.

9 Building on Governor Hochul's strong
10 record of support for pregnant New Yorkers,
11 new parents and infants, the Governor is
12 advancing another nation-leading legislative
13 proposal to improve maternal and infant
14 health through the provision of a birth
15 allowance: The New York State Birth
16 Allowance for Beginning Year Benefit, or BABY
17 Benefit.

18 The BABY Benefit will improve the
19 economic security of some of New York's most
20 underresourced families. This proposal will
21 provide a \$100 per month benefit during
22 pregnancy and an additional \$1,200 payment at
23 birth for families in receipt of public
24 assistance.

1 In addition, the Executive Budget
2 proposes providing maternal health and
3 newborn supply boxes and diapers to new
4 mothers. This work will be achieved through
5 a partnership with Baby2Baby, a national
6 nonprofit that provides essential items to
7 children living in poverty. This proposal is
8 estimated to reach the families of
9 approximately 100,000 babies at full
10 implementation.

11 Funding is also included in our budget
12 to implement the second year of the
13 Summer EBT program, which provides food
14 benefits to help cover the cost of groceries
15 during the summer months when school is out
16 of session and children may not have access
17 to free meals.

18 The Executive Budget continues the
19 Governor's commitment to address the housing
20 shortage and increase affordability. The
21 proposed budget increases capital funding to
22 create and preserve more supportive housing
23 through our agency's Homeless Housing and
24 Assistance Program.

1 The Executive Budget includes an
2 additional \$25 million, bringing the total to
3 \$153 million in capital funding to help meet
4 the ongoing demand for supportive housing and
5 maintain existing units that provide a safe
6 place to live for some of our most vulnerable
7 New Yorkers.

8 The budget also provides the most
9 significant investment in the New York State
10 Supportive Housing Program, or NYSSHP, since
11 its inception. The NYSSHP portfolio includes
12 New York State's first supportive housing
13 programs. This budget increases the state's
14 investment in NYSSHP by \$17 million, or
15 approximately 40 percent.

16 Additionally, the budget supports a
17 substantial increase in funding available for
18 the Empire State Supportive Housing
19 Initiative, or ESSHI.

20 Combined, these two programs, NYSSHP
21 and ESSHI, support nearly 30,000 supportive
22 housing residents. The increases are
23 tremendously important to ensuring our
24 supportive housing stock remains viable and

1 accessible for those who need it most.

2 Reducing child poverty and helping our
3 fellow New Yorkers meet their basic needs and
4 advance economically is at the core of our
5 agency's work. We seek your support to
6 implement the investments included in the
7 proposed 2026 budget. We look forward to our
8 continued partnership with the Legislature.

9 Thank you again for the opportunity to
10 testify here today, and I welcome your
11 questions and comments.

12 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you very
13 much.

14 Assemblyman Hevesi, 10 minutes.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,
16 Mr. Chair. Thank you, my colleagues.

17 Good morning, Commissioners. How are
18 you?

19 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: Good
20 morning.

21 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Good
22 morning.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Good morning.

24 It's good to see both of you. I thank you

1 for your work on behalf of the people of the
2 State of New York, but also I'm grateful to
3 see both of you, because I get to see all the
4 Assembly staff that you guys poached over the
5 years.

6 (Laughter.)

7 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: So it's -- hi,
8 guys.

9 (Laughter.)

10 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: So thank you for
11 all of your work. Dr. Harris-Madden, my
12 questions are going to be primarily for you.

13 Please forgive me. If it's okay with
14 you, I'm going to ramble for about a minute,
15 and then I have a couple of questions.

16 So let me start by saying thank you
17 for this Executive Budget from
18 Governor Hochul. There's a lot of good stuff
19 in here, in both areas. I'm going to focus
20 specifically on OCFS.

21 So first, a huge thank you to the
22 Governor for doubling the amount of money in
23 the CACs, the Child Advocacy Centers. That
24 is crucially important to save abused

1 children. I'm incredibly grateful.

2 Also, thank you for the increase of
3 1.5 for Runaway and Homeless Youth. Thank
4 you for the Get Offline, Get Outside; I'm
5 interested in that. And I'm even grateful
6 for the Dolly Parton Library, although I
7 shouldn't be, for some advocates.

8 And then let me move on to the other
9 parts of the budget where I'm going to --
10 where I have some questions for you.

11 For first, I know some of my
12 colleagues are going to be talking about the
13 workforce extensively. I understand that the
14 Governor put in a 2.1 cost of living
15 adjustment in there. We're going to be
16 coming back with a 7.8 on that.

17 And in addition to the human services
18 workforce, there are three workforces that
19 I'm primarily concerned with that are always
20 left out of the COLA. I just want to list
21 them for you, if I can. First is the
22 foster-care workforce. They have a separate
23 system for them.

24 Then also the preventative services

1 workforce, where we've been relying on the
2 65/35 reimbursement to counties, which we
3 have not been able to increase.

4 And then finally the last one is the
5 domestic violence workforce. If there's a
6 workforce that needs our assistance, that's
7 where we should be focusing our attention.

8 And then to my questions, if I can. I
9 thank you for bearing with me. So I know a
10 lot of my colleagues are going to be asking
11 questions about this, after-school and LEAPS.
12 So I thought I would give you the
13 opportunity, Commissioner, if you can, just
14 to go through what happened with our
15 transition and what our next steps are in
16 after-school. Please.

17 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

18 Thank you, Chair Hevesi. I'm going to borrow
19 this. I'm new to this, so thank you.

20 Thank you for allowing me to provide
21 the context regarding LEAPS. When I joined
22 the agency LEAPS had already been rolled out,
23 but I was thrilled to see that there had been
24 an increased investment in after-school. As

1 a long-time advocate for after-school
2 programming, I appreciated the fact that for
3 the first time many after-schools who had
4 been bereft of after-school opportunity now
5 have the opportunity to have children
6 supervised during unsupervised time.

7 Just as an overview for LEAPS, there
8 was 36,000 seats added, with 239 awarded.
9 LEAPS was a very competitive process. As you
10 might imagine, we had over 400 applicants.
11 And the breakdown of those who received
12 awards primarily went to New York City at
13 42 percent, 40 for rest of the state, and
14 19 percent downstate.

15 I just want to note that New York City
16 was a fierce competition, which we expected.
17 However, there is a structured
18 decision-making process in terms of ranking
19 applications and awarding accordingly.

20 I'd be remiss if I didn't say that
21 many of the applications were very well done,
22 from what I could glean in a short period of
23 time. Yet 377 applications received passing
24 scores but were not funded.

1 We did exhaust the 100-plus million
2 dollars that was infused into the system,
3 which again we appreciate that the Governor
4 as well as the elected officials made
5 possible. But the reality is it was a
6 competition.

7 I think there's a misnomer that LEAPS
8 was -- funding was cut, whereas the program
9 actually was an effort to consolidate
10 existing programs such as Advantage and
11 Empire, Empire having an economic threshold
12 whereas Advantage was for nonprofits that
13 were eligible.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. And
15 let me jump in to reiterate the point you
16 just made. Absolutely the consolidation was
17 something we needed to do; we've been
18 fighting for that for years.

19 And the rollout -- I guess the
20 question for me is if the Legislature, which
21 I hope we do in our one-houses, come back and
22 fulfill the 195 million that I think we need
23 to get every eligible LEAPS applicant, you
24 know, access to after-school, I would hope

1 that the administration would look kindly on
2 that.

3 In addition -- by the way, I'm sorry,
4 one other thing. You said there was an RFP
5 for the older kids that's coming out as well,
6 is that accurate?

7 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: We
8 do anticipate an RFP to come out. It's a
9 much smaller amount, but it is forthcoming.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. I think
11 all of us agree that after-school is hugely
12 important, so we'll try to work with you on
13 that. But I thank you for outlining that.

14 Two more areas that strike me as
15 problematic that are not yet addressed in the
16 budget, and just a quick question on each.

17 The first is Raise the Age. And this
18 does not fall squarely on Governor Hochul.
19 This is a Governor Cuomo issue. But this
20 year we'll be pushing for an innovation fund
21 for \$50 million that we think is essential to
22 start that program, jump-start it, to get
23 money directly into the hands of providers
24 for Raise the Age.

1 Is that something that the Executive
2 would be open to accepting?

3 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: As
4 you know, I'm unable to comment on the
5 policymaking. I leave that to the Governor
6 and the Legislature to do.

7 However, I would just note that, you
8 know, Raise the Age was an excellent
9 legislative act and we know that children do
10 not belong in adult prisons. So we thank you
11 for the funding that you have already made
12 available to address this population.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I appreciate it.
14 And we're going to need to work with you
15 prospectively to make sure that the close to
16 a billion dollars that has been promised but
17 not delivered. So Raise the Age I think for
18 us is a great victory that has turned into,
19 you know, a black eye for us because we
20 haven't funded it properly. And that's our
21 fault.

22 But I look forward to working with you
23 to try to fund it appropriately.

24 Two other issues, if I can squeeze it

1 in. Yes, I think so.

2 I'm concerned about, particularly in
3 the area of foster care, our agencies. Some
4 of them are starting to struggle, following
5 California, in obtaining mandatory liability
6 insurance. Is that something that the
7 Executive is looking at to make sure that our
8 foster-care providers are whole and they
9 don't have to go out of business like some
10 other companies in other states have done?

11 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

12 Thank you for that question, Mr. Chair.

13 I believe we are all keeping that at
14 the top of mind as it relates to our
15 foster-care agencies. Insurance is
16 skyrocketing everywhere, so this system is no
17 different than any other.

18 However, we are working closely with
19 the field. We are listening to our nonprofit
20 agencies. We are working with our LDSS, our
21 local districts of social services, just to
22 continue to stay apprised as this further
23 develops, particularly in New York State.
24 We're aware of California and what happened

1 there. So I assure you that this is
2 something that is a priority for us to
3 continue to think about. But absolutely we
4 are connected to the field and listening to
5 what's transpiring.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: That's great,
7 because this is -- this particular issue
8 scares me terribly because it will mean
9 dropping of services for our most vulnerable
10 kids. So I'd love to continue to work with
11 you on it.

12 And in my remaining time, I'd like to
13 talk about childcare. And I appreciate the
14 Governor's proposals. There's two pieces of
15 childcare I want to focus on.

16 One is the existential threat to
17 childcare from the Trump administration, and
18 particularly when I think about that, the
19 potential for cutting our federally funded
20 programs that were desperately needed, like
21 our CCR&Rs.

22 Is there a plan for us to make sure
23 that they stay whole in case the Trump
24 administration starts cutting? I mean, we

1 need those services to get our childcare
2 providers up and running.

3 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

4 Thank you for that question. Another top of
5 mind issue that we are paying close attention
6 to. At this juncture we have not received
7 any notice from the federal government of
8 threat for the funding under childcare.

9 I'm not sure of its impact in the last
10 Trump administration, but I don't believe
11 that childcare was grossly impacted.

12 But we do work very closely with our
13 CCR&Rs. I agree they are a vital resource in
14 our communities. And we do not plan to
15 change course unless, of course, forced to do
16 so. So thank you.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I appreciate
18 that. That's greatly appreciated.

19 And with my last minute, let me just
20 talk about childcare for a minute.

21 Governor Hochul deserves credit for
22 being the champion of the largest single
23 investment in history in childcare in
24 New York State, absolutely credit. This

1 year's budget, though, however, is not
2 prioritizing what her Child Care Availability
3 Task Force had suggested, which is to pay the
4 workforce.

5 I am of the opinion that all of our
6 efforts in childcare -- and by the way, over
7 the last four years it's been great. We've
8 been putting money, we've been doing -- we
9 dealt with copays, we dealt with all kinds of
10 other issues, absences. But I am of the
11 opinion that if you're not going to pay that
12 workforce, we're not going to be successful.

13 So I would recommend, and I hope the
14 Legislature agrees, that we expedite the
15 paying of that particular workforce this
16 year, if possible. And if we need to look to
17 a longer-term revenue source, I'm happy to
18 work with the Governor on that.

19 And my time is up. Commissioner,
20 thank you so much.

21 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
22 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

24 We've been joined by Senator Baskin,

1 Senator Cordell Cleare, Senator Weik.

2 And our first up is our chair,
3 Senator Brisport, 10 minutes.

4 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you,
5 Madam Chair (audio echo). Oh, this is
6 resonance going back up a little bit.

7 Thank you to both commissioners.
8 Commissioner Guinn, you're off the hook from
9 me, at least for the next 10 minutes. All my
10 questions are for Commissioner Harris-Madden.

11 Again, congratulations on your
12 appointment to this position. It was an
13 honor to support and vote for you in the
14 New York State Senate last year, and you've
15 been doing incredible work. I know it's been
16 a lot, it's been a whirlwind for the past few
17 months. It's a big purview. But welcome to
18 your first hearing.

19 My first question, I would like to
20 focus on the April 2024 Child Care
21 Availability Task Force report. The cover
22 letter that you submitted for that report,
23 along with Commissioner Reardon, makes the
24 point that we need to focus on addressing the

1 childcare workforce crisis. The report goes
2 on to repeatedly argue, over and over again,
3 that we need to act with urgency to institute
4 a permanent line of funding to supplement
5 childcare worker wages.

6 Why is it so important and urgent that
7 New York State stabilize its childcare
8 workforce?

9 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

10 Thank you for your kind remarks and also your
11 question, Chair Brisport.

12 Yes, we did underscore that workforce
13 shortage is an issue, as it is across all
14 health and human services fields. We
15 recognize the vital importance of our
16 workforce, particularly as they serve as our
17 most young -- the youngest, our most
18 vulnerable in many instances. And so yes,
19 the report did make those recommendations.

20 However, I'm happy to point out that
21 we are taking a measured approach here. This
22 budget does include some of the
23 recommendations of the task force, which
24 include the substitute pool, which will allow

1 for further supports within the system,
2 hopefully through our partners such as the
3 CCR&Rs and/or others.

4 They will help us to vet and find
5 qualified individuals who can step in as
6 substitutes. This has been done in other
7 states, and we think that this is a very good
8 approach to, you know, supporting our
9 workforce. This way classrooms are not
10 closing due to absences of the professionals
11 there.

12 But, you know, we have other instances
13 as well that OCFS has done prior to me
14 joining, and will continue to do, to include
15 subsidy -- educational subsidies, training
16 opportunities, paid scholarships for the
17 workforce. And also when we introduced in
18 this budget the New York Coalition on
19 Childcare, this is designed for research and
20 fund development opportunities and will be
21 comprised of tax experts, union experts,
22 business leaders, and childcare providers to
23 path-forward how we can create a sustainable
24 system.

1 Because the reality is that this
2 system is, you know, very costly. But we
3 recognize the importance of developing
4 revenue streams and providing recommendations
5 to bring forth to this honorable body to make
6 decisions on how we proceed.

7 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you. And I
8 do want to say I love hearing the words
9 "substitute pool" and "CCR&Rs" in the same
10 sentence, and hope that that plays out well
11 in the way that the substitute pool is
12 structured in the final budget.

13 But going back to the workforce, on
14 page 6 the report cites data that all
15 programs were operating below their license
16 capacity due to workforce shortages and that
17 we were serving 28,462 fewer children than
18 current capacity because of these workforce
19 shortages.

20 The workforce shortage is a big
21 problem when it comes to childcare capacity,
22 right?

23 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: The
24 workforce shortage is present in all systems

1 that we encounter at OCFS. And so I would
2 agree, yes, the workforce is something that
3 we should be building upon.

4 But again, with the current
5 infrastructure in OCFS and its budget, we
6 believe that we are supporting the workforce.
7 And of course there's more to be done, but
8 there are number of things that I could point
9 to that suggest that, you know, we are doing
10 well in this area.

11 Recently we learned that there were
12 508 new programs that were developed, and I
13 didn't share that with you in our last
14 conversation. That was a just a new
15 development. So that kind of lends to the
16 narrative that we are expanding
17 opportunities. And of course these ratios
18 and staffing is maintained, we are always
19 going out and, you know, reviewing, working
20 with our providers to make sure that they are
21 supported.

22 In addition to that, we -- I just want
23 to just provide some of the information that
24 we have in terms of our scholarships. I was

1 pleased to learn that 9,000 members of the
2 workforce received scholarships for training
3 and education, to the tune of \$8.5 million.

4 We are also working with businesses,
5 the Business Navigator, to provide additional
6 resources. We ensure that we have support in
7 the New York State Early Education Career
8 Centers, to the tune of \$2 million. And of
9 course we now are able, as of January 1, to
10 make direct payments -- well, not we, our
11 local departments of social services are able
12 to make direct payments to the providers so
13 they can pay their staff in a timely manner.

14 So, you know, I think that there's a
15 measured approach here and that we are making
16 progress.

17 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

18 I would highlight an additional claim
19 from the report that says these childcare
20 workforce challenges threaten to undermine
21 the tremendous gains New York has made in
22 expediting access to childcare assistance
23 because these challenges can directly cause a
24 decline in childcare capacity.

1 The Comptroller, the New York State
2 Comptroller, also released a recent report
3 talking about the workforce shortages and the
4 way that those would undermine our attempts
5 to increase childcare capacity.

6 I also want to highlight some language
7 from the task force report that you submitted
8 that says we need to act with urgency to
9 implement a permanent workforce compensation
10 fund. And then there was also the roadmap to
11 universal childcare that was released last
12 month.

13 The roadmap likewise that the
14 implementation of universal childcare will be
15 in jeopardy if the childcare workforce crisis
16 is not addressed. And it recommends that
17 New York establish a permanent workforce
18 compensation fund aimed at increasing wages
19 for all members of the childcare workforce,
20 and indexed to the cost of living.

21 I agree that this is an urgent need,
22 and we're going to hear from some additional
23 task force members later today. But what did
24 you mean when you stressed that this would be

1 a permanent line of funding?

2 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

3 Thank you. So in our current budget we have
4 \$1.8 million, a notable increase from where
5 we were just a few years ago. And we are
6 maintaining that funding to support the
7 workforce and other, you know, aspects of the
8 program.

9 So, you know, we are cognizant of the
10 fact that we need a permanent workforce. We
11 appreciate in the Governor's budget, which is
12 not under my purview, but the expansion of
13 opportunities for education, partnering with
14 CUNY and SUNY. Because the key here is
15 really to build a pipeline. If we have a
16 feeder that will allow for our workforce to
17 enter this space -- which has been
18 historically not in parity with other
19 educational systems -- if we continue to
20 advance our education and make tuition free,
21 like what is proposed for CUNY and SUNY, we
22 believe that we will have a pipeline that
23 will support this system.

24 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

1 And hypothetically speaking, because I
2 know that OCFS has administered childcare
3 supplements for the workforce in the past, if
4 the final budget, due April 1st of this year,
5 manages to include an additional \$1.2 billion
6 for a permanent fund to increase childcare
7 workforce wages, would OCFS be able to
8 implement that?

9 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: If
10 the policies make it so, we stand ready to
11 implement.

12 SENATOR BRISPORT: Okay. Another
13 question is, have you spoken with the
14 Governor herself about childcare workforce
15 wage supplements at all?

16 And do you know why this
17 recommendation from the task force report was
18 missing from the Executive Budget? Was it an
19 oversight?

20 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: I
21 don't know that I would say it was missed,
22 Mr. Chair. I think that there's some key
23 elements from that report that are integrated
24 in this year's budget. Again, the substitute

1 pool being one of them. The additional work
2 to convene the business and tax experts to
3 develop fund development strategies and
4 resources to sustain the system is another.

5 So I don't know that it was a miss; I
6 think it's just measured.

7 SENATOR BRISPORT: Okay. And my last
8 is that on page 12 of the task force report
9 you also recommend limiting restrictions to
10 childcare assistance based on a parent's
11 employment status, hours worked, and minimum
12 compensation.

13 I've heard that a lot of members of
14 the task force are very unhappy that the
15 Executive Budget left this out. This is very
16 important to restaurant workers, retail
17 employees, construction workers and gig
18 workers, because their hours are
19 unpredictable.

20 It's not a question, just a request.
21 Please talk with Governor Hochul about
22 getting these items back in the budget.

23 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
24 Thank you, sir.

1 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you,
2 Commissioner.

3 With that, I cede the rest of my time.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you,
5 Senator Brisport.

6 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you, Senator.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Oh, I'm sorry.

8 SENATOR BRISPORT: You can both thank
9 me, that's okay.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Wait. Did I cut
11 you off, Senator?

12 SENATOR BRISPORT: No, I just -- you
13 were both thanking me. Go for it.

14 (Laughter.)

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. And I just
16 wanted to introduce Senator Scarcella-Spanton
17 before I hand it over to the Assembly.

18 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you,
19 Madam Senator.

20 Before I move on, we've been joined by
21 Assemblymember Hooks, Assemblymember Wright,
22 Assemblymember Lee, Assemblymember Forrest,
23 Assemblymember Raga, Assemblymember Romero.

24 And Assemblymember Maher for five

1 minutes.

2 (Off the record.)

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
4 Seawright for 10 minutes.

5 Oh, okay. Assemblywoman Davila.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Okay, here we
7 go. Good morning, Commissioners. Thank you
8 so much for being here today and providing
9 testimony.

10 And thank you to my colleagues as well
11 for being here.

12 I just -- I'm excited about some of
13 the things that are on the table that the
14 Governor has proposed. But we have still yet
15 a lot of work to be done. I want to talk a
16 little bit about the migrant funding,
17 \$2.4 billion that we allocated last year. In
18 mid-December the administration announced
19 that they were going to pull out the
20 National Guard from the migrant shelters.

21 That same month, both the city and
22 state announced the closing of the
23 JFK shelter, Randalls Island and
24 Floyd Bennett Field shelters. Were there any

1 savings in the current fiscal year because of
2 these actions? And if so, what is becoming
3 of those funds?

4 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So the
5 funding that was authorized in prior-year
6 budgets to help New York City handle the
7 influx of new arrivals that has occurred over
8 the past several years, remains available for
9 New York City to access, as well as other
10 services that are -- some of which are
11 directly operated by the state.

12 So at this point I wouldn't
13 characterize it as there being savings
14 available. Certainly the city -- we'll be
15 working closely with the city as the city is
16 able to begin to ramp down some of the larger
17 congregate facilities based on the reduction
18 of individuals who are needing shelter at
19 this point.

20 But certainly there continues to be a
21 great need. There continues to be 46,000
22 such individuals residing in the city shelter
23 system. And we also know that many of these
24 households continue to need assistance with

1 legal services and other case management to
2 help them truly integrate into their
3 neighborhoods.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Okay, we have
5 yet to see how much money has been spent
6 through the city through these \$2.4 billion.
7 And I'm just curious as to if there was any
8 funding left to carry on through this fiscal
9 year.

10 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: There are
11 funds that remain available for the city to
12 draw down, and we expect that reimbursement
13 to continue in the upcoming several months in
14 the next fiscal year.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Okay, thank
16 you.

17 With the Home Energy Assistance
18 Program, earlier this winter the state
19 stopped accepting HEAP, which was a little
20 devastating because people were calling into
21 our offices panicking because they were
22 unable to put in applications. Then they
23 were reopened the next day.

24 When the Governor announced an

1 additional 35 million for HEAP, can you tell
2 us where this money came from?

3 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So yes. So
4 when the regular HEAP opened this past
5 November, November 1st of 2024, we did expect
6 that we would be able to remain open through
7 mid-March. But due to much higher than
8 anticipated early applications throughout
9 that program, we did get to a point where we
10 did need to shut down.

11 And we're very thankful that
12 Governor Hochul allowed us to reallocate
13 35 million to support the program.

14 I think -- I mean, at this point it's
15 reallocated from within the HEAP program, but
16 there is an effort to work with the Division
17 of the Budget to backfill that amount of
18 money to continue to fully fund all HEAP
19 components.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Do we currently
21 have a backlog of HEAP applications? And if
22 so, will the 35 million be sufficient to get
23 us through the end of the heating season?

24 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So we do

1 project at this point that the additional
2 35 million in funds that were made available
3 to support the regular program will allow us
4 to keep that program open through
5 early April.

6 And we also do expect the emergency
7 component, which is, as you know, critical to
8 make sure that people's heating sources are
9 not shut off, that that also will remain open
10 through early April.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Thank you.

12 Okay, let's go on to supportive
13 housing. What specific strategies is OTDA
14 implementing to accelerate the development of
15 supportive housing for individuals
16 experiencing homelessness and those with
17 disabilities? Because as you are aware,
18 those numbers keep increasing and, you know,
19 our ability to be able to provide services to
20 these homeless individuals is getting
21 smaller.

22 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yeah.

23 Right. Yeah. I mean, certainly supportive
24 housing is one of the key solutions to

1 homelessness. The ability for people to be
2 able to access permanent housing that is both
3 affordable and comes with those wraparound
4 services is absolutely essential, including
5 individuals with disabilities.

6 You know, as I mentioned during my
7 testimony, we are very pleased that this
8 year's budget includes significant
9 investments in supportive housing. So the
10 additional funds that are available to
11 bolster NYSSHP, that's directly intended to
12 make sure that some of those older supportive
13 housing units have additional resources so
14 that we do not lose them.

15 The other investment in this budget is
16 significant increases in the Empire State
17 Supportive Housing Initiative. And through
18 that we are going to be able to make
19 significant increases in the rates that are
20 available for providers who operate that
21 supportive housing.

22 So ESSHI right now, and since it was
23 established, has a budget of 25,000 per unit.
24 The Governor's budget will increase that to

1 31,000 for areas outside of New York City and
2 to 34,000 for areas within New York City. We
3 think that that increase is really important
4 to continue to bring in more providers who
5 are willing to operate supportive housing.

6 And then I'll also mention just the
7 additional capital investment on our
8 HHAP programs, our Homeless Housing
9 Assistance Program. That \$25 million
10 increase is also very much intended to help
11 stabilize some of the older units that need
12 preservation funds in order to maintain.

13 So it's a combination of investments
14 in preservation combined with new funding to
15 make sure that we're continuing to be able to
16 build additional supportive housing units.
17 And we think that this budget positions us
18 very well to do that.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Thank you.

20 My last question. What steps are
21 being taken to streamline the approval and
22 funding process for nonprofit and private
23 developers who want to create supportive
24 housing in high-need -- because we are aware

1 how slowly money is trickled down from the
2 state. And sometimes that can cause a
3 trickling effect in terms of the amount of
4 money it would take to build supportive
5 housing.

6 So what are we doing about
7 streamlining that funding so that we can
8 build quicker and have more availability for
9 people who are disabled and homeless?

10 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So we
11 definitely understand the need to reduce
12 bureaucracy and streamline processes so that
13 developers and nonprofits can establish
14 additional supportive housing.

15 I think our agency does pretty well in
16 this space. We have a very strong team that
17 manages our homeless housing and assistance
18 program as well as the subsidy programs
19 associated with supportive housing. And we
20 also work very closely with Homes and
21 Community Renewal, because we know often some
22 of the projects that are built are funded
23 both from HCR funds, tax credits as well as
24 our HHAP funding.

1 So I think that we have done a good
2 job in streamlining, but we certainly are
3 always open to any recommendations that you
4 may have about how we could do even better.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Thank you. And
6 next is just two comments.

7 I would be remiss if I didn't echo the
8 sentiments of my colleagues during
9 conference. And one of those issues is the
10 Summer Youth Program because it's being cut
11 significantly. This is an extremely
12 important program.

13 And the next is ESSHI. People were
14 extremely nervous about ESSHI. So we are
15 going to try to fight to restore these
16 programs.

17 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Okay. So
18 ESSHI is receiving significant increases
19 based on Governor Hochul's budget.

20 With respect to the Summer Youth
21 Program, it is actually increased over the
22 Governor's budget from last year, but it does
23 remove the legislative add from -- that was
24 included. And that is just kind of a

1 traditional process where the Executive often
2 removes legislative adds. But we certainly
3 look forward to working with you and other
4 members of the Legislature to do everything
5 we can to support the Summer Youth Employment
6 Program.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Thank you.
8 Thank you very much.

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.
10 Senator?

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
12 Chair Senator Persaud.

13 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you,
14 Madam Chair.

15 Thank you, Commissioners. Great
16 seeing both of you.

17 You know, it's great working with you,
18 Dr. Harris-Madden. You know, I enjoy the
19 conversation we have, and I understand your
20 commitment to the role that you're playing in
21 the agency.

22 I just have one question for you; it's
23 on Raise the Age in New York City.

24 Have you had a conversation about

1 New York City and when will they submit a
2 plan for Raise the Age funds? And if they
3 have no intentions of submitting the plans
4 for Raise the Age funds, how can we divert
5 the funding that's being left on the table
6 year after year to other opportunities for
7 the youth across the state?

8 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

9 Thank you, Chair Persaud, and it was a
10 pleasure talking with you earlier this week.

11 New York City clearly has great need,
12 and we have encouraged all of our counties,
13 not just New York City, to provide plans.
14 And although they were left out of the
15 initial legislation, any county can still
16 submit a plan.

17 So to your question, we do not know
18 when and if New York City will submit a plan,
19 but if it is submitted we will certainly take
20 it under consideration.

21 SENATOR PERSAUD: But in the
22 meanwhile, what can we do with the funds that
23 are being left on the table? Can we utilize
24 these for other programs for at-risk youth?

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OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

Well, if I may just speak a little bit about the plans and the process.

You know, the plans do come to OCFS. And almost every plan throughout the state that we receive, along with our sister agency in DCJS and the Department of Budget, typically approves the RTA plans. We are extremely flexible because it is an incredibly local response. The communities must say what they need. They know their populations best.

We are chronically encouraging -- and I know in my short time I also message that, you know, we want alternatives to detention, we want those interventions that are efficacious in our communities. But we must receive plans from the counties in order to be able to approve and subsequently allow them to spend, then they will claim, and we will promptly reimburse.

But if a county is not doing so then, you know, we -- we work with what we have.

SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. Thank you for

1 that.

2 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

3 Thank you.

4 SENATOR PERSAUD: And now

5 Commissioner Guinn. I am going to continue
6 on the supportive housing questioning.

7 You know, we know that NYSSHP stock
8 tends to be older, right, than the ESSHI
9 stock. What are we doing to ensure that --
10 because we have not -- the conditions seem to
11 be, you know, not up to standard. We are
12 funding so that we can renovate and all of
13 that.

14 Are we at any point at this time
15 anticipating losing any housing stock in
16 NYSSHP because of the conditions?

17 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So at this
18 point we're working closely with each
19 provider, trying to make sure that they
20 maintain the stock that is available. In the
21 past we've worked with them to try to bring
22 in project-based vouchers and other places to
23 bring in additional revenue to those
24 locations.

1 Importantly this year, as I mentioned
2 in my testimony, you know, Governor Hochul
3 has included a \$17 million investment in
4 NYSSHP. And as part of awarding those funds
5 we will certainly be looking at -- to bolster
6 those programs that have the greatest need.
7 Because yes, it's absolutely critical that we
8 keep those supportive housing units online.

9 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you for that.

10 And touching on HEAP, we understand,
11 you know, that temporary closure and the
12 money that was transferred to cover and
13 reopen the HEAP process.

14 Are we in danger of having the same
15 thing happen with the cooling funds for
16 summer? Can we say that we have enough funds
17 to cover the anticipated number of
18 applications that we will have?

19 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So the
20 HEAP plan allocates \$15 million towards the
21 cooling component. Each year we have to
22 balance the available HEAP funding among the
23 different components.

24 Is \$15 million sufficient? We shall

1 see. But I know that in prior years the
2 applications for the cooling component have
3 also been coming in quite rapidly. So, you
4 know, it's not necessarily intended to be
5 able to address every single household's
6 need.

7 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. What are you
8 doing in preparation of the possibility of
9 the cuts in federal funding?

10 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So at this
11 point we have not received cuts in federal
12 funding. But obviously we're very aware of
13 all the activity taking place at the federal
14 level, both from the White House as well as
15 as the budget process begins to heat up.

16 You know, we're going to continue to
17 fight for New Yorkers and continue to
18 advocate that federal funding is made
19 available -- in particular, federal funding
20 that's so important in our state as well as
21 in others states to really address the needs
22 of some of the most vulnerable. So we will
23 just fight and advocate as hard as we can to
24 keep federal funding flowing for these

1 priority areas.

2 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

3 So over the past few years we've had a
4 benefit cliffs bill vetoed and we continue to
5 push for that bill to be signed by the
6 Governor, because we think -- we know that
7 it's very important that we understand what's
8 causing the benefits cliffs and how do we
9 help New Yorkers, you know.

10 So the Governor has proposed the
11 Monroe County Ladders Program. And it's --
12 part of that is understanding benefit cliffs.
13 Why would we -- in my opinion, Monroe County
14 is not -- does not show you what is happening
15 across the state. And why would we not look
16 at what is happening across the state to fix
17 the issues so that we can help those most in
18 need?

19 Why are we focusing on Monroe County?
20 What was the rationale for that, do you know?

21 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So the
22 purpose of the Monroe Ladder demonstration
23 project is not -- it's to really dive in deep
24 and to work with employers to address

1 real-life situations. So our objective is
2 really to work with employees either through
3 financial counseling and then also through
4 subsidies, if that's appropriate, in the
5 event that they are otherwise unwilling or
6 fearful of taking on additional hours or a
7 promotion.

8 So it's really like a real-life I
9 guess demonstration project to better
10 understand what ways we might be able to
11 mitigate what might be either real or
12 perceived concerns associated with the fiscal
13 cliffs.

14 Our agency -- you know, I understand,
15 Senator, that this is a matter that's of
16 great importance to you, and I promise you
17 that our agency is willing to work with you
18 to collect data and to have discussions,
19 because I understand -- I understand why
20 you're interested, that you want to, you
21 know, be able to understand what's happening
22 so that any policy changes could be
23 implemented.

24 We are happy that over the past couple

1 of years, under Governor Hochul's leadership,
2 New York State has made some significant
3 changes with respect to both public
4 assistance and childcare. So both of those
5 programs used to be in a place where workers
6 would face a significant cliff. But through
7 policy changes, with the support of the
8 Legislature and additional funding to
9 increase eligibility thresholds, those cliffs
10 largely have been mitigated.

11 But like I said, I know this is
12 important to you and we're happy to work with
13 you on the project.

14 SENATOR PERSAUD: Well, thank you for
15 that. Because, you know, we will continue
16 pressing on that.

17 And in the time that I have left,
18 let's touch on our EBT cards. Could you tell
19 us the status of the chip cards? And what
20 else needs to be done before we can implement
21 the chip enhanced cards?

22 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. So
23 with respect to moving to chip cards, we
24 understand that movement to chip cards is

1 probably the best path forward in terms of us
2 being able to better protect public benefits
3 from electronic skimming.

4 Right now we do not have resources
5 within our agency budget to move toward chip
6 cards. That said, we are continuing to
7 collect additional information and see if we
8 can come up with strategies that would
9 produce the ability to move toward chip cards
10 at a cost that's lower than what we are
11 currently projecting based on what we are
12 aware of in other states.

13 SENATOR PERSAUD: Do we think we'll
14 have chip cards -- some sort of rollout by
15 the end of the year? By early next year?
16 What's the plan? Do we have a long-term plan
17 as to -- a short-term plan, actually, as to
18 when we will roll it out?

19 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right now
20 our best protection for individuals is for
21 them to lock their EBT cards. And so we're
22 continuing additional outreach on that
23 particular issue to make more households
24 aware of the ability to lock.

1 In fact, we've already started a text
2 campaign to all SNAP recipients this week to
3 increase the awareness of that.

4 And like I said, at this point we do
5 not have resources in our agency budget to
6 move towards chip cards, but we are
7 continuing to evaluate the situation, because
8 I do understand how important it is.

9 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay, thank you. I
10 just want to thank you for the information
11 that you've been giving our offices to
12 share --

13 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Of course.

14 SENATOR PERSAUD: -- with constituents
15 about locking cards. Thank you.

16 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Thank you,
17 Senator.

18 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

19 Assemblyman Molitor, five minutes.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN MOLITOR: There we go,
21 okay. Thank you.

22 I do not have any questions for
23 Dr. Harris-Maiden -- or Madden, sorry.

24 But I do have some questions for

1 Acting Commissioner Guinn, and I'm going to
2 be asking about fair hearings.

3 How many fair hearings are held
4 annually?

5 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So over
6 100,000 hearings are held on an annual basis.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN MOLITOR: And how long
8 does it take to conduct a fair hearing, on
9 average? What's the average wait time?

10 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: On average,
11 how long does it take to actually get through
12 the fair hearing?

13 ASSEMBLYMAN MOLITOR: Well, to get to
14 the hearing. Like how many days?

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right now
16 it's taking longer than is expected. The
17 expectation is that the hearings are
18 completed within 60 days, I believe, for
19 public assistance and 90 days for SNAP, and
20 similar time frames for Medicaid.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN MOLITOR: Once the hearing
22 is conducted, how long is it taking for the
23 ALJ to issue a decision? On average.

24 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. Once

1 the hearing is complete the decision should
2 be issued within weeks.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN MOLITOR: What is the
4 total amount of, quote, aid continuing,
5 unquote, that was paid out during the last
6 fiscal year?

7 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: I do not
8 have that information with me with respect to
9 individuals who retain access to their
10 benefits pending the completion of a fair
11 hearing. I do not have that information with
12 me.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN MOLITOR: Do you know,
14 what is the total amount of aid continuing
15 benefits that were repaid by beneficiaries
16 after a fair hearing during the last fiscal
17 year? In other words, if they had lost a
18 hearing and they had to repay, do you know
19 how much was repaid by beneficiaries in the
20 last fiscal year?

21 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: I do not
22 know the total amount that was repaid if an
23 individual is not successful in the outcome
24 of their hearing.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN MOLITOR: Okay.

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: {Mic off;
3 inaudible} -- but he's not Senator Mattera.
4 Sorry.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN MOLITOR: That's all
6 right. I'm not Senator Mattera.

7 (Laughter.)

8 ASSEMBLYMAN MOLITOR: I got a
9 promotion on the screen.

10 (Laughter; remarks off the record.)

11 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Take the win.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN MOLITOR: Just going back
13 to the -- I'm sorry, just going back to the
14 fair hearings, do you know is there an
15 average cost for how much does it cost for
16 the agency to conduct a fair hearing? What
17 are you paying? What is the amount that the
18 agency has to pay to conduct a fair hearing?

19 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: I do not
20 have that information with me. But I know
21 that we have, you know, over a hundred staff
22 members dedicated to that function.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN MOLITOR: Okay. I'd like
24 to move to the childcare capital program.

1 How many providers will the
2 \$100 million in new funding assist? Oh, I
3 guess I do have questions for Dr. --

4 (Laughter.)

5 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
6 Thank you. I'm glad to answer your question,
7 Assemblyman.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN MOLITOR: Thank you.

9 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: So,
10 you know, we anticipate approximately 10 --
11 to double what we had under the 50 million in
12 last year's. So last year we created about
13 5,000 additional seats. So we anticipate to
14 add approximately 10,000 additional seats.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN MOLITOR: And how will
16 childcare providers be selected for that
17 funding?

18 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: For
19 the capital funding they will be submitting
20 for an RFP. Our agency will produce an RFP
21 to which the respondents would reply to that
22 mechanism.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN MOLITOR: And is there a
24 particular goal within your agency to

1 distribute that funding across, you know, the
2 largest geographical area you can across the
3 state?

4 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: We
5 have not determined the exact methodology.
6 But I would imagine we would, you know, hope
7 to have respondents that represent the
8 diversity of this great state, and to
9 distribute of course based on, you know,
10 scoring but also looking at particular areas
11 throughout the state.

12 Typically we hope to serve the
13 deserts, childcare deserts, and stick to the
14 10 geographical areas that we have.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN MOLITOR: Okay. Those are
16 all the questions I have. Thank you very
17 much for being here to answer our questions.

18 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
19 Thank you.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
21 much.

22 Senator John Liu, three minutes.

23 SENATOR LIU: Thank you, Madam Chair.

24 And thank you, Commissioners, for

1 joining us.

2 So a quick question for
3 Commissioner Guinn. You know,
4 Senator Persaud was asking you about this
5 already, but the theft of EBT card funds is a
6 real big problem, and it's a growing problem.
7 So we need those -- anything that will stop,
8 curtail the theft of these funds. And our
9 understanding is that those chip cards are an
10 important part.

11 So you're saying you don't have
12 resources and you need more money. How much
13 more budget do you need to get these EBT
14 cards in the hands of people who need them?

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yes, so we
16 are continuing to collect additional
17 information. The initial information or
18 estimates that we came up with were as high
19 as \$40 million for the first-year cost
20 associated with moving toward chip cards.

21 Like I said, we're continuing to
22 gather additional information, kind of scan
23 with respect to the environment of the
24 vendors that are out there that can provide

1 get any of that done before you get another
2 budget allocation for this?

3 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: I guess in
4 theory we could issue a procurement, and
5 that's something that we have been working
6 on. And we could issue it and see what bids
7 come in and see if it's something that's more
8 affordable.

9 SENATOR LIU: Yeah, I think it's
10 really important for many of us, and more
11 importantly our constituents.

12 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Absolutely.

13 SENATOR LIU: These funds are being
14 stolen at a more rapid pace.

15 Commissioner Harris-Madden -- yeah,
16 I'm sorry, Commissioner Harris-Madden, thank
17 you and welcome to your new role. I don't
18 have much time left, but the LEAPS program is
19 a big problem all throughout the state. I
20 know you testified about the scoring system
21 and the fact that many have passed without
22 being able to access funds because I suppose
23 it's incumbent upon us to put more funding
24 into the plan.

1 But we've been trying to get more
2 information about what the scoring process
3 has been. And of all the ones that have
4 passed, how did you select the ones who
5 actually got the funding?

6 You're not going to have time to
7 answer this, but I just want to impart to you
8 that we're very concerned that we increased
9 the amount of after-school programming only
10 to see many of our programs completely
11 eliminated.

12 Thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you, Senator.

14 We've been joined by Assemblywoman
15 Simon and Assemblywoman Chandler-Waterman.

16 I'm now calling on Assemblywoman
17 Lunsford for three minutes.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Thank you
19 very much.

20 This is a question for OCFS.

21 Over the past several years we've been
22 hearing concerns from volunteer foster-care
23 agencies about the rising costs of their
24 liability expenditures with regard to

1 Child Victims Act cases. During the lookback
2 window, 50 percent of the cases filed were
3 against voluntary service agencies, and we
4 already saw the bankruptcy of a
5 Long Island-based facility.

6 Last year I asked if there was any
7 plan to help address these closures since our
8 counties rely on these voluntary service
9 agencies for available beds. Has any
10 progress been made in that regard? And could
11 you update us on the amount of closures of
12 voluntary service agencies, if there have
13 been any others this year?

14 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

15 Thank you, Assemblywoman.

16 Voluntary agencies are critical for
17 our operation, and we share your concern in
18 terms of their solvency and their ability to
19 operate.

20 That said, in terms of the insurance,
21 it's the same as I responded earlier. We are
22 aware that insurance is skyrocketing across
23 all fields, and --

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: I'm sorry,

1 it's not a question about insurance, it's
2 actually about their exposure on these cases.
3 Because of the 800 cases in the Child Victims
4 Act lookback window that were filed against
5 voluntary service agencies, a high proportion
6 of them have no insurance at all.

7 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

8 That's correct. I apologize for that.

9 So that is, again, another area of
10 deep concern for us in terms of supporting
11 our agencies. However, we are in
12 communications and monitoring as things
13 develop. We are in touch with the field. We
14 are, you know, participating with COFCCA and
15 other organizations, listening and learning
16 to what they're experiencing. And at this
17 juncture we're just still communicating with
18 our partners and speaking internally to, you
19 know, monitor this situation to see what
20 we -- what if anything we can do.

21 But we are clear that these agencies
22 are vital to our operation and to the
23 community.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Just a

1 reminder that if these fail, there are no
2 other beds. These are performing an
3 essential government purpose. We can't just
4 offshoot 50 kids who previously had beds to
5 the National Guard and say, You're
6 foster-care agencies now.

7 Switching quickly to the substitute
8 pool, we're very glad to see the substitute
9 pool. Can you speak a little bit in the last
10 30 seconds here about how we're going to
11 administer that substitute pool? Are we
12 going to rely on outside businesses? Are we
13 going to do it internally?

14 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
15 Sure. We anticipate an RFP for the
16 substitute pool. And again, we are hoping
17 that our partners who are well-versed in this
18 space, such as the CCR&Rs and other
19 nonprofits, will apply. And they will be
20 responsible for the vetting and ultimate
21 decisions regarding the substitute pool
22 candidates and the training as well.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Thank you
24 very much. I'll cede my last nine seconds.

1 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

2 Thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senate?

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Mic off;
5 inaudible) -- operating this morning. Thank
6 you.

7 We have Senator Rolison -- oh, no,
8 sorry, Senator Murray first. Excuse me.

9 SENATOR MURRAY: There we go. Thank
10 you, Madam Chair.

11 And thank you, Commissioners, for
12 being here. My questions will be primarily
13 to Commissioner Guinn.

14 I want to go back to the EBT and the
15 chip card technology. As you know, I'm a
16 strong supporter of this. I'm actually a
17 cosponsor of Senator Persaud's legislation --
18 I want to thank her for leading the way on
19 this -- of requiring the chip technology in
20 the EBT cards.

21 You've been very open about this.
22 We've worked on this issue. You've also
23 instituted the lock-and-block plan right now,
24 which has helped, but it's not solving the

1 problem. As Senator Liu said, this is a
2 major, major problem. We're losing hundreds
3 of millions of dollars.

4 But I have some concerns here. So
5 last year, in May, you switched vendors. Who
6 was your previous vendor, and who is the
7 vendor we're using now?

8 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: The previous
9 EBT vendor was Conduent. The current EBT
10 vendor is FIS.

11 SENATOR MURRAY: That's where I have a
12 major concern. So we switched from Conduent
13 to FIS. I'm looking at a press release from
14 the Department of Labor from June 26th of
15 2023 where they announced the new Conduent
16 "Way to Go" debit card utilizes chip
17 technology.

18 So we have the Department of Labor
19 that's been using these cards, using this
20 technology for almost two years now. Have
21 you had any conversations with Commissioner
22 Reardon about this?

23 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Our staff
24 definitely have had conversations with the

1 Department of Labor to understand their
2 contract structure and terms.

3 The systems are different in terms of
4 EBT and what it requires is different than
5 the UI system. But yes, we are aware that
6 they have chip card technology.

7 SENATOR MURRAY: The concern here is
8 we've been told that there are basically
9 two vendors, and that's Conduent and FIS.
10 And we've been told that the problem is that
11 there are only two. But yet we had a
12 contract in place, were using Conduent, who
13 is currently using or administering the
14 technology for the Department of Labor, yet
15 we switched away from them to FIS and moved
16 away where we're not ready yet, or it's not
17 ready to be implemented.

18 Why would we do that?

19 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So the
20 transition from Conduent to FIS happened as a
21 result of a procurement that we were required
22 to issue. It took years between the
23 procurement being issued and actually getting
24 to the point of transition. So it wasn't --

1 the reason we switched vendors was simply
2 because of the procurement process that we
3 were required to follow.

4 I wouldn't say that -- I mean,
5 Conduent's work or FIS's work with our agency
6 with respect to EBT is different in terms of
7 what is required to implement chip card
8 technology. I'm not saying that FIS is
9 incapable of doing so. I'm saying that we
10 need to have funds available to support that
11 move.

12 SENATOR MURRAY: But this isn't new,
13 Commissioner. This is -- for years we've
14 seen the fraud going on, we've seen them
15 stealing, literally stealing from people who
16 need this to feed their families on their
17 SNAP cards. And these criminals are getting
18 away with it.

19 Now, there's a lot of talk about the
20 federal government saying, We're not going to
21 now make good when those funds are stolen. I
22 don't blame them, because that's taxpayer
23 money, and I don't think the taxpayers should
24 be paying twice for these benefits, which is

1 what's happening. And the criminals are
2 getting away with it because we don't have
3 this technology in place.

4 So you can see the frustration when it
5 seems like the technology's there, the
6 technology's being used and has been in
7 New York State. So it's not like this is
8 something new. It's been in place for almost
9 two years. I just -- I'm having a hard time
10 wrapping my head around why we do not have
11 this in place right now.

12 But again, I do appreciate the efforts
13 that have been made as far as the lock and
14 block. And is there anything more we can do
15 to get the word out about that while we're
16 waiting for this chip technology?

17 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yeah. Just
18 please understand, I share your frustration.
19 There's nothing more important than being
20 able to protect people's benefits. And I
21 agree, the government should not have to pay
22 twice. But more importantly, the people
23 whose benefits are stolen, as you know, it's
24 a significant issue for their household

1 budget.

2 We -- with respect to the
3 lock-and-block, as I mentioned, we did look
4 into it based on some of your inquiries about
5 its usage, and it's not nearly where it needs
6 to be. So like I said, we are conducting an
7 outreach campaign via text this week to all
8 SNAP households to make sure that they are
9 aware of the lock-and-block technology. And
10 then we are also moving toward another
11 enhancement with that that would permit
12 people to "block and block" their benefits by
13 using a telephone as opposed to the current
14 option being online or a mobile app.

15 SENATOR MURRAY: And do we have any
16 numbers -- 10 seconds left -- do we have any
17 numbers thus far as to the lock-and-block?
18 Has it been effective?

19 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: It is being
20 used, but it is far underutilized, and so
21 outreach is important.

22 SENATOR MURRAY: Thank you,
23 Commissioner.

24 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you, Senator.

1 Assemblyman Maher, five minutes.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Thank you.

3 Thank you for being here, for your
4 testimony.

5 I wanted to start with Raise the Age.
6 So I really appreciate your support for this
7 program. I believe it is something that is
8 well-intended. I don't know that I can share
9 that same support based on these results.
10 And I just want to get to some of the causes.

11 So obviously nearly a billion dollars,
12 not funding it is going to really affect how
13 this has been implemented. And my hope is
14 that that will solve a lot of those issues.
15 However, before we really tackle the issue
16 and create a sustainable way forward, I think
17 we need to accurately quantify the problem.

18 So my question, my first question
19 would be when it comes to 16- and
20 17-year-olds, we have a lot of statistics
21 from a lot of reports that I've read that
22 suggests they're not being put in jails, as
23 was the intent of Raise the Age, and/or
24 prisons for misdemeanors and felonies. But

1 there's also a lot of cases where services
2 they are supposed to receive are not being
3 provided.

4 So my question is what is happening to
5 these 16- and 17-year-olds when they become
6 18, 19, 20 and 21? And do you have any
7 specific information on what the arrest rates
8 have been during those last seven years for
9 those ages? And has that been part of your
10 conversation on how to address this moving
11 forward?

12 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
13 Thank you very much for your question -- it's
14 hard to see -- Assemblyman.

15 So going back to Raise the Age
16 legislative intent, I appreciate that you
17 understand the importance of not putting our
18 young people in prison, 16 and 17 years old.

19 To your point regarding 18 to 21, we
20 still serve those young people within our
21 current facilities. I just wanted to make
22 the distinction.

23 In terms of crime overall, we
24 understand that crime is down, and youth

1 crime is consistent with adult crime. There
2 have been some spikes in certain areas.

3 If I understand your question
4 correctly, it is what more can we do to
5 ensure that these young people don't enter
6 this system at all. And so this is an
7 incredibly local response. Again, we defer
8 to our counties to create the plans so that
9 they are using efficacious models and
10 interventions that actually work.

11 We work hand in hand as it relates to
12 the young people who do enter the system.
13 And if their first stop is detention, let's
14 say, we are working 24/7 to help find beds
15 throughout the state. We make sure that our
16 young people are, you know, if they are
17 leaving detention and then entering our
18 system in the state, that that process is
19 seamless. And then we are providing
20 rehabilitative types of services within our
21 facilities.

22 So I don't have the numbers in front
23 of me today in terms of the actual numbers
24 and breakdowns by crime. But I'm happy to

1 provide that to you. I believe the
2 Department of Criminal Justice Services
3 maintains that data, and we are in constant
4 communication with that team.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Thank you. I have
6 two more questions, and I've got to hurry.

7 My final conclusion, it's kind of what
8 you said, is I do think there are a lot more
9 issues with this program. I have heard from
10 a lot of case studies, and I'd love to work
11 with both my colleagues and your offices to
12 try to address how some of these horrific
13 things are happening due to this program
14 being implemented in the way that it has.
15 Whether it's on you or the counties, whoever
16 it is, just the importance of having that
17 discussion and talking about those cases that
18 are taking place.

19 The second item I want to talk about
20 was childcare. A lot of investment has gone
21 into families being able to afford childcare,
22 but there has been a huge amount of misses
23 when it comes to the childcare providers
24 themselves. Obviously we heard about

1 insurance issues with foster care. Those
2 same insurance shortfalls exist with
3 childcare facilities.

4 When it comes to the desert grants
5 that have been awarded, it seems as though
6 not all of that 100 million, if that's the
7 accurate number, was given to those
8 facilities. Was there money left over, and
9 how was that used if it didn't go to those
10 facilities that weren't able to meet those
11 deadlines?

12 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

13 Thank you for that question.

14 In terms of the desert grants, again,
15 that was administered prior to my time. But
16 I understand it was very successful. We
17 were -- OCFS worked feverishly to get the
18 funding out the door, and that was supported
19 through federal funds. And so those grants
20 have terminated. But, you know, we're a work
21 in progress. But I think the historic
22 7 billion from the Governor, with the
23 assistance of this body, has been tremendous
24 in terms of expanding the opportunities. We

1 have seen a 34 percent growth --

2 (Time clock sounds.)

3 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Thank you. I'll
4 have to catch you later --

5 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: I
6 can talk to you later.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: -- for my last
8 question. Thank you.

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senate?

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

11 I'm sorry, second ranker,
12 Senator Rolison.

13 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you,
14 Madam Chair.

15 And thank you both for being here this
16 morning. My focus is with OCFS.

17 So Commissioner Harris-Madden, when
18 you were confirmed last year, and looking at
19 your career in local government -- City of
20 Mount Vernon in Westchester County, where
21 local governments need to be very flexible
22 and to collaborate with multiple partners to
23 see that the job is done and done
24 efficiently -- what have you found in your

1 short tenure here at OCFS, where OCFS can
2 lead a discussion amongst multiple agencies
3 to deliver these services?

4 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
5 Thank you, Senator Rolison. It's great to
6 talk with you again.

7 SENATOR ROLISON: Yes.

8 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: We
9 work with our local governments routinely.
10 And, you know, that spans across all of the
11 domains. We have Aid to Localities, where we
12 support our municipal agencies or municipal
13 governments so that they can provide positive
14 youth development, they can provide
15 preventive services, of course child welfare
16 services, juvenile justice services. So
17 we're in constant communication.

18 We're also partners with a number of
19 advocacy groups, and we do meet routinely, I
20 meet routinely with these organizations to
21 hear what they are seeing on the ground.

22 But essentially we are
23 state-supervised and locally administered, so
24 those decisions that are made at the local

1 level are really critical, and I think it
2 underscores your point that, you know, our
3 persistence in encouraging them -- an example
4 being Raise the Age -- to, you know, develop
5 plans that are responsive to their community
6 needs, we do routinely.

7 So I think that answers your question.

8 SENATOR ROLISON: And also, too, what
9 about at the state level? Because one of the
10 things that I have heard since being here,
11 and heard prior to that when I was a mayor,
12 was the complexity of dealing with multiple
13 Os, and families have -- using the Os for
14 lots of different reasons to help them with
15 their children and their family issues and
16 the situations that they have.

17 That seems to -- obviously that's a
18 tougher probably collaboration. But are you
19 trying to bring the local to the state?

20 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: I
21 think the locals are with the state --

22 SENATOR ROLISON: To collaborate
23 amongst your -- your fellow commissioners?

24 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: I

1 think they are. Our sister agencies also,
2 you know, are routinely in the field
3 listening and learning from those that are
4 boots on the ground.

5 In terms of our interagency
6 communications, you know, I'm told that we
7 have now, you know, enhanced communication.
8 We work very closely with our colleagues to
9 try to find solutions and to be thought
10 partners with our local communities.

11 SENATOR ROLISON: Well, thank you.
12 That's good to hear.

13 On the capital program for childcare,
14 different regions of the state, childcare
15 deserts. How flexible is that money so local
16 municipalities, local agencies can use that
17 money to how it works within their region?

18 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
19 Sure. I mean, just like any other
20 procurement we would expect that
21 organizations apply for this funding.
22 They're actually anticipating local support.
23 So, you know, we are enthusiastic and believe
24 that we will be working with the local

1 communities.

2 And we always encourage collaboration
3 and partnership within our, you know,
4 requests for proposals, but also in the
5 responses. And so we will continue to look
6 at the breakout. New York is just so
7 dichotomous in terms of its vastness and the
8 differences within the communities, but we
9 try our best to create a methodology that
10 looks at a breakdown that's equitable across
11 the state.

12 SENATOR ROLISON: In the substitute
13 program for childcare that has been rolled
14 out -- I think it's \$3 million has been
15 committed to that -- I recently got a
16 correspondence from a local county social
17 services that when the teachers register, can
18 they register locally to be able to expand
19 that pool and not have to go through the
20 state? Is there some flexibility there?

21 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: I'm
22 not sure I understand the question. Can
23 they, for substitute pools --

24 SENATOR ROLISON: Right, with the

1 pools that are going to be created to fill
2 the gaps when you need a substitute at a
3 childcare.

4 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: Yes.

5 SENATOR ROLISON: How flexible is it
6 for them to work with their local DSS to be
7 able to register and qualify there versus the
8 state level?

9 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: We
10 envision it to be very flexible, which is why
11 we are, you know, looking to the local --
12 hyper local organizations to apply so that
13 it's regionalized as well so that, you know,
14 there's opportunities throughout the state.

15 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you.

16 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
17 Thank you.

18 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman Clark
19 for three minutes.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thank you.

21 A first quick question to
22 Commissioner Guinn.

23 So on the BABY Benefit program, we've
24 been looking for years and had some much

1 bigger ask and commitment in our Assembly
2 one-house last year to do exactly this. We
3 do think supporting new moms is really a way
4 to ensure that that family gets off on the
5 right foot, that we can change the trajectory
6 of that child by pulling families out of
7 poverty.

8 I'm wondering, though, in the proposal
9 in the Governor's budget, is that based on
10 any other -- the numbers seem very low to me.
11 And my biggest fear is that we do something
12 and we do it too low and it doesn't have the
13 impact that we need it to have.

14 Is that proposal based on any
15 successful pilots in terms of the numbers
16 used in it?

17 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: It's not
18 necessarily based on a particular pilot. But
19 as you've noted, there's a ton of evidence
20 out there about how supporting individuals
21 during pregnancy, as well as when children
22 are very young, that even modest investments
23 can make a significant difference in terms of
24 the trajectory for that family and for that

1 child.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: But you would
3 agree that it probably makes sense to ensure
4 that the amount we're using has been proven
5 to be effective, versus just putting a number
6 in there, not having it be effective and not
7 work the way we want it to.

8 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: I mean, we
9 do think that this will be effective.
10 Obviously I think with many studies that are
11 out there, increased amounts will make an
12 increased difference in terms of reducing the
13 stress factors within that household that
14 parents often face, and other efforts that
15 would improve the child well-being.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Wonderful.
17 Perfect. Okay, on to childcare.

18 Quickly, I can't emphasize more on the
19 workforce. I understand -- I mean, we
20 have -- I've now toured a few centers just
21 recently that have literally their doors
22 shuttered on a couple of rooms, not because
23 they need capital to build out but because
24 they need staff to staff them. We have one

1 owner who owns multiple centers and he has,
2 he says, upwards of 15 rooms he can't open
3 right now.

4 So when we talk capital I appreciate
5 it, I know there are still needs out there,
6 but we know the workforce urgency is so much
7 greater. And I appreciate finding -- and I
8 do agree that we need to get to a point where
9 we have a sustainable, permanent line of
10 funding for that. But until then, I still
11 feel like we've been told now for six years
12 in various reports that this is what we need.
13 Why not do it one more time this year and
14 then use the year to get to a point where we
15 have a permanent source to fund that?

16 That's a comment. You don't need to
17 answer, because you talked about it. I do
18 want to quickly get to minimum earnings. The
19 Governor vetoed my bill last year. Do we not
20 think that those who are the lowest-paid --
21 our contractors, our independent workers --
22 need the dollars to get childcare? Don't
23 they deserve it as much as those who get
24 regular paychecks?

1 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

2 Thank you for your question. I think --

3 (Time clock sounds.)

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: To be continued.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator

6 Scarcella-Spanton.

7 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you,

8 Commissioners. Good morning.

9 My first question is for

10 Commissioner Harris-Madden.

11 My district was really negatively

12 impacted by the new eligibility provisions in

13 the LEAPS programming. We actually lost all

14 programming on Staten Island, and some

15 programming also in Southern Brooklyn.

16 Staten Island particularly was a huge problem

17 because there's a lot of youth violence, so

18 these schools depend on these after-school

19 programs.

20 So I have two questions. My first

21 would be, what is being done to give

22 providers the tools that they need to be

23 approved and receive funding? Because that

24 was a big problem.

1 A lot of the providers got a letter
2 stating that they were approved but not
3 funded. So they weren't sure what more they
4 could do to actually receive that funding,
5 and then they were left scrambling because of
6 the timeline that they got that letter.

7 And my second question is, is there a
8 plan for more equity across the boroughs to
9 bring this programming forward? Thank you.

10 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

11 Thank you so much, Senator.

12 I'll back into that question. We are
13 absolutely committed to equity. And as I
14 mentioned earlier, New York City was just a
15 very fierce competition. Your question
16 concerning quality, if you will, or what
17 could be done to improve the process for
18 applicants -- you know, I think that again,
19 with the fierce competition, many of the
20 organizations, while they may have crafted a
21 very well-written response, just due to the
22 sheer volume of applicants unfortunately they
23 made it to the "could be funded but were not
24 funded because we ran out of funds.:

1 In terms of Staten Island, I
2 understand that there's one community school
3 that's there that, you know, multiple
4 agencies wrote for and again were approved on
5 the list but we did not have the remaining
6 funding to support it.

7 But overarchingly, you know, I would
8 just say that with the infusion of money,
9 again thanks to Governor Hochul and this
10 body, we were able to actually expand the
11 number of seats for LEAPS and create a
12 higher-quality system. The existing -- the
13 programs that existed previously were based
14 on a 20-year model. And so after hearing
15 from the field, the team prior to me made the
16 decision to, you know, consolidate and create
17 LEAPS. And there are benefits that are
18 yielded throughout the state.

19 So I know that doesn't give as much,
20 you know, comfort for you in Staten Island.
21 However, I would note that Staten Island has
22 a number of DCYD-funded programs, I believe
23 it's like 40-some-odd programs. And I don't
24 have the map in front of me, but we're just

1 one part of the entire after-school system.
2 There's also, you know, New York State
3 Education Department with 21st Century, there
4 are, you know, other local organizations that
5 provide after-school programming.

6 So, you know, the state provides, you
7 know, a small piece to the overall picture.

8 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you
9 so much. And I look forward to working with
10 your office again to just see what we could
11 do to help get them to the place where they
12 get funding. Because they really do want the
13 funding. They're a big fan of LEAPS. So
14 thank you.

15 And my next question is for
16 Commissioner Guinn. I think it's a great
17 investment for the ESSHI program this year.
18 One of the developments on the Brooklyn side
19 of my district is called Surf Vets. It's
20 supportive housing units for veterans. It's
21 actually a really successful model. They
22 have a business on the bottom -- Cyclone
23 Bagels, where the veterans work. They bring
24 in the VA to get disability benefits.

1 I notice here it's kind of not
2 necessarily specific. It says "supportive
3 housing for families and individuals who are
4 unsheltered and have a disabling condition."
5 Is there any subcategories broken down that
6 we could carve out for veterans, let's say?
7 Because I think that this is such an amazing
8 model that the state could really be
9 utilizing. And I've had some people express
10 interest in other places in the state.

11 So if they could tap into something
12 like this, I think it would be a great
13 opportunity. Thank you.

14 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yeah, I've
15 been to that location, and it is phenomenal.
16 It's a great place for people to live.
17 It's -- they're very fortunate, both the
18 building and the location.

19 So with ESSHI, veterans -- I believe
20 it is an eligible group to be served.
21 Certainly veterans is also a focus area with
22 respect to our HHAP capital funding as well.
23 So those are groups of individuals that also
24 are impacted by homelessness that are

1 eligible for the various services.

2 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Excellent,
3 thank you. And I'll look forward to
4 connecting some of those providers who are
5 interested in just pointing them in the right
6 direction on how to get the ball rolling.

7 Thank you so much. That's all the
8 questions I have today.

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
10 Mitaynes.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

12 This is for the OTDA commissioner.
13 We're talking about SNAP fraud and skimming.
14 Can you provide data on the number of
15 reported cases in the past year, how many
16 have been resolved and what actions OTDA has
17 taken to assist victims?

18 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So with
19 respect to the number, I can tell you the
20 number of households that have been paid
21 through skimming. Certainly through SNAP and
22 PA combined is about 125,000 households have
23 received payments, or payments have been
24 issued.

1 People continue to accept applications
2 for public assistance skimming, and we still
3 have the authority to reimburse stolen public
4 assistance. But unfortunately the federal
5 government last December did not authorize
6 the ability for states to reimburse for
7 stolen SNAP benefits.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Given the
9 devastating impact of skimming on low-income
10 households, would OTDA support a state-funded
11 reimbursement program for victims? What
12 legal or budgetary challenges would need to
13 be addressed to implement such a measure?

14 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So at least
15 we certainly would support any funds that
16 could be made available to help individuals
17 whose benefits have been stolen so that they
18 can get reimbursed and so that they can make
19 up that loss in their budget. We understand
20 how devastating this is for these households.

21 In terms of investment, I think that
22 if we could have additional investment we
23 would certainly also concurrently want to
24 move forward with chip cards to provide a

1 permanent solution.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES:

3 Ms. Harris-Madden, really quick, just a yes
4 or no.

5 Childcare workers are some of the
6 lowest paid in the state, receiving wage
7 supplements using federal stimulus dollars
8 over the last several years. With no wage
9 supplements this year, would you say this is
10 a pay cut?

11 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: I
12 could not attest to whether that's a pay cut.
13 I can tell you that, you know, we released in
14 October the new market rates, which have
15 increased to the 80th percentile. And that's
16 an average of a 12 percent increase.

17 So organizations can make decisions
18 based on this new amount, which by the way is
19 above the federal 75 percentile rate. So
20 what that means is that there has been an
21 increase in the system in the minimum amount
22 that childcare providing agencies can charge
23 to their local departments of social
24 services.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: What steps is
2 OCFS taking to eliminate barriers to
3 childcare access for immigrant families and
4 those who may not qualify for federally
5 funded programs due to immigration status?

6 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
7 That's a great question. You know, we have
8 to adhere to the federal rules currently as
9 the federal allocation is sizable.

10 (Time clock sounds.)

11 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: I
12 can get back to you.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senator?

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

16 Senator Cordell Cleare, chair.

17 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

18 Good morning, Commissioners Guinn and
19 Harris-Madden. Good to see you here today.

20 My first question, I want to drill
21 down a little bit more on ESSHI, get a little
22 clarity on this. I have some of the older
23 supportive housing buildings in my district
24 who did not get the same level of funding.

1 that the workers were not included in the
2 COLA adjustment, and what we can do to bring
3 that up, because they are in desperate need
4 of that funding.

5 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. So
6 while there isn't a specific wage COLA for
7 these programs, the ESSHI program does
8 permit, has historically permitted a
9 2 percent escalator per year. And obviously
10 providers can pass that on to their workers,
11 and we certainly encourage them to do so and
12 expect that they will do so, given the tight
13 labor market.

14 And then we also similarly hope that
15 with the additional infusion of funding for
16 NYSSHP, that that will also provide
17 opportunities for wages to be increased for
18 those workers.

19 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. Well, thank
20 you. I look forward to communicating with
21 you. I'm really concerned about the
22 supportive housing units that we do have in
23 my district, and I'm very interested in
24 preserving them as well as creating more,

1 because the need is there.

2 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Absolutely.

3 We'd be happy to work with you.

4 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

5 For the HEAP program -- I know you
6 talked about that a little earlier. But as
7 climate change has continued to occur and
8 we're having hotter and hotter summers,
9 neighborhoods like Harlem, the South Bronx
10 and other areas are experiencing extreme heat
11 vulnerability and a disparate number of
12 heat-related hospitalizations and
13 heat-related deaths.

14 Is there a way that we can look at the
15 current funding? It seems as if we always
16 run out of money, you know, and we don't have
17 enough. And can we take into account
18 neighborhoods that are experiencing this
19 extreme heat vulnerability to lower the
20 deaths and hospitalizations?

21 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yeah,
22 definitely reflect that when it's hot in
23 New York City, it's really hot. And the
24 urban areas, that heat is a real issue for

1 households.

2 I mean, the HEAP funding, it's a block
3 grant, it's a capped block grant. So like I
4 mentioned earlier, we have dedicated
5 \$15 million to support this year's cooling
6 program. We really would need additional
7 funds to expand that.

8 I know that the Department of Health
9 is also working on a program also for those
10 who are medically in need that would -- that
11 medical condition is exacerbated by extreme
12 heat -- and we can certainly get more
13 information -- and that would also support
14 the purchasing of air-conditionings and fans.
15 And we'd be happy to get more information
16 about that program and bring that back to
17 your office as well.

18 SENATOR CLEARE: Well, I'd appreciate
19 that. I'd really love to be able to
20 prioritize that for them.

21 The birthing allowance that is getting
22 ready to be given, I want to know how will
23 the one-time benefit for public assistance
24 recipients be calculated upon the birth of a

1 new child, and what will that amount be?

2 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So the
3 benefit is structured so that it's \$100 per
4 month during pregnancy, and that would be as
5 soon as the individual has medical
6 documentation of their pregnancy that that
7 benefit would begin.

8 And then the \$1,200 payment would
9 occur at the -- after the child is born and
10 added to the public assistance case, that
11 \$1,200 amount would be provided to the
12 household.

13 So over the course of the pregnancy
14 and the first year of that child, it's
15 probably likely going to be around \$1800 per
16 family, which is a significant investment to
17 help those families.

18 SENATOR CLEARE: And how will that --
19 or will that, how will that affect the
20 current public assistance? Is that going to
21 impact the benefits that people are already
22 getting?

23 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: It will not
24 reduce the benefits that they are currently

1 receiving. And our understanding is is that
2 the \$1200 one-time payment, that we will also
3 be able to exclude that so it is not counted
4 towards SNAP benefits.

5 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. All right.
6 Thank you.

7 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: You're
8 welcome.

9 SENATOR CLEARE: Good to see you.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
11 Assembly.

12 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman
13 Burdick.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Thank you.

15 And I want to thank you for your
16 testimony. And this is a question for
17 Dr. Harris-Madden.

18 And I first want to thank you for
19 meeting by Zoom with Senator Harckham and me
20 earlier this week to discuss the LEAPS
21 program and organizations which were
22 disqualified from applying for LEAPS due to
23 the criteria which provided that they may be
24 serving the community that has high needs,

1 but because they're located in a school
2 district in which there are some
3 very-high-wealth individuals, the metrics
4 were skewed and distorted and so they were
5 ineligible to apply.

6 And so as we mentioned in our Zoom
7 meeting, we have found that a number of
8 organizations across the state were
9 ineligible to even apply, so we don't even
10 know that they were -- so they were obviously
11 not rejected but couldn't apply in the first
12 place.

13 Do you -- does your department have
14 any sense now, since our conversations, as to
15 how many there might be and how many needs
16 might not be served because of this outcome?

17 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

18 Thank you, Assemblyman. Good to see you
19 again.

20 You know, we again champion
21 after-school, and it is a holistic approach.
22 And in particular, some of the areas that
23 you're describing unfortunately did not meet
24 the criteria for LEAPS. However, previously

1 our Empire and Advantage grants that were
2 combined for LEAPS had one of the -- one of
3 those had similar eligibility criteria.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Right. No, I'm
5 aware of that.

6 But do you have any better idea now?
7 You know, this is further, I think, to
8 Chair Hevesi's questions regarding it. And
9 more specifically, you know, if a
10 supplemental funding stream were provided,
11 would your department be able to issue an RFP
12 that includes in its criteria the community
13 served, as opposed to the metrics which
14 disqualify them?

15 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
16 Again, if the policymakers made such
17 decisions, we would be a partner because we
18 naturally want to invest in our young people
19 and after-school.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: And so what
21 would you suggest now for those agencies that
22 are out in the cold? Anything?

23 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: Of
24 course. Fund development. I mean, that's

1 very important to look at all resources. As
2 we noted, there's the CCAP program, where you
3 can apply individually.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Thank you very
5 much.

6 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
7 Thank you.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Borrello.

9 SENATOR BORRELLO: Thank you,
10 Madam Chair.

11 First of all, thank you both for being
12 here.

13 Just to let you know, I sit on the
14 board of a not-for-profit childcare center,
15 so I want to focus my attention on the
16 workforce in childcare.

17 You know, one of the biggest
18 challenges we face is that we are trying to
19 fund recurring expenses like payroll with
20 non-recurring funding from grants. And it's
21 a Hunger Games, right, for everyone. But,
22 you know, childcare, in my opinion, is just a
23 building block of economic development,
24 workforce development. It is one of the

1 major barriers to people entering the
2 workforce. And we have a workforce problem.

3 So I think it's incumbent upon us to
4 fund childcare like an economic development
5 resource. And as a result, you know, it
6 falls, in my opinion, on OCFS. There is a
7 childcare workforce development funding
8 stream, is my understanding. Can you please
9 tell me what the plans look like this year
10 for that?

11 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

12 Thank you, Senator. And I agree with you,
13 childcare is part of the backbone of our
14 economic future here in New York State.

15 And so I'm not clear on exactly which
16 program you're referencing, but I will say
17 that we're continuing the \$2 million for the
18 workforce supports, which is for the Early
19 Education Career Centers, supporting the
20 workforce there.

21 We continue to support the
22 scholarships for the workforce so that they
23 can hire interns in higher education. And
24 the Governor has proposed tuition-free for

1 CUNY and SUNY to include now childcare early
2 childhood, so that helps in terms of
3 developing the pipeline.

4 SENATOR BORRELLO: Would that be like
5 very similar where it would be paid off over
6 time, you know, as far as -- you know, just
7 like the Excelsior Scholarship? Is that -- I
8 mean, we have people -- we're paying people
9 that have master's degrees, you know, \$18 an
10 hour. I mean, how do we expect them to pay
11 back these loans? I just -- you know, we
12 need to infuse more, I think, funding to this
13 as a -- again, a critical step.

14 So I appreciate what you're answering
15 so far. I'm just saying is there a way to
16 broaden that? Because \$2 million statewide
17 is not going to scratch the surface for the
18 need.

19 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
20 Thank you. And I think that's the aim of the
21 new coalition that is being formed that is
22 proposed in the Governor's Executive Budget.
23 They are looking to the tax experts,
24 businesspersons fiscally to develop some

1 plans and strategies so that we have a
2 sustainable and strengthened system.

3 Lots of research is going to be behind
4 this, and, you know, hopefully they'll have
5 some recommendations to bring forth to this
6 body so that we can pursue a more sustainable
7 plan for the future.

8 SENATOR BORRELLO: Well, thank you.
9 And again, funding this for what it is, which
10 is, you know, a basic foundation for our
11 workforce I think is the best way to justify
12 the expense. It will save us money down the
13 road. Thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Ra for
15 five minutes.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

17 Good morning -- it's still morning.
18 Good morning, commissioners.

19 I wanted to talk about the childcare,
20 in particular the sub pool. So I know
21 there's \$3 million along with this. Can you
22 provide a little more detail as to what's
23 being done with that money, how this is going
24 to be done? In particular, you know, who's

1 going to fill the role of the childcare
2 support centers?

3 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

4 Sure. Thank you for that question.

5 You know, the substitute pool was one
6 of the recommendations of the Child Care
7 Availability Task Force. And this will allow
8 for organizations who are selected through a
9 procurement process to vet -- to recruit, vet
10 and train individuals who then will serve as
11 substitutes to support, you know, childcare
12 centers, family home centers, so that they
13 don't have to close classrooms in the event
14 of absence from their personnel.

15 And so, you know, at this point we're
16 looking to make sure that we are creating
17 pipelines as well. It's been talked about at
18 length today how we can create a sustainable
19 feeder into this system. So we envision
20 substitute pools as another benefit to that
21 process.

22 And in terms of the implementation,
23 there will be a procurement process to which
24 nonprofits and, you know, our CCR&Rs will

1 apply. And then from there they will then
2 take the work of hiring the substitute pools
3 and then deploying them. But the CCR&Rs are
4 really critical in our communities because
5 they already provide resources -- I'm not
6 saying they're all going to apply. It's up
7 to them, their discretion. But we suspect
8 several of them will, which will be able to
9 kind of layer on additional supports.

10 But the \$3 million really will go
11 towards the workforce, supporting those
12 people that are working so that they can
13 afford to be sick and they're not coming in
14 ill or just calling out and leaving the
15 childcare providers without coverage.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. And, I mean,
17 do you foresee this kind of being piloted in
18 some way? Like I mean is it, you know,
19 regionally? Obviously you need to know
20 you're drawing from a region where people are
21 actually going to be able to get there. So
22 will there be partners in different parts of
23 the state?

24 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

1 Absolutely, yes. This will be regional. And
2 we do consider this a pilot to see how this
3 will work.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. And so you
5 mentioned that the \$3 million will support
6 the workforce. So, I mean, kind of
7 incentivizing people to be on the -- in the
8 pool? Any incentives in terms of the
9 providers to participate in the program?

10 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: At
11 this time no incentives. We think that the
12 agencies will actually be -- you know,
13 participate and they'll be working with
14 trusted individuals at the local level so
15 that they can, you know, fill those positions
16 temporarily, on a substitute basis, so that
17 they don't close.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. And lastly,
19 not so much about the pool but just in
20 general, is there any thought being given in
21 terms of whether it's law or regulation -- my
22 understanding is that, you know, you may have
23 a childcare agency or whatever with multiple
24 locations and they may have staffing at one

1 location and have a need at another one where
2 they need a substitute, and that they're not
3 allowed to pull that person over because
4 their certification or their license is for
5 one particular location.

6 Am I correct about that? And is that
7 something we're looking at as well?

8 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: So
9 the safety is always important for us. It's
10 tantamount to what we do in this space. And
11 so we want to make sure that the
12 organizations go through a process which is
13 called the SACC licensing process, and that's
14 where we take into account all the
15 individuals that will be working on-site.

16 So, you know, it's a little nuanced
17 but there may be a way prospectively to look
18 at how organizations might include, you know,
19 the same person on each site. I don't want
20 to say for sure that that can happen, but I'm
21 just thinking that we could look into that.
22 But there is a reason why we insist that, you
23 know, those that are hired are reported to us
24 so that we can make sure there's appropriate

1 clearances so they can work with our
2 children.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

4 As my colleague said earlier, you
5 know, we can give all kinds of tax
6 incentives, we can do all these different
7 things, but if there's no workforce within
8 this sector, then there's not going to be
9 spots for the children to go. So thank you.

10 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senate?

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator April
12 Baskin.

13 SENATOR BASKIN: Thank you,
14 Madam Chair.

15 Thank you, Commissioners, for being
16 here this morning.

17 Commissioner Guinn, I have a question
18 regarding OTDA and the fact that there are
19 several resettlement, refugee resettlement
20 agencies in my district who have called my
21 office regarding the fact that they've had to
22 lay off several employees, which is further
23 complicating their abilities to be able to
24 help individuals in our community, which are

1 my constituents.

2 What would need to shift in OTDA in
3 order to be able to step up and support these
4 agencies in light of the federal government
5 stepping back from support?

6 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right, yeah.
7 And as you said, that is definitely a result
8 of federal action. It was really the first
9 we saw impacting the refugee resettlement
10 agencies throughout the state, that they did
11 receive a directive from the federal
12 government to stop work.

13 I understand that there are lots of
14 efforts underway to see if there's something
15 that can be done to intervene in that to
16 continue those funds flowing.

17 There are funds available through
18 our -- the New York State Refugee Program
19 that our agency does administer that can
20 provide some support to those households.
21 But definitely that lack of federal funding
22 is critical at that time, especially when
23 it's for that first 90 days when these
24 families are just moving in and acclimating

1 in neighborhoods throughout our state.

2 So we do have some services that could
3 augment those providers, but certainly not
4 sufficient to replace that federal funding.
5 And hopefully efforts will be able to bring
6 that back online.

7 SENATOR BASKIN: Any ideas or plans
8 forthcoming around helping these agencies
9 maintain their stability? Because they're
10 the boots on the ground service providers,
11 and they would have the direct proximity to
12 build the healthy relationships, restore
13 public trust. Anything in this space not
14 necessarily for the constituents but for the
15 agencies to continue being able to provide
16 the service?

17 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. I
18 mean, we -- the providers that we fund are
19 selected based on the fact that they are
20 local affiliates of refugee resettlement
21 agencies, and typically awarded funds through
22 a procurement process. We do not have an
23 open procurement process, I believe, that
24 those agencies would be able to tap into.

1 But we certainly understand and
2 appreciate their particular role in this
3 process.

4 SENATOR BASKIN: I would just close
5 and add that in light of the situation with
6 the federal government that we explore a
7 process where a lot of these organizations
8 who may not fall within a traditional
9 procurement process have some type of conduit
10 to be able to gain state support so that they
11 can continue just helping communities thrive.

12 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Okay, thank
13 you.

14 SENATOR BASKIN: Thank you guys for
15 being here.

16 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblymember
17 Eachus.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Thank you, Chair.
19 Thank you, Commissioners, for being
20 here.

21 The only thing I'm a little depressed
22 about is in both your testimonies you
23 referred to inflation. And yet the best
24 inflation rate -- meaning the lowest that I

1 could find -- over the last year was
2 2.8 percent. And yet here in the
3 Governor's budget we're looking at the
4 possibility of a 2.1 percent increase.

5 So my question is, at any point in
6 time -- I know it's your boss and so on like
7 that, basically -- do you let the Governor
8 know that she's not keeping up with the
9 actual inflation rate for these workers, for
10 these foster families and so on like that?

11 Because you're very positive in your
12 testimonies, but they're falling behind --
13 the childcare workers, everybody.

14 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: Is
15 that for both, or me --

16 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Either one. Both
17 your testimonies.

18 (Laughter.)

19 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: I would just
20 say that the Governor's budget is making
21 significant investments to support families
22 and organizations that serve families
23 throughout the state.

24 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: I

1 would echo that.

2 We absolutely know that the TII is
3 very important, which is why we've included
4 this in the calculus, and we hope through
5 negotiations maybe that number will change.
6 But if not, we do know that we are targeting
7 our very vulnerable populations. So in OCFS,
8 this rate is going to be applied to our
9 foster-care agencies as well as our adoptive
10 parents and towards NY III, which is a
11 housing subsidy for foster care.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Well, I
13 appreciate your optimism, but I don't think
14 it's reality, to tell you the truth. But
15 thank you.

16 That's all I have. Thank you.

17 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senator Weber.

18 SENATOR WEBER: Good afternoon.

19 So I have really a regionalized
20 question. You know, throughout the summer
21 and fall of this year and last year we got a
22 lot of calls from childcare providers and
23 daycare centers in terms of fire inspections.
24 I guess there was a big delay and backlog in

1 getting fire inspections done I guess in a
2 timely manner.

3 And some of the research I've done has
4 indicated that maybe there's a shortage of
5 staffing or maybe some of the grade pay for
6 fire and safety inspectors is maybe too low
7 and we're having maybe trouble getting enough
8 fire inspectors to, you know, be in the
9 industry as well.

10 So I just wanted to bring that to your
11 attention. I don't know if you have any
12 comment to make on it. But, you know, it was
13 a very stressful time for a lot of centers
14 that wanted to open and they were -- you
15 know, they were feeling the pressures of not
16 having their certificates in time.

17 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
18 Thank you, Senator, for that question and
19 comment.

20 To my knowledge, we've actually
21 expanded the number of fire inspectors.
22 We're using contractors and working locally
23 to ensure that we have that support so that
24 we can move the process along faster,

1 particularly for our school-aged children and
2 the childcare programs.

3 But I would need to get back to you to
4 see what that actually looks like. I don't
5 have the figures on me at this moment.

6 SENATOR WEBER: No, that would be
7 great. Thank you.

8 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
9 González-Rojas.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Thank
11 you so much.

12 This question is for
13 Commissioner Guinn. I really want to go back
14 to the SNAP skimming issue.

15 And you're hearing a resounding
16 concern. It's impacted over a hundred
17 thousand New Yorkers. And with the feds
18 pulling back on their ability to replace
19 those benefits, that's really going to harm,
20 you know, our everyday neighbors that are
21 depending on SNAP to feed their families.

22 So can you be very clear about why you
23 suggested the cost might be 40 million? I
24 have the bill that would actually require us

1 to transition to the chip-enabled cards. We
2 were quoted 4 million for that transition.
3 And in an ideal world, the federal government
4 would be reimbursing us for half. So that
5 would be a net cost of 2 million to the
6 state.

7 The EMV chip can decrease fraud by
8 87 percent. And again, if we get to the root
9 of the problem we could, you know, not have
10 to pay back these families that are
11 suffering.

12 So can you be clear about what the
13 40 million would cover?

14 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yeah. And
15 thank you for your attention to this matter.
16 We agree it's of utmost importance.

17 The up to 40 million is based on
18 information that we collected from --
19 primarily from the State of California, also
20 some information from Oklahoma. California
21 has actually started to move in implementing
22 the chip card technology.

23 Like I said, we are continuing to
24 gather other information and think about

1 strategies that we could employ that would
2 bring that cost down, because we agree that
3 it is the most effective way that we could
4 protect people's benefits from being skimmed.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: But
6 would it cover -- is it just the transition?
7 Is it other systemic investments? And are
8 you clear that that's not even a fund to
9 reimburse the families, it's simply the
10 technical transition to the cards?

11 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So the cost
12 that we've identified is associated with
13 costs that it would require to amend the
14 existing EBT system to recognize and process
15 chip technology. So that's part of the cost.

16 And then the other portion of the cost
17 is primarily associated with a mass
18 distribution of new cards to all households
19 that receive SNAP and public assistance.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Yeah,
21 because we got the estimate from the
22 Empire State Justice Center and experts that
23 have worked on this.

24 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: We would be

1 very happy to have additional conversations
2 with you and work with you on this topic.

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Okay.

4 And then also we were discussing the
5 recommendations from the Child Poverty
6 Reduction Advisory Council around increasing
7 the minimum benefit. As you know, the SNAP
8 minimum benefit is \$23 a month. At this
9 point I don't think you can buy two dozen
10 eggs with \$23 a month. Over 100,000 --

11 (Time clock sounds.)

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Oh,
13 man. Anyway, it's something worth fighting
14 for. Thank you.

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Thank you.

16 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

17 Senate?

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

19 Hi. I'm the last Senator at the
20 moment, at least for the first round. So
21 appreciate you both being here.

22 And of course we did have some time to
23 talk about things before the hearing. But my
24 colleagues have raised a number of issues

1 that, you know, we just need to deal with.

2 So you've heard about the EBT cards,
3 and we've had that discussion. But we also
4 had something called the integrated
5 eligibility system that was supposed to
6 streamline the application and processing for
7 a variety of the programs through OTDA. And
8 my notes go back to 2018. Where are we on
9 that?

10 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So as -- I
11 acknowledge that it has been a process that
12 has been underway for many years. I would
13 say the current iteration does not go back to
14 2018.

15 But I would say a big difference with
16 this iteration is it is fully funded and we
17 are making significant progress in working
18 toward development. The project was taken
19 over from kind of a different leadership
20 structure so that it is not under the
21 leadership of ITS. But certainly we know
22 that it is also one of their highest
23 priorities, and it certainly remains a high
24 priority for our agency.

1 We understand the importance of making
2 it easier for people to apply as well as for
3 workers to process cases.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

5 And I know it was raised before, and
6 it's being raised at every hearing, how much
7 money we're at risk of losing from the
8 federal government, including programs run by
9 both of your agencies. But based on the
10 newspaper stories that are coming out, it
11 seems like the first round of cuts from the
12 federal government almost on a day-by-day
13 basis is the actual grants they give to
14 not-for-profits, not going through our state
15 budget to then move along, but actually just
16 being cut as grants through all these
17 different federal agencies.

18 Do we track any of that in our system
19 so that we will know, you know, we lost
20 \$60 million for this under the federal
21 changes, or 40 million for that? Because I'm
22 very concerned that this will be happening
23 and we won't even have a way to know exactly
24 who's getting hit and what that means.

1 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. I
2 mean, I would say first, for our agency,
3 obviously we don't have direct information
4 about grants that are going from the federal
5 government directly to nonprofits. But we do
6 have information obviously about the overall
7 funding amount that's available for the
8 various programs, and certainly can collect
9 information through -- our sources are also
10 various associations that are paying close
11 attention to each of these matters.

12 And so I think, you know, we are all
13 paying attention, people are definitely
14 looking at what's happening at the federal
15 level and being prepared to push back and to
16 make sure that funds continue to deliver
17 really needed services throughout our state.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Same situation
19 for you?

20 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: I
21 would say the same, yes. We have insight
22 into, you know, the broader numbers in terms
23 of the large allocations that come to our
24 departments, but not at a granular level.

1 We are closely monitoring and working
2 with the Governor's office and our legal
3 teams to just monitor around the clock when
4 new things kind of hit, and have been
5 actively communicating with the field to keep
6 kind of calm and let them know that we are
7 here to support and that we have confidence
8 in our Governor and the existing New York
9 State laws that protect New Yorkers.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So I think just
11 sticking with your agency, my colleague
12 Assemblyman Hevesi started out his
13 questioning this morning about Raise the Age
14 and the funding that has never gone from the
15 state to the city. And I think it's close to
16 \$800 million.

17 And I was quite shocked at that,
18 because I know that most of the programs in
19 the state are actually operating out of
20 New York City. And then I was doing a little
21 homework while we were up here listening, and
22 there was something in the statute that --
23 having to do with a 2 percent cap on property
24 taxes, and that the city was told they're not

1 eligible for that money.

2 But then I followed through and I was
3 told that they could waiver request for that
4 money.

5 So if they submit a waiver, are you
6 going to be able to give them the money that
7 they should have been getting all these
8 years?

9 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: To
10 my knowledge we have yet to receive a waiver
11 or request for a waiver. However, this is
12 something that we would look at.

13 But to your point, you know, based on
14 statute, that may be why New York City has
15 not submitted a waiver.

16 I will say that there's non-Raise the
17 Age -- so there's Raise the Age funds that do
18 support New York City in some ways, and
19 that's with our detention programs. And --
20 which, you know, support that similar
21 population.

22 But to answer your question
23 specifically, if and when we would receive
24 that request for a waiver, we would certainly

1 take that into consideration.

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. So you're
3 encouraging the City of New York to submit a
4 waiver for the Raise the Age funds that they
5 believe they would be eligible for, other
6 than this section of a different statute on
7 2 percent cap on property taxes, is that -- I
8 just want to make sure I'm hearing that
9 correctly.

10 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: So
11 to clarify, what I'm saying is from my
12 knowledge -- and it is limited in terms of
13 the history. But to my knowledge, we've not
14 received a request for the waiver.

15 And if we would receive one, we would,
16 you know, consider it and go back to both the
17 legislation and also discuss internally how
18 we might proceed.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: But you're not
20 saying to me, No, they have not fulfilled
21 their obligations under the Raise the Age
22 statute and that's why they haven't gotten
23 the funds.

24 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: I'm

1 saying that they have -- you know, they have
2 followed the legislation, at least our office
3 has, in terms of the cap, which prevented
4 them initially from applying.

5 However, I do believe -- and again,
6 I'm not the attorney in the room, but I do
7 believe there's an option for New York City
8 to submit a request through the waiver, which
9 we have yet to see. So ...

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay, so you need
11 the waiver but you don't currently have a
12 reason to believe that they are not
13 fulfilling the obligations of Raise the Age.
14 Is that a fair statement? I just want to
15 make sure --

16 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
17 Essentially.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay, thank you.

19 So then, Commissioner Guinn, there was
20 questions from colleague Senator Cordell
21 Cleare about the two different funding
22 streams for different kinds of supportive
23 housing.

24 And you clarified that yes, the

1 Governor put some additional money in for the
2 older contracts.

3 Can you tell me what, per unit, that
4 would increase their allocation?

5 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: I can't tell
6 you that at this point because we're
7 evaluating exactly how we would apply that
8 increase.

9 We're looking to make sure that we're
10 directing resources to those programs that
11 are most in need and do not have access to
12 significant resources outside of the NYSSHP
13 program.

14 I can only say that the 17 million
15 represents a 40 percent increase in funding
16 for NYSSHP.

17 But we would be happy to follow up
18 with you as we continue to work that through.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And what are
20 significant other resources? Are there other
21 government funding streams that I might not
22 be aware of that they are getting separate
23 from the state?

24 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: I believe

1 that many of the units receive support
2 through New York City.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. And then
4 in the contracts on obligations to serve for
5 both kinds of supportive housing contracts,
6 is there a big difference between the new and
7 the old? Because the dollar amounts are huge
8 differences.

9 So I'm just curious, are you just
10 making many less demands on the older
11 contracts?

12 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right.
13 There is a difference in the two contract
14 structures. So NYSSHP, the older version of
15 supportive housing, the intention there was
16 always to fund services but not necessarily
17 operating costs or rents.

18 ESSHI, when it was developed, was
19 developed to cover both services and
20 operating costs.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: But you break it
22 out. So you know, on the newer contracts,
23 what's going to rent, what's going to
24 services, right? And operating costs, I

1 assume?

2 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yes.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Everybody has
4 operating costs.

5 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: I believe
6 it's around 50-50. So about 12,500 for
7 services and 12,500 for rent. It might be a
8 little higher on the rent side.

9 But we can certainly get that
10 information to you as well.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: But just to get
12 it on record, there's no reason for any of us
13 to think both of those kinds of programs
14 don't have approximately the same service
15 costs. They might have different rent costs,
16 depending on the prices of the building.

17 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right, I
18 would agree that they both have similar
19 service costs and both serve very needy
20 populations.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. All right.

22 And you know what, the other questions
23 are longer than 28 seconds, so I'm not going
24 to start them. Thank you very much.

1 Assembly.

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you, Senator.

3 Assemblyman Anderson. He's gone?

4 Okay. Assemblywoman Rajkumar.

5 (No response.)

6 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman

7 Forrest.

8 (No response.)

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman Lee.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: It pays to wait.

11 Okay, this is for Commissioner

12 Harris-Madden. I just wanted to clarify

13 again on Raise the Age.

14 You mentioned that New York City does
15 have access to some Raise the Age funding, is
16 that correct?

17 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: So
18 Raise the Age has multiple pieces to it.
19 It's very complicated and I'm still learning.

20 But I will say that part of Raise the
21 Age includes detention, which we do support
22 in New York City. So the original statute
23 had a cap, to my understanding, for cities
24 with -- that exceeded 2 percent could not

1 apply. However, there is still an option to
2 submit a waiver for consideration.

3 So I hope that answers.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: So if New York
5 City is able to get that waiver, would you
6 support allocating some of the funding from
7 Raise the Age to nonprofits in New York City
8 who can support youth programs?

9 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
10 Again, the plan that would be submitted from
11 the local governments are reviewed, and then
12 once approved, then they would be able to --
13 so it's an incredibly local response. And if
14 New York City were to include nonprofits in
15 that plan, and that, you know, demonstrated
16 that they were addressing the need, then we
17 would take it under consideration.

18 But New York City again is an outlier
19 in this situation. So, you know, I would
20 have to get more details in terms of how we
21 would proceed with --

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Okay. And are you
23 able to -- once you approve the plan, are you
24 also tracking to make sure that the funding

1 is getting allocated?

2 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

3 Across the state we are tracking. We are
4 encouraging for, you know, local departments
5 of social services and/or units of
6 government, when they submit their plans,
7 there is the expectation that they will spend
8 on the programs that they intend to
9 implement.

10 And so, you know, it's based on
11 claiming. We're always asking for claims to
12 be submitted. Again, we rely on those
13 counties to submit the claims for
14 reimbursement.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Okay. And is that
16 public information where we can get -- we can
17 find out how many of the claims have been
18 unspent and where the claims are being spent
19 across the state?

20 OCFs COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: I'm
21 sure that we can get back to you.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Okay, great.

23 Thank you so much.

24 And for Commissioner Guinn, in October

1 the Governor announced an additional
2 35 million for COVID-related rent arrears.
3 Do you know how much of that has been spent
4 down for NYCHA?

5 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Okay, thank
6 you. The 35 million that was made available
7 to NYCHA, we have approved that plan and
8 NYCHA has drawn down the majority of those
9 funds.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Okay, great. Do
11 you know how many households that has
12 benefited?

13 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: I do not.
14 But we'd be happy to get that for you.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Great, thank you.
16 We appreciate your support on that.
17 It's impacted a number of residents in my
18 district. Thank you.

19 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
20 Torres.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN TORRES: It's really
22 hard. All right. Thank you, Chair.

23 Thank you, Commissioners, for being
24 here.

1 values that we hold as we move forward with
2 that.

3 The initiative referenced in the
4 Executive Budget is our effort to move
5 forward before we have that high-tech
6 support, so it essentially will be increased
7 data sharing between our agency and the
8 Department of Health.

9 So that when we identify someone, for
10 example, who is in receipt of SNAP and is
11 eligible for WIC but not receiving, we will
12 make sure there is outreach to that household
13 to try to bring them into WIC, and vice
14 versa. So if we have WIC households that are
15 not receiving SNAP, the same process will
16 come into play.

17 Because we definitely want low-income
18 households to access every single food
19 nutrition benefit, in particular those for
20 young mothers.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN TORRES: Thank you. I'd
22 love to keep track on this and see how it's
23 going. And any public reporting or anything
24 that we can learn, that would be great.

1 My second question -- it's a comment
2 and a question. My colleagues already raised
3 the concerns that have been ongoing on
4 benefit cliffs. And I'm excited to see the
5 Monroe Ladder Program. Would love to see it,
6 you know, once we see the study perhaps
7 replicated in other parts of the state.

8 Do you have any more information about
9 the program? Particularly I see financial
10 counseling, case management and the work
11 incentive payments. I think that one is
12 critical. Do you have a sense for -- if
13 there's going to be an actual replacement in
14 the cost? For example, if someone is no
15 longer receiving a benefit, are they going to
16 get that exact sort of subsidy as a part of
17 this program?

18 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So the
19 specific details have not been worked out.
20 But that is exactly what is envisioned by
21 that statement.

22 So it's looking at in the event that
23 someone does take on a promotion or increased
24 hours and it results in a reduction of

1 certain benefits, say SNAP, that that would
2 be an option to make that up for a period of
3 time and see if that makes a difference in
4 terms of people's willingness to take on more
5 work and also just our efforts to support
6 low-income workers.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN TORRES: Thank you.

8 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman
9 Epstein.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Thank you both
11 for being here.

12 Commissioner Guinn, I just want to go
13 back to the supportive housing conversation.
14 I'm wondering why there's still a
15 differential between downstate and upstate,
16 31 to 34,000 per unit.

17 And two is how many units are we
18 thinking we're going to get out of this for
19 this additional funding?

20 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So the
21 additional funding supporting ESSHI will
22 support another round. I believe we've been
23 adding at least a thousand units per year.

24 But the increase in the rates is

1 really just to provide additional supports to
2 those providers who are delivering this
3 service.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: So we've heard
5 from providers all over the state that, you
6 know, that it's good, that proposal to go to
7 34 for the city, but the rest of the state
8 are at these same issues with building these
9 units. And they would like to see the
10 increase for them as well.

11 Is there an opportunity to increase it
12 for everyone across the state to 34?

13 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: The
14 Executive Budget proposes increasing from
15 25,000 to 34,000 in New York City, but also
16 does include that significant increase for
17 areas outside of New York City to 31,000 per
18 unit.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: So we see the
20 need for supportive housing across our state,
21 we see this mental health crisis we're
22 experiencing every day. You know, I
23 represent parts of Manhattan on the
24 East Side, and so a thousand units is a great

1 movement. But it feels like we need to in
2 some ways double or triple that investment to
3 really get the people who are on the streets
4 in the supportive housing.

5 Why did you pick this figure on why
6 are we not doing more on the supportive
7 housing front?

8 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: You know,
9 again, I would just -- we're pleased with the
10 increased investments in supportive housing.
11 And in the event that the Legislature is able
12 to provide more funds either for the
13 operating and services cost or for our HHAP
14 program to develop more supportive housing,
15 we would be very happy to administer that.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Great. And that
17 would be for some of the older supportive
18 housing units that are already online or some
19 of the newer supportive housing units online.
20 If we were able to increase those
21 investments, it sounds like you'd be very
22 supportive of having those dollars available
23 to you.

24 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yes. And

1 the NYSSHP increase that does cover the much
2 older supportive housing units throughout the
3 state, particularly in New York City, and
4 then also the 25 million additional funds
5 that are in our HHAP budget, that is
6 specifically expected to enable us to support
7 preservation of older HHAP units.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Yeah. So yeah,
9 I would encourage us all to be thinking about
10 that preservation as well as more units,
11 because that's really going to get us in
12 front of this crisis that we're experiencing
13 every day. Thank you very much.

14 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yeah. Thank
15 you.

16 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman
17 Anderson.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: Good afternoon.
19 Thank you, Chair. And thank you to both of
20 our commissioners who are here this
21 afternoon.

22 I have some questions really quickly
23 that I want to briefly ask, but let me
24 acknowledge -- it's good to see you,

1 Commissioner Guinn, as well as our doctor,
2 our new commissioner -- I believe you're the
3 first African-American woman, and as we're
4 celebrating Black History Month, that's
5 something important to acknowledge. So
6 welcome to you both.

7 My first question, of course, to you,
8 Commissioner Guinn. You know we've done a
9 lot of work on this issue. We're actually
10 doing a press conference on it right now,
11 SNAP skimming. And I'd like to associate
12 some of my comments along with my
13 colleagues', but also asking the specific
14 resources that are on hand now to combat and
15 address it, given the fact that there's not a
16 request from the Executive in the executive
17 proposal. That's the first question.

18 The second question for you,
19 Commissioner Guinn, is we have a lot of
20 social service districts throughout the
21 state, and my thinking is that OTDA oversees
22 all of those social service districts. So
23 I'm just wondering, are there any recourses
24 or acts of recourse for a social services

1 district that violates state law or
2 directives given from the agency?

3 Let's say you give a directive to HRA
4 and they don't follow through. What do you
5 do about it?

6 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So first,
7 with your question on skimming, the resources
8 that are currently available include just the
9 ability for individuals to lock their card.
10 And that is the current best defense we have
11 for folks to protect their benefit.

12 So we are trying really to get that
13 word out and would certainly welcome support
14 from the Legislature to help spread the word
15 about that option for folks. So that's with
16 respect to skimming.

17 And if a social services district, any
18 of the districts within the state do not
19 follow state law or regulations we definitely
20 have recourse. And we have the power to
21 limit reimbursement. Our first step,
22 obviously, would be a conversation and
23 education and make sure that they understand
24 what the requirements are.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: But what
2 happens if they don't make any changes after
3 that conversation? Because it seems like
4 we're having a lot of conversations about
5 fair hearings, about SNAP skimming, around a
6 lot of things with HRA, and behavior's not
7 changing.

8 I'm just wondering what tools do you
9 have in your toolbox to hold the social
10 services districts accountable.

11 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: We do
12 have -- like I said, we have the authority to
13 direct them to make changes, and we have the
14 authority to adjust funding. Certainly we
15 are always welcome to work with your office
16 and that of others to address any unique
17 concerns that you may have.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: Definitely will
19 continue to reach out.

20 And in my last few questions I want to
21 thank -- I want to ask a genuine question
22 that you all can take to the next panelist.
23 In terms of employment, just wondering your
24 positionality about how employment is a tool

1 for anti-poverty. Just as you're answering
2 the questions, how that continues to be a
3 tool for anti-poverty.

4 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you,
5 Assemblyman.

6 Assemblywoman Chandler-Waterman.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN:
8 Thank you, Chair.

9 Thank you to the commissioners for
10 your time today.

11 I represent in Brookhaven Brooklyn
12 Assembly District 58 covering East Flatbush,
13 parts of Canarsie, Brownsville and
14 Crown Heights. My district is primarily
15 Black and brown Caribbean immigrants. I
16 cofounded a nonprofit, former childcare
17 provider, led after-school programs, former
18 teacher and the first to run the Empire State
19 After School Program in my district before I
20 was elected.

21 So I just want to thank you and your
22 team, Commissioner, for joining our gun
23 violence conversation -- to kick off June --
24 earlier this month. So I want to edify some

1 of those conversations.

2 We heavily depend on our grassroots
3 nonprofits on the ground when it comes to
4 providing safe spaces, programs to reduce gun
5 violence, after-school programs,
6 community-center concepts of public schools
7 that have the wraparound services.

8 However, the procurement process at
9 OCFS, it's very challenging. It seems at
10 times the goalposts keep on changing. And
11 there's several delays that leaves our
12 nonprofits stretched thin, unable to cover
13 payroll and other hardships running programs.
14 Then, to add insult to injury, after not
15 being paid for almost two years, with the
16 eighth year severely underfunded, Empire
17 State After School Program, we had the LEAP
18 grant that was put in place. Organizations
19 in my district got a letter that says
20 congratulations, you got 95 percent, you did
21 all the requirements, but guess what, we
22 don't have the funding, we ran out.

23 What are the plans going forward for
24 the LEAP grant? What is your office doing to

1 fix the issue of the procurement process?
2 And as we know, your staff is very essential
3 to assisting organizations receiving funds on
4 the ground. So what's the plan to address
5 the high turnover rate in OCFS?

6 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
7 Thank you, Assemblywoman. I share your
8 passion in terms of, you know, serving at the
9 grassroots level and certainly championing
10 after-school.

11 As I indicated earlier, the Empire and
12 Advantage Program was combined to create
13 LEAPS for, you know, increasing higher
14 quality within our after-school settings.
15 And we recognize that the competition was
16 extremely stiff. And as you indicated, your
17 agency, one of the agencies that you work
18 with received an approved score but was not
19 funded. And that simply was because we ran
20 out of funding. In New York City --

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN:
22 Thirty -- 30 of my organizations received
23 that letter.

24 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

1 Thank you. We had well over 400 applicants
2 and we were able to fund 239 sites.
3 Forty-two percent of the allocation went to
4 New York City; 40 percent rest of the state;
5 and 19 percent downstate.

6 So, you know, as I said earlier, there
7 were some organizations that did not receive
8 funding, but it was not a cut. It was a new
9 program that was created to increase
10 efficiencies into --

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN:

12 -- the procurement process, sorry.

13 (Overtalk.)

14 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

15 Okay, procurement process. So the
16 procurement process, the RFP is issued, the
17 respondents are provided information in
18 advance --

19 (Time clock sounds.)

20 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: And
21 I can go over that with you offline.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN:

23 Okay.

24 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman

1 Simon.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.

3 Thank you very much.

4 I have a couple of questions, I guess
5 it's for Commissioner Harris-Madden, about --
6 I'm looking at these major initiatives, one
7 of which is the self-service kiosk, \$600,000
8 to install in high-need communities to
9 provide access to public benefit programs.

10 So my question is just like
11 operationally, where are they going to be? I
12 assume they're not going to be out on the
13 street. Like we have these kiosks in the
14 city that -- they don't work, but they're out
15 on the street.

16 And what is being done with regard to
17 the accessibility of those kiosks? So for
18 example, will people be able to have
19 something that is voice-activated? Many
20 people have reading issues. How is language
21 access? What languages will this information
22 be available in? And how user-friendly is
23 this program that will be in those kiosks?

24 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

1 Thank you for that question, Assemblywoman.

2 This is a partnership that we have
3 with Commissioner Guinn's department --

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: So I can blame
5 her too?

6 (Laughter.)

7 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: No,
8 I wouldn't say blame, just to demonstrate the
9 synergy that we have.

10 This is an opportunity that we see to
11 increase access, to your point, to services
12 and to reduce the wait times and, you know,
13 bureaucratic fog, if you will, that some
14 folks have experienced.

15 So the kiosks really are designed to
16 be in locations that -- where there is
17 accessibility needs, and we haven't quite
18 figured out exactly where it will be, but
19 they will be throughout communities that we
20 see that there is -- particularly rural
21 areas, for example, where there is a
22 challenge to get to some of the official
23 offices to file for applications for various
24 things.

1 So this is a new initiative, it is a
2 pilot, and we're working collaboratively just
3 for the purpose of accessibility. And I
4 would imagine that we would work towards
5 creating language access, as we do with all
6 of our documents and supports within our
7 agency.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: What about
9 disability access, which is --

10 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
11 Absolutely.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Okay. So when
13 will we have some idea of how that's going?

14 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: I
15 would have to get back to you on that.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Okay, thank you.
17 And then we heard other comments -- I
18 know Senator Cleare mentioned the OMH
19 supportive housing. And I know that the
20 CRSRO program, for example, is way
21 underfunded. They have a higher service
22 mandate than the ESSHI housing. But there's
23 no -- the Executive Budget doesn't address
24 increasing their allocations to be at least

1 on par, if not above.

2 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: I can't
3 really speak to what's funded in the OMH
4 budget.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: But it's in here
6 under budget highlights for OTDA.

7 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: I'm sorry,
8 are you referencing ESSHI?

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Yes, it mentions
10 ESSHI in here. So maybe we can talk later.

11 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Okay.
12 Absolutely. Thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
14 Romero.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROMERO: Okay, thank
16 you. And good afternoon at this point.

17 My question is for Commissioner Guinn.
18 In my Assembly district, the 109th Assembly
19 District, there is a punishment system for
20 very low-income New Yorkers where if you have
21 a substance use disorder, you get a ding or a
22 punishment -- and this is actually, I'm sure,
23 across all of New York State, but I'll
24 describe the very specific program soon where

1 you have 30 -- if you have a substance use
2 disorder you get a ding or a punishment of
3 30, 90, 180 days on your access to your
4 services and basic necessities like housing
5 or food benefits.

6 And in my jurisdiction, after a
7 certain number of dings there's actually a
8 lifetime ban where there are people who are
9 actually lifetime-banned from services,
10 unable to get back into DSS to get access to
11 housing, SNAP -- unless they pay a large
12 up-front lump sum to a private agency for a
13 specific drug or substance use evaluation or
14 treatment program.

15 And I just want to know if that is a
16 109th Assembly District problem or if we're
17 seeing something like this across all of
18 New York State.

19 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: That's
20 alarming. I would definitely like to get
21 more information from you about that.

22 First of all, there should be no
23 lifetime ban on access to benefits. You are
24 correct that Social Services Law does

1 currently provide for durational sanctions
2 associated with individuals receiving public
3 assistance with respect to various
4 substance-use-related requirements. But
5 anything beyond that would certainly --
6 unless it's coming from some other policy
7 that I'm not aware of, but certainly within
8 Social Services Law is not legal. And I
9 would certainly like to follow up with you on
10 that.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROMERO: So this is a
12 great -- so you're saying that there is 30,
13 90, 180 days, but beyond that it's
14 unacceptable to have a ban that would go
15 beyond the aforementioned 30, 90, 180 days?

16 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So it does
17 require compliance. But if an individual is
18 willing to comply, then there should be no
19 additional -- they should be able to restore
20 their benefits. There is no lifetime ban.

21 And I've never heard of someone having
22 to pay an upfront fee. That's also
23 concerning.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROMERO: For an

1 evaluation from a private agency that's not
2 through DSS.

3 Great, I'd love to talk to you after.

4 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Okay.

5 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
6 Reyes.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYES: Hi, good
8 afternoon.

9 So in 2021 I passed legislation, along
10 with Senator Persaud, to enroll New York
11 State in the federal Restaurant Meals
12 Program, which would allow unhoused, disabled
13 and seniors to use their SNAP benefits to
14 purchase meals, hot meals from delis.

15 What is the status of New York's
16 implementation of the program? And have
17 recent executive orders and restrictions and
18 funding impacted the federal program or
19 New York State's implementation of the
20 program? And does the Executive Budget speak
21 to anything that may include any funding to
22 help the implementation or rollout of the
23 program?

24 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So the

1 Restaurant Meals Program has just actually
2 recently gone statewide. We started with a
3 pilot in Monroe County and then expanded to
4 Brooklyn and other parts of New York City.
5 So we have just opened it up so that
6 restaurants throughout the state can apply
7 for certification as a Restaurant Meals
8 Program, meaning that people can use their
9 SNAP benefits at that location, certain
10 individuals, if they are elderly or disabled.

11 So it's actually been going quite well
12 in terms of getting restaurants to
13 participate in the project. We are not
14 hearing concerns from restaurants or
15 districts with respect to its implementation.
16 And like I said, we just -- I believe last
17 week -- announced that we are moving to
18 statewide rollout for the Restaurant Meals
19 Program.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYES: And no concerns
21 in terms of federal guidance that's been
22 coming on the impact on the program?

23 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: There are a
24 lot of concerns about what could be coming

1 from a federal standpoint. I am not aware of
2 any that are directly targeting the
3 Restaurant Meals Program, but we certainly
4 will be on alert.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYES: And I have
6 another question. This one is around WiFi
7 for homeless shelters. And as you know,
8 New York State has varying access to internet
9 and broadband for unhoused New Yorkers in
10 temporary housing.

11 What is New York's plan to address the
12 lack of internet access in shelters? As you
13 know, it's very important for people who are
14 either going to school or applying for work
15 to be able to have access to the internet.

16 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. I
17 may need to double-check. I do not think
18 that our regulations require internet access,
19 but I am aware that most shelters -- in
20 particular, family shelters -- have access to
21 the internet.

22 Obviously that was something that was
23 elevated as an issue during COVID, and family
24 shelters really moved to make sure that that

1 was something available to individuals. And
2 most areas do have common spaces where
3 individuals can access the internet.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYES: Yeah, we've
5 gotten reports that it's not always
6 accessible. Oftentimes they use it as a
7 punitive tool to punish people who perhaps,
8 you know, they feel are nuisances in the
9 homeless shelter and deny access to the
10 internet.

11 It's very important, particularly for
12 adults, to be able to access the internet if
13 you want them to be able to apply for work,
14 look for permanent housing --

15 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you,
16 Assemblywoman.

17 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Agreed.
18 Thank you.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: The Senate is up
20 to our two chairs' three-minute follow-up.

21 First, Senator Roxanne Persaud.

22 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

23 Commissioner Guinn, this is a
24 follow-up. We're going to touch on

1 Summer Youth Employment. You know I'm always
2 asking about what is it we need to do to
3 increase the number of slots. You know, my
4 thing is that we need to ensure that every
5 youth across the state has employment.

6 And I've introduced legislation about
7 creating year-round employment. Can you tell
8 me, what else can we do to ensure that youth
9 across the state have access to employment?

10 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So thank
11 you. The Summer Youth Employment Program I
12 agree is an excellent opportunity for
13 individuals, and expanding it beyond where it
14 is now would be welcomed.

15 The Governor's budget does include, I
16 believe, 51.5 million to support the Summer
17 Youth Employment Program. So that does
18 include a 1.5 million increase.

19 SENATOR PERSAUD: But that's just
20 covering --

21 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Which is
22 intended to cover minimum wage increases.

23 SENATOR PERSAUD: Yeah, minimum wage.

24 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So the

1 bottom line is is the way we could expand the
2 number of slots available would be to
3 increase funding allotted to the program.

4 SENATOR PERSAUD: So how do we get to
5 the increased funding so that we have at
6 least a billion dollars allocated to youth
7 employment? How can you help me get that?

8 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: I'm sorry,
9 could you repeat the question?

10 SENATOR PERSAUD: How can you help me
11 get to an allocation of a billion dollars for
12 youth employment?

13 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Senator,
14 we'd be happy to work with you on that.

15 (Laughter.)

16 SENATOR PERSAUD: Yeah, we do have to
17 do that.

18 In terms of, you know, there's
19 Article VII language on the oversight, the
20 temporary oversight of shelters. Can you
21 tell us how many, of temporary operators, how
22 many did you authorize in the past year?

23 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: We have not
24 needed to invoke that provision. The

1 provision is just -- it's something that we
2 feel is a tool that remains available to the
3 agency if needed.

4 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. And are there
5 any shelters across the system that we need
6 to really focus on because they are not
7 operating at the optimum level?

8 You know, you haven't authorized any
9 temporary operators. But are there any
10 shelter systems across the state, do you know
11 of, that we should be focusing on?

12 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: I certainly
13 wouldn't cite any particular shelter. Each
14 year we inspect every shelter in the state
15 and certify those shelters. We look at both
16 the services available as well as important
17 factors such as the facility, security and
18 staffing.

19 And so as part of that process each
20 year, if there are deficiencies, we identify
21 those and we require corrective action plans
22 to be put in place and implemented to correct
23 any deficiencies.

24 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay, thank you.

1 Thank you and your team again for all
2 that you're doing and for always working with
3 us. Thank you.

4 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Of course.
5 Thank you so much.

6 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: The Assembly is
7 done.

8 SENATOR PERSAUD: So, excuse me, our
9 other chair, Senator Brisport, for his
10 three-minute follow-up.

11 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you,
12 Madam Chair.

13 The first one is for
14 Commissioner Guinn. We are getting a lot of
15 extra anti-immigrant rhetoric coming from
16 Washington, and in our communities we are
17 hearing immigrant families scared to approach
18 government offices for services that they're
19 fully entitled to.

20 What is OTDA doing to ensure that
21 immigrant New Yorkers are able to access the
22 services they need and are entitled to?

23 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: So we share
24 your concerns. We certainly do not want

1 individuals to stay away from accessing
2 services due to fears over their immigration
3 status.

4 So our -- we've had conversations with
5 social services district commissioners about
6 the importance of making sure that workers,
7 in managing their offices as well as shelters
8 or other facilities, are aware of the rights
9 that individuals have. And our advice is:
10 Call your attorney, but also that you do not
11 need to require entry unless there is a
12 judicial warrant.

13 But I understand what you're saying.
14 There is a lot of fear out there. And I
15 think what we'd like to do best is just to
16 get the word out about what individuals'
17 rights are and make sure that facilities
18 continue to make people feel welcome and not
19 discouraged from accessing services.

20 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

21 And I have one additional question for
22 Commissioner Harris-Madden. I just wanted to
23 follow up on a question from Assemblymember
24 Clark that the clock ran out on last time.

1 But given the Governor did veto the
2 legislation we passed to provide childcare to
3 parents who are considered to make too little
4 to access childcare, I do consider that just
5 one of the most egregious means-tests that we
6 do implement on families.

7 What is to be done about these
8 families who are, quote unquote, making too
9 little or doing part-time work to ensure that
10 they can access childcare for their children?

11 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

12 Thank you for that question, Mr. Chair.

13 You know, OCFS is very flexible in
14 terms of its collection of evidence to prove
15 eligibility. And so, you know, we go as far
16 as accepting Zelle payments to demonstrate --
17 you know, to help figure out how much one
18 makes per month. We also accept attestation.

19 But, you know, to your point in terms
20 of the policy and the legislation that was
21 vetoed, we are unable to comment on that
22 process.

23 SENATOR BRISPORT: Okay. And then
24 just one more about procurement.

1 With the procurement process at OCFS,
2 we've been hearing it's very challenging and
3 sometimes it seems that the goalpost of what
4 is needed keeps changing. And there are
5 severe delays that leave our nonprofits
6 stretched thin, unable to cover payroll and
7 other hardships.

8 Are there any things being done to
9 change the procurement process?

10 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:

11 Well, I've offered this, and I'd be crazy to
12 say it to everyone here, but, you know, I'm
13 more than happy to work with nonprofits.
14 It's my background in terms of preparing and
15 readiness for contracting with government.

16 Now, there are lots of --

17 (Time clock sounds.)

18 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

19 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN: We
20 can discuss offline with respect to that.

21 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you,
22 Commissioners. This ends this portion of our
23 hearing. I want to thank you both for your
24 testimony.

1 OTDA COMMISSIONER GUINN: Thank you
2 very much.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Look forward to
4 seeing you in the near future.

5 OCFS COMMISSIONER HARRIS-MADDEN:
6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: And I'll now call
8 up our second panel: The New York State
9 Office for the Aging and the New York State
10 Department of Veterans' Services.

11 (Pause off the record.)

12 CHAIR PRETLOW: Good afternoon,
13 Panel B. Mama V, you're wearing camos?
14 We're not going to attack you.

15 (Laughter.)

16 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay, we can start.
17 Who wants to start?

18 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Who
19 would you like to start?

20 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Well, Aging,
21 Veterans. Veterans are aging, we have a --

22 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Seventy
23 percent of the vets in New York are over the
24 age of 60.

1 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: We could flip a
2 coin. Let's do Aging.

3 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: All
4 right, that sounds good. Well, thank you so
5 much. It's always a pleasure to be here.

6 Good afternoon again, Chairpersons
7 Krueger and Pretlow, Chairperson Cleare,
8 Assemblywoman Chairperson Seawright, it's
9 great to see you and all the distinguished
10 members -- Senator Ashby, Assemblyman Krasny.
11 And I have to say hello to the Rochester
12 contingent, Assemblywomen Clark and Lunsford,
13 and Long Island, Assemblymember Stern. We go
14 back a long way.

15 My name is Greg Olsen. I'm the
16 director of the New York State Office for the
17 Aging. I'm honored to testify today -- I'm
18 always honored to testify.

19 Governor Hochul's Executive Budget
20 prioritizes affordability for all New Yorkers
21 and ensuring public safety. The proposed
22 Executive Budget does exactly that, building
23 upon investments in last year's budget. And
24 as always, the proposed Executive Budget

1 includes many proposals that support older
2 adults and their families across agencies,
3 and I'm going to highlight some of these in
4 my testimony today.

5 I'm pleased to testify on a provision
6 of the Governor's budget that directly
7 affects the New York State Office for the
8 Aging, our programs and services, along with
9 additional budget proposals that will
10 positively impact older New Yorkers and their
11 families -- because older New Yorkers live in
12 families -- and move towards the broader goal
13 of creating a more affordable and livable
14 New York.

15 The Governor's State of the State
16 message and subsequent Executive Budget
17 proposal build upon accomplishments passed in
18 last year's budget and set New York on a path
19 for a better future regardless of age.

20 Through much-needed investments, the
21 Governor's fiscal year '26 Executive Budget
22 expands and strengthens NYSOFA's and the
23 network of aging services providers
24 foundation that will help individuals access

1 needed services, age in their communities of
2 choice, and lead healthy lives.

3 The first proposal makes the largest
4 and most historic investment in NYSOFA in
5 state history by providing \$45 million to
6 address documented unmet needs statewide.
7 This investment brings the total invested in
8 the unmet need category to \$200 million since
9 2019. So I thank the Governor for that, and
10 certainly I thank you all for that. It's
11 needed.

12 Above the 45 million is an additional
13 4.7 million via COLA for vital services such
14 as in-home care, nutrition, transportation,
15 case management, and caregiver supports.
16 That's on top of 6.4 million invested last
17 year.

18 Continued support for the Master Plan
19 for Aging.

20 Continuing our nation-leading
21 investment of almost \$3 million to expand
22 efforts to combat social isolation, bridge
23 the digital divide, improve overall health
24 and wellness, reducing depression, addressing

1 elder abuse, and strengthening NYSOFA's
2 stipend program for two of our most important
3 volunteer programs.

4 And I just want to highlight one of
5 them. For example, we are serving now more
6 than a million additional people using our
7 public/private tech partnerships. And just
8 one of them is called GetSetUp. You'll see
9 that in our appropriations bill. That has
10 700,000 users that have taken over a million
11 lifelong learning and other types of classes.
12 The top 10 classes are all health and
13 wellness: Morning tai chi -- morning
14 exercise helps reduce injuries and falls.
15 Hydration, nutrition, et cetera. Designed to
16 combat isolation, but also teach people how
17 to use their tech.

18 Let's just do the math on this,
19 because I love it: 350,000 in our budget,
20 700,000 users. That's 50 cents per person
21 per year to access it, and it's available to
22 anybody over the age of 50. And we have
23 several things like that that I could really
24 use your help on getting the word out, like

1 GetSetUp, our caregiver portals that are free
2 for anybody in New York State. And you guys
3 can really help us get the word out on that.

4 Six-point-two million in the Long Term
5 Care Ombudsman Program, maintaining
6 base-level funding. They're the eyes and
7 ears for quality of care in residential
8 facilities.

9 The middle-class tax cut is going to
10 have a huge benefit for older adults, putting
11 money back in their pockets.

12 The inflation rebates checks. I know
13 you've heard about all of these before, but
14 again, I look at ways to make affordable,
15 especially people who are on fixed incomes.

16 Expansion of the child tax credit and
17 free school meals. Now, why would I mention
18 that? Because we have hundreds of thousands
19 of grandparents who are the primary
20 caregivers of their grandkids. And if
21 they're claiming them on their tax form,
22 they're eligible for these types of things.

23 Again, we have grandparents taking
24 care of their kids -- or parents who are

1 older taking care of kids. They're taking
2 care of their grandkids and vice versa.
3 Again, we often silo people in these
4 different age groups, but no different than
5 my family and yours: They're
6 multigenerational.

7 Expanding victim support services,
8 especially in the area around scam-victim
9 compensation, which I think is
10 extraordinarily important. I know that
11 Ann Marie Cook from Lifespan will be
12 testifying after me.

13 Scams cost older adults \$28 billion a
14 year nationally. Yeah, they're
15 sophisticated, but how to prevent them is
16 quite easy to do. And we work extensively
17 with her. I want to call out Dan Lyons,
18 Justin McCabe and their whole team in how we
19 can not only prevent, but this is a way to
20 again react and expand those services.

21 Increasing access to government
22 services, including SNAP. We heard on the
23 last panel a lot about SNAP. Another way
24 that I'm appealing for your help with your

1 constituents to get the word out, if we just
2 took three programs in New York State, the
3 MSP, Medicare Savings Program, SNAP and HEAP,
4 we'll put \$11,000 back into low-income
5 individuals' pockets every year. Older
6 adults leave \$66 billion of benefits they're
7 entitled to on the table every year, and we
8 could really use your help in getting the
9 word out. That's just three examples.

10 Innovative approaches to homebuilding.
11 We really know the issue with housing. It's
12 really, really important, especially small
13 and modular homes. They're very cheap,
14 they're quick to set up, they're
15 energy-efficient, they're safe, they're
16 affordable.

17 Banning algorithmic rent price fixing,
18 really important. Thirty-four percent of
19 older adults are renters in this state.
20 Enhancing subway safety and other consumer
21 protections for older adults so they can
22 travel, but also making it easier to cancel
23 subscriptions. I have somebody on my staff
24 who went through this for a year with his

1 mother, and it took almost a year to get rid
2 of all of these subscriptions that she had
3 that she continued to pay for.

4 Expanding support for homeowners and
5 businesses due to severe weather events.
6 Sixty-six percent of older adults own their
7 own homes. But what I found really
8 interesting is the increase in the number of
9 self-employed people who are 65 has increased
10 57 percent, to 230,000. So when we have
11 these extreme weather events, we don't think
12 of older adults as business owners, but they
13 are. They're the number-one entrepreneur
14 group in the country.

15 So this budget is about much more than
16 any one program or service. Of course I have
17 to talk about NYSOFA, and I always will,
18 because I'm so proud of what we do. The
19 staff that I have, but the 59 Area Agencies
20 on Aging, the 1200 community-based
21 organizations that we work with, the
22 Association on Aging, which will be
23 testifying after me -- we do amazing work.

24 But we have to work with other

1 agencies, and we do, to leverage those
2 assets. Why I love being here with
3 Commissioner DeCohen and Benjamin is because
4 of the number that I said: 70 percent of the
5 state's veterans, 440,000, are over the age
6 of 60. We have 28,000 on our caseload.
7 Which is why we work so closely together.

8 We obviously work with the Department
9 of Health, whether it be the folks in
10 Medicaid; Dr. McDonald, Dr. Heslin with the
11 MPA and their entire team; the AIDS
12 Institute. I could go on and on and on why
13 that's important.

14 Office of Mental Health -- we serve
15 19,000 people that have a diagnosed mental
16 health illness on our caseload, so we have to
17 work with them in order to leverage those
18 assets. Eighty five hundred with an alcohol
19 or substance abuse problem on our caseload.
20 I'm not even going to get into problem
21 gambling; that's the next big thing we've got
22 to get to.

23 OCFS, they house the Adult Protective
24 Services, Blind and Visually Impaired Bureau.

1 OCFS, who was just up here, OTDA, SNAP, SNAP
2 Ed, which we spent a lot of time trying to
3 get people on.

4 So we will continue and always we'll
5 be engaging anyone anywhere who can help
6 improve the lives of older adults in New York
7 because, working together, we can leverage
8 those assets so we can serve people
9 holistically.

10 One of the things I'm most especially
11 proud of is the work that we've done to
12 significantly increase access to
13 hard-to-serve individuals and communities.
14 We've worked tirelessly with our county
15 partners to reach diverse communities, and
16 these efforts are paying off because,
17 according to our assessment data, in every
18 single one of our core services we've seen an
19 increase in serving hard-to-serve older
20 adults. And we're going to continue to do
21 that, regardless of their circumstances, and
22 make sure that we can ensure, to the best of
23 our ability, access to services.

24 So I love being here. I really

1 appreciate the time. Look forward to any
2 questions that you have. Assemblyman Jones,
3 good to see you. And turn it over -- I think
4 we go right to Commissioner DeCohen.

5 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you.

6 Good now afternoon, Chairs Krueger and
7 Pretlow and esteemed members of the Senate
8 and Assembly. Senator, welcome back.
9 Congratulations.

10 I'm Viviana DeCohen, commissioner of
11 the New York State Department of Veterans'
12 Services, proud member of the United States
13 Marines. It's an honor and privilege to
14 testify on Governor Hochul's 2026 Executive
15 Budget.

16 The mission of our department, as you
17 know, is to connect veterans, members of the
18 armed forces and their families to the
19 economic, medical and social benefits which
20 they have so deservedly earned.

21 Governor Hochul has been a true friend
22 and strong ally to our veterans and military
23 families. The Governor has increased funding
24 to local service agencies, expanding the

1 peer-to-peer support programming and so much
2 more for mental health and wellness. Under
3 Governor Hochul's leadership, and with the
4 support and partnership of this Assembly and
5 Senate, DVS has continually advanced that
6 mission, expanding now our reach -- because
7 of you -- statewide.

8 Through our Operation Find and Serve,
9 focusing on getting out across the state and
10 reaching those where they live, work, and
11 play, many of them who were not aware that
12 they were even entitled to service by way of
13 no longer utilizing the word "veteran," but
14 for those who have served.

15 And applaud yourself: It is working.
16 DVS builds relationships and earns the trust
17 of all who have served. We do no longer
18 assume the veterans' voice, but we are now
19 listening and asking them what it is they
20 need to best serve their needs.

21 2024 was an especially impactful year
22 for our department, as we launched our
23 Veterans Emergency Housing Program, as well
24 as three Mobile Outreach Units that are now

1 on the road. We have continued to be
2 innovative, partnering with supporters like
3 HelloFresh, which in just a few weeks will
4 reach its two millionth meal for veterans,
5 service members, and the families.

6 Additionally, we continue promoting
7 our Veterans Welcome Center Digital Kiosks to
8 continue the connections with benefits and
9 services for those who served, expanded our
10 partnerships to ensure that no veteran or
11 family member goes without the essential
12 needs. One hundred fifty-four special events
13 were had during the month of November for
14 Veterans Month, over 543 in-person and
15 virtual outreach events throughout the year.
16 This means that we are reaching them, we are
17 reaching those who did not even know that
18 they needed to be reached.

19 Our accredited VBAs, or veteran
20 benefit advisors, all former members of the
21 military, all veterans themselves, are
22 continuing to help those who have served meet
23 their VA benefits.

24 For 2024, DVS assisted over 10,000

1 veterans who were seeking to submit benefit
2 claims to the United States Department of
3 Veterans Affairs. And as a result of that,
4 over 12,069 claims have been filed for our
5 veterans. Many of these were new or
6 first-timers who are now submitting claims.

7 In 2024, appellants represented by DVS
8 have received over \$4 million in retroactive
9 payments from the VA. I'll remind you that
10 these payments come back to our states. As
11 the old song goes, the more you give, the
12 more we give back to you. And we're seeing
13 it.

14 As the leading veterans claims
15 accreditation training entity in New York
16 State, DVS accredits and trains partners to
17 file veterans' claims on the department's
18 behalf via our power of attorney.

19 With me today is one of our deputy
20 counsel, Benjamin Pomerance, who does this
21 training.

22 Any entity officially accredited by
23 DVS, including our county partners and
24 nonprofits, can submit such claims, and these

1 filings help to measure the effectiveness of
2 our advocacy work.

3 Without them, without all of you, this
4 would be impossible.

5 By prioritizing fully developed
6 claims, DVS has significantly reduced the
7 waiting times, ensuring swift access to the
8 benefits earned by those who've served.

9 In regards to the Governor's 2026
10 fiscal year Executive Budget, the Governor's
11 Executive Budget has built upon and
12 strengthens this steadfast commitment to
13 veterans. In particular, the budget includes
14 three key initiatives for veterans and their
15 families which, if adopted, will be well
16 received with great praise by the veterans
17 and military families.

18 The first focuses on expanding the
19 Gold Star Parent Annuity to encompass the
20 families of servicemembers who give their
21 lives for their country in both non-combat
22 and combat theaters.

23 Currently the Gold Star Parent Annuity
24 Program, which you know, provides benefits to

1 parents of those who died in combat, but it
2 does exclude the spouses, children, and
3 families of those who die during non-combat
4 active duty.

5 So this is integral, and this is huge.
6 And it's a long time coming.

7 Governor Hochul has proposed
8 legislation to expand this program to now
9 include all immediate family members of
10 servicemembers who die while on active duty.

11 The second initiative focuses on
12 building on the track record of success
13 achieved by New York State's delegation to
14 the federal Governor's Challenge to Prevent
15 Suicide for servicemembers and their
16 families. Governor Hochul proposed a
17 \$1 million investment to expand that,
18 including enhanced risk assessment training,
19 outreach tools, gun safety programs, and
20 improved access to telehealth services for
21 mental health services.

22 We've even, inside of our own offices,
23 because we are veterans serving veterans,
24 have established a Wellness Wednesday where

1 we are establishing all of these services as
2 well, because we have the same needs for our
3 staff.

4 So I cannot overstate the lifesaving
5 importance of this initiative and investment.
6 Through the Governor's Challenge to Prevent
7 Suicide, we have developed innovative
8 approaches to reducing that. Benjamin
9 Pomerance happens to sit on the Governor's
10 Suicide Challenge Team, so he's able to tell
11 you wonderful things about that.

12 The third initiative allocates
13 \$350,000 for our Military Family Relief Fund.
14 I want to applaud the Governor, I want to
15 applaud you, because this means that you
16 heard us when we said we were asking those
17 who served across the state what it is that
18 their needs were, and you heard us say
19 diapers, but you also heard us say that it
20 should not be back to a diaper bank where
21 they have to be tied to social services. But
22 that there should be dignity services for
23 those who served.

24 So thank you, thank you. I'm

1 is Mr. Benjamin Pomerance, our deputy
2 counsel. He sits on many of these
3 committees, and he has initiated many of
4 these new legislations that we see now. He's
5 to be commended.

6 CHAIR PRETLOW: Okay. Deputy Counsel,
7 welcome.

8 Assemblywoman Seawright, 10 minutes.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you,
10 Chairs Pretlow and Krueger. Good morning --
11 or good afternoon, Director Olsen and
12 Commissioner DeCohen. Thank you for your
13 testimony today.

14 New York State is fourth in the nation
15 for the 60-plus population, with older
16 residents paying over 72 billion per year in
17 state and local taxes. This vital, very
18 special population is booming: 4.6 million
19 New Yorkers are over the age of 60, and by
20 2030 this population is expected to reach
21 5.3 million. Seniors are more than one-third
22 of the population, and increasingly diverse.
23 Yet there are elderly people sinking lower
24 into poverty each year.

1 Seniors are the driving force for the
2 economy, cultural life and the volunteer
3 base, yet they are struggling to afford
4 housing, transportation, the rising cost of
5 medication, and so much more.

6 Seniors are the largest voting block,
7 yet they feel invisible, without a strong
8 voice in our budget.

9 Director Olsen, we await the Master
10 Plan on Aging. Yet according to the
11 preliminary report, there have been 351 total
12 members representing all stakeholders in over
13 400 meetings. An additional \$1 million is
14 allocated in the proposed Executive Budget,
15 and we allocated 1 million last session to
16 support its mission.

17 What are the recommendations coming
18 from the Master Plan, and what are the
19 additional allocations in the Executive
20 Budget proposed for? And can you tell us
21 which of the 10 foundational pillars outlined
22 in the preliminary report are supported by
23 this proposed additional funding?

24 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well,

1 thanks, Assemblywoman, that was a lot of
2 questions. So I'll try to answer them and if
3 I forget any of them, you can let me know.

4 First and foremost, I appreciate the
5 question. I like you citing the data,
6 because that's our data we've been putting
7 together for the last 13 years to show,
8 again, the value of the older adult
9 population. We often think of, because we're
10 culturally taught this way, that older adults
11 are frail, they're a drain on resources, they
12 take more than they give, and they don't give
13 back. And that's not true. So I appreciate
14 you talking about that.

15 So do you want me to start with the
16 MPA? Because I think Commissioner McDonald,
17 you know, spoke of that yesterday, and my
18 answer's really the same as his. The
19 executive order has laid out that the final
20 report -- which is, again, just the first
21 report, right? This is a short, a medium and
22 a long-term plan over the next 10 years on
23 how we help older adults and their families
24 age. Because you begin aging the day that

1 you're born, not when you turn a certain age.

2 So, you know, we are on track to have
3 the final report with the interim reports
4 that were done -- there were two of them --
5 on time, which is the spring of 2025. So
6 that will be coming shortly.

7 I can't go through what the
8 recommendations are. These came -- I think
9 you cited 370 people that were involved. It
10 was a lot more than that. There were
11 500-plus stakeholders, among many committees
12 and subcommittees that spent a lot of time
13 using their expertise, whether they be --

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: So because
15 we're limited on time --

16 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Oh, I'm
17 sorry.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: -- I'm just
19 going to direct my question. So there's
20 additional funding that's requested. Can you
21 justify what it's going to be used for?

22 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: So
23 the -- if you're talking about the million
24 dollars in the budget, that's not

1 implementation money, that's for us, with the
2 help of the Department of State and other
3 agencies, to do the work. So that will
4 continue.

5 A couple of things. Because the MPA
6 is not designed to be a part of the budget,
7 but that will be presented for you guys.
8 We're just coordinating the recommendations.
9 But I can tell you the number-one
10 recommendation was an increase in funding in
11 the New York State Office for the Aging.
12 That is in there.

13 Another recommendation that has
14 already been implemented is an Older Worker
15 Office, which we launched with the Department
16 of Labor in September. So there's things
17 like that in there. They're not designed to
18 be together, but they will be at some point
19 because you guys will be engaged to review
20 what those recommendations are and then how
21 to move forward. We look forward to that.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you.
23 Area Agencies on Aging reported being unable
24 to advertise the availability of their

1 services due to an inability to meet the
2 demand. How much of an investment would be
3 needed to address waiting lists?

4 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: The
5 exact amount that was put into the budget
6 this year.

7 So we baselined the 10 million
8 legislative add last year, 35 million to
9 address the current waitlists, as reported by
10 the counties in September 2024, plus an
11 additional 5 million in COLA money, which
12 funds the same types of services.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: According to
14 the latest data on your website, the
15 Long Term Care Ombudsman Program does not
16 meet its program goals. Ten percent of the
17 facilities received no visit; 82 percent of
18 all the facilities did not receive a weekly
19 visit. What is the goal of the program if
20 we're not meeting these needs?

21 In New York City the problem is even
22 worse. Only 2.4 percent of all the
23 facilities received a weekly visit. Why has
24 the state not provided enough funding for

1 this program to even get close to the stated
2 program goals?

3 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: So
4 fortunately, Assemblymember, I have some of
5 my communications staff here. Those numbers
6 are not updated at all.

7 So what you'll see in the budget is
8 6.19 million, but there's several other
9 funding sources that we use to bring it up to
10 a total of 10.2. We've had a -- and what
11 that money's used for is our network was
12 really organized around volunteers. We're
13 way beyond that now, especially with LTCOP
14 and the HIICAP program, Health Insurance
15 Council.

16 We've gone from 57 full-time staff in '22
17 to 101. That's a 74 percent increase.
18 Eighty-one percent of facilities received at
19 least one visit each quarter. That's up from
20 24 percent. Ninety-four percent received at
21 least one in a year, up from 63 percent. And
22 we've doubled the number of visits to 22,000.

23 This is a federal program. You would be
24 stunned to see what type of support, not only in

1 the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program, but through
2 our general services, of the lack of support we
3 get from the federal government, where then the
4 state and the counties and others, private
5 fundraising, have to step up and try to provide
6 these funds. This is the start of the budget
7 process. I know this will be an issue that will
8 be debated and talked about, and we look forward
9 to being a part of that.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: So this
11 latest data was taken straight off of your
12 website. So maybe --

13 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I
14 know, I heard you say that.

15 Well, we'll make sure that it's
16 updated. But I can provide you with any
17 updated information and we'll make sure that
18 we update the site.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Aging Chair
21 Cordell Cleare, 10 minutes.

22 SENATOR CLEARE: Good afternoon,
23 Commissioners.

24 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Hello.

1 SENATOR CLEARE: I'm just going to
2 continue on the MPA a little bit.

3 I just wonder if we can -- if you can
4 tell us -- I heard you say the spring of 2025
5 is when -- is there a specific date we can
6 look forward to? I mean, you know, this
7 was -- we started this process a long time
8 ago, and I --

9 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah.
10 Well, no. And it is a long process. It's
11 not that we are late. Okay? I mean --

12 SENATOR CLEARE: No, I'm not trying to
13 say that.

14 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I know
15 that you're not.

16 SENATOR CLEARE: What I'm trying to
17 say is that I'd like to know when is -- I'm
18 really anxious.

19 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: We are
20 really expecting this to be coming out soon.
21 We're in the home stretch.

22 SENATOR CLEARE: You don't have a
23 date.

24 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I

1 don't -- I can't say to you February 22nd
2 it's coming out. All I can tell you is we
3 are on track and we're very, very close, as
4 Commissioner McDonald said yesterday.

5 SENATOR CLEARE: Do you know how much
6 in state funds will be needed to implement
7 the Master Plan?

8 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, I
9 mean, I think the decisions in terms of
10 what's in the Master Plan are going to be
11 debated with you guys. There are, you know,
12 statutory changes, regulatory changes.
13 There's -- obviously people have proposed new
14 programs.

15 SENATOR CLEARE: But there's no
16 estimate amount.

17 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well,
18 these are not things that the state agencies
19 put forth. These are things that the
20 stakeholders have said. So, you know, I
21 think depending on where you guys all stand
22 with the Governor's office, fiscals will be
23 done on anything that's being considered.

24 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. The Governor

1 proposed \$35 million in new money to help
2 close the waitlists. There are those who
3 think it needs more than that, but I heard
4 you say this is the estimate. Is this a
5 one-time Band-Aid or will this be recurring?
6 Is this something that's just being proposed
7 for 2025?

8 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well,
9 my experience is that, you know, when the
10 Governor proposes something in the budget,
11 those things are recurring.

12 I think it's important that over
13 time -- it originally started with 15
14 million, the Legislature put in eight that
15 was recurring. Then an additional 10, that
16 recurred. That's really important for these
17 programs and services because these are not
18 one-time expenses.

19 SENATOR CLEARE: Nope.

20 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN:
21 Somebody getting a meal, that's going to
22 happen for a couple of years. Personal care.
23 So --

24 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. Can you speak

1 a little bit as to what form -- how will this
2 money be allocated?

3 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
4 it's very easy. Every September we survey
5 our county Offices for the Aging that, again,
6 work with community partners. So -- and they
7 report to us, individuals in certain
8 categories of service needs that are eligible
9 and agree to go on a waitlist.

10 Then we have -- literally I have data
11 from every single county on how much it costs
12 to serve a person in that service category
13 for the year, and then you just simply do the
14 multiplication.

15 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. And do you
16 know -- is my understanding correct, there's
17 no county match?

18 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
19 that's the beauty of this.

20 So we have general like EISEP, CSE,
21 our federal titles, et cetera, all go out by
22 law, what's called an interstate funding
23 formula. We designed this back in 2019 for a
24 specific purpose. Number one, there's no

1 match. If this 35 million was in CSE, for
2 example, counties would have to come up with
3 a 12 million match. If they can't come up
4 with it, they can't draw the money down,
5 which makes the whole thing moot.

6 And then it allows us to direct the
7 service dollars to where they're actually
8 needed.

9 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. All right.
10 I'll shift a little bit.

11 In the last six or seven budgets, SOFA
12 has been required to report on spending on
13 unmet needs to the Legislature, among others.
14 We have seen reports for two years, I believe
15 '20-'21 and '21-'22. But the other years
16 seem to be outstanding.

17 Has SOFA submitted those? Do you have
18 them?

19 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: It's on
20 our website. So I knew that was going to
21 come up today, and I know there's going to be
22 testimony behind me about transparency or
23 something like that. All you need to do is
24 go to the website.

1 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. Is it broken
2 down by county?

3 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: It is
4 not broken down by county, it's aggregate.
5 You know, that's the way it's reported: What
6 service areas, how much we spent, how many
7 people were served.

8 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. And does SOFA
9 have -- this is another category -- have any
10 bonding authority? And if so, can you use it
11 to produce more senior housing?

12 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I'm
13 sorry, can you repeat?

14 SENATOR CLEARE: Senior housing. Does
15 SOFA have any bonding authority? I'm asking,
16 do you know?

17 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: No,
18 none at all.

19 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. And NORC
20 funding was kept flat by the Executive this
21 year. Does SOFA have a sense of how many
22 more NORCs could be created if we only found
23 more funding?

24 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, I

1 mean back in the day, Senator, that was --
2 the NORC question was the number-one question
3 I would get here.

4 Look, the population's getting older
5 but that doesn't mean that that's bad.
6 Seventy-five percent of older adults consider
7 themselves healthy, very healthy. We know
8 that from our statewide needs assessment
9 survey that backed up that data..

10 You know, could a lot of communities
11 use them? Absolutely. Do they always need
12 state funding money to prop them up?
13 Absolutely not. Is that helpful? Sure it
14 is. But it's a model that can be replicated
15 locally.

16 SENATOR CLEARE: I think we do need
17 more. And, you know, I really love our NORCs
18 because that keeps our older New Yorkers
19 living at home longer, which keeps them
20 healthier. So I really support more
21 investment in that.

22 New York City, we talked about this
23 last year. You know, they want to know if
24 the administration will commit to matching

1 the funding needs for older adult services to
2 the proportion of older adults living in
3 New York City. And I know there's a small
4 difference in the way that money is
5 allocated, but it is necessary.

6 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
7 again, Senator, I appreciate that they raised
8 that to you, probably have to other members
9 in the city. It goes out by funding formula.

10 They get their fair share. They
11 actually get more federal funding than they
12 really should be getting, under the formula.

13 We did revise, because we're required
14 by law to update our funding formula. That
15 was just approved by ACL in the fall. So
16 there will be some changes.

17 I know that there's older adult growth
18 in the city. The growth proportion outside
19 the city is higher. There is growth
20 everywhere, and --

21 SENATOR CLEARE: But isn't the
22 allocation given according to the number
23 of --

24 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Because

1 it's based on multiple factors, as required
2 by state and federal law. It's not just the
3 60-plus percent.

4 You know, part of the statute is
5 people living in rural areas, people with
6 geographic discrepancies. You know,
7 different types of weighting, which we did a
8 whole public comment period over. And I'm
9 not sure that we received any feedback from
10 the city on that at all.

11 SENATOR CLEARE: I'd like to continue
12 that conversation.

13 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Sure.
14 Absolutely.

15 SENATOR CLEARE: Medicaid home care
16 providers received a 55-cent increase by
17 EISEP. Home care providers are being left
18 out of that wage increase. Will the
19 administration or does the administration
20 have any plans to match that 55-cent increase
21 for EISEP home care providers?

22 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: So I
23 believe the home care increase was \$2.

24 And what we did -- you are correct

1 that our program -- and EISEP is just one of
2 many funding streams that funds the in-home
3 program. So I want to be very clear on that.

4 We told the counties that they could
5 use their COLA dollars over the last couple
6 of years to do that.

7 In terms of this year's unmet need
8 money, if that is passed -- and I'm hoping
9 that you're all supportive of that -- we
10 built a \$35 minimum rate increase into that
11 so that those dollars would get to the aides.

12 SENATOR CLEARE: And just -- how does
13 the administration plan to replace the
14 stimulus funding provided to the localities?

15 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: In any
16 particular area? Because a lot of it was in
17 nutrition. And again, nutrition is --
18 especially home-delivered meals is one of the
19 main areas in the unmet needs request.

20 So, you know, if you look at statewide
21 data, the average meals that somebody's
22 getting in our network is five per week.
23 That's one meal a day. So as part of that
24 calculation, I doubled that, as well as built

1 in a little additional rate. So we'll be
2 able to provide additional funding.

3 You know, I think that there is a
4 natural reduction in the people that we serve
5 year to year just because of how complex they
6 are. And sometimes in their 90s or hundreds
7 they're moving from our system and others.
8 So there's some natural attrition to that.

9 But I've got to tell you, Senator --
10 and you and I have talked about this many
11 times -- the federal government needs to step
12 up. We get \$90 million for a state with
13 4.84 million people over the age of 60. And
14 who's left holding the bag is the New York
15 State Legislature and the Governor and the
16 counties. That's the way that it works.

17 Not to mention, you know, people who
18 are providing through their own pockets --
19 older adults, they're providing \$16 million
20 annually just for a meal, \$1 to \$2
21 increments. We need help at the federal
22 level.

23 SENATOR CLEARE: I don't disagree with
24 that at all.

1 And speaking of meals, weekend and
2 holiday meals -- you know, in New York City
3 we have great organizations like Meals on
4 Wheels.

5 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN:
6 Citymeals on Wheels.

7 SENATOR CLEARE: But we have seen an
8 increase in need because, as you said, this
9 is one meal a day. This is not breakfast,
10 this is not dinner. And as people get older
11 and age, their health is definitely related
12 to their eating.

13 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN:
14 Absolutely.

15 SENATOR CLEARE: So do we see any
16 plans to maybe provide some support for
17 weekend and holiday meals?

18 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, I
19 know in the city, Citymeals does that for the
20 clients that Aging NY -- New York City Aging
21 provides five days a week. I've had multiple
22 conversations with Citymeals to look at, you
23 know, are there ways within our structure.

24 I mean, we are kind of tied by law

1 because our funding is required to go to the
2 Area Agencies on aging, and New York Aging is
3 one of them. But Citymeals is providing
4 those weekend meals and emergency meals. And
5 we would like to find a way to try to support
6 them.

7 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

8 CHAIR PRETLOW: Assemblyman Stern,
9 three minutes.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN STERN: Thank you,
11 Mr. Chairman.

12 Director Olsen, always good to see
13 you.

14 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: You as
15 well, thank you.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN STERN: Mr. Pomerance,
17 great job, sir.

18 Commissioner, thank you of course for
19 your service. It's good seeing you again,
20 and thank you to you and your outstanding
21 team for all you do for all who serve, and
22 their families, of our great nation.

23 As you had mentioned, the Executive
24 provides a million dollars to expand suicide

1 prevention initiatives for our veterans.
2 Suicide rates among our veterans are
3 troubling, heartbreaking. And I know that we
4 all believe that that is absolutely
5 unacceptable.

6 So I would look forward to getting
7 your vision on how that program is going to
8 be initiated, what the outreach efforts are
9 going to be, who determines who is most in
10 need, and how recipients of that assistance
11 are going to be brought into the system. And
12 share with us how you see that very critical
13 initiative being rolled out and who it will
14 be able to touch.

15 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you
16 so much.

17 Let me just begin, before Benjamin
18 gets into this, to let you know, you know, we
19 have expanded our department. And so in
20 that, we were able to change our intake form.
21 So I want you to know that one of the
22 benefits of that is utilizing the Columbia
23 protocol for the possible suicide.

24 And so we are finding -- and we can

1 continue to speak to that.

2 But that's a result of the efforts of
3 what it is that the Governor has done and
4 that we're proposing to ensure that the
5 find-and-serve for those who are on the
6 verge, but also to ensure that letters that
7 are on the base and that we are now on the
8 base to capture those who are coming back
9 into civilian life, to those who are off the
10 grid, for find-and-serve, and to those who
11 are in our organizations that need these
12 programs.

13 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: And
14 just to build on that, we've had a delegation
15 to the federal Governor's Challenge since
16 April of 2020, and it has received national
17 recognition from the VA, from SAMHSA, and
18 from other federal leaders for the work that
19 we've done here in New York State when it
20 comes to creative approaches to suicide
21 prevention.

22 The major thing that we have learned
23 throughout that five-year process is that
24 when we talk about suicide prevention, it's

1 an upstream process. A lot of preventative
2 maintenance takes place long before the
3 precise moments of crisis when someone is on
4 that verge. And so we look daily into how
5 can we find solutions to stop the problems
6 before they start, to find ways for the
7 transition from military service back to
8 civilian life to be as smooth and as seamless
9 as possible.

10 Because we've talked about the at-risk
11 categories. There's two major groups of
12 veterans that we see in those at-risk
13 categories. One, pertaining to our
14 conversations around aging, are veterans who
15 are 65 and above. The other are veterans who
16 have just come back home from military
17 service and they are coming back from
18 military service, entering civilian life, and
19 often not sure what's next.

20 So those are key groups and crucial
21 groups on which we have to focus.

22 We now have access, more than ever
23 before in the department's history, to data
24 around who is coming home to New York State

1 and how do we outreach to them. And we do
2 that on a weekly basis, week over week, with
3 Department of Defense data, to make certain
4 that we're reaching them, linking them with
5 us and with all of our partner agencies at
6 the state and county and city levels around
7 New York.

8 But there's still some key gaps that
9 we have to focus on. We've talked in many
10 prior hearings about transportation and
11 around connectivity being huge barriers for
12 so many veterans and their families. And
13 those -- if you take those issues and bring
14 them out downstream, those are predictors of
15 veterans who are at risk of suicide and
16 self-harm. So those are areas we have to
17 look at for sure.

18 Lethal-means safety: Crucial, okay?
19 Often controversial to talk about, crucial to
20 talk about and to act upon in a practical,
21 successful manner. We're already doing that
22 right now, in collaboration with the Office
23 of Mental Health, which has been fantastic
24 with their WAV, Worried About a Veteran

1 initiative, first in the nation, helping
2 military families approach veterans in their
3 households with these crucial conversations.

4 We're going to take that and build on
5 that, and plans are already in place of how
6 we're going to do that.

7 So there's so many areas, we can
8 certainly talk more beyond the time we have
9 here of where this is going. But when it
10 comes to lethal-means safety, when it comes
11 to identifying veterans early on in the
12 process, staying with them throughout their
13 journey for the rest of their life as
14 civilians here in New York State, and when it
15 comes also to coordinating and facilitating
16 care transitions at the proper time.

17 Also a crucial area, last year we had
18 all of our staff trained in mental health
19 first aid in the veterans and military
20 families specialty area. More of that needs
21 to happen not just within DVS, but beyond as
22 well. And we're doing work -- last year we
23 had a program where there were bartenders at
24 American Legion and VFW posts in the Erie

1 County area, who received this mental health
2 first aid training. Right?

3 The more points of contact we have
4 like that, the more successful veterans are
5 going to be in the rest of their journey back
6 home as New Yorkers.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN STERN: Thank you.

8 You had also, Commissioner, mentioned
9 the \$350,000 proposed in the budget for the
10 Military Family Relief fund or various
11 initiatives. Could you share with us your
12 vision there as to specifically what type of
13 assistance you see that fund providing to
14 military families?

15 And it is within your discretion and
16 the law provides that it's within your
17 discretion to determine eligibility and how
18 those funds are going to be utilized. Have
19 you given any thought to how that program is
20 going to be administered, the type of benefit
21 that military families will have the ability
22 to access and, again, how we will ensure that
23 those resources go to veterans and their
24 families most in need?

1 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you
2 so much for that question. And thank you for
3 the opportunity.

4 And again, let me say thank you to our
5 chair and our committee of veterans'
6 services, because we have worked together.
7 You know, you heard me say it the first year,
8 this looks like DVS, but this is all of us
9 with our hand to the proverbial plow and
10 pushing with hand or pushing with shoulder.

11 And I stated at that time that you
12 would see my office upstairs with the
13 resources in it. Today there are 5,000-plus
14 pairs of socks and underwear and resources in
15 that office upstairs. My pocketbook has been
16 my office. One of the benefits of being able
17 to go across the state and asking those who
18 have served what it is that they need is just
19 that, being able to ask them what resources
20 they needed.

21 Well, we didn't really have a good
22 understanding the first year when I said the
23 people were coming to us for diapers. We
24 said, Send them to the Diaper Bank. The

1 Diaper Bank is tied to social services. I'm
2 trying to get away from the word
3 "veteran" and those who have served and
4 social services, that the veteran is
5 impoverished, or those who serve because
6 they're poor.

7 We are finding more needs now of our
8 families who are in need of resources that
9 the emergency grant does not speak to, for
10 back rent -- and we'll talk about that. But
11 they're needing diapers. This has been so,
12 so spoken about, and the need now that our
13 military organizations and bases now have
14 family coordinators. Because the diaper
15 requests have been coming in to us for
16 veterans but also our reservists and our
17 active duty.

18 So when we say diapers, when we say
19 school clothes -- why? Because we have those
20 who have served that are home-schooling their
21 children not because they want to, but
22 because they can't afford school clothing.

23 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you,
24 Commissioner.

1 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: And also
2 book bags.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senator?

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

5 Senator Scarcella-Spanton.

6 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: You got
7 it.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I got it.

9 I apologize, our Veterans chair.

10 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you.

11 Thank you so much, Commissioner, for
12 being here.

13 And I think it's been no secret that
14 one of my frustrations is learning about
15 different programs that New York State has to
16 offer for veterans and for military families,
17 as opposed to searching for that information
18 when my husband got out of his military
19 career 10 years ago.

20 What is DVS doing specifically to
21 capture veterans who are getting out of
22 service and coming into New York? And do we
23 know how many veterans returned back to
24 New York over the past year?

1 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: I can get
2 back to you on that second part.

3 One of the things that you helped us
4 develop was that "Welcome Home" letter that
5 Joel signed maybe 10,000-plus a week or so.
6 So the people calling us and letting us know
7 that they received the "Welcome Home" letter.

8 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Can I
9 just -- really just in the interest of time,
10 with that letter, one of the -- that just
11 jogged my memory. One of the things --
12 especially as we see different cuts coming
13 from the federal government -- that I think
14 is incredibly important is making sure that
15 our returning veterans enroll in the VA.

16 Because we constantly see every few
17 years threats for different VAs to shut down.
18 Specifically in my district, the Brooklyn VA,
19 that came up a few years ago.

20 But the biggest issue is enrollment.
21 Does that letter include encouraging
22 returning servicemembers to join the VA?

23 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: It actually
24 encourages them for a special hand-hold, that

1 you don't just call the 188 number, but now
2 you call Veronica or Branch {ph}, who is
3 ready to do the hand-hold with you to get you
4 your eligible service connection, but also to
5 get you enrolled into the VA.

6 This is what we want to drive home.
7 You know, we have the resources, yes, on the
8 website. There's a list of them. We don't
9 have to say resources, a list of them. But
10 we want the veteran to sit with our veteran
11 benefits advisor. Why? Because they may ask
12 for the one thing, but when we sit with them,
13 they find out that they are entitled to 10
14 more things.

15 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Yeah, and
16 I think that's really important. And that
17 kind of brings me to my next point about the
18 website. You know, as you know, I feel
19 really strongly about creating a registry --
20 very similar to how you have the memorial
21 registry, a registry for resources.

22 The Governor, unfortunately, vetoed my
23 bill last year that we passed, I think it
24 passed unanimously in both houses. It is

1 entice you to look again and to scroll down,
2 because again -- because of the Governor's
3 initiatives and as well as yours, there are
4 things on there like outreach for the
5 Veterans Mobile Unit, with some of the
6 suggestions that we had from the monthly
7 meetings on being able to have those at
8 events and locations. Housing is on there.

9 It's actually a comprehensive list.
10 It doesn't say "resources," but the things
11 listed are the resources. And again, when
12 the phone calls come in and we ask how did
13 you hear of us, it's not through the website.
14 We are getting to the people across the state
15 who have never heard of us -- who have never
16 heard of us, who did not, again, know that
17 they were even veterans entitled to benefits.

18 We would rather have them speak to us.
19 And now, on that mobile unit, they can get on
20 there.

21 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: That
22 brings me to my next question. You know, I
23 see that there is a \$1 million investment to
24 expand veteran suicide prevention

1 initiatives. A couple of questions on that.

2 One, we know that family members are
3 often the first line of defense when you see
4 a veteran who is suffering with mental health
5 issues. Is there a specific resource for
6 family members to reach out to Veterans'
7 Services? That's one.

8 Two, can we get a breakdown of where
9 there \$1 million goes across the state?

10 And do you think also a larger
11 investment, you know, would be needed to
12 address this crisis? I think that, again,
13 utilizing military families is a really
14 important way to combat this issue, because
15 they see this firsthand day in and day out.

16 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: I'll let
17 you answer.

18 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE:
19 Senator, I could not agree more when it comes
20 to the importance of military families in
21 this work. That's why, for example, we've
22 had the success that we've had since 2021
23 with the Worried About a Veteran initiative.
24 That focuses on the families. We're the

1 first state in the country to do that,
2 through that interactive online resource.

3 So we want to do more with that, and
4 we're going to do more with that. Not just
5 in lethal-means safety, either. In the
6 entire panoply of topics that you're bringing
7 up here. Military families are crucial.
8 They are the first line of defense. And
9 working with them is essential.

10 So certainly as we're thinking about
11 and sketching out how this can be done,
12 working with military families, addressing
13 them directly, and also utilizing data that's
14 there right now from the Military Family
15 Advisory Council about where the greatest
16 needs are, the most glaring needs, the most
17 crucial needs. We're going to be using that
18 data to drive a lot of the work that we do
19 both with suicide prevention and also with
20 the Military Family Relief Fund, because
21 they're doing the research for us with that.

22 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: So that
23 was going to be the additional question I was
24 going to get to, was last year, you know, the

1 Comptroller had released the report regarding
2 the tax donations that had been
3 underutilized. To my understanding, some of
4 that money has gone out the door.

5 So I guess my first question would be,
6 how much of that money has gone out the door,
7 and to where?

8 And my second question was I see the
9 350,000 for the Military Family Relief Fund.
10 I know that there was also funds and it
11 needed an appropriation for the military
12 families, which is in there this year, which
13 is good. I don't think the rest of that
14 needed an appropriation.

15 So can you just walk me through what
16 that means exactly, the Military Family
17 Relief funds. Like how will this help
18 military families, and what will it be doing?

19 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE:

20 Certainly.

21 So first, if I may, on the question or
22 on the tax checkoff funding. We have the
23 Veterans Homeless Assistance Fund, for
24 example, right now, which has disbursed more

1 than \$430,000 since its inception to veterans
2 and their families who are facing crucial,
3 critical housing needs -- individuals who
4 literally on the street or about to get
5 there.

6 And these were people who had often
7 fallen through the cracks of both federal and
8 state systems. Oftentimes they didn't quite
9 qualify for one program or a different
10 program. Or they didn't know the programs
11 existed. And so what we're finding is many
12 of these veterans were contacting a veterans
13 benefits advisor or veterans service officer
14 for the first time through their application
15 to this fund.

16 And so we're getting them not just the
17 money for housing assistance, you know,
18 short-term needs being met, but also getting
19 disability compensation, pension, education
20 benefits, even blind annuity benefits for
21 these veterans who are facing these emergent
22 housing needs.

23 So that's definitely being utilized,
24 being extremely well run, and we're very

1 proud of the work that's been done in that
2 area.

3 Military Family Relief Fund, pivoting
4 over to that. Again, looking at what the
5 data shows us, one of the most crucial needs,
6 according to the Military Family Advisory
7 Council, is food insecurity. This is the
8 often-off-the-radar need that is not thought
9 of enough in this workspace, and it needs to
10 be front and center.

11 There are people right now in military
12 service in this state who are facing food
13 insecurity. And since June of 2020, we've
14 had the honor of partnering with the
15 Governor's anti-hunger policy coordinator and
16 with many both governmental and
17 nongovernmental partners around the state to
18 engage with the HelloFresh program, which is
19 coming up on 2 million meals in April of this
20 year.

21 We want to and we need to see more
22 work being done in that area. What exactly
23 that looks like is still under discussion.
24 We want to see more in that space.

1 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: In the
2 interest of time, because I know we're
3 closing up here, but for the Military Family
4 Relief Fund, especially that this is a new
5 appropriation, I would strongly encourage you
6 to have something designated for military
7 families, whether that be mental health
8 support for children and spouses as well, or
9 a coordinator specifically at the Department
10 of Veterans' Services that they can contact
11 if they are concerned about the veteran that
12 they live with.

13 So thank you. I hope that you will
14 take that into consideration.

15 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We will.

16 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: Most
17 definitely.

18 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman
19 Manktelow.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Thank you.

21 And good afternoon. Commissioner,
22 good to see you again, and thank you for your
23 service.

24 I've got a couple of tough questions

1 I'm going to ask you, and these are really
2 coming from our veterans that we see each and
3 every day in our districts, ones that we
4 know. And we talked a little bit about
5 mental health. And one of the questions we
6 are constantly being asked as legislators is,
7 you know, why does the Governor continue to
8 cut veterans' benefits in her budget, her
9 budget proposal? Why does she do that?

10 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank
11 you -- thank you -- thank you for that.

12 We want to say again these legislative
13 adds look like the cuts that's coming out.
14 We want to remind them also that when I first
15 began here, we were applauding this Governor
16 because we had an empty cup for a long time
17 and we had never had the benefits that we had
18 before. We know those legislative adds, the
19 ink is still good in your pen, we know
20 they'll be written back in there.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Okay.

22 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: And I
23 would just add I'd be curious on that front
24 which specific benefits are veterans saying

1 are being cut. Because I know that in my
2 11-plus years with the department, we are at
3 a high-water mark in terms of what we're able
4 to offer both directly and indirectly to
5 veterans and their families.

6 So I'd be curious to know which
7 specific things they're saying are being
8 constrained or cut.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: So maybe you
10 and I can directly have a conversation,
11 because I'd like to talk to you about veteran
12 suicide as well.

13 The second question is as you just
14 said, if she's going to put those cuts
15 upfront, we're going to have to get them back
16 in the budget. Okay? We are going to have
17 to put them in our one-house budgets, the
18 Senate and the Assembly.

19 What happens to our veterans if one of
20 those does not get put into that budget and
21 it doesn't get enacted in the final budget?
22 What happens to our veterans then?

23 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: I would
24 say in part this is probably why you had a

1 State Department of Veterans' Services.
2 We're able, for example -- there have been
3 organizations in New York State over the past
4 five years that have stopped doing direct
5 work as far as claims and appeals for
6 veterans. We have picked up that slack, if
7 you will, when that has occurred. And we've
8 taken on those cases, we've done those
9 claims, and we've won those claims.
10 Sometimes it's a pretty sizable six-figure
11 retroactive payments for those veterans.

12 So we are here as an organization --
13 not just an organization, an ally for
14 veterans and military families across the
15 state, and that does not change. We're here
16 each day and every day to serve that purpose.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: And you guys
18 do a great job, and I think we all agree
19 about that across the board.

20 But what we're talking about,
21 though -- first of all, this is the budget.
22 Because there's no doubt that we play this
23 game of chess with the budget process. And
24 why would we jeopardize our veterans by

1 playing this game of -- why not come up with
2 a straight line budget, this is what the
3 numbers are, why does one house or the other
4 house have to bring something forward to get
5 it back to where it was last year in the
6 previous budget? We are playing with our
7 veterans' lives and their families.

8 And I applaud you for all of your hard
9 work, but we need to do a better job with
10 that, making sure we constantly have that
11 number where it needs to be.

12 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: I would
13 just add, as was mentioned in Panel A of this
14 session that this is not new, as you
15 mentioned, and that this is not unique to
16 this administration. This has been a
17 longstanding concept of the legislative adds
18 being zeroed out and then added back in
19 individually. So it's not new to 2025.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: No, no,
21 absolutely not. But we as legislators, you
22 as commissioners and departments, you know
23 how the game is played here.

24 But what I'm saying is our veterans

1 that are home that don't get to see this each
2 and every single day, they don't know how
3 that is. And we need to do everything we can
4 to alleviate that mental stress on our
5 veterans. And doing the budget -- moving the
6 budget forward constantly, we need to do.
7 And we are going to all advocate for that.

8 So I just wanted to share that with
9 you. And that was one of the questions that
10 I'm receiving from some of my veterans out
11 there.

12 My second question is the expanded
13 Gold Star annuities. Thank you for that.
14 I'm glad to see the Governor put that in her
15 budget. How many more recipients do you
16 expect this expansion to take care of? With
17 the extra hundred thousand dollars, how many
18 more recipients will this benefit?

19 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: The
20 best answer we can give is we're not certain
21 at this point.

22 But one thing we can say is that based
23 on the number of individuals whom we have had
24 to horribly and regrettably turn down over

1 the past several years when it comes to the
2 death in question occurring in a non-combat
3 theater versus a combat theater, we have run
4 every projection imaginable in the last
5 several years. And certainly with that
6 additional 100,000 it will make certain that
7 all of those parents and families are fully
8 covered.

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you,
10 Assemblyman.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Thank you.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

13 So next is Senator Ashton, who's
14 getting 10 minutes -- Ashby, I'm so sorry.
15 Excuse me, Senator.

16 Don't get excited, all you other
17 rankers. He's getting 10 minutes because
18 he's the ranker for both the Aging Committee
19 and the Veterans Committee. Okay, thank you.

20 SENATOR ASHBY: I'm glad you got that
21 right.

22 (Laughter.)

23 SENATOR ASHBY: Director Olsen, it's
24 great to see you. Thank you for your

1 testimony today and thank you for your
2 continued work.

3 So it's my understanding that the
4 funding this year is not for the
5 implementation of the Master Plan but later
6 on, later on down the line still. We're
7 awaiting that. Of the discussions that
8 you've had, what's the biggest thing that
9 stands out to you that will need funding
10 immediately?

11 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I think
12 that the number-one recommendation that
13 seemed to be universal was an investment in
14 the New York State Office for Aging, and you
15 see that in our budget.

16 SENATOR ASHBY: As a general way of
17 funding it, yes. But specifically for what?

18 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: What
19 services, you mean?

20 SENATOR ASHBY: Correct.

21 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN:
22 Personal care, Level 1 and 2. Case
23 management. Home-delivered meals. Home
24 modifications. Transportation. All of those

1 are wrapped up within that.

2 And, Senator, first of all, thank you,
3 because you've been a staunch supporter of
4 ours and the network. I'm happy to get you
5 the unmet need report that will show you
6 where these dollars have directly gone. You
7 know, 23 million three years in a row.

8 SENATOR ASHBY: I appreciate that.
9 Thank you, Director.

10 Commissioner DeCohen, so last year we
11 had spoke about the veterans' tax checkoffs,
12 and you said the money would be moving
13 shortly with that. Have you released every
14 penny of these veterans' tax checkoffs yet?

15 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: So just so
16 you know, in reference to -- yes. Well, not
17 every penny.

18 The Emergency Housing Grant, we've
19 assisted 230 people out of over \$436,000.
20 Shortly after the announcement for the
21 cemetery, we acquired the Veterans Cemetery.
22 And so we have a balance of \$1 million, a
23 little over a million dollars that is there.
24 And then we're already working and utilizing

1 the money for the new columbarium and the
2 maintenance yard and maintenance building.

3 So yes, that money has been moving and
4 utilized.

5 SENATOR ASHBY: Why the delay? I know
6 that we've -- we have this new cemetery,
7 right, and there are still residual funds
8 that are left over. But by law, all of these
9 funds need to go. Homeless Veterans
10 Assistance, the disbursal that I've seen,
11 \$175,000. There's still 1.4 million left.
12 That's coming from your department, the last
13 correspondence that I have from July.

14 And by law, you're supposed to be
15 updating the Legislature on this. And I
16 understand that there needs to be -- or
17 you're asking for an appropriation. But if
18 you need to notify the Legislature, why do
19 you need an appropriation? Why can't you
20 just release it? That's duplicative.

21 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you
22 so much for that. Because from the time the
23 announcement came out that we were not
24 utilizing funds, the cemetery was not yet in

1 our possession. We --

2 SENATOR ASHBY: What about the
3 Homeless Veterans Assistance Fund?

4 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: That
5 program was being developed.

6 Please understand that as we have gone
7 from a division to a department and expanding
8 upon our programs, we wanted to ensure that
9 every I was dotted and every T was crossed
10 before we released this program. So the
11 program was not yet in existence, still being
12 developed. And since we have given --

13 SENATOR ASHBY: (Overtalk.) These tax
14 checkoffs have existed for seven years.

15 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: -- that
16 money -- that money has -- that money --

17 SENATOR ASHBY: Seven years.

18 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: -- has been
19 utilized.

20 SENATOR ASHBY: (Overtalk.)
21 Commissioner, seven years.

22 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We have --
23 we have --

24 SENATOR ASHBY: (Overtalk.) So it's

1 not like you didn't have a heads-up that
2 these tax checkoffs were not being used.

3 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Let me
4 remind --

5 SENATOR ASHBY: (Overtalk.) And when
6 you came into this role as commissioner,
7 this -- we made this abundantly clear last
8 year.

9 So I just -- I do not understand
10 how -- we're not even asking for the money.
11 The money exists. It's here.

12 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: The --
13 the -- the money from -- the money from
14 time -- and thank you for this. Because this
15 is why I say we have to have the partnership.
16 We have to continue to meet and not unmeet.
17 We have to continue when there's a
18 question --

19 SENATOR ASHBY: (Overtalk.) I agree.
20 So why have we not heard from you since July?

21 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: -- and
22 false news goes out, that we're available by
23 phone call for you to call us. Because these
24 programs were not even in existence yet and

1 released?

2 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: Not
3 that I know of at this time. But again, that
4 would be a question best suited for them and
5 not for DVS. If I --

6 SENATOR ASHBY: (Overtalk.) If they
7 have oversight on this. But these funds are
8 for veterans, right? So I understand that
9 you may not be the department that's
10 responsible for releasing the funds, but you
11 are the department that's responsible for
12 helping to take care of our state's veterans.

13 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We are --
14 we are -- listen, we are releasing these
15 funds. In fact the applications have been
16 coming in.

17 SENATOR ASHBY: By law, all of them
18 need to be released annually. You're
19 releasing pieces of them, portions of it.
20 Why?

21 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE:
22 Senator, I can speak to the Housing Fund in
23 particular. We are not just releasing pieces
24 of the Housing Fund. There's applications

1 coming in literally every day, weekends and
2 holidays included. Our outreach team is
3 processing them as rapidly as they come in to
4 make certain that the eligibility standards
5 are met. And as soon as they are approved,
6 we engage in the claim-for-payment process to
7 get the money out the door.

8 So there's nothing being held back.

9 SENATOR ASHBY: Has the Comptroller
10 confirmed that an appropriation is required
11 for the release of the Military Families
12 Fund?

13 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: I'm not
14 sure I understand the question.

15 SENATOR ASHBY: Why would we -- why
16 would you need an appropriation for this?

17 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: Because
18 that is what the department has been told.

19 SENATOR ASHBY: Even though, by law,
20 you're supposed to update the Legislature
21 annually, specifically for this fund you need
22 an appropriation, even though for all the
23 others you don't?

24 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: Again,

1 Senator, all I can tell you is what we have
2 been told as an agency.

3 SENATOR ASHBY: (Overtalk.) Have you
4 asked why?

5 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: What's
6 that?

7 SENATOR ASHBY: Have you asked why,
8 why the discrepancy?

9 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: No, we
10 have not asked that.

11 SENATOR ASHBY: Why specifically for
12 this?

13 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE:
14 (Shaking head.)

15 SENATOR ASHBY: Okay. Being that
16 you're now a full cabinet-level department,
17 what staff increases have you seen since
18 becoming a full department?

19 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: I'm sorry,
20 I didn't catch the first part of what you
21 said, Senator.

22 SENATOR ASHBY: What staff increases,
23 now that you're a full cabinet-level
24 department?

1 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Good.
2 We've gone from the 89 -- we were allotted
3 for 110 FTEs. We have gone from 89 to now
4 over 99, and still interviewing at this time.

5 SENATOR ASHBY: What -- what federal
6 money are you going after now that you can
7 acquire federal grants as a department? Do
8 you have any large-scale initiatives that
9 you're looking at?

10 I know we talked about -- I really
11 appreciate the Gold Star Family Annuity. I
12 mean, we've been working on that with
13 Carrie Farley and the Gold Star Mothers and
14 very happy to see that go through and the
15 Governor's \$1 million investment in mental
16 health is nice, right.

17 I went to a funeral for a buddy, a
18 veteran, two weeks ago. This is still a big
19 issue, right? Are you going after or do you
20 see anything on the horizon as far as a
21 large-scale initiative for the department?

22 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: A
23 large-scale initiative in a certain area,
24 or --

1 SENATOR ASHBY: We heard the
2 chairwoman just talk about the website,
3 right? We've had legislation exist since I
4 was in the Assembly where we've gone back and
5 forth on the quality of the website. It's
6 pretty much the same thing.

7 And Spectrum News reported just last
8 year 17 percent of our state's veterans
9 access their resources, 17 percent. We have
10 to be doing more than what we're currently
11 doing. And if there's not a list of
12 priorities out there in terms of going over
13 federal dollars, right, that you now have the
14 ability to garner, to communicate better,
15 right, educational resources, vocational
16 resources, mental health. There's a host of
17 initiatives that you could be going after.
18 Right?

19 I didn't hear -- I didn't hear much of
20 that at all.

21 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: Let me
22 speak in 35 seconds --

23 SENATOR ASHBY: I heard you kind of
24 double down --

1 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: -- on
2 what we're doing.

3 SENATOR ASHBY: -- that we are
4 reaching our veterans when we're reaching
5 17 percent.

6 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Twenty-four
7 percent. Which is a national average.
8 Seventeen percent did not include --
9 17 percent did not include all of those who
10 had served, but those who have connected
11 disabilities.

12 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: If I
13 may, on the website as well, the website has
14 changed. I can verify that because I have
15 written the content changes myself.

16 SENATOR ASHBY: What's been --

17 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: If
18 there are -- if there are further content
19 changes that are desired, I welcome any and
20 all recommendations, changes, edits and so
21 on.

22 SENATOR ASHBY: (Overtalk.) We've
23 written -- we've written legislation on --

24 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN:

1 (Inaudible.)

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you, ladies
3 and gentlemen.

4 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: -- there
5 are ample changes.

6 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman Clark
7 for three minutes.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thank you.

9 And my questions are for
10 Director Olsen. A couple of rapid-fire, and
11 then we'll get to hopefully where I want to
12 land.

13 But on LTCOP, the Long Term Care
14 Ombudsman Program, how much staff has been
15 hired in the last two years, with the
16 current --

17 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: It went
18 from 57 to 101. And we're still hiring.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: We're still
20 hiring based on the money that's been
21 allocated extra --

22 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: I mean, I think
24 it's been said already, but reiterating the

1 fact that we're not meeting our targets but
2 that yet -- but we know professionalizing
3 works. I'm assuming when you go from 57 to
4 101 you see a difference in terms of the
5 ability to really advocate for our residents?

6 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Double
7 the number of visits over that time.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Wonderful.

9 On the waiting lists, were the
10 community-based organizations that sort of
11 run this, were they talked to in terms of
12 when you said this is the number that will
13 clear the waiting list? Our assumption and
14 what we're hearing from them is that it is
15 actually much higher.

16 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: So, I
17 mean, you know, Ann Marie's going to be
18 behind me, I know that they weighed in.
19 Catholic Family Center comes through
20 Monroe County Office for Aging, for your
21 particular district. It's really incumbent
22 upon them and every other triple A, whether
23 they're providing direct services or
24 subcontracting out, to reach out to their

1 folks to get a handle on what exactly the
2 waitlist is.

3 As you know, Assemblywoman, there's a
4 difference between waitlist and need.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Okay. Our
6 numbers that we're hearing, though, are
7 closer -- are well over 80 million.

8 So I appreciate the Governor, but I
9 think if we're going to do it, we need to
10 just do it regardless of the cost.

11 The second thing, on the scams. We
12 know that what we've seen on fraud and elder
13 abuse, through what Lifespan's been able to
14 do, and other organizations, that it is
15 really amazing but we haven't invested yet on
16 the same kind of level in terms of education
17 around scams, yet we know that that's
18 increasing.

19 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I
20 mean that's a huge priority for me. I know
21 it is for Ann Marie.

22 That's why we've done a lot of work --
23 you know, we fund them to do a lot of work.
24 They're spectacular. But we're also doing a

1 lot of work together. Doing videos, doing
2 training. We provided funding so
3 that Ann Marie's staff could actually not
4 just work in and around the Rochester area,
5 but go statewide.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Yes.

7 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: But
8 you're absolutely right, we need a campaign,
9 because this needs to be stopped: 28 billion
10 annually.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: The scams is a
12 big piece. We really need to double down on
13 that, not just the fraud and abuse.

14 I just want to ask you, if there was a
15 program out there that had already been
16 tested, tried and trued that kept 30 percent
17 of our older New Yorkers who are living at
18 home out of emergency rooms, would that be
19 something that we should be jumping for joy
20 in our state and funding, knowing that it
21 costs so much less to keep people at home,
22 safe and healthy, versus -- and keeping
23 30 percent out of emergency rooms?

24 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: So let

1 me answer that in 18 seconds. The integrated
2 care model in the Rochester area, absolutely.

3 You know, strong advocate for those
4 types of models that bring together social
5 services, clinical services, and you can
6 measure them.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: We didn't see it
8 in the budget, so we hope we can get it there
9 in the final product.

10 Thank you.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

12 Senator Liu, is he still here? No.

13 (Off the record.)

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So, okay, we're
15 not doing three-minute follow-up yet. I
16 think it's me, then, if I don't see another
17 Senator. Oh, wait, I have other Republican
18 Senators. Excuse me.

19 All right. I'm just looking at the
20 numbers, excuse me. The clock is -- no,
21 don't run, I apologize. Senator Stec is
22 listed next. Oh, he's not? Because he left,
23 because he's not here.

24 Okay, Senator Weber. No, he's not.

1 Senator Rolison?

2 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you,
3 Madam Chair.

4 For Director Olsen, about the expanded
5 victim support services and increasing
6 compensation for scams, as you said and as we
7 know, we're living longer. I would also say
8 there's probably a correlation to the amount
9 of people who are going to fall victim to
10 these scams. I know in our district office
11 we field a lot of calls, we put a lot of mail
12 out, and of course we know we're not reaching
13 everybody.

14 Does -- do you coordinate with -- and
15 just for our veterans' services, we have an
16 aging veteran population also. Are they
17 receiving like the same information? Is
18 there a coordinated effort to reach as many
19 people as possible, you know, in these age
20 categories to let them know they can fall
21 victim very easily?

22 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah.
23 There's -- I mean, there's no question. I
24 mean, one of the things that -- and Benjamin

1 entered a while ago, and now of course under
2 the leadership of Commissioner DeCohen, we do
3 a lot of cross-training for exactly this
4 reason.

5 So we added -- you know, I used to be
6 a case manager. One of the things we added
7 to our COMPASS years ago was "Are you a
8 veteran," so that we could do that soft
9 hand-off. Right? We're screening for
10 anxiety, depression, and so on and so forth.

11 I'm talking fast because I know you
12 only have a couple of minutes.

13 The answer's absolutely yes. And this
14 is not an issue just for older people. So I
15 don't know how many of you have gotten the
16 Thruway scam. I've gotten it from
17 Massachusetts, I get it from New York, I get
18 it daily. The USPS scam. There's a ton of
19 them. You got IRS scams now because of tax
20 season. FTC scam. I mean, you know, the
21 advice is simple. Again, it's very
22 sophisticated: It's like don't click the
23 link, don't answer the phone. Those are the
24 things we keep telling people.

1 So, you know, in your district,
2 Senator, we could certainly work with
3 Ann Marie and her team because, as I said, we
4 put together a budget for her so her folks
5 can travel. They're amazing. You know, past
6 law enforcement officials, investigators.
7 And it also can be done electronically.

8 But to your question of do we connect,
9 that's our job. We are the connect-the-dots
10 agency because our folks hit so many
11 different systems.

12 SENATOR ROLISON: And I thank you for
13 that, and we look forward to partnering. And
14 to your point, anybody can fall victim to a
15 scam. I almost did with Nordstrom Rack.

16 (Laughter.)

17 SENATOR ROLISON: So it's possible.

18 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
19 it totally is. You're right. I'm glad you
20 raised it.

21 SENATOR ROLISON: Yeah. If you see
22 things that look really cheap, they're not
23 real.

24 (Laughter.)

1 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you.

2 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank
3 you, Senator.

4 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman
5 Burdick.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Thank you.

7 And Commissioner DeCohen, I want to
8 thank you for your service to the country and
9 also for your testimony.

10 We know that one of the difficulties
11 in serving our veterans' community is that
12 thousands of veterans don't know that they
13 may be eligible for benefits and help. And
14 of course to respect their privacy rights,
15 you can't just send out notices to them
16 because we don't have their addresses and
17 they're not available in public record.

18 So have you considered collective
19 collaborating with the U.S. Department of
20 Veterans Affairs to provide notification to
21 veterans in New York State that they may be
22 eligible for benefits and to contact your
23 department for help?

24 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: Sir,

1 the short answer is absolutely. Both with
2 the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and
3 with the U.S. Department of Defense.

4 We structured an agreement, an
5 authority to operate with the U.S. Department
6 of Defense, whereby we get a weekly update, a
7 weekly spreadsheet, provided securely by DOD,
8 which tells us who has listed New York State
9 as the state to which they intend to return.
10 And that provides not just the address, but
11 it also provides, for those who opt in, an
12 email address. And we reach out to them in
13 those welcome-home letters the commissioner
14 mentioned.

15 In addition to that, we partner with
16 the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs all
17 the time on outreach programs, on awareness
18 programs, on -- as was mentioned earlier --
19 enrollment campaigns, the VA --

20 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: If I may, are
21 you satisfied with those results, or do you
22 think that further efforts are needed in
23 order to reach the veterans that still
24 haven't been reached?

1 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: I'll
2 give a two-part answer. Yes, we're doing
3 well with the results. But also yes, we want
4 to do more. Always we want to do more.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: A different
6 area. Could you share with us, Commissioner,
7 the number of veterans your agency has served
8 in each year since your appointment as
9 commissioner?

10 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: I can show
11 you what -- give you the approximate number
12 of where we started and where we are now.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: You know what,
14 rather than giving that to me now, if you
15 could just share it with the group here.

16 And one thing also is can you describe
17 any new initiatives to provide help to local
18 veterans' organizations such as the American
19 Legion chapters, as well as to county
20 veterans' agencies? Anything new that you've
21 been doing, anything on the horizon?

22 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We're
23 continuing to offer the training to them.
24 We're also working with our veterans service

1 officers across the state as it relates to
2 the needs for those veterans, especially
3 expecting the babies, those who are in need
4 of the additional resources like the book
5 bags.

6 And Benjamin has a comprehensive
7 training and monthly meetings each month with
8 the veterans service presidents.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Thank you so
10 much. Appreciate it.

11 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

13 And now we have Senator Murray, also a
14 ranker.

15 SENATOR MURRAY: Thank you,
16 Chairwoman.

17 Thank you both for being here -- all
18 three of you for being here.

19 And Director Olsen, first let me say I
20 so appreciate your energy and your passion.

21 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank
22 you.

23 SENATOR MURRAY: You can see it in
24 what you're doing. And I very much

1 appreciated your testimony because it was
2 eye-opening for me on a couple of aspects.

3 So I'm going to hit you with a couple
4 of questions. You might not have exact
5 numbers, but if you can give me guesstimates,
6 that would be fine.

7 So I've been very, very outspoken -- I
8 want to start with the universal three meals
9 in schools. I've been very outspoken. My
10 colleague to the left here, Assemblywoman
11 González-Rojas, has been extremely passionate
12 and out there about this. I didn't realize,
13 though, and I didn't think about the other
14 benefit being that of our seniors, of how
15 many grandparents are actually the primary
16 caregivers.

17 Do you have numbers as to how many
18 will be affected by that?

19 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I don't
20 know how many actually claim their grandchild
21 on their tax, because that's the key.

22 But you're right, I mean, that's --
23 it's just the way that my mind works, is like
24 look, they don't just live at the State

1 Office for Aging, because I don't either and
2 neither do you guys. The last count I saw
3 was about 350,000 grandparents and over
4 400,000 kin care -- so it's still family
5 members, but they're not necessarily
6 grandparents that are taking care of somebody
7 else due to a variety of reasons.

8 SENATOR MURRAY: That's a very big
9 impact, and I appreciate that.

10 Moving on to some others, I want to
11 talk also about the SNAP benefits. And again
12 I'll ask, do you have numbers as to how many
13 seniors are currently qualifying for SNAP
14 benefits?

15 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I can
16 probably get through the other agency.

17 But I can tell you, the average
18 benefit's a little over \$200. That's
19 \$2400 minimum a year for an older adult
20 household. Right? That goes right back into
21 their pockets, and that's why it's so
22 important.

23 A lot of older adults don't tap these
24 benefits. Just like we're talking about with

1 veterans, there's a lot of reasons why that
2 is. But we can do so much better. They're
3 leaving \$66 billion of benefits on the table
4 every year at a time where -- you know, a
5 report came out yesterday that half of older
6 adults in New York State who are retired
7 don't have Social Security. That is stunning
8 to me.

9 So that's new. I just read that
10 yesterday, and I think AARP is going to
11 testify about that study. But like what are
12 we doing? How can that be? Fifty-nine
13 billion dollars of Social Security gets
14 pumped back into New York State. And if half
15 of folks aren't receiving it, like, oh, my
16 God.

17 SENATOR MURRAY: That is -- that is
18 big.

19 Do you collaborate with other
20 agencies, such as OTDA and others?

21 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN:
22 Constantly. Because older adults touch all
23 these agencies. So OTDA does HEAP; we do
24 HEAP outreach. They're responsible for SNAP.

1 We do SNAP outreach. We have a contract with
2 them for SNAP ed.

3 So I could go on and on, but that
4 really is leveraging what we do and what they
5 do to serve people holistically and expand
6 services under, you know, the budgets that we
7 have. That's the number-one job.

8 SENATOR MURRAY: Good. Now, I work --
9 locally I work with our district attorney,
10 Ray Tierney's office, and we do a lot of
11 senior scam events. We go and do that. Do
12 you also work with law enforcement, or do you
13 have something that we could work with you,
14 your offices as well?

15 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah.
16 So make sure you ask Ann Marie when she comes
17 up afterwards.

18 We're the only state in the country
19 that has organized and has a statewide EMDT,
20 Enhanced Monthly Disciplinary Team, to combat
21 elder abuse in all its forms. And that
22 includes law enforcement, district attorneys,
23 DSSs, Aging, Office of Court Administration,
24 et cetera, et cetera. Again, for a holistic

1 approach, right?

2 And these cases get very complicated,
3 so what you want to do is you want to
4 leverage every asset because if somebody
5 needs housing, you need the housing people
6 there. If they need, you know, a particular
7 benefit, you need those folks there.

8 So very, very proud of that. That's
9 something that we worked really hard with Ann
10 Marie and a group of folks to establish. So
11 there's those types of things, but they're
12 very localized in a hub-and-spoke model.

13 SENATOR MURRAY: Well, we'll talk more
14 about that and collaborating.

15 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN:
16 Absolutely. Would love to.

17 SENATOR MURRAY: And finally, I want
18 to touch on the Long Term Care Ombudsman
19 Program. And it kind of ties into what you
20 were just saying about people not knowing
21 about the benefits.

22 I can't tell you how many times I've
23 had conversations with families and they
24 didn't know this existed, this was there for

1 hear the thing, does it really exist?

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

3 Assembly.

4 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thanks.

5 I would love to follow up with you.

6 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman

7 Hooks.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN HOOKS: Thank you,

9 Speaker. And thank you, Commissioner and

10 Acting Director, for being here today.

11 I have worked in aging services from
12 2011 to 2024, and throughout my tenure I have
13 witnessed a persistent case management
14 waitlist -- a persistent case management
15 waitlist due to a need crisis in New York
16 City. In my district alone, there are six
17 older adult centers, yet only two provide
18 case management services, both of which have
19 extensive waitlists.

20 Even more concerning is that
21 community-based organizations are all not
22 allocated funding for case management. As a
23 result, older adults are forced to seek
24 services outside their neighborhoods,

1 creating further barriers to access.

2 Additionally, while case assistance
3 regulations have been modified to closely
4 resemble case management regulations, the
5 necessary funding had not been provided to
6 support this change.

7 To address this crisis, every center
8 should receive dedicated funding for case
9 management services with quality personnel.
10 This would not only help alleviate the
11 current backlog, but also ensure equitable
12 access to essential support for older adults
13 across all communities.

14 How can NYSOFA assist in securing
15 appropriate funding for all CBOs to provide
16 case management services?

17 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thanks
18 for the question. I love it. I started as a
19 case manager in 1992, so that's how I started
20 my career. I know exactly what you're
21 talking about. It is way different than care
22 coordination in a clinical model, so you know
23 exactly what I'm talking about.

24 One of the number-one areas of

1 waitlists that gets reported to us is case
2 management. So that will be a part of, if
3 the budget passes with all of your support,
4 that will go out the door. What you're
5 talking about is a little bit differently,
6 because what -- the way that we are
7 structured and required by federal and state
8 law is the dollars have to go to the 59 Area
9 Agencies, who then in New York City
10 subcontract out to case management agencies.

11 So if we want to talk about how to get
12 directly to the community-based providers,
13 that would be -- we would need some statutory
14 change to do that. Because that's the way --
15 again, back in '65 and up till today, that's
16 the way the network is structured, is my
17 hands are tied. The funding has to go to the
18 triple As.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN HOOKS: Thank you so
20 much.

21 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thanks
22 for the question.

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. I
24 think it's now my turn. Hi, everyone.

1 So we've had this discussion before,
2 Greg, that the statute requires that you
3 share with us each year the unmet need broken
4 down by county and service. Last year after
5 I asked you, you were able to get that
6 information to us. So can we expect that
7 information from you again after today's
8 hearing?

9 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I don't
10 have any problem sharing the county. Are you
11 looking for the allocations?

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes, both the --
13 well, any kind of data on their waiting -- if
14 there's waiting lists on any services, what
15 the services provided were per county and
16 where we are on unmet need. Because --

17 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Well, we know
19 why, because you and I are both passionate
20 about the issues for older New Yorkers.

21 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: We are,
22 Senator, and I appreciate it. And it's not
23 ever anything that I do not want to share,
24 it's what's the impact of sharing that

1 publicly. Because what winds up happening is
2 then you have counties that don't report what
3 their needs are because of local political
4 issues. That has always been the issue.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. So even
6 the discussion today highlights being an
7 older New York is probably a 30-to-35-year
8 age range. I think we actually struggle with
9 even understanding all the needs, because
10 they really vary. I'm now proudly 67. I'm
11 one of your constituents, and I'm still
12 working, but I have plenty of constituents
13 looking for jobs. I also have plenty of
14 constituents who end up in a situation where
15 they've lived longer than their savings and
16 they are in rough financial trouble.

17 And I want to have an understanding of
18 how we're sort of holistically looking at
19 this when you talk about the Master Plan and
20 recognizing that there's all kinds of
21 different needs. I really worry that the
22 \$1 million isn't enough for you to actually
23 start to come up with ways to create models
24 that work.

1 I worry that even though we did give
2 you additional money this year to try to help
3 fill some of the gaps of unmet need at the
4 local levels for all kinds of fundamental
5 services, that that can't possibly be enough.

6 So if the Governor hadn't put a limit
7 on how much more you could ask for, what
8 would your ask have been?

9 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, I
10 just want to go back and clarify that the
11 million that's in our budget is not
12 implementation money.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Right.

14 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I think
15 you understand that.

16 The recommendations from the MPA did
17 not come from us, they came from the
18 stakeholders, which you guys will then, you
19 know, sift through, I am sure.

20 There are a ton of needs. There is
21 economic insecurity. There are benefits that
22 I think we all could be helping people with.
23 You know, I don't really -- it's a really
24 difficult question to answer, Senator. I

1 don't think that there's anybody in any
2 agency, any not-for-profit anywhere that
3 would say they wouldn't be open to having
4 additional resources put in.

5 But I can't quantify exactly what a
6 fair number would be. I just can't do that.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. So already
8 during these budget hearings we've heard many
9 people concerned about the CDPAP changed
10 policies that are supposed to be all rolled
11 up by April 1. A large number of the people
12 in that program are seniors. Does DFTA play
13 a -- not DFTA, SOFA play any role in this and
14 evaluating and tracking what happens if it
15 doesn't work?

16 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: The
17 CDPAP program, as you know -- and, you know,
18 there was nine hours of conversation about
19 this yesterday -- is a Medicaid program.
20 It's administered by the Health Department,
21 so I defer to them on that.

22 What our goal is, Senator -- and, you
23 know, we've known each other a long time --
24 is we can walk and chew gum at the same time.

1 The best way to save future Medicaid dollars
2 is not to go on Medicaid. And that's what
3 our system is. It's the pre-Medicaid, it's
4 the community support, it's helping older
5 adults remain independent, supporting their
6 families who are taking care of them,
7 et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

8 We do have a small consumer-directed
9 program. We are keeping our eyes on what
10 that's going to mean, because we obviously
11 use some fiscal intermediaries. But in terms
12 of CDPAP I have to defer to the commissioner.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. So you had
14 a pilot with robots going to people's homes.
15 How is that going?

16 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: So we
17 have over 20 public/private partnerships now
18 serving over a million people using a variety
19 of tech. What you're talking about I think
20 is ElliQ, from Intuition Robotics.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes.

22 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: It's a
23 proactive AI companion to combat social
24 isolation and loneliness.

1 All of these projects have been
2 incredibly successful. We published a report
3 in '24 on 18 of them, with the outcome
4 measures. Happy to share this with all of
5 you guys. We are literally doing -- nobody
6 in the world is doing what we're doing here
7 in New York. Ninety-seven percent reduction,
8 loneliness and isolation, 96 percent
9 reduction in depression, 95 percent increase
10 in overall health and wellness from the
11 things that they're doing.

12 We can send messaging out. For
13 example, when SRV {sic} -- what's the
14 difference between SRV, the flu and COVID.
15 We were able to send messaging out to folks.

16 But that's just one of many platforms
17 that are so low-budget, high-yield, where you
18 measure then and -- you know, this is the
19 future. And, you know, oftentimes states are
20 not proactive, they're reactive -- agencies.
21 That's not us. We have to find ways to do
22 more with what we have, and that's what we're
23 doing, serving a million more people.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: You're planning

1 to expand those programs, I'm assuming?

2 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: We're
3 doing the best we can to pilot them, show
4 that they work. And then there's, you know,
5 individuals that can purchase them on their
6 own. There is mainstream insurance, there's
7 Medicare Advantage, share them with the
8 Health Department, there's MLTC.

9 So there's a lot of ways to say, Look,
10 somebody's got to take the risk. I don't
11 think it's risky to try something, to measure
12 it, see if it works. They've all been
13 positive. I'm going to make sure that you
14 personally get a copy, but I'm happy to
15 provide it because it's incredible.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Great. Great.
17 So one of my favorite programs that's
18 I think hopefully county by county is the
19 HIICAP program, helping Medicare participants
20 get advice on what the best options are. I
21 know how well it's working in New York City.
22 It's one of the really I think successful
23 programs.

24 Do we have it in every county?

1 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: We do.

2 And then there's what's also called
3 the Managed Care Consumer Assistance Program.
4 So that came about in 2005 when the Medicare
5 Modernization Act came forward, right,
6 because now you have all this open
7 enrollment. It's very, very confusing.

8 The HIICAP program is unbelievable.
9 And it's the mainstay of getting the outreach
10 and education out on the MSP program, right,
11 which is administered by the Health
12 Department, puts \$7,000 back into people's
13 pockets every year.

14 So, you know, that's something that we
15 are continuing to not only advocate at the
16 federal level, because it's a federal
17 program -- it drives me nuts, the feds keep
18 changing things, adding things, they don't
19 fund anything, and then, you know, you guys
20 are left and the counties are left and people
21 are left picking up the bag for, you know,
22 the failures at the federal level.

23 But yes, there is a program in every
24 county. And then we have backups because of

1 the volume.

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And new
3 colleagues, if you don't know about the
4 HIICAP program for your own constituents,
5 learn about it. It's incredibly valuable to
6 people.

7 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Great.
8 Thank you for pointing that out, Senator.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
10 Guardianships. There's been some
11 exposés about really disturbing things
12 happening through guardianships. Now, I know
13 you don't officially have a role here. The
14 courts do, OCFS. The AG's office is now
15 looking into it, I met with them, I met with
16 the courts. And yet the vast majority of
17 people who end up in a guardianship situation
18 are older New Yorkers.

19 Is there a role that you should be
20 playing? Is there a role -- I mean, one of
21 the things we've learned, no one knows how
22 many people are in guardianship in the state,
23 no one. Nobody knows who actually might be
24 the guardians, because there are registered

1 not-for-profits with government contracts,
2 there are unregistered not-for-profits.
3 For-profits have gotten into the business,
4 which frankly terrifies me. What is a
5 for-profit doing wanting to go become a
6 guardian?

7 So what do you all know, and what's
8 your role here?

9 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Our
10 role over the last couple of years is
11 administering funding for Project
12 Guardianship and others who are collecting
13 information through an 800 number that they
14 established. If you haven't seen that data
15 yet --

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: No, I've met with
17 Project Guardianship, yes.

18 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Okay.
19 So, I mean, you know, we're talking about the
20 same people.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yup.

22 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: The
23 issue is is that you can't find pro bono
24 lawyers, and lawyers are not doing this

1 anymore for a court-appointed guardian.

2 And there's other ways to do this with
3 nonlawyers, and that what's happened. That
4 was funded in Nassau and Suffolk County
5 for -- going back probably a decade.

6 So there's certainly a need. I think
7 there's target areas in the state where it's
8 more than others. If there's no lawyer
9 available, it's supposed to be through the
10 DSSs at the county level, but they're not
11 available either.

12 So I can't imagine that between --
13 where are we now -- February 12th and April 1
14 there's not going to be more conversations
15 about this.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: There needs to
17 be.

18 And I've run out of time to talk to
19 about the veterans, I'm sorry. I guess the
20 only question that I didn't hear yet today,
21 how cooperative is the Veterans
22 Administration in making sure all the
23 healthcare services, mental health care
24 services that our veterans deserve, that

1 they're getting them? Are they cooperative
2 with you? Are we coordinating successfully?

3 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: They've
4 been very cooperative with us, as well as
5 including us in their whole life and their
6 wellness programs, especially for the women
7 who have served. We've actually been
8 instrumental in designing some of them and
9 then being able to support them across the
10 state.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
12 Assembly.

13 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you,
14 Commissioner.

15 Assemblywoman Lunsford.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Thank you
17 very much. Director Olsen, I hope that the
18 Governor is planning on investing in cloning
19 technology with the amount of things that you
20 have said Ann Marie will do today. We're
21 going to need seven more of her.

22 (Laughter.)

23 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well,
24 Ann Marie's been a great partner and friend

1 for many, many decades. So we just aged
2 ourselves.

3 (Laughter.)

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: I appreciate
5 your testimony. It was very thorough.
6 Yesterday I was speaking with the DOH
7 commissioner and specifically asked if our
8 1115 waiver funding could be used to better
9 address prevention with older New Yorkers.

10 When I've seen information about what
11 we're going to do with that money, I have not
12 really seen a focus on our aging population,
13 despite the fact that we are poised to have
14 more New Yorkers over the age of 65 than any
15 other demographic in the next 10 years.

16 Can you speak to what we should be
17 doing and planning as a Legislature to better
18 leverage those funds for this aging
19 population?

20 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: So I
21 really can't say what you should be doing,
22 right? CMS has to approve an 1115 waiver.
23 There's not much in it for older adults.

24 I will tell you that the Health

1 Department has been very proactive in the
2 last couple of weeks reaching out to me to
3 talk about how to potentially include --

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Oh, he told
5 me it could be used today. That's what he
6 said.

7 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I'm
8 sorry?

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: The DOH
10 commissioner said absolutely, yessiree, we
11 can use that money for older New Yorkers.

12 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well,
13 great, then I'll follow up with him and
14 figure that out.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Fabulous.
16 Wanted to let you know he said that. Thought
17 that would be convenient for both of us. All
18 right, excellent.

19 Commissioner DeCohen, I love your
20 coat. I love the theme. Thank you so much.

21 Two years ago I passed a bill that
22 created a permanent public education campaign
23 to help destigmatize access to mental health
24 and substance abuse for our veterans and

1 military personnel. Can you speak more about
2 what your department is doing in regard to
3 that program?

4 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Absolutely.
5 In fact, Benjamin is one of our program --
6 was our former program administrator.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: How
8 convenient.

9 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: The
10 topic is essential, the topic is of daily
11 need. And in the work that we talked about
12 earlier when it comes to enhanced suicide
13 prevention efforts, it's a crucial part of
14 the work that we're doing.

15 In our interactions with veterans and
16 also with their families, we're bringing up
17 this topic literally every single day. It's
18 a keystone of our work.

19 I work with a World War II veteran who
20 just turned 100 years old. He filed a claim
21 successfully, with our assistance, for PTSD
22 caused by his time in World War II service.
23 He had never filed a claim in his life
24 because he had been told for decades what

1 you, Senator.

2 SENATOR O'MARA: I've got a couple of
3 questions for the commissioner of Veterans'
4 Services.

5 Commissioner, thanks for being here
6 and thanks for the commitment to the State
7 Veterans Cemetery in Seneca County, where I
8 represent.

9 As you're probably aware, we're still
10 working on getting some grounds equipment for
11 there. Presently relying on one sole
12 contractor for the digging of gravesites. So
13 it's imperative that we get moving on that to
14 get that so we can have the appropriate
15 equipment on-site that staff can use and not
16 rely on one sole contractor out there.

17 So you're aware of the need, and where
18 does that stand in getting that processed?

19 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Good.
20 Thank you for that question, Senator.

21 Just so you know, we just had a
22 private meeting with the staff at the
23 cemetery, and we have actually put out for
24 additional assistance as well as getting the

1 list of equipment and possible folk to get it
2 from. So we've got our pulse on that. We're
3 in agreement with you.

4 SENATOR O'MARA: Great, thank you. I
5 was unaware of that recent meeting, so thank
6 you for that.

7 Just to follow up a little bit on the
8 PTSD, the treatments. It seems to me that
9 we're just continuing to do the same old
10 thing that doesn't seem to be all that
11 effective. I've been a champion for years of
12 the research and recognition project of
13 Dr. Frank Burke, and a different approach to
14 this. Been trying to get -- I was successful
15 years ago in getting them some funding.
16 We're still trying to do it. American
17 Legions of states across the country and the
18 National American Legion is on board with
19 this and pushing for this. Other states are
20 moving forward to train counselors in this
21 treatment protocol.

22 So why are we having such a difficult
23 time in New York getting any funding to
24 sustain this, to train counselors for

1 something that it seems to me actually works?

2 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: We
3 definitely are familiar with the program.
4 We've met many times with the doctor and his
5 team. As far as the question on the funding,
6 I don't have an answer for you right now on
7 that. We can certainly talk more about where
8 that stands, because the process and the
9 protocol we certainly know of and have had
10 many conversations about with respect to its
11 effectiveness.

12 SENATOR O'MARA: Well, it's an
13 important issue for me. And from what I know
14 of it, and I've worked on this for years now,
15 it seems to be effective and works. Other
16 states are going to be beating us to this, to
17 the use of this. Other states are in the
18 process of doing it now. It seems to me to
19 be a wise investment to get counselors
20 trained in this protocol and actually
21 treating our veterans for PTSD rather than
22 just having group meetings to talk about it,
23 because it doesn't seem to be getting
24 anywhere as far as treatment goes.

1 collect Social Security or any other benefit.

2 As the New York State Office of the
3 Aging develops the Master Plan for Aging, how
4 has the agency worked to engage foreign-born
5 seniors and representatives of the community
6 in the development of the Master Plan to
7 better support this community? And what work
8 has the office done to address the needs of
9 this vital community?

10 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
11 that's a great question. I can't get into
12 specifics, but we work obviously with some of
13 the other state agencies, faith communities,
14 Office of New Americans, et cetera. Just
15 another factoid that you want to put out
16 there, they also contribute \$97 billion to
17 Social Security and Medicare. Right?

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYES: Correct.

19 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: So
20 certainly I think that the state and the
21 Governor have been extraordinarily clear
22 on -- you know, whether it be my agency, the
23 Executive, or any others -- how we are going
24 to deal with hard-to-serve populations, and

1 that's to protect them.

2 So in terms of the MPA, again, I can't
3 get into specifics on specifically this was
4 addressed in terms of this specific
5 population. But I think we look at all
6 people as people that we want to support and
7 help build up, regardless of who they are.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYES: Okay. But in
9 terms of -- at least for us, right, when we
10 have seniors in our communities that are
11 really struggling to make ends meet, and it's
12 difficult for us to direct them to any agency
13 or any services, just wondering how you guys
14 can also just provide us some guidance on how
15 we can better support members of this
16 community. We usually had to send them to
17 our local senior centers to try and get some
18 services met that way. But the reality is is
19 that folks are struggling and --

20 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN:
21 Struggling because they're afraid?

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYES: Struggling
23 because they're afraid, struggling because
24 there is really no clear place for them to go

1 and receive services.

2 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
3 because -- you know, at least in the network
4 that I oversee, we don't ask any of those
5 questions. We don't ask immigration status,
6 we don't do any of those things. So, you
7 know, there shouldn't be a -- that's why I
8 asked you about the fear. There should be no
9 concern about going to any of the similar
10 services that they've always gone to.

11 So if it's a fear issue -- which I
12 completely get -- I think there was a fear
13 issue prior to this administration, right?
14 That what would be really helpful for me,
15 Assemblywoman, is to sit down with you. And,
16 you know, I've asked for some guidance and I
17 think it's being developed in terms of our
18 providers. But it would also be helpful to
19 hear from you in terms of what we should be
20 thinking about so that we can bring them into
21 the MPA deliberations.

22 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you for your
23 response.

24 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Sorry

1 about that, Assemblyman.

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: That's all right.
3 I like people who finish the sentence, but --
4 (Overtalk.)

5 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: It's
6 just a really important question, so my bad.
7 My bad.

8 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: -- when a sentence
9 becomes a chapter, it gets a little long.
10 Assemblywoman Buttenschon. Is she
11 still here?

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: Thank you.
13 Good afternoon. Thank you, Chairs, very much
14 for your service to our country.

15 And this question is for Commissioner
16 DeCohen. So recently we passed legislation
17 that enacted liaisons in all of our state
18 agencies. And they're liaisons for our
19 veterans. My first question is, how is that
20 going? Do we see -- not only with the state
21 agency, but this legislation reflected the
22 Executive branch.

23 And the second question is we also
24 passed legislation this year for veterans'

1 TAP for non-combat-serving veterans. And
2 just seeing how you see that rolling out.

3 Thank you.

4 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: So let me
5 say again -- let me applaud you on this. We
6 were making it clear that there are so many
7 who have served within state agencies. When
8 we got into the halls of the Concourse and we
9 put up that signage for those who have
10 served, our state partners got into their
11 work environments and we were able to find
12 those who served working right here in the
13 state.

14 The need for the veterans
15 coordinators, we are so pleased to be able to
16 have them. Because we think that there
17 should be a veteran coordinator everywhere
18 where a veteran or someone who served -- in
19 corporate and beyond.

20 We have put out the clarion call, and
21 we have gotten the response. We have two
22 trainings that are up -- that's upcoming.
23 One is going to be, the first one, virtually,
24 and then the second with the coordinators.

1 And again, a wonderful response across
2 the state. Within the agencies is going to
3 be in-person.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: So all
5 state agencies have responded that they have
6 put this in place? As I believe it was
7 yesterday.

8 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: They have.
9 So just the first training is --

10 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE:
11 February 26th. That will be virtual. With
12 the second one taking place in April
13 in-person.

14 In addition to that, we've established
15 a partnership that's been in place for a
16 number of years now with the National
17 Veterans Legal Services Program. They have
18 an online training opportunity which each
19 veterans liaison will have the opportunity to
20 take and complete, entirely free of charge,
21 to better inform them about the benefits and
22 services available to the veterans and
23 military families in their midst.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: So where

1 would these names be posted? Will these be
2 on your website so we can direct individuals
3 of each one of those -- you call them
4 coordinators, we call them liaisons.

5 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE:
6 Veterans liaisons, yesterday. It will be on
7 our sites --

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: So it will
9 be on your website that they can reflect on
10 what state agency and within the Executive
11 also.

12 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: That's
13 correct.

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: And then
15 the VTAP, obviously you'll have a SUNY
16 liaison. But how do you see that rolling out
17 for non-combat veterans?

18 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: So this
19 is a huge administrative advancement that was
20 announced on Veterans Day of last year, that
21 everyone is very excited about. My
22 understanding at this point is we are still
23 waiting to see the text go forward in the
24 chapter amendments. Once that's passed, it

1 will be rolled out.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: I will get
3 that to you.

4 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: Thank
5 you.

6 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Eachus.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Thank you, Chair.

8 I want to start off by thanking
9 Chairwoman Seawright for inviting you,
10 Mr. Olsen, to our last committee meeting.
11 And I hope it happens more often.

12 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Oh, and
13 thank you. I'm Greg, my dad is Mr. Olsen.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Yeah. No, it was
15 great.

16 I do want to caution you on the
17 Social Security numbers that you were
18 throwing around. I was qualified to get
19 Social Security over seven and a half years
20 ago, and I'm still not getting it. But
21 there's a reason behind that, as you well
22 know. You can receive it at different ages
23 and different amounts, so --

24 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Right.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: But I do feel
2 that because of the uncertainty of
3 Social Security, that we need to do
4 everything we can to advertise your services
5 and programs out there so that the folks who
6 are very nervous about this feel a little
7 more secure at least, anyway.

8 I wanted to mention I am so glad that
9 we're going to a paid ombudsman program,
10 because I don't know if people realize but if
11 you wanted to be an ombudsman person,
12 volunteer, you cannot have a family member in
13 that particular facility that you are
14 visiting. Which makes it very difficult to
15 maintain that, as you mentioned. So.

16 And then the last thing that I wanted
17 to mention, Commissioner Olsen, was I love
18 your innovative housing suggestions.
19 However, as we know, those are all kind of
20 subject to home rule, you know.

21 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Did you
22 say housing?

23 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Housing, yeah.

24 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Okay,

1 thank you.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Yeah, the
3 microhouses, minihouses, all of those. But
4 subject to home rule, which is a problem.

5 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well,
6 that's the whole problem with housing, right,
7 is because it's home rule. I mean, I've
8 seen -- I've been in these microhouses.
9 They're absolutely amazing. I mean, the one
10 I was in, it was on Seneca Lake, so it's a
11 little bit different. But, you know, it goes
12 up in a day, costs \$30,000 to build,
13 completely energy-efficient.

14 So there's a whole difference between
15 how we grew up in usual housing.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: But we have to
17 tackle the home rule issue of that.

18 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN:
19 Absolutely.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Commissioner
21 DeCohen, on this Gold Star Annuity Program
22 that's coming in, I have a number of
23 families, too many families that have lost
24 their father, their husband or their wife and

1 so on like that. Will there be a lookback to
2 that program when it comes in?

3 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: I'm not
4 sure. I'm not certain of that.

5 Do you know that, Benjamin?

6 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: There
7 will be the opportunity for families that
8 have applied in the past who were previously
9 denied to file a new application under the
10 new statutes, and then be able to receive the
11 benefit if they qualify.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: But if they knew
13 they weren't qualified and it was only going
14 to the parents, how many folks is that,
15 possibly? I mean, you know.

16 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: We
17 intend to engage in a significant outreach
18 campaign, in collaboration with partners
19 across the state, to get that word out.

20 We also have information about those
21 who applied in the past and have been denied,
22 and we'll reach out to them directly, as well
23 as say, Hey, you filed before, the law has
24 changed, please file again.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Okay. And now
2 you mentioned something about tracking, with
3 the DOD, the veterans coming into New York
4 State. You can do that now? About 20 years
5 ago when I was with the county veterans
6 department, they were not releasing that
7 information because of privacy problems. But
8 you can do it now?

9 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: Yes,
10 sir, you're exactly right. There was a
11 lengthy process of negotiations between New
12 York State and DOD, but now it's possible.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Great. Thank
14 you.

15 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
16 Walsh.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALSH: Thank you very
18 much, Chair.

19 Welcome to the panel.

20 I have a comment and then really a
21 question. It's directed towards Veterans'
22 Services.

23 So we all know or we ought to know,
24 we're going to know soon, by April 15th, that

1 New York State has the highest tax burden in
2 the entire nation. But somehow,
3 miraculously, maybe, we're also very generous
4 people. And we have people in our state who,
5 in addition to paying the highest taxes in
6 the entire country, will also check off an
7 extra box or two and say that they're willing
8 to, on their own, pay more -- pay more
9 because they care so deeply about an issue
10 that they're willing to pay more.

11 I am very troubled by the issue of
12 having these different checkoffs and the
13 money that's collected not completely
14 distributed to the benefit of the categories
15 that they're intended for within a fiscal
16 year.

17 So in response to earlier questioning,
18 you discussed expenditures for homeless
19 veterans. But that is not tax checkoff
20 money. Comptroller DiNapoli says that there
21 is \$1.3 million in that account for homeless
22 veterans, but zero dollars in disbursements.
23 Why is that?

24 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Go ahead.

1 imminent needs.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALSH: So are you
3 saying that there is a lack of applicants?
4 It sounded like you had more applicants --

5 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: No,
6 there's no lack of applicants.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALSH: So what -- I
8 don't understand why -- do you need more
9 people to process the applications?

10 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: We do
11 not. No, we have a full outreach team that's
12 working on those literally day in and day
13 out, since that program started up on
14 Veterans Day of 2024.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN WALSH: So you've got
16 plenty of applications, you've got plenty of
17 people to process the applications, you're
18 doing it on a basis, and yet you still have
19 over a million dollars, according to the
20 Comptroller's office, that's unexpended.

21 I don't understand why that number is
22 still -- listen, I don't care if it's \$50. I
23 don't care if it's \$100. My point is if
24 people care enough, that money should all be

1 spent.

2 Thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
4 González-Rojas.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Thank
6 you.

7 This question is for Director Greg
8 Olsen. Thank you for being here.

9 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank
10 you.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: I might
12 have actually shared this last year, but I
13 personally navigated a challenge where my
14 mother fell, broke her hip, ended up in the
15 hospital, rehab, and then we were stuck as a
16 family as to what -- assisted living for a
17 short period of time. Ultimately we just
18 wanted her to have 24-hour home care. She
19 struggles with dementia.

20 I want to personally thank Becky
21 Preve, who's in the audience, from the
22 Association on Aging, who helped me and my
23 family navigate the Nursing Home Transition
24 and Diversion Program, which is an amazing

1 program to have family members stay in their
2 home and get the care that they need,
3 especially older adults.

4 I'm concerned that I see the Executive
5 tout an \$18.2 million savings by instituting
6 an enrollment cap on the Nursing Home
7 Transition and Diversion Waiver Program. So
8 I'm just baffled as to why this is included.
9 How many older adults will be impacted by the
10 cap? And I would imagine if there are
11 savings from this program, it will ultimately
12 be transferred in greater costs to their
13 nursing home system. And for many of us, it
14 would be more costly and remove our loved
15 ones from the comfort and dignity of their
16 homes.

17 So please make this make sense.

18 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: First,
19 thanks for sharing your story, because what
20 you demonstrated is really the value of what
21 our network does every single day.

22 In terms of the program that you're
23 talking about, that's administered by the
24 Health Department, and I really can't speak

1 to it. I'm so sorry.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Right.

3 I would love to hear about -- I know the
4 Master Plan for Aging has yet to be -- or is
5 coming soon, as I understand. But I'm
6 wondering about how we are thinking about
7 family caregivers that are not in programs
8 like CDPAP, are not getting covered. What
9 are the ways that we're supporting our family
10 caregivers who are uncompensated that put
11 billions of hours of labor into this field
12 but are not compensated and don't have a lot
13 of support?

14 Is there an element of family
15 caregiving -- I know you can't give away the
16 details of the plan. But how are we thinking
17 about this?

18 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, I
19 can't give away details of the plan. I can
20 just tell you what we do. That's one of our
21 four huge pillars. We've got 4.1 million
22 caregivers at any time during the year,
23 providing \$39 billion worth of care.

24 So through our network, through a lot

1 of community partners, there are a lot of
2 services and supports, both directly --
3 meaning how do you support the caregiver --
4 respite, support groups, et cetera -- and
5 indirectly. And those are the services that
6 take those tasks like you were dealing with
7 off of the family. Right? So that's really,
8 really important.

9 The biggest problem, Assemblywoman, is
10 over 50 percent of caregivers don't
11 self-identify. And so we've got to come up
12 with a different word. They think of
13 themselves as sons, daughters, et cetera,
14 et cetera. So we have a whole campaign
15 statewide we've been running to change that.
16 When we do, we see a 430 percent increase in
17 outreach --

18 (Overtalk.)

19 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you for your
20 response.

21 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank
22 you, Assemblyman, thank you. I'm looking at
23 you. Sorry about that.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: I'd

1 love to talk more about that.

2 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank
3 you, Assemblywoman.

4 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblymember
5 Maher.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Sorry, I didn't
7 hear that.

8 Thank you all for being here today. I
9 wanted to bring up the Veterans Nonprofit
10 Capital Program. So I just wanted to ask --
11 I believe this is the third round. Is the
12 funding for the third round from the fiscal
13 year '23 in the enacted budget appropriation?
14 Or is that an additional funding?

15 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: The
16 applications for the third round, sir, are in
17 progress right now. And so there is funding
18 that is in place on the books at the moment
19 that will be used to fund that third round.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Do you expect this
21 to be expanded into future years?

22 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: At this
23 point it will depend in part what the full
24 response to the third round is.

1 We've already provided, you know,
2 millions of dollars, as you know, in funding
3 through this program. It's a question at
4 this point of what we see as far as lingering
5 need after this third round is completed.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Have you heard of
7 some difficulties from local VSOs being able
8 to apply, some roadblocks they received? Has
9 anyone reached out to your office and then
10 not submitted an application or maybe
11 received that assistance?

12 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: Yes,
13 sir, we have. The biggest roadblock and
14 really the only roadblock that we've heard
15 about is challenges with the technology, of
16 utilizing the system formerly known as Grants
17 Gateway, and I can't think of what it's
18 currently called.

19 But the access and the use of that
20 system was a challenge for a number of
21 veterans' service organization leaders. We
22 provide opportunities, as we've heard about
23 this, to better educate them about how to go
24 through that process.

1 For example, in this last round there
2 was an entire education session with the
3 Dormitory Authority of the State of New York
4 that provided full-scale guidance and
5 answered every question that was posed during
6 those sessions about how do you utilize that
7 system.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Will you be, based
9 on the response, advocating for this to be
10 continued?

11 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: That's
12 going to have to be looked at and evaluated
13 internally at our agency. Our general
14 counsel, Jonathan Fishbein, is our project
15 lead on that.

16 But we certainly are looking at all of
17 the results of that. We've heard many
18 positive things from veterans' service
19 organizations about their use of those funds,
20 and we'll certainly be taking those into
21 consideration as we evaluate the program and
22 the after-action work that we'll be doing.

23 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: And as
24 boots on the ground we can tell you, going

1 across the different legions and the posts
2 that I get to see, we get to see the
3 difference before and after -- leaky roof
4 coming down, and now the wonderful work
5 that's been able to be done as a result of
6 this project. And we hope to be able to
7 continue.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: No, for sure. The
9 capital improvements are huge for recruitment
10 for all of the operations that exist, that
11 camaraderie that's created. Some of it is
12 just being prevented from happening because
13 there are so many capital issues all over the
14 State of New York.

15 So I would hope to see this program
16 continue, but I also would love to talk
17 offline about how we can overcome that tech
18 gap and, whether it's in our district or
19 districts throughout the state, working with
20 members to kind of identify how we can help
21 with some of those veterans' organizations in
22 getting the funds to them.

23 Thank you.

24 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you.

1 Thank you so much, Assemblymember.

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
3 Giglio.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: Thank you.

5 I'm just going to follow up on what we
6 were just discussing about the grant
7 opportunities and applications. Because we
8 did put a program in place that says that
9 every department should have a veteran
10 liaison.

11 I'm just wondering if every agency
12 throughout the state has a veteran liaison,
13 especially when it comes to these grant
14 opportunities. Because I just got off the
15 phone with my VFW post commander, and he did
16 apply for grant funding and thought for sure
17 that he would have it, and then said: No, we
18 just got an email back saying these are the
19 posts that did get the grant funding.

20 So, one, are all of those funds being
21 utilized by the VFWs and by the veteran
22 service organizations? Is there any money
23 ever left? Do you ever look into that? And
24 then also, is there a liaison? Because it

1 could take hours to go onto the grant portal.
2 And a lot of these people do not have the
3 technical skills, whether you're going around
4 to different parts of the state and training
5 them for hours on how to apply for these
6 grant funding opportunities. A lot of them
7 don't have the technical ability or they're
8 snowbirds, they go south in the summer and
9 then they're back in the winter -- I mean,
10 south in the winter and back in the summer.
11 So they may miss, if they get an email a week
12 later saying, Hey, you've got to give us the
13 deed to the property, or, You have to give us
14 the budget.

15 So they really need technical help.
16 So do we have veterans liaisons in every
17 state agency?

18 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: Not
19 only do we have them, but we have programming
20 already on the schedule coming up this month
21 and the months beyond to work with them to
22 educate them about the programs at the
23 federal and state levels that they can be
24 speaking to their constituents about.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: Okay, because
2 he -- like I said, he had went onto the
3 portal and didn't get the funding, got an
4 email saying this is who was awarded the
5 grant funding and no explanation as to why.
6 And he didn't know who to call in DASNY to
7 determine why he wasn't able to get that
8 funding.

9 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: Be
10 happy to have a conversation both with you
11 and with the post commander regarding that,
12 because again, there is a third round that is
13 in progress. And certainly those who may
14 have not gotten it in the previous couple of
15 rounds can apply again and file an
16 application through that process.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: Okay. So is
18 there a list of all the liaisons for every
19 agency in the state and veterans service
20 organizations have so they know who to call
21 to help them with these technical issues?

22 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: If I
23 may, are we talking about state agency
24 liaisons or veterans service organizations

1 liaisons?

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: We're talking
3 about the executive or the Chapter 477 of the
4 Laws of 2024 that requires a liaison, a
5 veterans liaison for every agency.

6 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: There
7 is a list being built. Once that list is
8 finalized as to who's in that position for
9 each agency, it will be finalized and posted
10 on our websites.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: Okay, so we
12 don't have all the -- all of the agencies in
13 the state as per Chapter 447 haven't been
14 established yet.

15 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: They
16 have. We're going to be having a meeting
17 with them on February 26th to make certain
18 that we have all the information correct.
19 After that, the list will be posted.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

22 Senate for follow-ups?

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

24 First we have Senator Cordell Cleare,

1 three-minute follow-up.

2 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you again,
3 Director Olsen, for being here. And I want
4 to thank your office for the work that we do
5 together on social isolation, and I look
6 forward to doing much more of that.

7 I'm glad that you all are recognizing
8 grandparents. We've known that for a long
9 time, a lot of grandparents and
10 great-grandparents are raising their
11 children, their great-grand and their
12 grandchildren.

13 I want to know two things that I am
14 noticing. You know, many of the homeless
15 individuals I encounter are older
16 New Yorkers, and their needs are very
17 different from families and younger people.
18 Is there any portion of NYSOFA's budget or
19 anything dedicated to address this sadly
20 growing --

21 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN:
22 Senator, I would love to have a follow-up
23 with you on this. In previous
24 administrations when I was in here, there

1 was, you know, a Homeless Advisory Council
2 that we tried to bring the issue of older
3 adults to.

4 I don't hear it really from the field
5 very much. But if it's something that you're
6 seeing, you're absolutely right, the needs
7 are completely different. Shelters need to
8 be, you know, organized or at least have
9 staff that understand what those differences
10 are.

11 But this is not something that
12 trickles up to me. I know it's there, but I
13 don't hear about it. So I'd love to
14 follow up with you.

15 SENATOR CLEARE: Sure.

16 And then something that's been touched
17 on today a little bit in different ways by
18 yourself and others, you know, almost every
19 agency touches the lives of older
20 New Yorkers. But there is no one place --
21 even for me, it's a struggle. I go from
22 committee to committee, agency to agency,
23 looking for what has been appropriated for
24 seniors in every category.

1 Can NYSOFA develop a report and let us
2 know so we can actually see in one place
3 everything that we are doing for older
4 New Yorkers?

5 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I
6 think where -- you looked at the testimony
7 that I put together. Been doing that every
8 single year, from State of the States to
9 final budget. I don't have to do a formal
10 report, but I go through them all for exactly
11 that reason, to show that the Governor really
12 cares about this population. And whether
13 you're DVS or OTDA, we're all doing work to
14 support them.

15 So we can absolutely package that
16 together.

17 SENATOR CLEARE: Yeah, I'd like to see
18 it in front of me. And anything my office
19 can do to continue to help and amplify SNAP,
20 HEAP, MSP and all the other programs to get
21 it out, we're happy to do that.

22 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I love
23 to hear you say that. I appreciate that,
24 Senator. You've been a great supporter of

1 ours. But I think everybody could do a
2 better job, because these are benefits
3 they've earned.

4 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

5 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank
6 you.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
8 Assembly?

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
10 Seawright, for a three-minute follow-up.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you,
12 Mr. Chairman.

13 For Commissioner DeCohen, I just
14 wanted to mention that in 1925, a memorial
15 grove of 24 trees and a flagstaff was
16 conceptualized in Central Park, and the grove
17 was a tribute to American women veterans.

18 It was forgotten about, and a senior
19 constituent was in the library reading
20 through old New York Times and saw a 1930
21 article. So every Veterans Day a group of
22 us, including Senator Krueger, have an event
23 in Central Park on Fifth Avenue between 69th
24 and 71st Street.

1 So we'd like to invite you to come
2 look at this wonderful grove of trees and
3 this living memorial in the fall.

4 And I have two quick questions for
5 Greg. Thank you again for your testimony.

6 What are your thoughts or what is your
7 position on including in the Master Plan
8 home sharing and respite care? What are your
9 thoughts?

10 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I think
11 that the Master Plan is going to continue to
12 evolve.

13 I am a huge proponent of home share.
14 I think the New York Foundation is testifying
15 today. We piloted the Vermont model that's
16 been going on for 38 years. It's very, very
17 effective not only for the individual who is
18 opening up their home, but for the individual
19 who is moving in -- not only in providing
20 services that they didn't expect to, but
21 obviously the cost sharing. Huge fan.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: And I know
23 you said the 1115 waiver, you've told me
24 previously, doesn't include anything for the

1 elderly. I know Assemblywoman Lunsford said
2 the commissioner I believe yesterday had said
3 that it does.

4 So what's your position on including
5 that in the Master Plan as well?

6 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well,
7 again, any waiver has to be approved by CMS.
8 It's pretty prescriptive. So I will follow
9 up with Commissioner McDonald. If there is
10 room in there for 1115 waiver dollars to
11 support older adults, I'd be a hundred
12 percent behind that.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: And with
14 regard to the Ombudsman Program, how many
15 more volunteers would be needed statewide to
16 meet the need?

17 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I
18 don't know the answer to that question,
19 Assemblywoman.

20 We are continuing still to try to push
21 to get as many volunteers as we can.
22 Volunteering today is way different than it
23 was 10, 20, 30 years ago, just in terms of
24 what people are doing. This is a very, very

1 skilled job. And the volunteers that are
2 doing it -- I mean, God bless 'em for what
3 they do.

4 But we will continue to push that as a
5 wraparound, a supplement as we're increasing
6 the FTEs.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: I received a
8 letter from a constituent on the
9 Upper East Side that participated in the
10 home-sharing program and what a success it
11 was. And I'm hearing from people in my
12 storefront district office that come in,
13 seniors that really appreciate the respite
14 care and the home-sharing program.

15 Thank you.

16 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: No
17 doubt the hardest thing is to match,
18 especially around politics these days.

19 (Laughter.)

20 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

21 Senator?

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

23 And I think to close for the Senate,
24 Chair Scarcella-Spanton.

1 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you
2 again.

3 I know this has come up a few times.
4 The Executive Budget proposes 157,000 for the
5 coordination of those employees for each
6 agency, the veterans' liaisons. Are we going
7 to be adding to people's portfolio, like
8 assigning somebody, if they're doing
9 something else, they're going to also be
10 doing veterans work? Because it feels like
11 157,000 wouldn't be a sufficient amount to
12 cover every single agency in having a
13 veterans' liaison. My first part.

14 And second part, similar to what
15 Senator Cleare said, this -- Veterans'
16 touches every single agency. I've been
17 waiting to see if we can get a breakdown of
18 what we're spending in each agency for our
19 veterans so we have a better idea of what
20 New York's investment is.

21 Thank you.

22 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: Thank
23 you, Senator.

24 As far as the question around the

1 \$157,000 for the veterans liaison work, what
2 we're seeing with the agencies across the
3 executive branch is they're individuals, many
4 of them veterans themselves, who are raising
5 their hands saying I want to be in this spot.
6 They're already working for those agencies.
7 They're not new hires, they're already there
8 boots on ground.

9 But they want to be taking on this
10 role, and they want to get the education and
11 training that we're looking to provide them
12 as well to become better informed about their
13 fellow veterans in the agency as well as
14 those whom they serve constituency-wise.

15 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Really
16 quick on that, if you could provide our
17 office with a list of who each veteran
18 liaison is, that would I think be incredibly
19 helpful for us. Because especially in my
20 district office we get a tremendous amount of
21 cases. So if it's a veteran and it's
22 specific to a veteran, it would be great to
23 have that contact.

24 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: You

1 will have it on the afternoon of the 26th of
2 this month.

3 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you.

4 And also for the update on what we're
5 spending within each agency, that would be
6 helpful as well, so we have a better, more
7 comprehensive idea of what we're spending and
8 investing in New York veterans.

9 And I also just wanted to leave you
10 with this. As we see changes coming down
11 from the federal government, I think it's
12 really important that New York State takes a
13 leadership role in making sure our LGBTQ+
14 veterans are taken care of, whether that's
15 mental health resources, additional
16 protections for benefits if they lose any
17 benefits.

18 I think that's really important that
19 New York State starts thinking about that.

20 Thank you.

21 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: We are
22 fully prepared to pursue justice on all the
23 fronts you are mentioning. Our appellate
24 units in particular, both with VA cases and

1 discharge upgrade cases -- and with
2 Restoration of Honor Act matters.

3 We have had many conversations
4 internally about that topic, and we are ready
5 for what comes.

6 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you
7 very much.

8 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: And I was
9 just on our first meeting with the doctor
10 who's been reappointed to the office of
11 experience, Dr. Davis.

12 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

14 And to close for the Assembly,
15 Assemblyman Stern, three-minute follow-up.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN STERN: Thank you,
17 Mr. Chairman.

18 Two issues. Following up on the
19 Gold Star Annuity Program, the last annual
20 report of 2023 -- looking forward to getting
21 the 2024 as soon as we can, by the way. But
22 the 2023 report, there were 206 Gold Star
23 parents. Has there been an analysis on, with
24 the expansion of the program, how many more

1 beneficiaries we expect to have in the coming
2 years so that we can plan accordingly going
3 forward?

4 The 2024 annuity was \$588. I'm
5 wondering if you know what the 2025 annuity
6 number is going to be.

7 The second issue, in the 2023 budget
8 there was a requirement for the agency to
9 submit a report on the Justice for Heroes
10 initiative. These are legal services
11 provided through the law schools throughout
12 the state to provide vital representation for
13 veterans in legal proceedings.

14 The report was supposed to be filed --
15 submitted the end of the year. So when can
16 we expect to receive that report? And prior
17 to receiving the report, I'm wondering if you
18 can share maybe just a little bit of insight
19 on the impact of that very important program.

20 DVS DEPUTY COUNSEL POMERANCE: I'd be
21 honored to, sir.

22 Yeah, taking your questions in order,
23 if I recall them correctly. First on the
24 Gold Star parents, the answer is yes, we do

1 have several mathematical calculations about
2 what this looks like in the outyears. Happy
3 to share those. Probably more complex than
4 we have in the minute and 20 seconds I see
5 left in the time, but I'm happy to provide
6 those to you about what that calculation
7 looks like.

8 When it comes to Justice for Heroes,
9 that's going to be in our annual report that
10 you'll be getting for the 2024 calendar year,
11 talking about the successes of that program.
12 I've had the honor of being a part of that
13 since the very beginning of that grant
14 program, and we're actually in the new cycle
15 right now. The RFP's going to be coming out
16 quite soon for law schools to apply for
17 what's going to be a third round of funding
18 in that area.

19 What we are seeing is life-changing
20 services being provided free of charge in
21 areas ranging from character of discharge
22 upgrades to housing matters, family law
23 cases, a lot of work being done even as far
24 out as things like driver's license

1 suspensions, which can be devastating to a
2 veteran, and making certain that they can get
3 access to justice when they are facing those
4 situations. That's Part A.

5 Part B, and in some ways the best part
6 of the entire thing, it's helping the
7 veterans of today; it's also training the
8 veterans' advocates of tomorrow. Because
9 when you have law students going through a
10 clinical legal education program and they see
11 firsthand the direct impacts of what veterans
12 law in its various forms can do, that will
13 inspire them to go into this field for a
14 career or, if it's not their main focus, to
15 at least make it a part of their practice in
16 some way, shape or form.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN STERN: Very good. Thank
18 you.

19 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: And with that fine
20 answer, that ends this portion of the
21 hearing. Commissioner, Director, Attorney,
22 I'd like to thank the three of you for your
23 testimony.

24 And I'll call up the next panel,

1 Panel C.

2 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank
3 you all. Appreciate your support.

4 ("Thank you" from legislators,
5 panelists.)

6 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Calling AARP
7 New York, New York Statewide Senior Action
8 Council, the New York Foundation for
9 Senior Citizens, Lifespan of Greater
10 Rochester, LiveOn NY, and Association on
11 Aging in New York.

12 (Pause; off the record.)

13 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: (Mic off) -- in the
14 booth, just introduce yourselves so they'll
15 know what names to put up on the screen when
16 it's being broadcast.

17 So start from my right, your left, and
18 just go right across, just your name and
19 organization. Don't start your testimony
20 until -- yes.

21 MS. MYERS: Gail Myers, New York
22 StateWide Senior Action Council.

23 MS. McMANUS: Kristen McManus, AARP
24 New York.

1 MS. BAER: Barbara Baer, New York
2 Foundation for Senior Citizens.

3 MS. COOK: Ann Marie Cook, from
4 Lifespan of Greater Rochester.

5 MS. FISHER: Dora Fisher, LiveOn NY.

6 MS. PREVE: And I'm Becky Preve,
7 executive director of the Association on
8 Aging for the State of New York.

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.
10 Welcome, one and all.

11 We can start wherever you'd like, left
12 or right.

13 MS. McMANUS: Yeah, sure, I'll start.

14 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: You'll pick you to
15 start? Okay.

16 MS. McMANUS: Thank you. As you
17 heard, I'm Kristen McManus from AARP New
18 York, and I really appreciate the opportunity
19 to be here to testify in front of you today.

20 AARP is a nonpartisan, nonprofit
21 social mission organization. We have
22 2.2 million members in the State of New York.
23 We advocate for the needs of the 50-plus
24 population. And that is a population that is

1 booming.

2 There was a report that came out
3 yesterday from the Center for an Urban Future
4 that says the 65-and-over population in
5 New York State is 3.5 million people. This
6 is a 50 percent increase from the previous
7 decade. And unfortunately, this is also a
8 population that is increasingly living in
9 poverty. More than 50 percent of this
10 population is under the poverty line, and
11 around half does not have access to
12 retirement income.

13 So the need really is for a state
14 budget that looks at the needs and wants of
15 this population and meets them. And what we
16 know from our research is that overwhelmingly
17 this is a population that wants to age in
18 their own homes and in their own communities.

19 The programs that we've been speaking
20 about today, the non-Medicaid home and
21 community-based services that are
22 administered through the State Office for the
23 Aging allow older adults to do that. We are,
24 speaking for AARP, unbelievably appreciative

1 of the Legislature's historic commitment to
2 funding these programs, providing the
3 additional investment every single year. We
4 are beyond grateful that the Governor has
5 recognized how important these programs are
6 and put in a historic investment to be able
7 to finally address these waiting lists.

8 Some of my colleagues here are going
9 to go into a little bit more of the details
10 of what more funding is needed, but I just
11 want to emphasize how important this is for
12 unpaid family caregivers that are taking care
13 of their aging loved ones. This provides
14 respite, it allows them a break. These
15 family caregivers are spending money from
16 their own pockets, they are leaving work,
17 moving to part-time, and overwhelmingly these
18 are women. These are older women around
19 58 years old that are leaving the workforce
20 in their prime years to be saving for their
21 own retirement to take care of their aging
22 loved ones.

23 I also want to quickly mention our
24 support for increasing funding for the

1 Long Term Care Ombudsman Program. This is
2 critical eyes and ears for our most
3 vulnerable residents.

4 And lastly I just want to close and
5 say that AARP strongly supports efforts from
6 the Governor to combat senior, elder
7 financial exploitation. Allowing employees
8 of financial institutions to place a hold on
9 a suspicious transaction will really help the
10 demographic that is most frequently targeted
11 for scams and fraud.

12 Thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

14 MS. MYERS: Hi, I'm Gail Myers from
15 New York StateWide Senior Action Council.
16 Thank you for the opportunity to speak with
17 you today.

18 A lot of what we say, we are joined in
19 arms to support a strong aging program for
20 New York.

21 In addition to ensuring adequate
22 funding for the two helplines that our
23 organization has through state contracts, our
24 members have prioritized the need to stop

1 Medicaid home care cuts from being
2 implemented, and also to invest to build the
3 capacity of the aging service provider
4 network to meet the needs of today's seniors
5 and future seniors.

6 We need investment to address both
7 inflationary costs and unmet need. I'll talk
8 about those in our two contracted programs.

9 The Patients' Rights Helpline Project.
10 We have had an increased number of callers,
11 an increased complexity of patients' rights
12 concerns. In our written testimony we've
13 given you some data on looking at 2020 till
14 today. The number of clients we have helped
15 has increased by 184 percent. The amount of
16 time spent has increased by 250 percent. And
17 our outreach and community education has
18 increased by 2,000 percent.

19 We are asking you, very sincerely, to
20 stop the cut in the Governor's budget. The
21 Legislature in the past has added \$200,000 to
22 this program that is not in the budget. We
23 also need help because one of our
24 \$100,000 bequests from the Legislature has

1 not been included in the reappropriation.
2 I'm asking for a 30-day amendment from the
3 Governor's office for that.

4 We also request an additional
5 investment of \$500,000 so that total funding
6 for this program would be 731,500.

7 You've heard this morning from NYSOFA
8 about the MCCAP program. It complements the
9 HIICAP programs in the county Offices for
10 Aging. We are very, very involved in trying
11 to reach people who are eligible for the
12 Medicare Savings Program but have not yet
13 enrolled, and we expect that there's over
14 300,000 New Yorkers who would fall into that
15 category, putting about \$8,000 a year back in
16 their wallets. We need additional money to
17 complete that outreach and education. And to
18 meet those needs, there are six
19 not-for-profit providers who are asking you
20 for an additional million dollars
21 proportionally allocated to those providers.

22 I also wanted to let you know that in
23 our testimony we have recommendations for
24 improvements to the EPIC program. We have

1 concerns about cuts to the Medicaid program
2 that do affect older New Yorkers as well as
3 their families -- we care about everybody.

4 And we also are very concerned about
5 economic security issues, so we want to
6 establish a SNAP cash assistance fund for
7 victims' compensation, and we want to
8 increase the SNAP benefit for families and
9 also improve the use of chip cards so that
10 there's not this scamming that's going on in
11 the SNAP program.

12 HEAP needs to be funded for both
13 heating and cooling. We can't have people
14 freezing.

15 (Time clock sounds.)

16 MS. MYERS: And thanks. See my
17 testimony.

18 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you,
19 Ms. Myers.

20 MS. BAER: Thank you. So hello to
21 Senator Krueger, who I've known for a long
22 time. And hello, Chair Pretlow. I want you
23 to know that I grew up in your district and I
24 still love Mount Vernon. It's a secret gem.

1 So pleasure to meet you.

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: My pleasure.

3 MS. BAER: And Assemblywoman Seawright
4 and Senator Cleare, we're so happy that
5 you're the chair of the Aging Committee. I
6 think you really understand the issues and
7 really that's a blessing for seniors, all
8 seniors.

9 So I'm Barbara Baer. I am the program
10 director of the New York Foundation for
11 Senior Citizens. And I may be a little
12 hoarse from sitting quiet for five or six
13 hours. The foundation is the only nonprofit,
14 non-sectarian organization serving older
15 adults throughout New York City's five
16 boroughs.

17 We are truly grateful for your past,
18 present and hopefully ongoing support of our
19 citywide Home Sharing and Respite Care
20 programs. The programs provide the only
21 services of their types in New York City.
22 These services allow the city's older
23 residents to age in place in their own home,
24 and thereby respond to the city's housing

1 crisis, prevent institutionalization in
2 nursing homes and shelters, and provide
3 significant savings to the state and
4 Medicaid.

5 Our free home-sharing services are
6 implemented by social workers who use their
7 professional skills to successfully match
8 older adult hosts who have extra space with
9 guests who need a place to live. And I am
10 the recipient of thousands of phone calls
11 myself, having been a policy wonk -- I'm
12 moving off the speech for a second.

13 Having been a policy wonk my whole
14 life, to actually be back in the field and
15 hear the daunting stories of seniors, many of
16 whose only income is Social Security -- thank
17 you, Frances Perkins from another age. These
18 people really need help. And, you know, in
19 our own way, we are reaching out to them.
20 And I'm constantly daunted by this poorest
21 group. We're talking about the 450,000
22 seniors who have so little income, and really
23 they're living on Social Security.

24 So during the past 44 years we have

1 successfully matched 2,613 -- 2,600 in 1300
2 shared living arrangements. I see I'm
3 running out of time. And I apologize, but I
4 did want to speak to you.

5 So what we're looking for is an
6 added-on -- and listening to these budget
7 numbers, this is peanuts. We'd like an
8 allocation from the Senate and from the
9 Assembly for \$250,000. And we'd take less,
10 but it would increase our ability to do home
11 sharing and respite care, which are really
12 both terrific programs for our seniors.

13 Thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

15 MS. COOK: Good afternoon. I want to
16 thank Senator Krueger and of course
17 Assemblymember Pretlow, and I also want to
18 thank, of course, Senator Cleare and
19 Assemblymember Seawright for your incredible
20 support of aging services. And I have to
21 give a shout out to my Assemblyman,
22 Assemblyman Meeks. Thank you very much.

23 I'm Ann Marie Cook, and I'm president
24 and CEO of Lifespan of Greater Rochester.

1 We're a direct aging service provider. We
2 provide services to about 30,000 older adults
3 and family caregivers every year, and among
4 other things also operate the New York State
5 Older Abuse Coalition.

6 We really are seeing right now a
7 convergence of issues that are making our
8 work more challenging. Very specifically, a
9 dramatic increase in the older adult
10 population -- we've talked about that all
11 morning -- a dramatic increase in older
12 adults in poverty.

13 I will also say a decline in the
14 family caregiver, because families are
15 smaller and of course those family caregivers
16 are the backbone of the system.

17 We've seen a dramatic increase in
18 scams -- thank you for talking about it
19 earlier -- workforce shortages, and of course
20 a historic underfunding of aging services.

21 And while I applaud the Governor for
22 the \$35 million increase -- it was
23 \$35 million -- that in no way makes up our
24 ability to serve those individuals on

1 waiting lists.

2 And of course the aging service
3 network primarily serves those individuals
4 just above the Medicaid line. And sometimes
5 the only way we can serve them is to have
6 them spend down, which is exactly what no one
7 wants.

8 I'm going to focus today my budget
9 requests on those older adults who are most
10 vulnerable and ask for your consideration.
11 One, for the restoration of \$375,000 to serve
12 older adults who have been abused. This is a
13 restoration in funding, and we serve all
14 individuals across the state in all forms of
15 abuse -- physical abuse, sexual abuse,
16 psychological abuse, and of course financial
17 exploitation.

18 And while financial exploitation and
19 elder abuse is typically perpetrated by
20 family members and close friends, what we've
21 really seen an explosion on, which is
22 number two for me, is an explosion in scams.
23 There isn't a meeting I go to or a
24 presentation where I talk about scams where

1 someone doesn't come up and talk about them
2 either being scammed or almost scammed.

3 So, Senator, thank you for saying that
4 earlier. You're keeping my perfect record
5 for me.

6 While the Governor has increased
7 victims' compensation for people who are
8 being scammed, quite frankly we have to look
9 at the prevention side and add money for
10 that.

11 A couple more things because I'm
12 running out of time. We need to establish a
13 guardianship program across the state for
14 vulnerable individuals. We have to be able
15 to address the social determinants of health
16 and coordinate care better for older adults.
17 And we need increased funding for the
18 Long Term Care Ombudsman Program.

19 There are 5 million older adults in
20 this state, 4.1 million caregivers, and they
21 need support. Thank you very much.

22 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

23 MS. FISHER: Hello, and thank you for
24 the opportunity to testify. I'm Dora with

1 LiveOn NY.

2 At LiveOn NY we believe that everyone
3 should have the opportunity to age in the
4 communities that they built.

5 I want to thank again -- I want to
6 echo my colleagues' much appreciation for the
7 Legislature and for all of you who are
8 champions here today.

9 LiveOn represents a network of more
10 than 120 community-based organizations that
11 are out there serving older New Yorkers every
12 single day, providing essential services that
13 help older New Yorkers age in place --
14 services like senior centers, home-delivered
15 and congregate meals, case management,
16 affordable housing with services, elder abuse
17 prevention, transportation, and more.

18 We are really proud to represent these
19 organizations because what they are doing is
20 they are out there giving people the services
21 that they need so they can age in place.

22 Countless older adults across New York
23 are providing invaluable services to their
24 communities, such as volunteerism,

1 caregiving, civic participation. But
2 New York is failing to meet the needs of
3 older New Yorkers. Current aging policy is
4 fragmented, siloed, underfunded. Older
5 New Yorkers lose their independence,
6 communities lose economic benefit of the
7 older adults in their communities, and
8 hundreds of thousands of older New Yorkers
9 are at risk for financial ruin, social
10 isolation, and poor health outcomes.

11 And so we have an over-65 population
12 projected to grow to astronomical
13 proportions, and now is the time that we have
14 to address these core issues.

15 The core issues are our entire system
16 is set up to prioritize the most expensive
17 services and the least effective services.
18 We spent like eight hours yesterday talking
19 about the ballooning Medicaid crisis. Well,
20 guess what? We have the answer. Right? We
21 have the social and the community-based care
22 that we know saves money and that people
23 want. It costs 10 times more per individual
24 to provide institutional care than it does to

1 provide community care.

2 The funding has not kept pace with the
3 need. Service providers have been doing more
4 with less and have still not recovered from
5 major budget cuts in 2010 -- plus that
6 doesn't even include the pandemic, all while
7 demand continues to skyrocket. There's
8 waiting lists, as we've discussed at length.

9 So the current and future demand
10 cannot be met unless we build capacity. We
11 simply do not have the number of service
12 providers that we need, nor do we have a
13 simplified process to access services.

14 So I don't want to be all doom and
15 gloom here, because the good news is we do
16 have amazing programs and services that help
17 people. Our members are doing it. All of us
18 on the panel, we know about these amazing
19 programs and services that are happening that
20 save the state money, give people the
21 services that they need to stay in their
22 community, and they're so much cheaper. And
23 they're very popular.

24 So we have to act. Now is our chance

1 to lead the country. The cost of inaction is
2 clear. Without investment, more older adults
3 will be left without the support they need.

4 I see I'm running out of time. Please
5 see our testimony for our specific asks. And
6 LiveOn NY shares the stances of every one of
7 my colleagues on the panel.

8 Thank you so much for your time.

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

10 MS. PREVE: Good afternoon, and thank
11 you all for the opportunity to testify.

12 I'm Becky Preve. I'm the executive
13 director of the Association on Aging, so I
14 get the distinct pleasure of having the
15 membership that Greg Olsen oversees, so you
16 can imagine I am tired all the time, based on
17 the enthusiasm that he spoke with.

18 And I think this is probably the only
19 time as a legislative body you are going to
20 see a whole group of advocates completely
21 agree on one topic. This was done
22 intentionally. We started at the
23 micro level; I'm going to talk about the
24 macro level.

1 hearings this body has been hosting for the
2 past few weeks. And yes, I have watched all
3 of them, so I feel your pain.

4 Our network supports individuals who
5 are over the Medicaid benchmark but cannot
6 afford to privately pay for the services and,
7 on paper, qualify to go to a skilled nursing
8 facility. We serve them, on average, for
9 seven to eight years at less than \$10,000 per
10 year, on aggregate, versus \$150,000 in a
11 skilled nursing facility.

12 And it's confusing to all of us that
13 instead of focusing on Medicaid prevention
14 and supporting individuals at the lowest cost
15 with the highest impact, the state continues
16 to choose to underfund aging services,
17 specifically home and community-based
18 services.

19 These individuals are not numbers,
20 they are human beings that are dependent on a
21 hot home-delivered meal. They cannot bathe
22 without someone coming into their home.
23 These individuals are retired teachers and
24 healthcare workers that were the heroes

1 during the COVID-19 pandemic, but somehow
2 have completely lost all value as they age.

3 Through the two-year MPA process, one
4 thing is abundantly clear: Over 600 members
5 have come to consensus that NYSOFA needs to
6 be fully funded to allow older individuals to
7 age with dignity, autonomy and respect.

8 From an advocacy perspective, this is
9 very frustrating. Professionals have come
10 before you, individuals have come before you,
11 older individuals have told stories of laying
12 in their own soiled linens because they can't
13 get assistance -- and none of it has worked.

14 Caregivers are in crisis. They cannot
15 get support for loved ones. They're using
16 alcohol and substances to cope, have
17 significantly increased suicidal ideation,
18 and are leaving the workforce in droves,
19 which is obviously an economic impact.

20 We've made the economic case that the
21 state is overwhelmingly benefiting from the
22 wealth and contributions of older adults, and
23 we have shown the cost savings to the
24 ballooning Medicaid problem. Even with all

1 of the data and metrics referenced in mine
2 and their testimony, the state refuses to
3 prioritize the older population by investing
4 any real funding into the aging services
5 network.

6 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.
7 Assemblywoman Seawright.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you.
9 It's great to see a table of all women
10 with Women's History Month coming up soon.
11 Thank you each for your testimony.

12 I'd like to address my questions to
13 Barbara Baer from the New York Foundation for
14 Senior Citizens.

15 You said you're requesting \$250,000
16 from the Assembly. Are you also requesting
17 250 from the Senate?

18 MS. BAER: Absolutely.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: And what is
20 the history of the Foundation with regard to
21 your home sharing and respite care programs?
22 And why are you seeking more funding this
23 year than last year?

24 MS. BAER: The history of the

1 foundation is that in 1981 Linda Hoffman
2 started the program with I think half a
3 social worker and somebody answering the
4 phone and actually Roy Goodman and
5 Helene Weinstein, who helped start it in
6 South Brooklyn. And it grew from 10 to 20
7 and went back and forth for a while.

8 And then last year we did 31 matches,
9 which means we helped 62 people. This year
10 we're on track to help 100 people, which
11 means 50 matches. So that's pea -- I don't
12 know where I got the word "peanuts" from, but
13 that's very little in terms of what you're
14 all dealing with, and I totally realize that.

15 But basically this program is
16 cost-effective and compassionate. By
17 cost-effective, for all the money that the
18 Governor and all of you put in, it costs
19 about \$3900 per person to match. So in my
20 view, when I get excited that the persons --
21 we're matching two people, we are putting two
22 people under a roof for less than \$10,000.
23 And many of the people stay many more years
24 than two or three.

1 So essentially while you're sending
2 down 300,000 for an affordable housing unit,
3 we are at least acting as a bridge for
4 several years to house people. And we save
5 guests because people can't afford New York
6 City; we all know that. And we save hosts
7 because their mortgages and, you know, the
8 water bill and everything else is going up.
9 So people can stay in their own home in both
10 ways.

11 And we also help some students who
12 are -- one person has to be 60, the other can
13 be any age over 18. So it's a gem, and I
14 kind of fell in love with the program. And
15 with vision, it could really grow and be
16 helpful. There was just a study, there's
17 10,000 vacant rooms in New York City --

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Do you have
19 any programs with CUNYs or SUNYs, matching up
20 young people for the home sharing with the
21 elderly?

22 MS. BAER: You know what, I didn't
23 hear you, Assemblywoman.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Do you have

1 any programs with SUNY or CUNY matching
2 students?

3 MS. BAER: No, we have NYU and -- but
4 we'd love to extend it, and that's a great
5 idea. No, we don't.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

8 Senator --

9 MS. BAER: I want to ask you, can I
10 just answer one question about respite care?

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'm sorry, we
12 have to cut you off. We're equal opportunity
13 mean here.

14 (Laughter.)

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Cordell Cleare.

16 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you, all of
17 you, for what you do every day to uplift our
18 older New Yorkers.

19 I just want to lift up the name of
20 Alma Rangel, who passed away this year and
21 who was a big part of the respite care for
22 the Foundation's program that I really
23 believe in. And I hope that it grows and
24 will fight to make sure that that happens.

1 And we should work to see if we can reach
2 even more people, because I think it's a
3 great program.

4 I just want to ask -- and this is
5 random, whoever wants to jump in. Master
6 Plan for the Aging --

7 PANELIST: Senator, I'm old --

8 SENATOR CLEARE: (Loudly.) Master
9 Plan for the Aging --

10 (Laughter.)

11 PANELIST: Aging.

12 SENATOR CLEARE: Yeah, the aging
13 master plan, MPA. Anything that sticks out
14 that we really should be including in that?

15 And also if you could speak to the
16 \$35 million add, which we're all happy for,
17 but are we getting everything we need? Do we
18 need more? Quick, if you can.

19 MS. PREVE: We absolutely need more,
20 and I conferred with my colleagues on
21 answering this question.

22 I will tell you I personally had
23 attended hundreds of hours of meetings at the
24 MPA for the last two years, along with

1 Ann Marie Cook and many of our colleagues.
2 I'm cautiously optimistic on what we will see
3 with the report. The process definitely was
4 difficult at the inception. My hope is that
5 it will absolutely include the over 100
6 recommendations, which included fiscal
7 components which were very significant. And
8 that's not surprising when you're talking
9 about capital improvements to nursing homes,
10 to funding the home and community-based
11 services network to an additional
12 252.5 million, which is what our
13 recommendation was being put forward.

14 So I think a lot more to come on that.
15 That is supposed to be a 10-year-long plan
16 moving forward.

17 Regarding the 35 million, I will tell
18 you it's not 45, it was a 10 million
19 restoration of legislative add-ons that we
20 have to beg for each and every year for
21 services that are already turned on.

22 The 35 million will go a very long way
23 to address the waiting list. That is a
24 waiting list that was from last September.

1 So if you told me today "Do a statewide
2 advertisement for services," we would be
3 inundated and we would have a very robust
4 waitlist again.

5 I will tell you I do webinars on a
6 monthly basis. Our advocacy line then blows
7 up with people looking for services and we
8 have to tell them we can't turn those on yet.

9 So does it address the waitlist from
10 September of last year? Absolutely. Does
11 that rightsize or adjust for inflationary
12 costs to our network? Absolutely not.
13 Yesterday the food pantries testified to a
14 25 percent inflationary increase to food.
15 Our home-delivered meal program uses food to
16 feed people, and we got a 2.1 percent COLA
17 increase. We also did not get the \$2 rate
18 increase for the home care workers, which is
19 a \$7 million hole times three years.

20 So absolutely we have not received
21 what is just, fair and necessary for the
22 aging services network.

23 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

24 Anybody else? Or did she do it?

1 She's good.

2 (Panelists nod in agreement.)

3 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

4 MS. MYERS: I would just say we can't
5 wait for funding until the Master Plan for
6 Aging gets printed.

7 MS. BAER: We'd like to be included in
8 the Master Plan. They were contemplating
9 including home sharing, but I'm not sure it
10 is, and I would push for it to be put in the
11 Master Plan.

12 SENATOR CLEARE: Let's make sure that
13 happens. Thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Eachus?

15 (No response.)

16 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
17 Hooks?

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN HOOKS: Hello, everyone.
19 Thank you, Chair, and thank you all for being
20 here today.

21 A special shout out to LiveOn NY, as I
22 was a member of LiveOn NY. And also -- I was
23 also a member of the Master Plan for Aging.
24 So I know the beginning.

1 Could you provide the current number
2 of older adults on the waitlist for case
3 management services? Additionally, how much
4 funding would be required to eliminate the
5 backlog?

6 And there should be a higher
7 reimbursement percentage for case assistance
8 and friendly visiting services, as they
9 constitute a significant portion of case
10 management. Ensuring equity in this area is
11 essential. It's essential also for pay rates
12 for staff.

13 MS. PREVE: I couldn't agree more. We
14 have around 6,600 individuals that are
15 waitlisted for case management.

16 But I do want to clarify something
17 that's really important. If someone reaches
18 out to their local Office for the Aging or
19 case management service agency and says, "I
20 need assistance with Mom, she's coming out of
21 the hospital," and you're told you're going
22 to be placed on a waiting list, most likely
23 you're going to pursue a different avenue.

24 So that does not reflect the actual

1 need for case management services. I will
2 tell you I used to run a local Office for the
3 Aging, I was a case manager, I know how
4 vitally important those services are. And
5 case management isn't just a one-and-done.
6 We follow a client the entire time that
7 they're in need of service. And we also are
8 not episodic in nature, and I think that
9 those are two things that I wanted to point
10 out.

11 We're not like it is under the
12 Medicare system where we can come in for
13 three weeks and help you and then we're gone.

14 And there's also no payment criteria,
15 so you can receive case management services
16 just if you need them.

17 I think the other component that's not
18 captured within the waiting list is our
19 NY Connects program, which is really advocacy
20 birth to death. So you could call to say "I
21 need Early Intervention services for a
22 child," all the way up to "My mom needs to go
23 to a nursing home."

24 And I will tell you, those case

1 management services aren't done in a
2 half-hour block of time. You might spend 10
3 to 15 to 20 hours with one family to get a
4 placement or get home care services.

5 So I couldn't agree with you more, but
6 I want everybody to know that the waiting
7 list is not reflective of the actual needs of
8 the aging community in the State of New York.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN HOOKS: Thank you for
10 that response. Yes, I know, I was the VP for
11 Older Adult Centers.

12 But my real question is about case
13 assistance and friendly visiting, because
14 they do the same work. But what's happening
15 is the staff is not getting no pay equity.
16 They are also actually -- friendly visiting
17 services provide more services than case
18 management to go in and visit the home. So
19 where they have to do it every two weeks and
20 case management has to do it every six
21 months.

22 What I'm saying is, where's the equity
23 in those services?

24 MS. PREVE: Again, I speak to that

1 just in the sense that it's an equity issue
2 and we don't have enough funding and case
3 management is legally required for our
4 federal and state funds.

5 But I couldn't agree with you more.
6 Friendly visiting is an unbelievably
7 important service that really carries the
8 backbone of the work that we do.

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Tom
11 O'Mara.

12 Senator Ashby.

13 SENATOR ASHBY: Thank you,
14 Madam Chair.

15 Becky, earlier when you were talking
16 about different parts of the Master Plan that
17 are going to be coming out, what can we do in
18 the Legislature to prep for that?

19 So if you're aware of the priorities
20 within it, right, and the stakeholders --
21 which are many -- rollout, I would imagine,
22 is going to be fairly comprehensive. What
23 can we do within the Legislature to help
24 clear a path?

1 MS. PREVE: Well, first and foremost I
2 think it is a disservice that the Legislature
3 was not included in the MPA and the MPA
4 process. Because I will tell you I
5 personally put forward recommendations on
6 bills that you guys were voting on that are
7 going to be in the Master Plan that we didn't
8 want invoked that were invoked, and
9 vice versa.

10 So I think it's contra-intuitive for
11 us to have spent two years on a Master Plan
12 that the Legislature was not included in.
13 That's not something that we can fix.

14 What I would say to, you know, any
15 elected official, we are all available to
16 meet with you. All of us have been very
17 involved in the Master Plan for Aging, and we
18 can share the knowledge that we have. I do
19 believe there's not much content to the
20 interim report, so you can't really get
21 anything from that other than we had a lot of
22 meetings and there were a lot of discussions
23 and these are the pillars.

24 I do think that that final report will

1 be forthcoming. But I think, you know, in us
2 and advocacy, at the end of the day this was
3 a Governor's signed executive order to really
4 look at the aging process in the State of
5 New York, which is not about them. It's
6 about us. And policies that we implement now
7 are going to impact, you know, our aging
8 future.

9 So I think continued conversations
10 with those of us that are in the field doing
11 this work that were part of the MPA are
12 really important. And I also think that
13 there should be pressure put on the Executive
14 to share what has happened through the MPA
15 and the MPA process, because it directly
16 influences what you're going to see before
17 you as far as bills and laws are concerned.

18 SENATOR ASHBY: Do you think that any
19 of those conversations could have an impact
20 at the local level to help the counties prep
21 for it as well, potential early actions of
22 success?

23 MS. PREVE: At least in my network, I
24 mean, I speak to every single director in the

1 State of New York on a weekly basis.

2 I will also say that
3 Commissioner Olsen holds, at least two times
4 per month, meetings with all of the
5 directors. So I feel like our network is
6 prepared for the MPA. But we have over
7 1200 subcontractors that, you know,
8 organizations like LiveOn and others support.

9 None of what can come out of the MPA
10 can be an unfunded mandate. We are at a
11 breaking point in the service industry.
12 There are a lot of recommendations that are
13 going to make sense as far as service
14 delivery and increasing what we're providing
15 to older people. But if it does not come
16 with funding, you are going to see the aging
17 services network crumble.

18 SENATOR ASHBY: Thank you.

19 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
20 Clark.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thank you.

22 And to Barbara first, I will just say
23 I hope as we look at your program that we
24 continue to look in how in the Legislature

1 can fund it to be statewide --

2 MS. BAER: That would be great.

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: -- and to open
4 up opportunities to see it in other areas
5 where we know both the housing crisis but
6 also isolation and other factors are really
7 on the increase. And really enjoy the
8 success it's seen in New York, and hope we
9 can bring it upstate at some point.

10 MS. BAER: That would be terrific.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: To Ann Marie and
12 the gem that is Lifespan in Rochester,
13 New York, a question. Why do we need this
14 extra funding for scams? Like why can't it
15 just be included in what we do now with elder
16 abuse and fraud? Why at this moment do we
17 think we need more money here to really focus
18 on this very specific piece?

19 MS. COOK: Well, I will have to say
20 that the elder abuse funding hasn't increased
21 in years. And because of the Legislature,
22 each year you at least restore us up to where
23 we were before.

24 Since COVID we've seen such an

1 explosion in scams I've had to use elder
2 abuse funding for scams. We -- in the field
3 we see these as two different issues, quite
4 frankly. That puts tremendous pressure on
5 serving individuals who have been abused.

6 I do not have any additional
7 information on scams. So it is really using
8 our elder abuse funding to meet the needs of
9 older adults right now, whether being abused
10 or scams. But I'm telling, I've never seen
11 such an issue explode -- and I've been doing
12 this for decades, almost 30 years now -- like
13 I've seen this issue in scams. Older adults
14 being scammed by the computer, by romance
15 scams, by AI scams, by bank scams and
16 government impersonation. And they're
17 losing, on average for us, \$10,000 per scam.

18 But we do not have additional funding
19 to expand this program, and we need to.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Perfect.

21 Second question, and I asked it to our
22 acting director of the Office of the Aging.
23 If there is -- we already know connected
24 care -- connected care community. We've seen

1 it. We've seen it in action, we've seen what
2 it's done. But can you just give a little
3 synopsis of how this very inexpensive program
4 has reduced hospitalizations by 30 percent,
5 not to mention all the other numbers? But it
6 is a small investment on the front end and
7 ends up being a huge savings on the back end.

8 MS. COOK: Yeah, I'm just going to
9 describe our client. Typically those without
10 a family caregiver who are medically complex,
11 who need to navigate both community-based
12 services and healthcare. And when we provide
13 this team approach of a social worker and an
14 LPN healthcare navigator, we can reduce
15 hospitalizations, ED use and observations by
16 30 percent.

17 It's been evaluated for years by the
18 New York academy of medicine, and it's been
19 in two peer-reviewed articles about really
20 this very small expanse of what the aging
21 service network can do -- it can save
22 hundreds of thousands of dollars.

23 This is the exact direction I think
24 the waiver wants to go. We should do this in

1 the aging service network.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

4 Senator?

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Other Senators?

6 Yes? No?

7 Thank you very much. Back to the
8 Assembly.

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Oh, okay.

10 Assemblywoman Giglio.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: Thank you.

12 My question is for Rebecca.

13 So you had indicated earlier that the
14 home care wage increase was affecting your
15 ability to actually pay people, to get that
16 increase, because it's not funded. Can you
17 talk a little bit more about that, please?

18 MS. PREVE: I would love to. Quite
19 frankly, it shows the complete inequity in
20 the Medicaid versus the non-Medicaid system.

21 So we provide non-Medicaid-eligible
22 individuals home care services. So we use
23 the same licensed home care provider network
24 as the Medicaid system. We authorize home

1 care services for, you know, toileting,
2 bathing, dressing. And what happened was
3 when the \$2 mandated rate increase went into
4 effect -- which we wholeheartedly support.
5 Home health aides need to make way more money
6 than they currently do --

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: Of course.

8 MS. PREVE: -- we were mandated to
9 provide that \$2 rate increase to the licensed
10 home care provider network because they were
11 getting it from Medicaid. MLTC plans got the
12 funding to pay for the \$2 rate increase. We
13 got zero dollars. Which created a \$7 million
14 hole. We were told to use our COLA funds to
15 absorb that cost so we didn't have to cut
16 services for people.

17 I have personally raised that with the
18 Executive since 2022. We have never gotten
19 the \$2 mandated rate increase in our service
20 network, which just shows you, again,
21 everything is laser-focused on Medicaid and
22 the aging services network is stuck trying to
23 fill those holes and those barriers.

24 Our home care program, our average

1 client is an 83-year-old low-income female
2 who lives alone, has four to 10 chronic
3 conditions and needs assistance with
4 activities of daily living. They are sicker
5 than the traditional Medicaid patient, and
6 we're serving them in homes and communities
7 but couldn't get the rate increase.

8 We were also completely disregarded in
9 the consumer-directed conversation regarding
10 going to one fiscal intermediary, even though
11 we run a consumer-directed program through
12 our home care program.

13 So again, it's a complete disregard of
14 the aging services network versus the
15 Medicaid system, and the Medicaid budget is
16 well north of, you know, \$120 billion and
17 we're around 230 million.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: Okay. And then
19 also you had talked to the consumer-directed
20 home care. So how many have you spoken to
21 that have transitioned over with PPL?

22 MS. PREVE: So again, because we were
23 completely left out of the conversation about
24 the one fiscal intermediary, we have not been

1 told to transition anyone. We are literally
2 waiting to see what FIs that we contract with
3 are going to close their doors.

4 There are a lot of questions around
5 that. I will also note that yesterday --
6 well, last evening during the hearing we were
7 informed that PPL is using text messages and
8 links to click to get individuals to enroll.
9 You just heard Commissioner Olsen testify
10 that we tell people constantly, Do not click
11 a link and do not open a text message.

12 So our clients, which are a little
13 north of a thousand that are using the
14 consumer-directed program, we have not
15 transitioned yet because we've gotten no
16 direction that we need to. But it does
17 appear that many of the FIs we contract with
18 will be closing.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: Yeah, and the
20 memorandum of understanding that PPL is
21 sending out to those consumers is really
22 basically do-it-yourself. So --

23 MS. PREVE: I will say if we're forced
24 to transition people, we will hand-hold,

1 because that's what we do.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: Thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

4 Assemblyman Meeks.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN MEEKS: Thank you.

6 This question is for Ann Marie Cook.

7 We all experience the cost of
8 groceries at the store, the cost of a dozen
9 eggs, the rate of inflation. How has that
10 affected the population of seniors that you
11 all work with? Just on a weekly basis, a
12 daily basis. I know you also -- Lifespan
13 offers like a whole cafe and a food pantry.
14 How has that affected you all in costs as
15 well?

16 MS. COOK: Well, the costs in
17 particular you mentioned, our food pantry,
18 five years ago we didn't have that food
19 pantry. And as you know, it's just around
20 the block from your office.

21 A few years ago, because we had so
22 many older adults coming to us saying "We
23 don't have any food for the weekend," we had
24 established that food pantry so they could

1 have food over the weekend. And as you know,
2 because you visit our centers so often, they
3 get their meals during the week in our
4 center.

5 I have never seen such -- so many
6 older adults in need. And as you know,
7 Rochester has the second-highest poverty rate
8 of older adults in the state. Older adults
9 are hurting, and we really need to connect
10 them to benefits, ensure that they're
11 receiving all the benefits they need, but we
12 also have to be there when they have no food
13 over the weekend.

14 And it's right in your district,
15 Assemblymember. And we had to establish
16 that. It's the only food pantry for older
17 adults in our area.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN MEEKS: Thank you. And
19 thank you for your service.

20 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Hevesi.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

22 Ms. Baer, very quickly, I hope you
23 hear somebody else's words when they come out
24 of my mouth. But how are home sharing and

1 respite matches implemented among the
2 participants?

3 MS. BAER: You know what, Assemblyman,
4 I have to admit I'm a little deaf, and I
5 didn't hear the last part of your question.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Not a problem.
7 I'll speak up. It's my fault.

8 How are home sharing and respite care
9 matches implemented among the participants?

10 MS. BAER: Well, they're two different
11 programs but somewhat the template is the
12 same, which is with very great care.

13 So with regard to respite, you have
14 funded the Foundation to actually offer
15 respite care for three months to anybody who
16 asks for it. And what it is is a program
17 where if somebody suddenly, for example, goes
18 to the hospital and is alone and they have to
19 come home, we have home health attendants who
20 we've certified who are fine.

21 And if you call, we recommend -- we
22 interview you and then recommend a home
23 health attendant, and that person goes and
24 works for you and is paid only by you. And

1 they are paid \$19.10, which is in the city
2 the minimum wage, and the idea is that it's
3 between the client and the certified home
4 health attendant.

5 And that person must work eight hours
6 a week, but it can be lots more. And that
7 person can work for three months. And then
8 if you think the person is terrific and you
9 want to have a continued relationship with
10 them, we say hooray and we find another home
11 health attendant another case.

12 So it's an incredibly popular program,
13 much easier to explain and sell than home
14 sharing. But it's really wonderful because,
15 as you know, so many seniors are alone. And
16 when people might have a stroke and there's
17 no family, as is often the case, this person
18 can be terrific.

19 So because of your funding, it's
20 \$19.10, whereas if you go for a for-profit
21 agency it can be 30 or 40 dollars an hour.

22 So that's what that is.

23 And the template for home share is
24 somebody calls, yes, we'd love to have you as

1 a guest or a host, but as a host you have to
2 show us proof that you own the home or that
3 you lease it. You have to show us proof of
4 ID. Then we interview you, and we also do a
5 background check or, in the alternative, get
6 three letters of reference and we check them.

7 And with regard to the guest, we ask
8 for three letters of reference, photo ID, and
9 proof of income, which is frequently
10 Social Security only.

11 And then we have a Zoom call with each
12 person, we have 40 minutes with 40 questions,
13 from do you have a dog, how far will you walk
14 to the laundry to, you know, who do you want
15 to live with.

16 And then we match. It's very hard.
17 Very hard and very daunting. And also one
18 has to be very responsible, because you're
19 having two people move in --

20 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

21 Assemblywoman Griffin.

22 MS. BAER: And it's been safe.

23 Thank you.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Thank you.
2 Thank you, Chair.

3 To the panel, I appreciate your
4 comprehensive advocacy and support of the
5 aging in our state. I'm new to this
6 committee, and I'm interested to learn the
7 many ways we can help.

8 My first question is for Barbara. I
9 really appreciate the success of this
10 citywide home sharing and respite care
11 program. And I wonder, is this throughout
12 the state or is it just in specific cities?

13 MS. BAER: No, it's in New York City,
14 but we'd love to make it statewide. There's
15 70 programs across the country. It should be
16 huge because there's such a need for housing
17 and -- it should be huge. And we wish it
18 were bigger.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Yeah, I
20 represent Assembly District 21, which is the
21 South Shore of Nassau County, and I know so
22 many people that are living by themselves
23 that would love the company, that would love
24 to be in a system where they could save

1 money, have a companion live with them. It
2 just seems like such a great idea.

3 So I would love to see that --

4 MS. BAER: We'd be happy to expand.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Love to see it
6 expand.

7 And then on the -- Gail Myers, on the
8 StateWide Senior Action Council, I really
9 appreciated the -- your mention of the dental
10 coverage for all. And obviously I believe
11 that's so essential for everyone. And I just
12 wondered if you could speak to it.

13 There's people that are on Medicare
14 that they're not able to get that. I just
15 wonder if you could speak to that and
16 describe what level of people does that mean.
17 Like what number of people are shut out of
18 that program as it is?

19 MS. MYERS: So original Medicare does
20 not have a dental provision in it. There's
21 no dental benefit. Some people who purchase
22 a Medicare Advantage plan for their coverage
23 choose them because they say they have dental
24 benefits, but the benefits aren't --

1 generally are not comprehensive. So there
2 might be a screening, there might be a
3 hygienist appointment, there might not be
4 dentures.

5 So what we're looking for is the
6 ability for people on Medicare, like anybody
7 else, to be able to purchase on the Exchange.
8 The state's Exchange excludes anybody who's
9 covered by Medicare from using that network
10 and services.

11 And there is now, starting January of
12 '26, going to be a freestanding dental option
13 on the Exchange. The Department of Health is
14 moving forward with that, but it is not going
15 to be open to people unless you purchase the
16 rest of your insurance on the Exchange.

17 So that's what we're looking for. And
18 we also implore you to help increase the
19 capacity of the dental provider networks so
20 that people who have insurance can actually
21 access the service and use it.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Okay, thank
23 you. And that seems like such a necessary
24 idea, like all people should be allowed to

1 purchase that without purchasing some fuller
2 plan. Thank you very much.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: And thank you, and
4 that closes out Panel C.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

6 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you all for
7 your testimony.

8 I'm calling down now Panel D: ECE On
9 the Move, Citizens' Committee for Children of
10 New York, Early Care & Learning Council,
11 Wonderschool, and Project Guardianship.

12 (Pause.)

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Good afternoon,
14 everyone. Let's start to my right, and
15 you're going to each just give your name and
16 affiliation so the media guys know whose name
17 to put up when you're speaking. And then
18 we'll go to the testimony.

19 So starting here.

20 MR. MOSS: Good afternoon, my name is
21 Jason Moss. I'm the head of new government
22 initiatives from Wonderschool.

23 MS. BOWEN: Good afternoon, Shanita
24 Bowen, chief operating officer for ECE On the

1 Move.

2 MS. BUFKIN: Good afternoon. I'm
3 Alice Bufkin with Citizens' Committee for
4 Children.

5 MS. GEORGE: Kimberly George, Project
6 Guardianship.

7 MS. CHIMENTO: Meredith Chimento,
8 Early Care & Learning Council.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

10 Why don't we start again with you on
11 my right, your three minutes, and we'll just
12 go down the line again. Thank you.

13 MR. MOSS: Esteemed chairs and members
14 of the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing for
15 Human Services, thank you for the opportunity
16 to present testimony on behalf of
17 Wonderschool.

18 I'm here to address the Executive
19 Budget's proposal on the creation of
20 childcare support centers to implement early
21 childhood education substitute teacher pools.

22 Wonderschool is the leading provider
23 of innovative solutions for the childcare
24 industry, and we commend the Governor's

1 commitment to addressing the critical
2 shortage of substitute teachers in early
3 childhood education settings.

4 The shortage of substitute teachers is
5 a significant challenge faced by childcare
6 providers across New York State. This
7 shortage leads to disruptions in care, limits
8 program quality, and creates additional
9 stress for already overburdened childcare
10 professionals.

11 When a teacher is absent and no
12 substitute is available, childcare centers
13 may be forced to close classrooms or even the
14 entire facility for the day. This results in
15 parents and families missing work, causing
16 lost wages and productivity, and ultimately
17 impacting the state's economy. The Executive
18 Budget's proposal to establish childcare
19 support centers is a crucial step toward
20 addressing this critical need.

21 Wonderschool has a proven track record
22 of success in implementing substitute teacher
23 pools. In Mississippi, our partnership with
24 the Mississippi Department of Health and

1 Human Services resulted in the creation of a
2 statewide substitute teaching pool. Since
3 beginning operation on November 1, 2023,
4 we've recruited and trained over 450 early
5 childhood educator substitute teachers.
6 These individuals have worked over
7 50,000 hours and over 7,000 individual
8 substitute job postings.

9 This initiative has significantly
10 improved the availability of substitute
11 teachers, particularly in underserved
12 communities.

13 We believe the Executive Budget's
14 proposal provides a strong foundation for
15 establishing a successful substitute teacher
16 pool system in New York. However, we propose
17 the following amendments to optimize the
18 program's effectiveness and increase the
19 chances of success.

20 One, a statewide digital platform.
21 The legislation should require childcare
22 support centers to utilize a statewide
23 digital platform to facilitate the efficient
24 matching of substitute teachers with

1 childcare providers. This platform should
2 also streamline administrative processes such
3 as recruitment, background checks, substitute
4 teacher payments, and training verification.

5 Two, collaboration with CCR&Rs. Child
6 Care Resource and Referral agencies possess
7 extensive knowledge of local childcare needs
8 and training requirements. We recommend
9 integrating CCR&Rs into the substitute
10 teacher pool model to provide high-quality
11 training and support for substitute teachers.

12 Three, incentives and support. The
13 program should include mechanisms to
14 incentivize participation by childcare
15 providers and substitute teachers, such as
16 financial incentives and professional
17 development opportunities.

18 And four, data collection and
19 evaluation. The Office of Children and
20 Family Services should be mandated to collect
21 data on program outcomes and report on key
22 indicators such as substitute recruitment,
23 deployment, training, service quality, and
24 financial management.

1 We're confident that with these
2 amendments we can establish a robust
3 substitute teacher pool.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

5 MS. BOWEN: Thank you to the chairs
6 and the Legislature for the opportunity to
7 testify today, and especially to our
8 childcare champions, Senator Brisport and
9 Assemblymember Hevesi.

10 Over the past three years, we have
11 expanded access to childcare assistance,
12 helping thousands of families afford care.
13 The Governor promised to make childcare a
14 priority, yet today the sector is suffering
15 more than ever. Families may qualify for
16 assistance, but if providers can't afford to
17 stay open due to low wages, there won't be
18 enough childcare programs to meet the demand.

19 As well, New York City and other
20 counties underestimated how many families
21 would need and rely on childcare assistance.
22 Funding is running low, and without action,
23 families will lose subsidies; childcare
24 programs, especially those in economically

1 disadvantaged communities, will close; and
2 parents will be left without care.

3 But this isn't just about filling a
4 short-term gap. We must prepare for
5 increasing demand and ensure that there is
6 enough funding to meet it always. The demand
7 for childcare isn't just about families.
8 It's also about the workforce. Right now
9 educators, especially those operating from
10 residential settings, are watching to see if
11 the state values their profession.

12 If workforce-specific funding to
13 supplement the current market rates is not
14 included in this budget, it will send a clear
15 message that those who educate and care for
16 young children do not deserve fair pay,
17 benefits, or a sustainable future. The
18 overhead in operating our businesses is
19 insurmountable, and it isn't fair to ask
20 childcare programs to donate their services
21 for little to no profit.

22 This isn't just about today, it's also
23 about ensuring that we have enough providers
24 for years to come. Without real investment,

1 we will lose current educators and fail to
2 attract new ones. When providers struggle to
3 stay open, families and businesses suffer.
4 Every day we see childcare educators leaving
5 this profession -- not because they want to,
6 but because they can't afford to stay.

7 ECE On the Move and Empire State
8 Campaign for Child Care continue to report on
9 increasing workforce shortages. Educators
10 cannot afford to stay open, and they're
11 driving taxis, working retail, or anything
12 that will pay them at least minimum wage.

13 The Governor made a commitment to
14 childcare. We urge this Legislature to hold
15 her to that promise. Hold the Governor
16 firmly to the recommendations set by her own
17 deeply committed Child Care Availability Task
18 Force, and ensure that the childcare
19 workforce does not have to rely on the
20 current low-market-rate wages.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

22 Next?

23 MS. BUFKIN: Good afternoon, Chair
24 Krueger, Chair Pretlow, and committee members

1 and chairs. My name is Alice Bufkin. I am
2 the associate executive director of policy at
3 Citizens' Committee for Children. We're a
4 children's advocacy organization dedicated to
5 ensuring every New York child is healthy,
6 housed, educated and safe. Thank you for
7 this opportunity today.

8 In the time I have, I want to uplift
9 some of the most pressing issues facing
10 parents, families and children in the state,
11 although there are more in our written
12 testimony.

13 I first want to reinforce what my
14 colleague from ECE On the Move has referenced
15 about the urgency of investing in the
16 childcare workforce, as well as ensuring that
17 low-wage workers and parents working
18 irregular hours can access childcare
19 assistance. I also want to flag an issue
20 that New York City and other counties are at
21 risk of exhausting their Child Care Block
22 Grant funds without additional state funding,
23 which is jeopardizing the access of thousands
24 of families to childcare assistance.

1 And I just want to pivot to uplift a
2 package of critical investments arising from
3 the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council
4 that was established by Governor Hochul's
5 Child Poverty Reduction Act.

6 As you know, CPRAC's mission is to
7 reduce child poverty by 50 percent over the
8 next 10 years, and we support the package of
9 recommendations they produced.

10 First, we support their recommendation
11 to permanently increase New York's Empire
12 State Child Credit to \$1500, eliminate the
13 minimum income requirement and phase-in that
14 prevents lowest-income filers from receiving
15 full credit, permanently index the Child Tax
16 Credit to inflation, and ensure the
17 enhancement includes all children under 18.

18 These changes go further than
19 Governor Hochul's Executive Budget proposal,
20 although we're deeply grateful for her
21 proposed investments as well, and are
22 estimated to reduce child poverty by
23 23 percent.

24 Second, we support the establishment

1 and funding of a statewide housing voucher
2 program to assist populations on the brink of
3 homelessness or in shelter. CPRAC's voucher
4 proposal would reduce child poverty by nearly
5 16 percent.

6 Third, we urge state leaders to adopt
7 CPRAC's recommendation to increase the
8 Public Assistance benefits level by
9 100 percent and index it to inflation. This
10 would reduce child poverty by 18 percent over
11 the next decade.

12 And finally, we applaud Governor
13 Hochul for proposing full funding for
14 universal school meals, but more must be
15 done, including increasing the SNAP minimum
16 benefit to \$100 a month and supporting the
17 creation of a state-funded nutrition program
18 for those ineligible for the federal SNAP
19 program.

20 In the area of Raise the Age.
21 Earlier, OCFS indicated that counties can
22 apply for Raise the Age funds. This does not
23 adequately convey the deeply onerous process
24 counties must currently undergo to receive

1 funds. Advocates also are not confident
2 New York State would approve a waiver of
3 hardship for New York City.

4 That is why we support investing
5 \$50 million for a youth justice innovation
6 fund, which would directly fund CBOs that
7 provide a continuum of critical youth
8 services, including prevention, Early
9 Intervention, and alternatives to detention,
10 placement and incarceration for youth age 12
11 through 25.

12 Raise the Age was intended to provide
13 counties with resources needed to prevent
14 involvement of youth in the criminal justice
15 system. However, these resources have never
16 materialized for communities. In fact, only
17 a third of the money appropriated -- and
18 sometimes as little as 10 percent -- have
19 been used for the community-based services
20 and programs they are intended for.

21 The innovation fund would address this
22 failure by directly supporting the community
23 resources that bolster positive youth
24 development and keep young people out of the

1 youth justice system.

2 Thank you.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

4 Next?

5 MS. GEORGE: Good afternoon. I'm

6 Kimberly George, president and CEO of

7 Project Guardianship.

8 Thank you, Senator Krueger, for asking

9 Acting Director Olsen about guardianship.

10 I'm here today to talk about

11 New York's broken guardianship system.

12 Article 81 of the Mental Hygiene Law states

13 that any person or entity can petition for

14 someone else to be appointed a guardian and,

15 after an investigation and hearing, if the

16 judge decides the person is unable to meet

17 their personal or financial needs, is unable

18 to make reasonable decisions, and is at risk

19 of coming to harm because they do not

20 understand their need for help, the judge

21 must appoint a guardian.

22 But there is nothing in place to

23 ensure that a good guardian will be available

24 to serve. The system relies on family and

1 friends to do the work unpaid or for the
2 person needing the guardian to have money to
3 pay a private practicing guardian. This
4 leaves many adults who don't have family
5 members able to take on the role who are
6 aging alone and living on limited financial
7 resources in precarious situations.

8 In some parts of the state nonprofits
9 have stepped in to fill the gap, working to
10 care not only for their guardianship clients,
11 but also to raise the funds, year after year,
12 to keep their programs going. Several have
13 closed their doors in recent years. And
14 those of us who are surviving don't have
15 enough funds to meet the demand.

16 This leaves guardianship judges
17 struggling to find appropriate guardians.
18 The judges report having difficulty finding a
19 qualified guardian to serve in one-third of
20 the cases they hear each and every day. In
21 New York City, that number goes up to
22 one-half.

23 Project Guardianship and a coalition
24 called Guardianship Access New York have been

1 raising awareness of this serious and growing
2 crisis for a number of years now. New York
3 needs a publicly funded guardianship program.
4 We are very disappointed that the Executive
5 Budget for fiscal year '26 did not include
6 any funding for guardianship.

7 We have a proposal for an annual
8 investment of 15 million for a statewide
9 initiative of nonprofit guardians, also
10 called SING. SING would ensure New Yorkers
11 who need a guardian have access to a
12 high-quality person-centered guardian
13 regardless of their financial or social
14 circumstances.

15 SING would build the capacity of local
16 nonprofits across the state to serve as
17 guardian. It would create a workforce
18 trained to do the healthcare coordination,
19 social work, money management, legal
20 services, housing services, benefits
21 applications, et cetera, required of good
22 guardians.

23 It would establish a database with
24 demographics and outcomes of nonprofit

1 guardianship clients. And it would result in
2 an estimated net savings of \$80 million per
3 year in Medicaid costs by shortening hospital
4 and nursing home stays and keeping people out
5 of institutions and in their homes and in
6 their communities.

7 Our proposal is rooted in decades of
8 practical experience and a deep understanding
9 of what it takes to be a caring guardian for
10 another person. Please fund SING. And if
11 you're not convinced, please Google
12 "Pro Publica, guardianship," because as
13 Senator Krueger mentioned, there's been
14 10 articles in the last year focusing on the
15 crisis.

16 Thank you, everybody.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

18 Next?

19 MS. CHIMENTO: Good afternoon. I'm
20 Meredith Chimento, the executive director of
21 the Early Care & Learning Council, and it's
22 my pleasure to speak with you today.

23 Assemblymember Hevesi, Senator
24 Brisport, and Chairs Krueger and Pretlow, you

1 guys are rock stars. It's been a long day.

2 I can't begin to explain how excited I
3 was today to hear Child Care Resource &
4 Referral agencies stated over and over again
5 by each of you and by Commissioner
6 Harris-Madden.

7 We are the state network of the
8 35 Child Care Resource & Referral agencies
9 that serve all 62 counties of New York State
10 and the 10 Regional Economic Development
11 Councils. We work closely with community
12 members at the community level, working with
13 childcare providers, families, and local
14 businesses.

15 While 64 percent of New York State is
16 classified as a childcare desert, and there
17 have been large investments to increase the
18 capacity of providers -- investments in
19 childcare assistance, it's record-breaking.
20 More families can access care. But we must
21 continue to follow the roadmap defined by the
22 Child Care Availability Task Force report and
23 move toward a permanent workforce wage fund.
24 As Shanita said, we need it desperately.

1 I am hopeful that the childcare
2 coalition and the Governor and the state will
3 make quick movements to fund universal
4 childcare an intentional matter.

5 CCR&Rs are the workforce behind the
6 childcare workforce. As we move toward
7 universal childcare, our involvement in
8 working to improve the business operations of
9 our programs is critical.

10 CCR&Rs are positioned in communities
11 to coordinate the \$3 million investment in
12 substitute pools. We can vet and train subs
13 quickly so they can be sent to programs
14 quickly. We have relationships with
15 providers to build and manage the sub pools.
16 We are in touch with other CCR&Rs nationally
17 that run sub pools, and we have access to
18 lessons learned from four of the seven states
19 that are currently running substitute pools
20 through their CCR&R networks. We are ready
21 to go.

22 This past year, ECLC worked to develop
23 the Business Navigator toolkit, an employer's
24 guide to childcare solutions. We are

1 grateful to the Governor for the inclusion of
2 an additional million dollars to expand this
3 project in the next year.

4 As we toured the 10 Economic
5 Development Regions, businesses cited that
6 availability and affordability of childcare
7 were among the top three challenges to
8 recruit and retain employees in your
9 communities.

10 We have identified simple
11 opportunities for businesses to survey their
12 employees and implement small, favorable
13 movement towards supporting childcare in
14 their communities. If you don't have a copy
15 of this toolkit, ask me or ask your local
16 CCR&R. We'll be sure to get you one.

17 We are an integral mechanism for the
18 state to distribute the critical economic
19 supports that have kept childcare afloat. We
20 are positioned to do this once again by
21 supporting them to access the \$110 million
22 investment in capital grants, much-needed
23 investments for home-based providers and
24 centers alike.

1 But I ask you at this time when we are
2 horrifically uncertain about federal funding,
3 to recognize that the state and the
4 Legislature must commit to supporting
5 nonprofits like Child Care Resource &
6 Referral agencies.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

8 Our first questioner is
9 Assemblymember Hevesi.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,
11 Senator. Appreciate it.

12 Thank you, everybody, for your
13 testimony.

14 I'm going to go pretty quick through
15 what I gleaned from each of you, so -- and
16 then I have a question for Ms. Bowen, if I
17 can.

18 So let me start with Mr. Moss. Thank
19 you for those recommendations. I'm going to
20 review them and see if we can reconcile what
21 you're recommending to see if it goes into
22 our Assembly one-house. But I do appreciate
23 about the substitute pools.

24 Ms. George, really sorry to hear about

1 the lack of funding for guardianship, and I
2 appreciate your testimony.

3 Ms. Bufkin, I heard all of it, but I'm
4 particularly grateful for your comments about
5 the Child Tax Credit, but more importantly
6 that \$50 million innovation fund is
7 absolutely, absolutely crucial as a starting
8 point for us getting back on the track to
9 Raise the Age.

10 Ms. Chimento, all I can say is the
11 CCR&Rs got the recognition I believe from the
12 commissioner that they deserve today. And
13 with the existential threat from the
14 administration that -- I'm going to leave
15 that alone. I was about to opine on the
16 administration.

17 The fact that, you know, it even could
18 be potentially on the chopping block is a
19 frightening thought. And yeah, we do need
20 to, as a state legislature, make sure that
21 you are whole, because we're not only
22 grateful for all the work that you've done,
23 but also prospectively to help us with
24 substitute pools and other parts of the

1 childcare service that we need to provide.

2 So thank you.

3 MS. CHIMENTO: Thank you.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: And then
5 finally -- sorry, I've rambled enough --
6 Ms. Bowen, thank you so much for your
7 testimony. I agree wholeheartedly.

8 My question for you is, as a former
9 home-based childcare provider, can you
10 explain to me what a compensation benefit, a
11 bonus for compensation, how important is that
12 for you as a former provider? If you could
13 speak to your experience about how crucial
14 the compensation is. Because that is the
15 primary thing in front of us in the
16 Legislature as it relates to childcare: It
17 is paying the workforce.

18 MS. BOWEN: Thank you, Assemblymember
19 Hevesi, for that question.

20 It's extremely important. I ran the
21 program in my home for 14 years, and it was
22 devastating because we go into it with all
23 our hearts, we love working with the
24 children. Sometimes my program looked like a

1 school, but that's how I wanted it. Every
2 corner was safe and of quality. There was so
3 much to do.

4 It cost. What it cost me was my own
5 livelihood. I was able to pay -- in my
6 program I wanted two assistants because
7 there's so many jobs involved in taking care
8 of children. And it just wasn't enough to
9 pay myself as well. And I could only give
10 the young ladies who later became nurses in
11 the field -- they loved working with
12 children, and I could only afford to pay them
13 minimum wage. No one got benefits. And I
14 could only keep the lights on and keep the
15 doors open. It just wasn't enough.

16 And the second prong to that is when
17 you don't fund the family childcare enough or
18 any program enough, it creates a disparity
19 between the haves and the have-nots, children
20 who have enough in childcare and those who --
21 when a program is sufficiently funded and
22 when a program is not, when -- depending on
23 the neighborhoods that we're serving --

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'm sorry, I have

1 to cut you off.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you, that
3 was very helpful. Thank you very much.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
5 Senator Brisport.

6 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you,
7 Madam Chair.

8 I have -- I'm using my time for the
9 representative from Wonderschool today.

10 Hello. Thank you for being here.

11 I was listening to a podcast that your
12 CEO did for Marc Andreessen's venture capital
13 firm with some other folks from
14 Silicon Valley, and he said a few things that
15 worried me. He said to this venture capital
16 audience that you haven't seen much price
17 sensitivity from governments and that in your
18 past experience you've asked yourself are we
19 undercharging for your services. He also
20 mentioned that you're looking to land and
21 expand in some jurisdictions, and I suspect
22 New York is one of them.

23 You also said that the best way to
24 actually achieve this childcare expansion in

1 a capitalist society is to empower
2 businesses. Here in New York we have
3 definitely had some issues with contractors
4 overcharging the state for its services. I'm
5 also very worried about large investors
6 trying to divert state subsidies towards
7 investors at firms like Goldman Sachs and
8 Andreessen Horowitz, who are two of your
9 company's investors.

10 On top of that, I think that the
11 childcare sector is one that is a classic
12 example of a big market failure.

13 None of this is about you personally.
14 We see lots of people that come into this
15 industry looking to do good things and just
16 get paid a decent wage while doing it. I
17 just think that some of your CEO's comments
18 really underscore the bigger problems we have
19 with this entire sector. And that when we
20 introduce venture capital firms we can get
21 even bigger problems of sophisticated parties
22 diverting state resources towards investors
23 rather than the childcare providers who need
24 them most. I think this is a big danger.

1 So I know this isn't a question. I
2 just wanted to say for the record that when
3 it comes to things like substitute pools, I'd
4 really like to see our own agencies,
5 nonprofits and CCR&Rs, who have off the
6 record knowhow, take the lead, and not as a
7 sort of junior partner or a captive audience
8 paying fees to some platform.

9 I do have a question with my remaining
10 time. I saw in an interview, another one
11 your CEO did, where he was asked how
12 Wonderschool makes money, he responded: "We
13 have two models. We either have a monthly
14 subscription fee that providers pay us, or we
15 take a percentage of tuition."

16 He then said the Wonderschool will
17 take a 10 percent from parents.

18 So my question is, with the cost of
19 childcare so high right now, how can we all
20 afford a 10 percent increase in costs?

21 MR. MOSS: I believe what my CEO was
22 referring to is a model for sort of as
23 providers are able to generate more
24 enrollments, the economics work such that

1 tag. The judges' proposal is to create a new
2 office of the guardian where the state would
3 become the guardian, and they estimated it
4 would cost \$72 million per year.

5 Our proposal is for \$15 million.

6 We also have a coalition of nonprofits
7 ready, willing and able to do the work, that
8 have programs that exist, that have staff
9 that are trained. So we're ready to go. It
10 doesn't need to be built.

11 We have expertise that we've gained
12 over two decades serving thousands of people
13 as guardian. And we do the tough job of like
14 running services 24/7, 365 days a year. A
15 lot happens nights and weekends and holidays.

16 So I think the nonprofit model -- I
17 mean, we outsource social services to
18 nonprofits all the time. Why should this be
19 any different?

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Rolison.

22 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you,
23 Madam Chair. This question is for Meredith.

24 I was lucky to be able to come to the

1 event at Orange Community College in Newburgh
2 just a week or two ago, as far as the toolkit
3 was concerned. And then you said that you've
4 been throughout the state, you've conducted
5 all of those forums like the one in Newburgh.

6 And ESD -- these are -- they were all
7 done in the different Regional Economic
8 Development areas, that's correct?

9 MS. CHIMENTO: Yes.

10 SENATOR ROLISON: Yeah. Does ESD have
11 a role to play in any of this navigating and
12 developing? Because I don't know the answer
13 to that. That's why I'm asking you.

14 MS. CHIMENTO: It's a great question.
15 I thoroughly enjoyed having you at the
16 launch, and so thank you so much. And I
17 always enjoy our conversations.

18 ESD was there at every one of the
19 Business Navigator launches in the 10
20 Economic Development Regions, the
21 representatives were. They are ready to work
22 with local businesses. We will need to rely
23 on them so that they can bridge that gap with
24 Child Care Resource & Referral

1 agencies connecting with the local
2 businesses.

3 So we need to continue to develop that
4 relationship. That's the hope of this
5 additional million dollars, is that they will
6 play a larger role in it.

7 There are childcare workgroups with
8 some of the Regional Economic Development
9 Councils that function, you know, well to
10 okay. And we continue to move that so that
11 we continuously educate local businesses
12 about the importance of this work.

13 So they were there, we're ready to
14 work with them, and I believe in many of the
15 regions they're absolutely committed to
16 strengthening this work.

17 SENATOR ROLISON: So there could be a
18 role to play with ESD --

19 MS. CHIMENTO: Absolutely.

20 SENATOR ROLISON: Because it is
21 economic development --

22 MS. CHIMENTO: Yup.

23 SENATOR ROLISON: -- and the childcare
24 system that, especially if they're going to

1 be granting monies for business development,
2 expansions, people relocating into New York
3 State -- and I guess maybe not right at this
4 complete second that we're having this
5 conversation.

6 But to me, that's the perfect
7 partnership, that ESD, which has access to
8 those types of economic development funds,
9 it's the same thing.

10 MS. CHIMENTO: Absolutely. I think as
11 we move toward universal childcare and figure
12 out the revenue model that's going to support
13 this, we're going to need those partnerships.

14 And so it's a step. Right? It's not
15 the complete answer, because we need this
16 permanent workforce fund, we need those
17 supports to lift up our childcare providers.
18 But absolutely, that's what the Business
19 Navigator project does: How are we able to
20 look at incentivizing to come into these
21 communities so that they find supportive
22 childcare for their employees? It's a
23 barrier for them.

24 Corning, Inc.'s model of investing in

1 childcare to the tune of \$7 million a year is
2 a perfect example of economic development.
3 They support centers, three centers in their
4 region, and home-based providers.

5 SENATOR ROLISON: Makes good sense.

6 Thank you.

7 MS. CHIMENTO: Thanks.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

9 Assembly.

10 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Ra.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you, Chair.

12 For Wonderschool, at the risk of
13 asking a very general question, what's the
14 biggest lesson you've learned from running a
15 statewide sub pool in other states?

16 MR. MOSS: Thank you for the question,
17 Assemblyman.

18 The biggest lesson is that this takes
19 a lot of learning, it takes a lot of trial
20 and error, and it takes a tremendous use of
21 sort of technology to figure out how to
22 scale.

23 So I think there's an important
24 distinction between -- if the goal is to run

1 sort of a local sub pool, what that can look
2 like. And if the goal is to run a statewide
3 sub pool, what is necessary.

4 And what we have seen is that sort of
5 the investment in technology in order to
6 drive the necessary application pool to
7 support that, in order to ensure that sort of
8 as people are engaging with the process,
9 they're sort of quickly moving through so
10 that we can get them on-boarded, in order to
11 ensure that people get the appropriate
12 background checks and all the qualifications
13 done -- all of that takes sort of an
14 integration of technology and then really a
15 platform to ensure that when a provider posts
16 a job it can be quickly responded to, to get
17 that provider help.

18 And that's an overnight learning
19 curve. So the ability to sort of do that
20 with the numbers that I shared in Mississippi
21 is really what we've learned over time.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: And you mentioned
23 briefly in your testimony, you know,
24 mechanisms to incentivize participation by

1 both providers and substitutes. What type of
2 things do you feel have been successful in
3 incentivizing that that you've seen in other
4 states?

5 MR. MOSS: Yeah, I'll give several
6 examples.

7 The first is that if we think about
8 getting substitutes into this market -- but
9 we're competing with McDonald's, right? Like
10 that is a more attractive financial option.
11 So there's got to be a way to complement what
12 a sub might typically earn and add to that to
13 make this sort of attractive thing.

14 That's the first thing, is we've got
15 to get substitutes. When you speak to local
16 sub pools, this is the hardest challenge that
17 they have across the country, is recruitment.

18 Beyond that, there are ways to use
19 incentives to help people to travel to
20 farther-away jobs. In Mississippi there's a
21 lot of rural communities, so thinking of
22 travel reimbursements to get somebody to go a
23 little farther distance is a great way to
24 support your more rural, less populous

1 providers.

2 If you think about once you've
3 invested the time to get a substitute, how do
4 you keep that person on the platform, that
5 suggests are there ways that we can think of
6 like retention bonuses, things like that.

7 All of these are sort of different
8 incentives to complement the work and build
9 in a statewide sub pool.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Murray.

12 SENATOR MURRAY: Thank you,

13 Chairwoman.

14 And thank you all for being here.

15 I'm going to make kind of a statement,
16 and I'm kind of piggybacking off what
17 Assemblyman Hevesi was talking about as far
18 as wages and pay for childcare workers.

19 So a couple of years ago, drastic
20 increase in minimum wage. And while I get
21 the reason behind it, there were warnings
22 that it could have some unintended
23 consequences, and that's what we're seeing.
24 So the increase was not just an increase, it

1 was a drastic increase. And it continues to
2 increase, which put businesses with small
3 margins in peril.

4 And one of those also was the direct
5 care providers, the same thing happened with
6 them. They came up and they were -- you
7 know, we need a living wage, we need more, we
8 can't survive. But the margins were just so
9 tight. So our answer was we'll give you
10 bonuses, or retention bonuses, something like
11 this. And we threw bonuses at them.

12 In my opinion, that's not a solution,
13 that's a Band-Aid. If that were to be
14 something that were offered up to you, is
15 that a solution or just more of the same?

16 MS. BOWEN: As long as you are
17 recognizing that it is a Band-Aid, it has to
18 be a step that leads to another step that
19 leads to -- you know, to a permanent
20 solution.

21 So we are asking for a more permanent
22 solution to supplement the market rate. We
23 need it to be acknowledged that the current
24 market rates, the whole system does not work.

1 You know, we cannot continue to be paid what
2 the community can offer if the community
3 cannot offer. And our expenses as caregivers
4 are high.

5 And I'm just going to say real quick
6 the -- paying the workforce, paying your
7 assistant and paying yourself -- and we
8 haven't been able to pay ourself -- is the
9 number-one expense, then followed by all of
10 that comes with having a small business and
11 payroll, taxes and liability and insurance.

12 So we're all -- and I'm speaking on
13 behalf of residential at this time. We have
14 the expenses of a small business, but we do
15 not get the income that we should have to
16 operate. So we are constantly at a deficit
17 year after year until we just systemically
18 close.

19 So you are right, yes, we need to move
20 from thinking temporary and more permanent,
21 yes.

22 SENATOR MURRAY: Anybody else?

23 Okay, that was good. Thank you very
24 much. Appreciate it.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.
2 Assemblywoman Griffin, are you here?

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Yes. Okay,
4 thank you, Chair. I'm losing my voice a
5 little bit.

6 I thank you all for being here to
7 testify.

8 My first question is for Kimberly
9 George. I really appreciate the work that
10 Pro Guardianship does, and you did a great
11 job explaining how vital this is. And one
12 question I had was about how many people
13 would you say are in need of a guardian but
14 cannot find one or they don't have the
15 ability to be matched up with one?

16 MS. GEORGE: Thank you. It's a great
17 question, and it's unfortunately hard to get
18 at because our court system, which is where
19 the guardianship proceedings go through, has
20 not been collecting great data.

21 So I think it was mentioned earlier,
22 when Acting Director Olsen was up here, that
23 there isn't good data on how many family or
24 friends are serving, how many nonprofits are

1 serving, how many private guardians are
2 serving. And as Senator Krueger pointed out,
3 now we're seeing for-profits get into this
4 business, which I think is not even legal,
5 according to the statute.

6 Our proposal would serve 1500, and we
7 think that that would meet the current need
8 for the judges who are struggling to find
9 guardians for a very specific population,
10 which is people that are living in poverty
11 and people that don't have other supports and
12 often have overlapping, very complicated
13 situations to untangle.

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Thank you. I
15 appreciate -- I appreciate your goals and
16 would support your funding, because it
17 doesn't seem like that much funding to make
18 this happen.

19 And one more thing I wanted to ask and
20 mention, if I have time, to all of you is
21 with the minimum wage going up, that might
22 have exacerbated issues. But it was already
23 that workers were being paid too low a wage.
24 So to me it's not like, oh, well, the minimum

1 wage went up so now we have a problem. We
2 already had a problem because it was a low
3 wage to begin with.

4 So I really support that workforce
5 development. I've spoken to a lot of
6 childcare providers in my district; mostly
7 they're all women-owned businesses and it's
8 women working, like some of you have
9 described, working other jobs to enable your
10 business to stay in place.

11 One thing we discussed was the problem
12 of finding suitable workers to help with
13 special ed children that come in, and I just
14 wondered, you know, if anyone wants to speak
15 to that issue. And we don't have that much
16 time, so ...

17 MS. BOWEN: Definitely children who
18 come to the program and need special
19 attention and have special needs, we have to
20 be able to pay for that.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Yes.

22 MS. BOWEN: Okay? And also, minimum
23 wage is not enough. We want for people who
24 are working with us as educators -- we have

1 to pay educators as educators should be paid.
2 Which is not minimum wage. We have to think
3 beyond minimum wage when we're talking about
4 educating children zero to five.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Thank you very
6 much.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
8 Senator Persaud.

9 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you all for
10 being here.

11 I just wanted to follow up with the
12 Wonderschool, because I'm looking at -- you
13 have a tremendous amount of resources. The
14 others can't compete with you. What are your
15 salary rates like for -- you talk about
16 people leaving, wanting to -- you know, that
17 you can't compete with fast food. But you
18 have a tremendous amount of resources, so you
19 should be able to offer the staffing that you
20 have higher wages.

21 How are you paying them? What are
22 your wages like?

23 MR. MOSS: Just to clarify, Senator,
24 are you talking about the substitutes?

1 SENATOR PERSAUD: Yes.

2 MR. MOSS: So the substitutes are not
3 our staff. The substitutes are hired by the
4 childcare providers. Right?

5 And so the -- and so the
6 recommendation is that when childcare
7 providers, as has been said on this panel,
8 obviously are running on very tight margins
9 in terms of what they can offer a substitute.
10 Our recommendation in terms of the incentives
11 is to take that amount and add a little extra
12 on, which would come out of these dollars
13 that have been allocated for the substitute
14 pool, because that's what's going to allow us
15 to incite demand. That's what's going to
16 make this job now a little more attractive,
17 which is what we need to do. And that's what
18 we've seen in Mississippi.

19 In fact, if we look at Mississippi,
20 Colorado, Washington, anywhere where there
21 are statewide sub pools, this is a common
22 practice.

23 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. So you're
24 fund -- so what do you offer -- because

1 you're doing a lot of fundraising to get the
2 funds that you have. Right? And you're
3 coming to us asking for the same pool -- from
4 the same pool as others who can't fundraise.

5 Why should we be offering money to you
6 and not, you know, in the same pool?

7 MR. MOSS: I think the question should
8 be what does it take to operate successfully
9 a statewide sub pool. What does it -- what
10 is needed to do that?

11 And our belief is that doing that well
12 requires a mix of putting in place the
13 necessary technology platform so that
14 something can scale to support your needs so
15 that you have realtime data to understand
16 sort of what you're seeing.

17 It requires having sort of the
18 automations in places from the recruitment
19 through the on-boarding to get them involved.

20 It requires having the incentives in
21 place.

22 Sort of all of those pieces are
23 necessary to operate a sub pool. And so
24 we're here to say that as we think about sort

1 of this legislation, you should be thinking
2 of it with that kind of structure in mind.

3 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay, thank you.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

5 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman
6 Burdick.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Thank you.

8 And I wish to thank all of you for
9 your testimony and the critical work that you
10 perform.

11 And this is a question for
12 Shanita Bowen. You mentioned in your
13 testimony that the top recommendation at the
14 Governor's Child Care Availability Task Force
15 is workforce development. And, you know, I
16 think you've got a lot of support for moving
17 ahead on that in the Legislature.

18 But there are many ways in which the
19 state can do this, and I'd be curious as to
20 what you think is the best mechanism.
21 Childcare reimbursement rates? You know, a
22 statewide wage supplement program? Expanding
23 workforce stabilization grants? And so
24 forth.

1 And please don't tell me all of the
2 above. What would you say would be the best
3 way of addressing it? What would you think
4 would be the most equitable?

5 MS. BOWEN: Well, thank you for that
6 question.

7 Definitely I want to say that
8 childcare is a public good. And just like
9 public school is no means --

10 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: I think we all
11 agree with that. You know, I think you've
12 got a lot of support up here.

13 And so what would you say that we
14 should be focusing on? Should it be the
15 reimbursement rates? Do others have ideas on
16 this on the panel?

17 MS. BOWEN: If I could -- if I could
18 just --

19 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Sure.

20 MS. BOWEN: Definitely, you know,
21 we'll hear any ideas.

22 But also parental choice. So
23 different providers, different programs,
24 different family childcare programs. We

1 offer different levels. So, you know, create
2 a system where if we want to offer more, we
3 would get more. Give us incentives to do
4 more. Pay us according to experience and
5 offerings.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Any others have
7 some --

8 MS. CHIMENTO: I think you'll hear
9 more about that in the next -- in another
10 panel, with the career ladders and tying
11 compensation to education and experience.

12 We've addressed very well the
13 Child Care Assistance Program. Right? CCAP
14 is at its highest that it's been ever. The
15 investments are incredible. We have to take
16 care of the workforce. And we have to look
17 at the regional or local differences in
18 compensation, reference the ALICE report,
19 what's occurring in different communities.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Any others?

21 MS. BUFKIN: I do just want to
22 reference I know that there's a lot of
23 momentum around establishing a childcare
24 workforce compensation fund, which would

1 really allow us for having a central place to
2 make sure that we're able to address,
3 long-term and permanently, the need to
4 compensate the workforce adequately.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Thank you all
6 very much.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

8 I think I'm the last Senator. So just
9 quickly, not a question, for Kimberly George.
10 Yes, we have to do much more about
11 guardianship. We were very impressed with
12 your model. I don't believe 1500 people is
13 the universe that we need to serve, so we
14 need to figure out how we expand good models
15 that protect people.

16 From Wonderschool, so we take early
17 childhood education quite seriously in this
18 state. We have pre-K, we have 3-K, we have
19 daycare, we have home care, family-based
20 care. But we have certification and
21 licensing for everyone. Do your people go
22 through our standards? And are you allowed
23 to even operate in New York under current
24 rules?

1 MR. MOSS: I'll speak to Mississippi
2 first.

3 In the case of Mississippi, which is
4 the example that I gave, all the substitutes
5 are going through 100 percent the
6 state-required guidelines for being in the
7 centers. We follow that to the T, we work
8 very closely with the licensing department.
9 So anywhere where we operate, we are ensuring
10 that we follow 100 percent the requirements
11 of the state.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So when I was
13 reading your website as you were answering
14 questions, it talks about Missouri,
15 Mississippi, West Virginia. Those states
16 have some of the worst education rankings in
17 the country. We pride ourselves in New York
18 on having and trying to have some of the
19 highest education rankings and recognizing
20 the importance of quality early childhood
21 education, because it gets us better outcomes
22 throughout the kids' lives.

23 So you're actually looking for some
24 kind of approval to operate in New York? Am

1 I misunderstanding that?

2 MR. MOSS: I'm here to present our
3 recommendations on how to amend the current
4 legislation. That's where I sort of
5 suggested the different points that I think
6 would make the current legislation meet
7 the -- I think what are really sort of the
8 true goals of the substitute pool.

9 The second thing that I would say,
10 just regarding the states, is we do work in a
11 number of states. And, you know, Michigan is
12 a state that we've been in for many years,
13 and I think you'll find that, you know, our
14 goal is always to help states and help
15 providers achieve sort of the best outcomes.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: But right now
17 you're not allowed to operate in New York
18 State under our current rules.

19 MR. MOSS: Right now there is no --
20 there is no substitute teacher pool, and we
21 are not approved to be a substitute teacher
22 pool in New York, correct.

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I just wanted to
24 clarify that. Thank you.

1 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
2 Giglio.

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: Yes, I was
4 wondering if any of you could please answer
5 the question when it comes to the 4410
6 preschools and the 853 schools, which are the
7 not-for-profit schools that deal with special
8 education and mental health. They are -- no?
9 Because they are at risk of closure because
10 of the low wages and attracting --

11 (Time clock sounds.)

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: -- and those
13 kids will go into the public schools.

14 Anybody?

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Did she really
16 use three minutes? No, something was wrong.
17 You didn't really use three minutes.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: It's okay.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: She used the rest
20 of my time. Sorry. Let's give her -- you
21 already had your question. Let's roll with
22 the answers. Okay?

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: Thank you.

24 MS. BUFKIN: I know we'd be happy to

1 follow up with you on that. There are some
2 recommendations around the 4410s around some
3 of the state recommendations that have
4 occurred recently and wanting to support
5 that. But I don't have those in front of me.

6 But I'd be happy to follow up with you
7 with those afterwards.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GIGLIO: That would be
9 great.

10 And also the continuation of education
11 when children turn -- or when people turn 22
12 in the middle of the school year and the
13 funding cuts off right when they turn 22. So
14 if you could get back to me on that, that
15 would be great. Thank you.

16 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Is that it?

17 Okay, then that ends this Panel D.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

19 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you very much
20 for your testimony.

21 And we'll move to Panel E: Northern
22 Rivers Family of Services, the New York
23 Foundling, Council of Family and Child Caring
24 Agencies, and United Way of New York State.

1 Is one missing?

2 UNIDENTIFIED ASSEMBLYMAN: Yay.

3 (Laughter.)

4 UNIDENTIFIED ASSEMBLYMAN: Sorry.

5 (Laughter.)

6 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay, we're missing
7 one entity. So if you would just introduce
8 yourselves, just your name and your
9 organization, so the people in the booth know
10 what names to put up on the board.

11 MR. GETTMAN: So we get their time
12 too?

13 (Laughter.)

14 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: We can't, but good
15 try.

16 MS. NEWMAN: I'm Michelle Newman. I'm
17 the associate executive director upstate at
18 COFCCA.

19 MR. GETTMAN: I'm Bill Gettman, CEO of
20 Northern Rivers Family of Services here in
21 the Capital District.

22 MS. DALY: Hi, I'm Therese Daly,
23 president and CEO of the United Way of
24 New York State.

1 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: United Way, all
2 rightly. So we're missing the Foundling.

3 All right, you're on.

4 MS. NEWMAN: Okay.

5 Good afternoon. Michelle Newman,
6 associate executive director at COFCCA,
7 representing over 100 nonprofit organizations
8 providing foster care, prevention, adoption
9 and juvenile justice services in New York.

10 First I want to strongly emphasize the
11 collective human services sector ask for an
12 investment at 7.8 percent instead of the
13 2.1 percent included in the Executive Budget,
14 which was previously known as the human
15 services COLA.

16 Our members report experiencing
17 significant costs to operate their programs,
18 including health insurance increases of 15 to
19 20 percent. Food expenses have grown more
20 than 10 percent. Liability insurance costs
21 have increased by 20 to 40 percent for some.

22 Additionally, agencies are struggling
23 with staff recruitment and to raise salaries
24 in order to stem significant turnover in the

1 sector.

2 We request that the Legislature
3 include language in their one-house budgets
4 to strengthen these investments by ensuring
5 foster-care rates grow year over year, and
6 including prevention and health home care
7 management programs.

8 Next the Family First Prevention
9 Services Act provides the state with the
10 opportunity to draw down federal Title IV-E
11 funding for prevention services. While
12 New York has had an approved prevention plan
13 for some time now, the state has yet to draw
14 down these funds. We encourage the state to
15 maximize federal Title IV-E funding and
16 reinvest these savings back into community
17 services, including in primary prevention
18 services as proposed in the child and family
19 well-being fund, and increasing prevention
20 funding to support programs and the workforce
21 that help families safely remain together.

22 Last but decidedly not least,
23 providers must be able to obtain liability
24 insurance in order to provide foster-care

1 services. Due to social inflation and
2 increasing pressures in the insurance market
3 specifically related to foster care, agencies
4 in New York State and nationwide are
5 experiencing significant challenges in access
6 and coverage. This is becoming an
7 increasingly urgent issue.

8 There are very few insurance providers
9 in the sector already, and we are seeing the
10 field get even smaller in recent months. In
11 late August of last year, the nonprofit
12 Insurance Alliance of California, which
13 insured 90 percent of family foster-care
14 agencies in the state, announced it would no
15 longer renew insurance coverage for family
16 foster-care providers across the state. That
17 was as of October 1st.

18 This change, on such short notice,
19 created a crisis in the sector in California,
20 and to date there is still no current
21 statewide solution.

22 Then in January the same company
23 announced that effective April 1st of this
24 year, they will not renew umbrella coverage

1 for any of their insured foster family
2 agencies nationwide.

3 We urgently request that the state
4 intervene to stabilize the insurance market
5 for nonprofit child welfare agencies
6 providing foster care in New York State. If
7 our providers who care for more than
8 80 percent of the children and youth in
9 foster care across the state aren't able to
10 provide these services, this responsibility
11 will fall on the counties, and the
12 infrastructure is not there to take on that
13 load.

14 Thank you.

15 MR. GETTMAN: Hi, I'm Bill Gettman,
16 CEO of Northern Rivers. We are a human
17 service provider that serves 18,000
18 individuals from the age of six weeks old to
19 Medicare-eligible seniors. We provide
20 foster care, prevention, mental health
21 counseling, 853 schools, Early Head Start and
22 childcare. We serve 42 counties.

23 While the Governor's budget addresses
24 affordability -- all good for New Yorkers --

1 the not-for-profit sector is ignored in her
2 budget. The 2.1 percent is an underfunded
3 insult, quite frankly, to our sector. We are
4 the safety net for all New Yorkers. Be it
5 childcare, be it social work, be it
6 healthcare, the not-for-profit sector is so
7 fragile today that unless we infuse new
8 dollars for our workforce to pay for our
9 insurance, we're going to have closures,
10 we're going to have higher waitlists, we're
11 going to have kids in school who can't get
12 special education services. We're in a
13 crisis.

14 And while affordability's an important
15 issue for everyone in New York State, we need
16 to invest in our workforce and in the sector.
17 As Michelle pointed out, insurance costs are
18 double digits. Food is up 14 percent. And
19 as a residential provider, I think we should
20 provide high-quality food for our kids.
21 Every single day we are faced with an
22 increase that's not supported by the State of
23 New York. At the same time the foster home
24 insurance crisis could put agencies out of

1 business, send kids back to congregate care,
2 or leave them in unsafe situations. We need
3 a risk pool.

4 Our third recommendation deals with
5 creation of a fund to support justice under
6 the Child Victims Act. We need to find a
7 solution to this problem that is both just
8 for individuals and also keeps the viability
9 of the sector alive.

10 My last recommendation -- that relates
11 a little bit to schools because we run a
12 school -- is we support the school cellphone
13 ban because it's a good thing for kids to
14 educate, especially those with mental health
15 needs and those who have social and emotional
16 needs.

17 So again, we support the efforts in
18 the past to keep our sector alive and vital,
19 but it's at a very serious tipping point
20 right now and we need investment in
21 resources, we need additional flexibility as
22 it relates to the workforce, and we need
23 innovation. So we encourage you to press for
24 those things in your final budget.

1 Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

3 MS. DALY: Good afternoon,
4 Chairpersons Krueger, Pretlow, Persaud,
5 Davila, Hevesi, and Brisport, as well as the
6 distinguished members of the Senate and
7 Assembly. Thank you for allowing me the
8 opportunity to testify before you today to
9 elevate the essential priorities for the
10 United Way of New York State.

11 My name is Therese Daly, and I am the
12 new president and CEO of the United Way of
13 New York State.

14 The core mission of United Way is to
15 be a leader and an advocate for community
16 solutions. Every day the 32 local
17 United Ways work with local communities to
18 help find solutions to complex problems.
19 They work collaboratively with community
20 partners to define issues that impact health,
21 education and financial stability of
22 individuals and families across New York.

23 As the new president and CEO, I look
24 to invest more than 160 million in our

1 communities statewide.

2 To continue our impact on local
3 communities, United Way of New York State
4 once again is seeking your support for
5 essential priorities to be included in the
6 '25-'26 enacted state budget. Your support
7 will help the United Way maintain, sustain
8 and build on these effective initiatives.

9 We're requesting a \$2.8 million
10 investment in the 2-1-1, which is a \$400,000
11 increase over last year's enacted budget.
12 But it will help maintain and expand access
13 to 2-1-1. An investment in the 2-1-1 system
14 is needed now more than ever.

15 We were once again disappointed to see
16 the lack of funding and support included in
17 the Governor's budget proposal. We have
18 requested, as part of the 30-day amendments,
19 a reconsideration, and also shared important
20 information on the importance of 2-1-1
21 yesterday, which was National 2-1-1 Day, a
22 day celebrated in communities across
23 New York.

24 We greatly appreciate the support of

1 the Legislature to ensure funding for 2-1-1
2 has been included in the passed budget.

3 The next item is United Way of
4 New York is requesting the Legislature to
5 maintain the Governor's \$7 million investment
6 in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library
7 Program in the enacted state budget.

8 United Way supports early literacy, and many
9 local United Ways across New York have been
10 participating in this program.

11 On to universal school meals. We were
12 thrilled to see Governor Hochul's historic
13 initiative to ensure every single one of
14 New York's over 2.7 million students can
15 receive both breakfast and lunch. We request
16 that the Legislature maintain the Governor's
17 investment to fund universal school meals and
18 provide free breakfast and lunch to all
19 students across the state.

20 Lastly, the United Way of New York
21 State is incredibly supportive of the
22 expansion of the Empire State Child Credit.
23 As reported in our ALICE report in 2022,
24 40 percent of families with children in

1 New York were below the ALICE threshold.
2 This expansion will allow more than 1 million
3 families to receive financial assistance and
4 allow individuals to have a direct payment of
5 up to \$330 per child.

6 Thank you!

7 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

8 (Laughter.)

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Hevesi.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great, thank you,
11 Mr. Chairman.

12 Thank you all for your testimony.
13 It's good to see all of you.

14 Let me start here. Ms. Daly, thank
15 you for talking about 2-1-1. I feel like
16 Donna Lupardo is not going to be mad at me
17 because we've talked about this.

18 2-1-1, you're absolutely right. I
19 thought we were -- I thought we were closer
20 to potentially getting it into the
21 Executive Budget. Because it is -- it's a
22 service that the state provides now.

23 So in the absence of that, I want to
24 say thank you for the work on 2-1-1, and also

1 that I hope my colleagues will join me in the
2 Legislature in pushing to continue and add
3 funding to the 2-1-1 system that you
4 recommended. So thank you. I appreciate
5 that.

6 MS. DALY: Thank you. And thank you
7 for your support continually.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: You got it.

9 Mr. Gettman, it's good to see you,
10 sir. Let me -- let me start with I totally
11 agree about the 2.1 COLA.

12 MR. GETTMAN: (Inaudible.)

13 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: 7.8, is that
14 enough?

15 (Laughter.)

16 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Am I sold?
17 That's perfect.

18 You know what, I'm done. I have no
19 more questions for this gentleman. Thank
20 you.

21 (Laughter.)

22 MR. GETTMAN: (Inaudible) -- 240,
23 your bill, and Senator Persaud's bill and
24 Senator --

1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: You know what, I
2 would like to cede the rest of my time to
3 Mr. Gettman --

4 (Laughter.)

5 MR. GETTMAN: -- and Senator Ramos's
6 bill on the employee wage board I think would
7 be an important conversation to have in the
8 future also.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I appreciate it.
10 And actually I have a joint question
11 for you and Ms. Newman, if I can.

12 So first, Ms. Newman, thank you. One
13 thing you mentioned that -- I'm interested in
14 all of it, but one thing I'm really
15 interested in is the potential to draw down
16 on the Title IV-E money. Do we have a sense
17 of why that's not happening?

18 My original understanding of this --
19 forgive me, from years ago -- is that
20 programs have to be evidence-based, and that
21 was a distinct problem in using that money.
22 But the state has drawn down none of the
23 Title IV-E money, or very little of it?

24 MS. NEWMAN: (Mic off.) My

1 understanding is -- ooh, I'm sorry, everyone.
2 My understanding is that there was a delay in
3 getting (mic out) -- spending plan, for which
4 I believe (mic out) -- it is quite difficult
5 in upstate to get those models running
6 because there's joint risk among the county
7 and the provider, but we're very interested
8 in seeing those funds get taken advantage of
9 and any savings generated reinvested back
10 into the system.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Perfect.

12 MR. GETTMAN: I would add,
13 Assemblyman, that there's a 19 percent local
14 share, which is always a caution flag for
15 local counties. And then in addition, the
16 evidence-based models require the most highly
17 qualified and credentialed staff.

18 So this leads us right back, are there
19 enough social workers, clinical social
20 workers, mental health counselors, addiction
21 specialists.

22 So again, we've got to address all
23 parts of the system, which is the workforce
24 piece, the administrative burden, cost

1 allocation, et cetera.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I have 10
3 seconds. Could you each, Mr. Gettman and
4 Ms. Newman, tell me in one word what would
5 happen if New York State loses its liability
6 insurance for its voluntary foster-care
7 agencies?

8 MS. NEWMAN: Hotels.

9 MR. GETTMAN: Return to orphanages.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very
11 much. I appreciate both of you.

12 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Could a Senator
13 jump in? No?

14 Assemblyman Ra.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

16 Going back to 2-1-1, can you just
17 detail a little bit what that extra money
18 would enable you to do in terms of expanding
19 the system?

20 MS. DALY: Thank you so much, first of
21 all, Assemblymember Ra, for your support over
22 the years.

23 Secondly, thank you for the question.

24 So yes, what is happening is 2-1-1,

1 for those of you who don't know, is an
2 emergency line. We help with resources. We
3 help everyone 365 days a year, 24/7.

4 So what is happening, the calls are
5 becoming more complex and they're taking
6 longer, because there's not only more of
7 those in crisis, but there's more severity to
8 the crisis. It's taking longer.

9 Also, a number of individuals call for
10 the first time, and when you call for the
11 first time, the calls also take longer as
12 well.

13 And the cost just to generate
14 operations are increasing, as everyone is
15 experiencing.

16 And then also I would just say there
17 have been a lot of weather and
18 natural-disaster-related events that have
19 happened, and those are not refunded
20 through -- with 2-1-1. So the costs are
21 technically eaten.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. And with my
23 remaining time, if either of you want to
24 expand upon Mr. Hevesi's question regarding

1 what happens if our foster agencies lose
2 access to insurance, I would be happy to hear
3 from you.

4 MS. NEWMAN: Yes. So they're
5 required, our agencies are required by their
6 county contracts to have liability insurance
7 and if they don't have that, they can't
8 legally provide the services. The
9 responsibility at that point falls to the
10 county. And if the county is not able to
11 have the capacity to do that work, which many
12 of them currently don't do, our agencies
13 provide 100 percent of the foster care,
14 family foster care in New York City, and
15 80 percent statewide, then there's going to
16 be a real problem finding placements for
17 children.

18 MR. GETTMAN: Right now we already
19 know that some kids are placed in hotels or
20 motels because of lack of placement
21 resources.

22 If we had several foster children,
23 where would they go? They would end up
24 either in hotels, as Michelle said, or

1 they're going to end up in congregate
2 facilities, which makes absolutely no sense.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

4 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
5 Griffin.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Thank you,
7 Chair. Thank you to all of you for being
8 here.

9 I just wanted to say, you know, I
10 agree with the 7.8 makes absolute sense. So
11 I don't think we're getting anyone to argue
12 that point.

13 I just want to speak about the loan
14 forgiveness incentive programs to recruit and
15 retain mental health clinicians and child
16 welfare workers. So this is already
17 {inaudible}, and you're looking to continue.
18 But sometimes we never hear directly how
19 you've seen this impact, like how you've seen
20 this work, that you are getting more workers
21 and you're retaining them. So I'd love
22 someone to speak on that.

23 MS. NEWMAN: Yeah, so the loan
24 forgiveness program that's coming out of OMH

1 for mental health clinicians serving children
2 hasn't yet been implemented, so we don't have
3 an impact. We're waiting for the RFP. We
4 anticipate that will be out soon. That's
5 funded at 4 million and continued in the
6 Executive Budget.

7 The child welfare loan forgiveness and
8 scholarship programs are currently only
9 funded at 50,000 each. Last year the
10 Legislature increased the scholarship program
11 by 100,000, so the total was 150,000. With a
12 maximum award of 10,000, you know, the
13 maximum number of folks that can be assisted
14 at that level is five.

15 So it's really hard to quantify a
16 systemwide impact of such a small number.
17 It's why we're asking for those programs to
18 be increased to a million each.

19 MR. GETTMAN: I can say on the ground
20 level we privately raise for loan
21 forgiveness, and it allows teachers and
22 social workers specifically to stay longer.
23 So we get an additional year to two years of
24 tenure out of them because we're helping them

1 with their loans.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Okay, thank
3 you. Thank you both very much.

4 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: That closes this
5 panel, then.

6 MS. DALY: Thank you so much.

7 MR. GETTMAN: Seven-point-eight, thank
8 you.

9 MS. DALY: Two-point-eight,
10 two-point-eight.

11 (Discussion off the record.)

12 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: (Mic off.)

13 MS. DALY: Thank you, Assemblymember
14 Pretlow, for your support in the past.

15 Yes, so across the state we had
16 2,045,078 calls alone in 2024.

17 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: And how many total
18 employees are answering these calls?

19 MS. DALY: That's a really good
20 question. I'm on my 31st day, so I feel like
21 that's a 32nd day answer.

22 In all seriousness, I would say
23 probably about 150, if not more.

24 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: A hundred and fifty

1 people handle 2 million calls?

2 MS. DALY: Yes, I'm sure --

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Are they paid or
4 volunteers?

5 MS. DALY: I can follow up with you
6 with the exact number, because I am -- I'm
7 not confident in that number.

8 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: You're the new
9 president. You'll get to know these --

10 MS. DALY: Like I said, 31 days.

11 But I will get you that. I will
12 follow up with you on that exact information.
13 There might be some discrepancy between
14 part-time and full-time workers as well.

15 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay, thank you.

16 And you operate 24 hours a day?

17 MS. DALY: Yes, sir. So 365 days,
18 24/7. So we are always there to help.

19 And just one other plug. For it as
20 well, it has been consistent even despite
21 crises and weather-related events, et cetera.
22 It's always been standing strong.

23 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay. I only hear
24 good things about you. Thank you.

1 MS. DALY: Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Raising New York;
3 Association of New York State Youth Bureaus;
4 New York State Network for Youth Success;
5 New York Early Childhood Professional
6 Development; and the Adirondack Birth to
7 Three Alliance.

8 Before we start, just for the benefit
9 of the people in the booth, could you all
10 just announce your name and your organization
11 before you start your testimony.

12 We can start on my right. I guess
13 that's you.

14 MS. RYAN: Hi. Kate Ryan, Adirondack
15 Birth To Three Alliance.

16 MS. TETTEH: Trudy Morgan Tetteh,
17 New York State Network for Youth Success.

18 MS. O'CONNOR: Jenn O'Connor, Raising
19 New York.

20 MS. ANDERSON: Dona Anderson, New York
21 Early Childhood Professional Development
22 Institute.

23 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay, thank you.

24 Where do you want to start?

1 MS. RYAN: I'll go first.

2 Good afternoon. My name is Kate Ryan,
3 and I'm the director of the Adirondack Birth
4 to Three Alliance at Adirondack Foundation.
5 We're a coalition of childcare providers,
6 employers, community organizations and
7 parents across the Adirondacks and the
8 North Country dedicated to ensuring all of
9 our region's families are able to thrive.

10 I would like to use my time today to
11 share with you a portrait of an Adirondack
12 family childcare provider.

13 She lives in Franklin County. She has
14 a 35-minute drive to the local grocery store
15 and an hour and a half drive to the childcare
16 resource center, critical partners in helping
17 her to become a family childcare provider.

18 She's a mother, most likely with one
19 or two young children under the age of
20 3 years old. Her childcare provider closed
21 and she can't find anyone else to provide
22 care. She leaves her employment and seeks to
23 become a licensed family childcare provider.

24 She starts the process to become

1 licensed with the help of the local CCRC.
2 Her home did not meet the requirements so she
3 had to invest \$500 for water testing and
4 remediation, a thousand dollars for a
5 backyard fence. Upon inspection, her wood
6 stove was found to have had a chimney fire,
7 and instead of having to pay \$10,000 in
8 repairs, she instead chooses to cap the
9 chimney and remove the pipe. This all takes
10 time.

11 She found childcare coverage and
12 transportation to the CCRC and participated
13 in the three-day in-person training sessions.
14 After a long, expensive six months, she
15 received her license as a family childcare
16 provider. She did it all while caring for
17 her children with no income.

18 Finally, she opens her first business
19 to help financially support her family. On
20 any given day, the first child arrives at
21 6 a.m. and the last child leaves at 6 p.m.
22 In the evenings or weekends she's meal
23 planning, cleaning, cooking, bookkeeping,
24 shopping, communicating with parents, and

1 completing required activities to maintain
2 licensure.

3 She's immediately hit with trying to
4 balance the requirements of the business, the
5 needs of the families that rely on her, and
6 her own family obligations, all while
7 spending large amounts of time creating
8 lessons and activities that support the
9 development of the young learners she is
10 responsible for educating -- the most
11 important part of the job.

12 In 2023, 21.3 percent of
13 Franklin County children lived in poverty.
14 The true cost of running a family childcare
15 business outpaces the fee she can charge her
16 families, so she goes without her own salary.
17 In a year or two her own children become
18 eligible for universal pre-kindergarten and
19 she closes her business and looks for
20 employment elsewhere. The children and
21 families she has served are now without
22 childcare and have to make their own decision
23 regarding employment.

24 The cycle starts over, but our

1 families and local economy remain stagnant,
2 without growth or opportunities for
3 advancement. Our children go without
4 consistent care and education and secure
5 attachment to their providers, a critical if
6 not the most critical part of child
7 development.

8 Essentially, the system of childcare
9 as it is today doesn't work. It doesn't work
10 for our children, our families, our
11 providers, our employers. It definitely
12 doesn't work for the Adirondack region and
13 other rural areas. We need universal
14 childcare. We need investments in
15 infrastructure and workforce.

16 Thank you.

17 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

18 MS. TETTEH: Thank you for opportunity
19 to testify today. As mentioned early on, my
20 name is Trudy and I'm the policy director at
21 the New York State Network for Youth Success.
22 And as the statewide after-school network,
23 we are committed to increasing access to
24 high-quality after-school, summer and

1 expanded learning programs across the state.

2 I want to read a statement provided to
3 us from an after-school provider that I think
4 directly speaks to how our school investments
5 are vital for New York's youth, working
6 families, and the state's economic future.

7 It says: "After-school funding has
8 been life-changing for our communities and
9 school districts, as it has provided safe
10 space for youth in enriching and supervised
11 settings. It creates jobs, helps families
12 maintain jobs, promotes overall health and
13 well-being for the youth and entire family
14 unit."

15 As level funding streams support
16 after-school in our state, I want to focus my
17 testimony on the LEAPS grant and why we think
18 there should be continued investment there.

19 LEAPS was a promising step forward for
20 after-school, and it introduced much-needed
21 reforms, including a revised funding
22 allocation to help provide further financial
23 support to providers and efforts to advance
24 payments and streamline the contracting

1 process. And it also incorporated a Positive
2 Youth Development approach, ensuring
3 high-quality learning experiences that help
4 young people thrive.

5 However, despite these important
6 improvements, notable challenges -- or rather
7 should I say opportunities -- emerged. Some
8 after-school providers that previously relied
9 on Advantage and Empire State grants did not
10 receive this funding and have seen
11 disruptions or anticipated closures.

12 The exclusion of youth age 13 and
13 older from the grant has also left some
14 middle- and high school students without the
15 after-school support that they used to
16 receive.

17 Additionally, delays in securing a
18 technical assistance provider have left
19 programs without key guidance and resources
20 while workforce shortages continue to
21 threaten the stability of the sector.

22 We believe that this year's budget can
23 help chart a path towards a strong
24 foundation, enabling expansive access to

1 high-quality, well-supported after-school
2 programs by doing three things.

3 Firstly, we want to see an allocation
4 of an additional \$180 million to expand
5 LEAPS. About \$155 million of that would
6 provide support to applicants that were
7 eligible but not funded under the program,
8 and also about \$25 million to help restore
9 access to after-school support for middle-
10 and high school students.

11 Currently we know that about a third
12 of eligible applicants receive funding,
13 leaving about 48,000 youth who could benefit
14 from after-school programs without access.

15 I secondly want to see the dedication
16 of \$5 million for school-age childcare and
17 after-school quality supports through the
18 network and our critical position as the
19 statewide after-school network.

20 And then, thirdly, we echo the call to
21 establish a permanent childcare workforce
22 compensation fund to ensure after-school
23 professionals receive fair wages and career
24 development opportunities.

1 We know after-school, summer, and
2 expanded learning programs are a lifeline for
3 families and communities alike.

4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

6 MS. O'CONNOR: Good afternoon.

7 Raising New York is the statewide coalition
8 that focuses on children age zero to five and
9 their families.

10 These are our four top priorities.

11 Number one, ensure that the state
12 adopts the recommendations of the Child
13 Poverty Reduction Advisory Council. While we
14 support all of the CPRAC recommendations,
15 we're most focused on the child tax credit.
16 We're excited about the Governor's proposal,
17 but would like to see that be made permanent
18 and include children up to age 18. And the
19 north star will be the Working Families Tax
20 Credit.

21 Our second priority is provide
22 long-term sustainable investments in the
23 childcare sector. Shanita said that better
24 than I can, so I'm not going to repeat what

1 she said.

2 But I will tell you that members of
3 the Child Care Availability Task Force, which
4 I sat on for seven years, sent a letter just
5 yesterday to the Governor and to legislative
6 leadership urging them to address the
7 workforce issue, which was the task force's
8 number-one recommendation.

9 We strongly support school-age
10 childcare and the New York State Network for
11 Success. I won't repeat what Trudy just had
12 to say.

13 Number three is ensure that all
14 families have access to comprehensive
15 maternal and child health programs, services
16 and supports. To that effect, we are highly
17 supportive of the Birth Allowance for
18 Beginning Year -- BABY -- benefit. We just
19 hope to see that increased and extended to
20 18 months postpartum, as opposed to just a
21 one-time payment at birth.

22 We were also pleased to see the
23 Baby2Baby newborn baby box initiative
24 included in the Executive Budget, but this

1 leads me to our disappointment that there is
2 no increase in home visiting, particularly
3 the ParentChild+ program, and no move toward
4 a universal, voluntary home visiting program.

5 In order for proposals like Baby2Baby
6 to be successful, one-on-one human
7 interaction in the form of research-based
8 home visits are necessary. The state should
9 pair the proposed initiative with strategic
10 investments in home visiting, including
11 restoration of 200,000 and an increase of
12 300,000 for ParentChild+.

13 Finally, number four is to increase
14 early literacy. We are thrilled with the
15 \$7 million investment in Dolly Parton's
16 Imagination Library. We ask that that be
17 paired with a \$3 million investment in the
18 Reach Out and Read Program to serve
19 95 waitlisted clinics across the state.

20 And since I have 48 seconds left, I
21 will say that, again in terms of childcare,
22 we had a call with some folks in New York
23 City last week; they have a \$240 million
24 funding gap based on the fact that they

1 implemented the market rate and expanded
2 eligibility. We need to make good on those
3 promises and help New York City pay for those
4 slots.

5 Thank you.

6 MS. ANDERSON: Hi, everyone. I'm
7 Dona Anderson. I'm the executive director of
8 the New York Early Childhood Professional
9 Development Institute. We are located at the
10 City University of New York.

11 I'm really excited to be here with all
12 my colleagues and those who have presented
13 earlier today, and I'm happy to say that I'm
14 here to bring some good news.

15 New York has been really smart about
16 how it has invested in childcare. And three
17 of the systems that New York has invested in
18 have smartly -- and that my organization has
19 the honor to be able to operate -- really has
20 laid the foundation for all the things that
21 we've been talking about here today. So I
22 want to highlight a few of those here first.

23 So first of all, I want to talk about
24 the Aspire Registry. This is New York

1 State's early childhood workforce registry.
2 This is an online platform. It's a data
3 system that already exists, that already is
4 utilized by a majority of childcare centers
5 in our state and a number of our family and
6 home-based centers, as well as some of our
7 after-school programs.

8 And this is really the statewide
9 system that offers a lot of information about
10 what the workforce does, who they are, what
11 kind of experience in education they have,
12 and where there are areas of opportunity to
13 improve.

14 And so working in conjunction with our
15 CCR&R partners, we see this as a vital part
16 of a substitute pool in the future. This is
17 building on infrastructure that already
18 exists. We are a statewide system that then
19 augments the very local work that CCR&Rs are
20 going to be able to do in this space. So
21 it's thrilling to know that New York was
22 smart enough to really start investing in
23 that system 10 years ago.

24 The other system that I want to talk

1 about today is QUALITYstarsNY. This is our
2 state's quality rating and improvement system
3 for early childhood programs. We currently
4 serve almost 2,000 programs across all
5 different modalities, centers, school-based
6 programs, home-based programs and others,
7 including 4410 programs.

8 And this -- and what we are looking to
9 do is of course expand this. QUALITYstarsNY
10 works very closely with the director, the
11 program leader, to measure their impact and
12 to look at their own quality and how to
13 improve that.

14 And one of the things that
15 QUALITYstarsNY does, along with Aspire, is
16 really provides not only a way to improve
17 quality, it also provides a way for programs
18 to be accountable and for you to hold us
19 accountable and programs accountable for the
20 significant public investment that you are
21 making through the CCAP, through pre-K and
22 3-K, through all the public investments that
23 these programs receive. These are the
24 systems that help to really keep them

1 accountable and help improve their quality.

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

3 Assemblyman Hevesi.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,
5 Mr. Chairman.

6 Thank you all for your testimony. I
7 appreciate it.

8 Ms. Ryan -- I'm just going to go down
9 the list -- that was really, really helpful
10 to hear that provider experience. And that
11 can't be specific just to the Adirondacks,
12 that's all across the state. And listen,
13 when you're sitting here and telling us that
14 the system just doesn't work, we're
15 listening. So we very much appreciate that.

16 Trudy, it's good to see you. I have a
17 couple of questions for you, if I can, about
18 the LEAPS program.

19 So when the conversion to LEAPS
20 happened, obviously -- not obviously -- OCFS
21 focused on elementary school kids. Earlier
22 today the commissioner of OCFS said they're
23 about to put out an RFP to catch other kids,
24 I think it was about 3,000 kids, that we

1 didn't get before.

2 Yet in your testimony you mention that
3 that would cost, I think, 25 million. Am I
4 right or wrong about that? So how is OCFS
5 putting out an RFP without any money behind
6 it?

7 MS. TETTEH: Thank you so much,
8 Assemblymember, for that question.

9 So this 25 million is actually based
10 on our calculations of how many students,
11 middle- and high school students, were served
12 by Advantage After School. We didn't have
13 the data for Empire State After School
14 Program. And then based on the information
15 we had, it seemed about 35 percent were
16 served -- 35 percent of the program served
17 middle- and high school students.

18 So based on that number, we would have
19 come to that \$25 million or so.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: That's great. I
21 appreciate that.

22 I'm going to move on to Ms. O'Connor.
23 And Ms. O'Connor, just -- it's good to see
24 you.

1 If I'm hearing you correctly, the
2 Assembly should reject any assistance for
3 literacy and reject the Dolly Parton Library,
4 is --

5 MS. O'CONNOR: (Inaudible.)

6 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: No, absolutely.
7 Just kidding.

8 Could you talk to me about home
9 visiting for a second?

10 MS. O'CONNOR: I can talk to you about
11 home visiting. I can talk about home
12 visiting all day.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Now that I threw
14 you off a little bit, we are completely for
15 the Dolly Parton Library, just saying.

16 MS. O'CONNOR: (Inaudible.)

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: But yeah, home
18 visiting.

19 MS. O'CONNOR: Home visiting. Home
20 visiting improves health outcomes, it
21 increases school readiness, it decreases
22 child abuse and neglect. There are a couple
23 of research-based programs across the
24 state -- Healthy Families New York,

1 ParentChild+ and Nurse-Family Partnership.
2 ParentChild+ sits at this table, so that's
3 why we're talking about it here.

4 ParentChild+ actually goes into, on a
5 voluntary basis, into homes to work with
6 families, but also goes into home-based
7 childcare programs to work with providers.
8 And its focus is on early literacy, so we're
9 a big fan of that.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great. Thanks
11 for bearing with me.

12 And Ms. Anderson, I'd like to -- we
13 have no time, but I'd like to talk to you
14 offline about the Aspire Registry and how we
15 can maximize the use of that existing
16 resource. We haven't really given that a ton
17 of thought, so I'd love to brainstorm with
18 you.

19 MS. ANDERSON: I'm happy to set up a
20 conversation at any time. We have a lot of
21 data and a lot opportunity.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Cool. Thank you
23 very much. Appreciate it.

24 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senator?

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Brisport.

2 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

3 I was worried that the Assemblymember
4 was going to steal my thunder; I had some
5 questions about the Aspire Registry as well.
6 But I'm very interested and I'm curious if
7 you could expand on it more for us, tell us,
8 you know, how many providers or actually
9 childcare workers are currently registered
10 there versus how many are in the workforce in
11 general, and if there are -- what barriers
12 you may see to having additional providers
13 register with it.

14 MS. ANDERSON: So the Aspire Registry
15 is the state's workforce registry, as I
16 mentioned. The coverage, we have about
17 70 percent of licensed childcare centers
18 represented in the registry. Our home-based
19 providers are a little bit lower; we've got
20 about 11 percent of family childcare
21 providers and 17 percent of group family
22 childcare providers.

23 But statewide, all across the state.

24 We've made significant improvements in

1 the last year to make it easier to get into
2 Aspire and to utilize Aspire. There's now an
3 app. It makes it just a lot easier,
4 especially for folks who are on the go, to
5 access what they need to access, to upload
6 documents and really be able to utilize all
7 the tools that are there as part of that.

8 We have about 40,000 users altogether.
9 That includes not only childcare-serving
10 folks but also trainers, coaches, a lot of
11 these additional folks that are necessary,
12 that are supports for our childcare
13 providers, to make sure that they are
14 qualified to do their jobs, that they have
15 the proper education and backgrounds to be
16 able to do that important work as well.

17 And of course always happy to speak
18 more with you about the opportunities that
19 might be provided.

20 But I will say we're doing some really
21 exciting stuff around how to connect data
22 systems behind the scenes so that it makes it
23 as easy as possible for the end-user, for our
24 childcare owners and operators and workforce

1 to be able to use the system, and that they
2 are really reducing the administrative burden
3 that's required.

4 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you so much.

5 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I guess I just have
6 a question for Ms. Ryan.

7 Are you advocating that the
8 requirements for newbie daycare are too
9 stringent or too expensive and it's pricing
10 people out? Because I -- it sounded like
11 you're saying that it was really expensive to
12 start doing daycare.

13 I mean, I'm thinking back when my son
14 was born and we had what was called back then
15 a babysitter, and it was \$25 a weekend. You
16 know, she did fine but she had three kids and
17 they were all in the same little room. Now,
18 she couldn't do that. You need so many
19 square feet, you need so much recreation, you
20 have to have a certain kind of food.

21 So I know there are a lot of
22 requirements that are there, but those are
23 all supposedly for the safety and well-being
24 of the individual, of the young people. So

1 that's one of the reasons that it costs
2 \$23,000 and up for childcare now.

3 But your testimony sounded like you
4 were saying that it was overbearing for
5 people that are living in the Adirondacks.

6 MS. RYAN: Although there are -- those
7 are the barriers that exist, what I think I
8 really want you all to leave today with is
9 that we need to support the workforce
10 providing the care and the education so that
11 they're willing to jump through those hoops
12 and stay in the career and the business so
13 that they can grow and they can expand, they
14 can access QUALITYstarsNY, they can provide,
15 you know, continual service and education for
16 the children in our region.

17 And so it's worthwhile for them to
18 make that time and financial investment for
19 themselves and for the community.

20 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay, thank you.
21 Senator?

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: No, we're good.
23 Thank you very much. Appreciate your
24 work.

1 PANEL MEMBERS: Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I call Panel G:
3 Albany Damien Center; Legal Services Access
4 Alliance; SAGE; and Good Shepherd Services.

5 (Off the record.)

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Are we missing
7 anyone else who's here for this panel?

8 Nice to see you, Nic.

9 MS. RANGEL: Nice to see you. I know
10 so many people. Hello, everyone.

11 (Laughter.)

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: For the record,
13 one of those people was our counsel until
14 recently.

15 MS. RANGEL: Yes. Hi, everybody.

16 Let us know when we can start.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Would you first
18 introduce yourselves so that they know at the
19 booth which is which?

20 MR. COOK: Sure. Bryan Ellicott-Cook,
21 SAGE.

22 MS. RANGEL: Nic Rangel, executive
23 director of Legal Aid Society for
24 Northeastern New York.

1 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Welcome the two of
2 you. Ladies first.

3 MS. RANGEL: If I can be called such.
4 (Laughter.)

5 MS. RANGEL: Hello. I've been here
6 all day. So have you. It's really wonderful
7 to be here, Senators and Assemblymembers and
8 esteemed colleagues. I just introduced
9 myself; I'm Nic Rangel, I'm the executive
10 director at LASNNY.

11 LASNNY's service area covers
12 30 percent of upstate New York, from
13 Columbia County to Canada and the St. Regis
14 Mohawk Reservation.

15 Today I'm here as a board member for
16 the Legal Services Access Alliance. The
17 Alliance is grateful for the opportunity to
18 speak at this legislative budget hearing
19 today.

20 We are a membership association that
21 represents seven of the largest providers of
22 free civil legal services outside of New York
23 City and includes Neighborhood Legal
24 Services, Legal Assistance of Western

1 New York, Legal Services of Central New York,
2 Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, Legal Aid
3 Society of Northeastern New York, Legal
4 Services of Hudson Valley, and Legal Services
5 of Long Island. All but one of us are
6 grantees of the Legal Services Corporation,
7 which is an independent 501(c)(3) led by a
8 bipartisan board of directors at the federal
9 level.

10 We collectively serve every county
11 outside of New York City, and we employ over
12 900 legal service workers.

13 We are deeply grateful for the
14 Governor's continued commitment of
15 \$35 million in her Executive Budget for the
16 Eviction Prevention Housing Stability
17 Program, through the Office of Temporary and
18 Disability Assistance, OTDA. This vital
19 program provides essential legal services and
20 representation for eviction cases outside of
21 New York City.

22 Further, the Legislature's additional
23 appropriation of \$15 million last year to
24 expand this program throughout New York State

1 has helped bridge funding gaps when other
2 pandemic-related sources have dried up.

3 And it's working. This program,
4 through its various iterations since the
5 first tranche of ERAP, has drastically
6 expanded access to civil legal services
7 across the state, helping keep more people in
8 place by preventing evictions while also
9 distributing millions in rent arrears and
10 rent assistance. This helps keep rental
11 units affordable and prevents foreclosures as
12 well.

13 In fact, over 100,000 people have been
14 served in the 57 counties outside of New York
15 City with this program. Over 43,000 cases
16 have been closed by Alliance members or their
17 subcontractors. More than 325 jobs have been
18 created. Though some positions remain
19 difficult to fill and the vicarious trauma of
20 eviction work contributes to issues of
21 turnover, we are still very glad that we've
22 been able to expand our services with so many
23 new positions.

24 Six collaborations and partnerships

1 have been created with New York law schools
2 to recruit and train new lawyers in housing
3 defense and eviction law. We've created
4 35 paid legal internships that help to
5 cultivate a more diverse and robust pipeline
6 of civil legal service providers.

7 Twenty-five subcontractors have been
8 engaged to further broaden services to
9 tenants, and we've developed a statewide
10 toll-free number including an intake portal
11 to increase access for legal representation
12 to tenants.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

15 MS. RANGEL: Of course.

16 MR. ELLICOTT-COOK: I guess it's good
17 evening, I guess. My name is Bryan
18 Ellicott-Cook. I am the director of
19 government relations at SAGE.

20 On behalf of SAGE and the LGBTQ+
21 elders and older adults living with HIV whom
22 we serve, thank you to the members of both
23 the Senate and the Assembly for holding this
24 hearing today and providing a platform for

1 SAGE to present our state budget priorities.

2 Just to highlight, we are asking for
3 the 650K of continued funding and 450K of new
4 funding, given the attacks against TGNB and
5 immigrant communities that we are seeing
6 under the current presidential
7 administration.

8 I'm going to keep this really short.
9 My testimony's on the record.

10 I wanted to thank Senator Jessica
11 Scarcella-Spanton, as a born and raised
12 Staten Islander, for her dedication to the
13 SAGEVets program. It's a program that I was
14 the program manager of up until eight months
15 ago. I come from a military and veteran
16 family, and that program has saved lives of
17 LGBTQ+ veterans, not only through discharge
18 upgrades but by making sure that they are
19 connected to the services that they sometimes
20 distrust. That is the essential component of
21 the SAGEVets program.

22 That is the same essential components
23 that are part of our SAGEPositive program and
24 our SAGETrans program. And we know now more

1 than ever than older adults of trans and
2 nonbinary experience are going to go through
3 hardships where they distrust our state and
4 federal governments, and they're going to
5 need folks like me to stand up for them,
6 which means I need funding from all of you to
7 make that happen.

8 I don't think I need to explain to any
9 of you right now the attacks against LGBTQ+
10 people and that New Yorkers are scared.
11 However, we know by evidence -- like last
12 week, there was a bunch of you with me
13 outside NYU that we are committed to keeping
14 LGBTQ+ New Yorkers safe, whether they are
15 young or aging.

16 So I wanted to say thank you for your
17 support, and I welcome any questions. It's
18 been a long day.

19 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I have one quick
20 question. Do you have -- in your legal
21 services, do you deal with undocumented
22 individuals?

23 MS. RANGEL: So LSC-funded programs
24 are prohibited under federal regulation from

1 serving undocumented individuals.

2 However, the state's Eviction
3 Prevention funding has allowed us to
4 subcontract with providers specifically for
5 the provision of eviction services to
6 undocumented households. And our program and
7 all of the other ERAP recipients have done
8 exactly that.

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay. And do you
10 get any direct federal funding?

11 MS. RANGEL: Yes. About 12 percent of
12 my budget and a larger percent for other LSC
13 programs receive federal funding. And in
14 fact part of really why this funding at the
15 state level is so crucial is that some of our
16 state programs -- I'm sorry, some of our
17 federal programs like HUD are subject to the
18 funding freeze evaluations and could be at
19 risk of being cut in the near future.

20 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: And I guess if you
21 lost that federal funding it would be
22 devastating to your organization.

23 MS. RANGEL: Absolutely. Many
24 organizations would shutter, would have to

1 end some of their very crucial programs.
2 some of those programs include HIV/AIDS legal
3 services. Again, I mentioned HUD
4 programming, which is a right-to-counsel
5 funding stream at the federal level.
6 Potentially some of our domestic violence
7 work, which does serve people who are
8 undocumented.

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: So, Mr. Cook, same
10 questions to you. She said 12 percent of
11 their budget comes from federal money. What
12 percentage of federal money goes to your
13 organization?

14 MR. ELLICOTT-COOK: I'd have to get
15 back to you on that. But I can look into it
16 and get back to you. We've already had one
17 of our programs suspended. But a great deal
18 of our HIV work is done through the Ryan
19 White funding. So that's a big component of
20 that.

21 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Well, that's
22 federal money --

23 MR. ELLICOTT-COOK: Yeah, exactly.
24 But I don't have a percentage for you. I'm a

1 bad numbers guy.

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

3 Senate?

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Also, I want to
5 thank you both for your work. I know your
6 organization, SAGE. I've known the legal
7 services world and Nic Rangel forever.

8 Bryan, I know how hard this is if you
9 are LGBTQ in this country at this moment.
10 And yes, no doubt you're not going to get
11 government money -- federal money. That
12 might be the least bad thing that would
13 happen, to be fair.

14 But I just want to remind everyone, we
15 passed a constitutional amendment that went
16 into effect in January that we're not allowed
17 to discriminate against people based on their
18 LGBTQ status. And it doesn't matter what the
19 federal government says, we are still not
20 allowed to discriminate against people in the
21 State of New York.

22 So on a personal note I'm telling
23 every LGBTQ family member and friend who
24 lives in any other state in the country, come

1 to New York. We're still welcoming. We're
2 still open to everybody coming.

3 And guess what, we usually just work
4 everything out and live in peace here in
5 New York, and that's my goal for us in the
6 future. So I know it's going to be really
7 tough going, but I think it's also really
8 important that we do all stand together and
9 that we make it clear this is New York. This
10 doesn't happen here.

11 So thank you both for your work.

12 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I have a late
13 entry: Assemblywoman Simon.

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: So thank you
15 both for your testimony.

16 Bryan, thank you. It's great to see
17 you here with SAGE, which is an organization
18 I certainly have supported throughout the
19 years.

20 Do you have any sense of the
21 increasing numbers of seniors with HIV who
22 would be more likely to seek your services
23 going forward, particularly if we have
24 federal cuts?

1 MR. ELLICOTT-COOK: So I believe,
2 according to the data I have from my --
3 there's like up to 30 -- 36 percent new HIV
4 cases amongst the state of people over the
5 age of 50. And that's mostly because until
6 recently you couldn't -- your primary care
7 physician did not encourage you to get
8 tested.

9 So yes, rates are going up. But I
10 would say people who are living with HIV are
11 living longer, which means they are in need
12 of services for longer. So we are happy that
13 people are living longer lives. However,
14 they will need medications and services for
15 longer.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.

17 And Ms. Rangel, just curious about
18 retention of attorneys. One of the concerns
19 I have had, and have recommended, of course,
20 is to expand the student loan repayment
21 program. Are the legal services attorneys
22 with your organization similarly affected by
23 that?

24 MS. RANGEL: Yes, of course. So we've

1 been working with groups like Empire Justice
2 Center on counseling law students and
3 undergrad students on loan repayment options
4 if the Public Service Forgiveness Program is
5 eliminated.

6 LASNNY and many legal service programs
7 and LSC itself provide reimbursement to
8 people who are making payments on their
9 student loans. It does have to be after the
10 payment's been made. But we're trying to
11 help bridge that gap.

12 We do use funding from many sources,
13 and I would say that supporting additional
14 funding for IOLA is one way that we are
15 bridging the salary gaps to help ensure that
16 we're paying student loans but also that
17 we're paying competitive wages.

18 And we would respectfully request that
19 the Legislature add \$2.5 million in funding
20 to IOLA to continue the work that we're doing
21 with IOLA on the Justice Infrastructure
22 Program and many other programs that IOLA's
23 supporting at the state level that's helping
24 us with some of these federal challenges.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Okay. Thank you
2 very much. I appreciate it.

3 MS. RANGEL: Of course. Thank you.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Brisport.

5 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you,
6 Madam Chair.

7 And thank you both for being here and
8 all the work you do. And Bryan, it's just
9 such an incredible honor to represent the
10 SAGE Center that's located in Brooklyn.

11 I was curious, in addition to your
12 budgetary request, I know this is a budget
13 hearing but are there any other legislative
14 suggestions that you're looking at for what
15 we should be doing in this new era that we
16 are in?

17 MR. ELLICOTT-COOK: So we are part of
18 the coalition for the Compassionate Care Act,
19 around death with dignity, which I'm sure
20 they spoke about yesterday in the Health
21 hearing.

22 And we are also looking at a long-term
23 home-based community bill of rights. We know
24 that last year the Legislature passed the

1 Healthcare Bill of Rights, which was quite
2 expansive.

3 However, given the state of how things
4 are looking in the federal government, even
5 though Senator Krueger did say that we here
6 have Prop 1 and all the things that came in
7 the Constitution with that, we are seeing a
8 spike in fear when it comes to LGBTQ+ older
9 adults having folks come into their home to
10 even do like plumbing changes, adding grab
11 bars to your shower. People are fearful of
12 what it looks like for an LGBTQ+ person to
13 invite someone into your home to do
14 contracted work.

15 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

16 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
17 Romero.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROMERO: Thank you,
19 Chair.

20 I don't have a question, but I'd be
21 remiss if I didn't shout out Nic for the
22 incredible work that you've been doing.
23 Nic's a constituent of mine, and I just
24 wanted to really thank you for the intense

1 work in legal services that you've been
2 doing.

3 You're not necessarily within my
4 practice area, but I've seen you as an
5 attorney shine and be such a great leader and
6 mentor for other attorneys. And it's really
7 wonderful to see another attorney be a mentor
8 like that and really shine and help other
9 attorneys.

10 And it's great to see you here
11 testifying and, you know, waiting all day.
12 So thank you for the work that you're doing
13 in the legal field. Thank you for the people
14 that you're helping every single day.

15 And thank you for waiting all day to
16 testify and for helping us kind of do the
17 work that we are doing as legislators and
18 guiding us in the work as we work through
19 this budget. Thank you.

20 MS. RANGEL: Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: And thank you both
22 for your testimony, and this concludes
23 Panel G. I am now calling Panel H.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

1 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you very much
2 for your testimony.

3 Panel H: Supportive Housing Network
4 of New York; New Destiny Housing;
5 Immigration Law and Justice of New York;
6 United Neighborhood Houses; and
7 Essential Care Visitor.

8 (Off the record.)

9 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Is Hunger Solutions
10 New York here? Do you want to join this
11 panel? Okay.

12 (Off the record.)

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Just to
14 double-check, if there's anyone else here who
15 thinks they're scheduled to testify, come
16 down, please.

17 (Off the record.)

18 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay, could
19 everyone please introduce yourselves so the
20 people in the booth know which names to put
21 up? So I guess starting from my right.

22 MR. HEALY: Hi, everyone. Ryan Healy,
23 advocacy manager, Feeding New York State.

24 MS. ZANGEN: Rebecca Zangen, chief

1 policy officer, Supportive Housing Network of
2 New York.

3 MS. REQUENA: Gabriela Sandoval
4 Requena, New Destiny Housing.

5 MS. HESDORFER: Krista Hesdorfer,
6 director of public affairs at
7 Hunger Solutions New York.

8 MS. GOHEEN: I'm Marcella Goheen,
9 founder, Essential Care Visitor dot-com, and
10 wife of Robert Victor Viteri, who resides in
11 a nursing (mic out) -- nursing home (loudly).

12 (Laughter.)

13 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you, and
14 welcome all. You can start wherever you wish
15 to start.

16 MS. ZANGEN: Okay, let's go. Well,
17 thank you, Chairs Krueger and Pretlow. My
18 name's Rebecca Zangen. I'm the chief policy
19 officer of the Supportive Housing Network of
20 New York.

21 When we talk about how supportive
22 housing can meet New York's housing and
23 homelessness crises, we need to focus on two
24 tracks: First, building new housing, and

1 second, ensuring the existing stock remains
2 safe and stays open.

3 Regarding the existing stock, let's
4 talk about NYSSHP, the New York State
5 Supportive Housing Program, which we heard
6 about earlier today. NYSSHP touches over
7 20,000 units of supportive housing statewide.
8 Nine thousand of those units are dangerously
9 underfunded. So the commissioner spoke about
10 that this morning. They receive no other
11 source of social service funding, so only
12 2900 per unit per year for individuals and
13 3900 to serve families, compared to modern
14 programs like ESSHI that start at \$25,000.

15 The commissioner spoke about some of
16 those other sources, and she mentioned
17 New York City funding. Some of the
18 11,000 units that receive additional funding
19 in NYSSHP also could receive state contracts
20 like OMH or OASAS, but that leaves those
21 9,000 units with no other sources of funding.
22 So those are the ones that we really want to
23 focus on.

24 And the commissioner also mentioned

1 that NYSSHP was not designed to provide
2 operating funds, but that doesn't mean that
3 those programs don't need them. So we have
4 found 7,000 units that have no dedicated
5 operating stream, which puts those programs
6 at serious risk.

7 We're very grateful the Governor
8 acknowledged the need with an additional
9 \$17.8 million in her budget. However, it's
10 not enough. We are asking the Senate and
11 Assembly to meet that need at a more
12 impactful scale, including \$32 million in
13 their one-house budgets and passing the
14 Supportive Housing Modernization Act, led by
15 Senator Cleare, who was here earlier, and
16 Assemblyman Hevesi. Thank you so much. And
17 sponsored by you, Senator Krueger,
18 Assemblymember Romero, Assemblymember Simon.
19 Thank you so much.

20 The legislation calls for a five-year
21 plan to save the most underfunded NYSSHP
22 programs and would also enable OTDA to issue
23 a new RFP to specifically target those
24 programs.

1 Here's just two examples of the
2 programs that are most at risk, of the many
3 we've collected. So right here in Albany,
4 there are two buildings that serve
5 96 formerly homeless adults. The buildings
6 are a hundred years old, facing underfunded
7 staffing and dangerous building conditions,
8 and they're at risk of being sold at market
9 rate and have received an offer from a
10 market-rate developer.

11 In New York City, Senator Krueger, I
12 know you're very familiar with the Woodstock
13 Hotel. It's a 120-year-old building serving
14 almost 300 low-income and formerly homeless
15 seniors, with a case management ratio of
16 1:48. They have significant capital needs
17 and dwindling reserves.

18 I should mention that 65 percent of
19 NYSSHP tenants are older adults, so it's also
20 de facto senior housing.

21 And I have much more in my written
22 testimony.

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

24 MS. REQUENA: Good evening, Chair

1 Pretlow, Chair Krueger, members of the
2 State Legislature. Thank you for holding
3 this long but important budget hearing and
4 for the opportunity to testify on behalf of
5 New Destiny Housing.

6 My name is Gabriela Sandoval Requena.
7 I'm the director of policy and communications
8 at New Destiny. New Destiny is the only
9 organization in New York that's solely
10 focused on permanent housing solutions for
11 survivors of domestic violence.

12 We implemented the first rapid
13 rehousing program for survivors in New York
14 City, and we're also the largest provider of
15 supportive housing for those New Yorkers
16 impacted by domestic violence in the state.

17 Why do we do this work? First,
18 because domestic violence is the main driver
19 of family homelessness in New York City,
20 pushing more families into shelter than
21 evictions. Because one in three New Yorkers
22 across the state will experience abuse by an
23 intimate partner in their lifetime. And
24 because access to a safe and affordable home

1 often determines whether survivors leave
2 their abuser and stay alive.

3 We submitted extensive written
4 testimony, so I'd like to spend this time
5 focusing on our number-one priority: That
6 is, protecting domestic violence survivors
7 living in the New York State Supportive
8 Housing Program, or NYSSHP.

9 New Destiny operates five NYSSHP
10 buildings, with a total of 177 homes for
11 adults and children who survived the double
12 trauma of abuse and homelessness. NYSSHP is
13 supposed to fund basic case management and
14 security, but it falls tragically short. The
15 program provides \$3,900 per family per year,
16 which for New Destiny translates to about
17 91,000 per building.

18 So simply put, NYSSHP covers,
19 essentially, one case manager and zero
20 building security for buildings where we have
21 domestic violence survivors. If New Destiny
22 relied on NYSSHP only to provide 24-hour
23 security and three case managers to maintain
24 the generally accepted case management ratio

1 of 15:1, our staff would earn \$5.51 per hour,
2 which is a third of the minimum wage.

3 Like the other nonprofits that have
4 NYSSHP contracts across the state, we are
5 forced to constantly fundraise to try to
6 bridge the gap and pay staff a livable wage
7 and benefits -- yet it's impossible to make
8 up the difference.

9 The shortfall leaves NYSSHP staff
10 chronically underpaid, and domestic violence
11 survivors unsafe and without the services
12 needed to recover from the trauma.

13 New Destiny's grateful that the
14 Governor included 17 million for NYSSHP in
15 her budget proposal. However, it's not
16 enough. We urge the Assembly and the Senate
17 to increase NYSSHP funding by 32 million and
18 to pass the Supportive Housing Modernization
19 Act.

20 On behalf of New Destiny, again, thank
21 you for the opportunity to testify, and happy
22 to answer any questions.

23 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

24 MS. HESDORFER: Thank you for the

1 opportunity to testify. I'm here
2 representing Hunger Solutions New York, a
3 statewide nonprofit dedicated to alleviating
4 hunger for all New Yorkers by maximizing
5 federal nutrition assistance programs,
6 including SNAP, WIC, Summer EBT, and other
7 child nutrition programs.

8 SNAP is our nation's largest
9 anti-hunger program, providing monthly food
10 benefits to more than 2.9 million
11 New Yorkers. For nearly 40 years, through a
12 contract with OTDA, we've worked to maximize
13 SNAP by providing statewide outreach and
14 application assistance through the Nutrition
15 Outreach and Education Program, or NOEP.

16 NOEP is a network of SNAP navigators
17 based in community organizations across the
18 state. These navigators help low-income
19 New Yorkers determine if they may be eligible
20 for SNAP and provide a helping hand through
21 every step of the application process.

22 For the last two years, the
23 Legislature has allocated an additional
24 \$2 million in NOEP funding to expand services

1 in high-need areas. Thanks to your
2 investment, NOEP has added 24 new SNAP
3 navigators and has reached more than 163,000
4 New Yorkers each year, providing an estimated
5 25-to-1 return on investment to the state.

6 Unfortunately that added funding is
7 not sustained in the 2026 Executive Budget,
8 and if it's restored, NOEP will be forced to
9 scale back at a time when families are
10 struggling to put food on the table.

11 Seventeen counties across the state could see
12 reductions or a total loss of NOEP services.

13 To sustain SNAP navigators statewide,
14 we ask the Legislature to restore \$2 million
15 in NOEP funding, for a total of
16 \$5.624 million.

17 We also join many of our colleagues in
18 supporting the \$100 minimum SNAP benefit.
19 Providing a more adequate minimum benefit
20 would increase participation in SNAP and
21 support food security for our seniors and
22 people with disabilities.

23 We also urge the Legislature to
24 establish a state fund to replace SNAP

1 benefits when families are the victims of EBT
2 skimming and to ensure OTDA has sufficient
3 funding to support a transition to EBT cards
4 with enhanced security.

5 And finally, I'd be remiss not to
6 mention universal school meals. Though it
7 falls outside of the human services budget,
8 it is a critical anti-hunger investment.
9 We're thrilled Governor Hochul included full
10 funding in her Executive Budget, and now we
11 call on all of our lawmakers, including the
12 long-time champions in this room, to make
13 sure that that investment gets across the
14 finish line.

15 Our written testimony notes several
16 other priorities, from Summer EBT funding to
17 SNAP for All. Together, these strategic
18 investments can support food security for all
19 New Yorkers. Thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

21 MS. GOHEEN: Hello. Marcella Goheen,
22 founder of Essential Care Visitor dot-com,
23 and wife of Robert Victor Viteri, who is a
24 resident in a long-term-care-facility nursing

1 home for -- we're on our ninth year.

2 In our testimony we highlight the need
3 for innovative care infrastructures on the
4 frontline amidst the devastating reality of a
5 clear financial care war as the solution for
6 the owners and the State Legislature and the
7 DOH, who duke it out over what can constitute
8 safe staffing. We have lived as long-haulers
9 a magnificent journey through COVID of what
10 nursing homes could be and what they are now,
11 with little improvements and only a
12 frustrating care gridlock that my husband
13 daily depends on. He's nonverbal. He's a
14 neurodegenerative 70-year-old who Mayor Adams
15 just gave him actually -- I think he's the
16 only nursing home resident in New York State
17 that has a day named after him -- July 1,
18 2025, Robert Victor Viteri Day -- as a
19 nursing home resident who advocates.

20 He worked in disability for 30 years.
21 I am his voice.

22 It's care crumbs on the frontlines,
23 and it's devastating. I'm going to keep it
24 simple. I sat on four workgroups for the

1 Master Plan for Aging. I kept mentioning the
2 word "nursing home," "nursing home," "nursing
3 home," and it was dead silence. And that
4 devastated me -- on the anniversary of five
5 years of COVID, for all of Bob's resident
6 mates who we lost. He was a miracle.

7 And it's 1:38, and it's an odd life
8 that I live. I never thought I'd be in this
9 position. But there is a solution, and I
10 have hope.

11 And one of those solutions is a
12 program that I've engineered and I'm
13 delighted to let you know that the NYSOFA
14 office and the Association of Aging has given
15 us pilot money to navigate a Family Essential
16 program, which I'm on my 11th week. And I'm
17 here to tell you there is a need.

18 And you talk about the ombudsman
19 program; nobody knows about it. What we do
20 at Family Essential is we advocate, we
21 educate, and we collaborate. And we
22 navigate. It's a model of a peer-to-peer,
23 and we work with a provider. And we answer
24 questions for the families in several

1 different ways, and we help them get to the
2 next step.

3 We had a win last week where two
4 families were matched up, and they were able
5 to be directed to the Nursing Home Diversion
6 Community Program to get them into the
7 community. You know, families on the
8 frontlines don't know about any of the
9 services. That's one thing being on the
10 Master Plan for Aging. I'm a lucky person.
11 I read a lot and I'm a word person, so I love
12 words.

13 And I would ask the State Legislature
14 to invest, both sides -- by the way, it's an
15 honor to be here. There's \$200 million
16 you're saying that you were going to allocate
17 to hospice and assisted living. Those should
18 not just be capital dollars. They should be
19 innovative programmatic infrastructures that
20 are transformative.

21 And when I say transformative, I just
22 don't mean programmatic. You know, my mom
23 was just saved in Indiana by an iWatch. She
24 fell in her bathroom in an assisted living,

1 and it saved her life. We got there before
2 the nursing home people even knew she fell.

3 So I'll finish with we can do better.
4 And I look forward to working with you. I
5 want to meet with every one of you and show
6 you our program so you can give us \$500,000.

7 Thank you.

8 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

9 MR. HEALY: And thank you to the
10 chairs, ranking members, Senators and
11 Assemblymembers for the opportunity to
12 provide remarks. On behalf of our network of
13 food banks and over 3,000 community-based
14 partners, we're grateful for the chance to
15 share our perspective.

16 To start, New York State has made
17 significant progress in recent years on the
18 issue of food insecurity. Two years ago the
19 state budget expanded free school meals for
20 over 350,000 kids. Last year our state opted
21 into Summer EBT and increased funding for
22 statewide hunger relief programs. This is
23 excellent.

24 And this year we're encouraged to see

1 Governor Hochul's support for universal free
2 school meals for all New York kids, an
3 expansion to the state's Child Tax Credit,
4 both of which would have a tremendous impact
5 for New York families.

6 The truth is, however, we've a lot
7 more work to do. Building off Governor
8 Hochul's efforts to create a more affordable
9 state, we need to make sure that every
10 New Yorker participating in SNAP receives a
11 benefit of at least a hundred dollars per
12 month.

13 Despite the program's success in
14 helping New York families afford a more
15 nutritious and well-rounded diet, far too
16 many New Yorkers receive inadequate benefit
17 amounts. Ask yourself -- go to the grocery
18 store today -- what can you afford with \$23,
19 the federal minimum benefit? And ask
20 yourself would that sustain you for an entire
21 month. The answer is of course no.

22 Guaranteeing a \$100 SNAP minimum would
23 raise benefits for about 110,000 New Yorkers.
24 These individuals are typically older adults

1 making \$16,000 per year, over a quarter of
2 whom are actively participating in SSI,
3 receiving disability assistance.

4 As Krista mentioned earlier, low
5 benefit amounts are often cited as a major
6 barrier for SNAP participation, suggesting
7 that a higher minimum benefit could draw down
8 more federal dollars into our state.

9 This initiative has strong bipartisan
10 support in both the Assembly and Senate.

11 At its core, though, this issue is a
12 matter of dignity for New Yorkers struggling
13 to afford food. In addition to raising the
14 SNAP minimum, vital nutrition benefits must
15 be accessible for all New Yorkers regardless
16 of their immigration status. This is a
17 recommendation provided by CPRAC, the state's
18 Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council. We
19 fully agree. Immigrant New Yorkers
20 contribute over \$27 billion each year in
21 state and local taxes. The very least we can
22 do is ensure that monthly food benefits are
23 available to all.

24 Additionally, we support a series of

1 other food and nutrition priorities such as
2 fully funding HPNAP and Nourish NY at
3 75 million, restoring the \$2 million
4 legislative add-on to support the Nutrition
5 Outreach and Education Program, replacing
6 benefits for victims of SNAP skimming, and
7 upgrading EBT card security for SNAP
8 participants. Each of these initiatives are
9 cost-effective ways to guarantee food is a
10 basic human right.

11 And of course ending hunger and
12 poverty will require bold action beyond food
13 and nutrition programs. We need to ensure
14 living wages for all workers, address the
15 worsening housing crisis, and guarantee
16 healthcare for all New Yorkers as a basic
17 human right. Lot more to do beyond that.

18 But today our state can meaningfully
19 address hunger and food insecurity through
20 these investments and initiatives.

21 Thank you.

22 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

23 Assemblyman Hevesi.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,

1 everyone on the panel. I appreciate it.

2 I'm going to keep this relatively
3 brief, although it's a little too late for
4 that.

5 Mr. Healy and Ms. Hesdorfer, thank you
6 for your comments on food insecurity. Very
7 much appreciate it. We have certainly more
8 work to do.

9 Ms. Goheen, I look forward to meeting
10 with you to learn about the program and
11 nobody gets points for subtlety here, so I'm
12 grateful for your presentation, so thank you
13 very much.

14 And Ms. Requena and Ms. Zangen, I want
15 to end with you, if I can. So my limited
16 understanding of supportive housing, from our
17 friend Steve who's sitting behind you, is
18 that New York State invented supportive
19 housing in the 1970s. Groundbreaking. You
20 provide a very simple idea -- provide
21 services with housing.

22 But now it seems that a significant
23 portion of our housing stock is just housing
24 stock, and it doesn't provide the services.

1 Can you call the 7,000 units actually
2 supportive housing anymore if they're not
3 providing the services that we need like
4 security or other services that these people
5 need? And if it's not supportive housing,
6 please, again, reiterate what we need to do
7 to get it back to the gold standard
8 supportive housing that New York deserves.

9 MS. ZANGEN: Well, I would say that we
10 have an incredible community of nonprofit
11 providers, like New Destiny and others, that
12 pretty much scrape and scrounge and do
13 whatever they can to meet the basic needs of
14 their tenants.

15 But no, it's not living up to the
16 standards that I think we as New Yorkers
17 should be held to. We should be leading, as
18 we did when we created supportive housing in
19 the 1980s. And so I think the Supportive
20 Housing Modernization Act -- thank you so
21 much for introducing that -- is what we need
22 to do in order to really bring those most at
23 risk, most underfunded -- really, they're in
24 a previous generation. Right? This is not

1 what we today in New York are building and
2 calling supportive housing.

3 And I think one of the risks is as
4 we're building new housing, the community
5 pushback we get. And if people look at
6 NYSSH and say, Well, this is falling apart
7 and there's no security here and I don't want
8 this in my -- why is New York continuing to
9 invest in this going forward -- that's a huge
10 risk.

11 So I think the Supportive Housing
12 Modernization Act and investing with
13 \$32 million in the first year of a five-year
14 plan. I will say the 17.8 million in the
15 Executive Budget is great and it is the
16 largest investment they've put into the
17 program in decades. But it would take us
18 much longer than five years at that rate to
19 bring us up to modern standards. I think
20 that's too long to wait.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

22 MS. REQUENA: And if I can just add.
23 So in our buildings in particular, we are
24 able to provide some security, so we've been

1 able to identify the most at-risk hours. But
2 it's just simply not enough, and it doesn't
3 meet the promise of what supportive housing
4 should be.

5 But we trust that with the support of
6 the Assembly and the Senate, we'll get there.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Murray.

9 SENATOR MURRAY: Thank you,
10 Chairwoman.

11 And thank you all for being here. I
12 want to say a specific thank you to Krista
13 and Ryan for all of your efforts, especially
14 with the universal free meals. I know how
15 hard you worked on that, and I think this is
16 the year we're going to get this done. It's
17 well -- well past due.

18 And it was interesting earlier today
19 talking to the director of Aging that I kind
20 of didn't think about it, but found another
21 group that benefits from it, and that is some
22 of the seniors who are the primary caregivers
23 for their children -- their grandchildren.
24 So it's beneficial all the way around, I

1 completely agree.

2 I also agree with increasing the
3 amount of SNAP from 23 to 100. I think 23's
4 ridiculous. But I have a concern about doing
5 it right now before we fix the problem of the
6 chip technology and the security. We all
7 know the fix is the chip technology. We know
8 that.

9 And then when I learned last night in
10 doing research -- and what I further found
11 out today about the fact that the Department
12 of Labor's already using it. The New York
13 State Department of Labor is already using
14 the chip technology. Why we don't have it in
15 place -- I don't think the effort's been made
16 like it should be.

17 I think we can do it. I think we can
18 do it right now. And I worry about
19 increasing the amount right now when we have
20 people stealing the funds. I worry about
21 setting up a fund to replace the funds when
22 we have the people stealing the funds, rather
23 than fixing the problem.

24 I don't mind either one of those

1 proposals -- once we fix the problem. But
2 I'm concerned about us just benefiting the
3 criminals more than we should right now when
4 I feel like the fix is right -- right there
5 within our reach.

6 It's more of a statement, but I
7 just -- I feel like we're right there. I'm
8 supportive of everything you're saying. But
9 we have to fix the problem, and I'm not
10 convinced that we can't do it immediately,
11 this year. We've got to roll up our sleeves
12 and make that our number-one priority.

13 I also wanted to touch on one thing
14 regarding domestic violence and housing the
15 victims. This may be a little off-track, but
16 I want to talk about animal care and the fact
17 that one of the big issues is are you finding
18 it a problem, the fact that many of the
19 shelters, many of the places do not -- you
20 cannot take the animals with you. And many
21 times people will stay in a bad situation
22 because they don't want to leave their
23 animal. And I understand that completely.

24 How can we fix that? What can we do?

1 I mean, I understand the limitations, but do
2 we need to put more focus on this? Anyone.

3 MR. HEALY: I'll just jump in and say
4 Senator, I hear your concern around SNAP
5 skimming. And I think it's not one or the
6 other, I think it's to do all of these.
7 Right?

8 We do need to improve the card
9 security for the nearly 3 million New Yorkers
10 participating, right? And at the same time
11 we also need to do what other states like
12 New Jersey, New Mexico now have done and say
13 that, you know what, \$23 a month is just
14 woefully inadequate.

15 So I think that you're right to
16 highlight that issue, and we fully agree.
17 We'd love to work together with your office
18 on that. But at the same time I think for
19 New Yorkers currently participating, they
20 deserve more than \$23.

21 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Ra.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you, Chair.

23 I wanted to start with supportive
24 housing. So last week I had a great meeting

1 with a group that was up for the advocacy
2 day, and one of the great things -- I always
3 tell people, you know, it's never a waste of
4 time when you're here and talking about your
5 circumstances and how the state can better
6 serve you. But it was eye-opening to learn
7 that there's these different -- depending on
8 when these different pieces of this program
9 were founded, that you have way, way
10 out-of-date rates. And to Chair Hevesi's
11 point, how do you provide services if you're
12 getting a rate that's based on almost
13 40 years ago, it makes zero sense.

14 So can you talk a little bit about
15 that and how we modernize that system so that
16 we're providing adequate funding so the
17 services can be provided?

18 MS. ZANGEN: Yeah, absolutely. I
19 mean, I think that we should be -- we're
20 serving the same population and the
21 expectations of service are the same. And
22 the commissioner spoke to that this morning.

23 So I think modernizing with the
24 Supportive Housing Modernization Act and just

1 bringing the rates up to that same level is
2 the way to start.

3 And the second piece is making sure --
4 supportive housing requires -- we call it a
5 three-legged stool: Capital to build the
6 housing; operating to basically fill the gap
7 between what the tenant can pay -- because
8 they're very low-income -- and what it costs
9 to run a building; and then the services,
10 which funds the case management, the social
11 services and all the things that people
12 retain their housing when they have special
13 needs or disabilities.

14 So we need all three of those things,
15 and NYSSHP is only one piece. And we
16 actually have, under HCR -- three years ago
17 the Governor and the Legislature had the
18 foresight to create a supportive housing
19 preservation program, which is capital under
20 HCR. But we can't access it because we don't
21 have the operating funding. We have
22 7,000 NYSSHP units with no dedicated
23 operating funding. So we're leaving money on
24 the table.

1 The programs that need that capital
2 the most to actually fix their roofs, fix
3 their boilers, fix their elevators -- add an
4 elevator if they don't have one -- all of
5 those things. They need that more than any
6 other program. They can't access it because
7 they have no operating funding. They can't
8 put it together in a 30-year budget showing
9 cash flow, which is what you need to access
10 that type of capital.

11 So the Supportive Housing
12 Modernization Act actually also helps us with
13 that capital piece.

14 I hope I answered your question.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Rolison.

17 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you,
18 Madam Chair.

19 This is a question for New Destiny
20 Housing, Gabriela. And thank you for what
21 you're doing in the area of providing housing
22 for domestic violence victims, for families.

23 And did you say that you're doing work
24 outside of New York City as well, in other

1 communities? Or --

2 MS. REQUENA: We are to some degree.

3 So yes.

4 Our supportive housing program, we
5 have one -- our newest building actually is
6 in Westchester County in New Rochelle. And
7 that is the only project that we have outside
8 of the five boroughs.

9 And then our rapid rehousing program
10 that only operates within the five boroughs
11 of New York City.

12 SENATOR ROLISON: So specifically to
13 DV-related housing supports, what would you
14 say the need would be in the five boroughs?

15 MS. REQUENA: Tremendous, in one word.
16 It's huge. I mean, in order for a survivor
17 to flee abuse, they have to literally become
18 homeless, especially if they're low-income.
19 So they enter the shelter system. In
20 New York City, the emergency shelter system
21 has a six-month cap and then they have to
22 enter a different shelter if they're able to
23 remain in the DV system.

24 And then they're likely to linger

1 there for years unless they're able to get a
2 rental assistance program or enter supportive
3 housing. But the supply does not meet the
4 demand.

5 SENATOR ROLISON: So with your
6 initiatives now in Westchester County, do you
7 have -- again, I know it's very tremendous
8 there too. But do you have any sort of sense
9 of what a number would be with the need for
10 the housing for DV victims and their
11 families?

12 MS. REQUENA: Well, I don't have -- I
13 can certainly look for more numbers for you.

14 But for instance, in our building in
15 New Rochelle we have 77 units that are set
16 aside for domestic violence survivors and
17 they're completely full. And we know we have
18 received more applications for those
19 77 units, so there were some folks
20 unfortunately we had to turn away.

21 SENATOR ROLISON: Which is
22 unfortunate. But thank you for what you're
23 doing. Is that specific to Westchester as
24 well too, Westchester?

1 MS. ZANGEN: Yeah.

2 SENATOR ROLISON: And we could follow
3 up on this, but I would be interested --
4 because I hadn't heard this number before,
5 and pretty active in that space is -- what's
6 like the statewide number?

7 MS. REQUENA: Well, just to give you
8 perspective, it's one in -- one of every
9 three New Yorkers in the state will
10 experience intimate partner violence. And
11 chances are that most of them will need some
12 sort of housing support in their journey.

13 SENATOR ROLISON: Okay, thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman
15 Shimsky.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SHIMSKY: Thank you,
17 Mr. Chairman.

18 I just have one question that's kind
19 of a tip ball for all of you. How would you
20 recommend that we get the word out to people
21 who need your services? What are the best
22 ways to reach out to people?

23 MS. HESDORFER: So I can jump in here.
24 We have a number of constituent resources,

1 outreach resources that we'd be happy to
2 share with anyone here and others, to make
3 sure that families in your community know
4 about our SNAP application assistance
5 services, but also programs like summer
6 meals, Summer EBT, WIC, school meals, all of
7 the different resources that are available
8 for folks. So I'd be happy to follow up with
9 that.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SHIMSKY: Oh, that would
11 be great.

12 MS. REQUENA: For New Destiny, we have
13 staff that are collocated in the New York
14 City Family Justice Centers. So there is one
15 Family Justice Center in each borough. Folks
16 can call 311 to be connected directly with a
17 Family Justice Center in their borough, and
18 from there we can service them.

19 MR. HEALY: I'll just add from Feeding
20 New York State. So we can follow up with
21 your office. We have 10 food banks around
22 the state, 3,000 community-based programs.
23 And so some folks can actually plug in their
24 zip code with their local food bank and find

1 pantries and emergency feeding programs in
2 their community.

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SHIMSKY: And that would
4 be true statewide and not just in the city.

5 MR. HEALY: That's right.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SHIMSKY: Yeah. Okay.

7 MS. GOHEEN: We're in the city in Long
8 Island, for our pilot, so it's a website and
9 word of mouth and families on the frontline.
10 But just go to our website and you'll see our
11 FEP hub.

12 MS. ZANGEN: For individuals and
13 families that need access to supportive
14 housing, the entry point is usually the local
15 continuum of care. And -- but unfortunately,
16 you know, the demand for supportive housing
17 just far outstrips the supply. So I know
18 like in New York City there's about 9,000
19 people with active supportive housing
20 applications waiting to be placed into
21 housing. And then, you know, each continuum
22 of care outside of New York City would kind
23 of manage the application process as well.

24 But that's the entry point.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SHIMSKY: Okay. Okay.

2 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senate?

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

5 I think it's just me. So I thank you.

6 So we actually had another panel on
7 food and hunger last night, so I think a lot
8 of the issues that our two representatives
9 were talking about were issues that we
10 focused on a bit more yesterday, and I think
11 we are familiar with the real concerns out
12 there for the emergency food world.

13 And frankly, real concerns that the
14 federal government is going to radically
15 reduce eligibility and benefits for SNAP,
16 WIC, other -- school meals program, all the
17 food and nutrition programs we're counting
18 on. So it's pretty scary.

19 And on supportive housing, which -- I
20 have more supportive housing in my district
21 than I think any other district in the State
22 of New York. And it works great when it
23 works. But if you don't have adequate
24 funding, it doesn't work.

1 And the thing that you didn't mention
2 but we all know, particularly for those
3 7,000 units in the old contracts, another
4 thing: Your population are now senior
5 citizens. And so there are additional
6 services and demands because they're folks
7 who might not have been, you know, unhealthy
8 earlier when they first got into your
9 buildings, but are now, and are aging in
10 place. And they're not going anywhere.

11 So you need that. You certainly need
12 the security. I have visited several of the
13 buildings under the old contract. And I was
14 a little disturbed that the state's statement
15 was, Well, some of them have other funds so
16 we don't have to worry about them.

17 So just please answer that. One,
18 really, has anybody got like secret cash bank
19 accounts somewhere, you don't need more state
20 money?

21 (Laughter.)

22 MS. ZANGEN: Does anybody else want to
23 respond on that?

24 Well, on that, the additional funding,

1 NYSSHP would absolutely not have survived if
2 our providers didn't access other contracts.
3 Like it's 1987 rates. You cannot operate for
4 40 years.

5 And, you know, frankly many of the
6 providers in the group of 9,000 that don't
7 have other contracts, it's a miracle. You
8 know? It really is a miracle.

9 So the other -- the other 11,000 that
10 access OMH contracts for supportive housing,
11 OASAS, possibly federal funds for supportive
12 housing, they just did what they had to do to
13 keep their programs open.

14 So I actually do believe that if we're
15 trying to be really strategic about how we
16 move our portfolio into the future and be a
17 good steward of the state's resources, we
18 should start with those 9,000 units that
19 don't have any other source of funds. Not
20 that the other programs that have multiple
21 sources don't have their own funding
22 challenges, but it's certainly not as dire.
23 So I do want to focus on those that are only
24 NYSSHP.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Right. Okay,
2 thank you. I think that's my last question
3 for now, and it's four seconds to go.

4 Assemblymember.

5 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: We'll let the four
6 seconds trickle away.

7 Assemblyman Anderson.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: Thank you,
9 Chair.

10 Thank you to all of you for being
11 here, sticking it out with us through the
12 evening to talk about such important subject
13 matter.

14 It's good to see two incredible
15 advocates -- well, many incredible advocates
16 in all of you. But I send special
17 congratulations to Ryan and Krista for your
18 successes with getting the school meals. We
19 just have to make sure we push it over the
20 finish line.

21 So I have two quick questions for the
22 panel. Any of you all can jump in. So I
23 represent the 31st Assembly District and have
24 parts of South Queens and JFK Airport. And I

1 had an opportunity over the summer two
2 summers ago to tour one of my ESSHI housing
3 developments in my district -- or just
4 outside of the district, but serving
5 individuals who originally had addresses in
6 the district.

7 Can you share some problems with the
8 program and what the executive proposal that
9 the Governor has put forth does to work to
10 resolve those, given that you guys have a lot
11 of older building stock? That's the first
12 question.

13 MS. ZANGEN: So ESSHI is the newer
14 program. And, you know, I think overall it
15 has been quite a successful program. You
16 know, the intent is to create 20,000 units
17 over the course of 15 years. We're
18 waiting -- you know, we're about halfway
19 through, waiting for the eighth RFP to come
20 out, and I think they've awarded close to
21 9,000 units. So, you know, almost half.

22 I think, you know, we're continuing to
23 make the same mistakes over and over again.
24 Which is they started ESSHI in 2016 with a

1 rate of \$25,000 per unit per year, and then
2 now it's 2025, it's almost nine years later,
3 and there's been no increase to the starting
4 rate.

5 So, you know, we keep making the same
6 mistakes where we don't -- we don't follow
7 inflation, right? We don't have COLAs.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: So does the
9 Governor's executive proposal which bumps it
10 up to 3100 at least put it on the right
11 track, or is that something will --

12 MS. ZANGEN: I believe so.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: Okay, so that's
14 good to know.

15 And then just for folks who are
16 watching the Empire State Supportive Housing
17 Initiative is just -- I know acronyms are
18 sometimes inaccessible.

19 MS. ZANGEN: Yeah. Can I add one
20 thing on that?

21 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: Please.

22 MS. ZANGEN: So what's good about the
23 Governor's increase is of course that, you
24 know, the starting rate needs to be higher in

1 order to deal with 2025 costs, right, not
2 2016 costs.

3 It doesn't address the older contracts
4 that actually started at 25,000 and only got
5 2 percent increases. And some of them
6 started out below 25,000 because they were
7 concerned about being competitive. So when
8 they submitted their response to the RFP,
9 they undercut themselves. And even though
10 the contract is only a five-year contract,
11 once it expires there's no opportunity to
12 submit a new budget and say, Now that we know
13 our costs, at least bring us up to what the
14 starting rate is for other new programs.

15 So the Governor's proposal does not
16 address those older contracts. And I know
17 New Destiny has that.

18 MS. REQUENA: We have one building.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: We'll talk
20 offline. I had a food question, too, so --

21 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you very
22 much. And this ends Panel H/I. Hi.

23 (Laughter.)

24 PANEL MEMBERS: Thank you. Thank you

1 very much.

2 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I want to thank you
3 all for your testimonies. And I think it's
4 nice weather -- I don't know what's happening
5 out there, people, but anyway, thank you all
6 for coming.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
8 much.

9 This hearing is closed?

10 CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: This hearing is
11 closed, yes.

12 (Whereupon, at 6:09 p m., the budget
13 hearing concluded.)

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