

**Commissioner Roberta Reardon**  
**New York State Department of Labor**

February 5, 2020

Joint Hearing of the Legislative Fiscal Committee

Chairs Krueger and Weinstein and distinguished members of each committee, thank you for this opportunity to talk about some of the proposals that Governor Cuomo has put forward in his Executive Budget as well as the work of the Department of Labor.

My name is Roberta Reardon and I am the Commissioner of the New York State Department of Labor. I am proud to lead the Department in carrying out its mission of protecting workers, providing benefits to the unemployed and connecting job seekers to jobs.

The work we do is challenging and constantly evolving but the dedicated and motivated employees behind our record of accomplishment continue to deliver.

Governor Cuomo has been steadfast in his commitment to ensuring equal opportunity, no matter where you stand on the economic ladder.

As a state, we are in a stronger economic position, better than we have been in many years. Most importantly though – greater prosperity isn't reserved for the wealthiest few. Under the Governor's leadership, I can report today that minimum wage is

\$15 in NYC, \$13 in LI and Westchester, and \$11.80 in the rest of the state.

At the start of this administration, New York's minimum wage was just \$7.25 per hour.

Under Governor Cuomo's leadership, New York has had the strongest decade of growth since the 1940s.

Since the beginning of this administration, the New York State economy has added 1.2 million private sector jobs and has experienced a record setting 117 consecutive months of growth.

The state also maintains a very low unemployment rate of 4 percent.

Against the backdrop of low unemployment, we also see fewer New Yorkers collecting Unemployment Insurance—581,000 in 2019, down from over 1.4 million claimants in the last recession.

I am proud to say that the Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund has a balance of \$2.5 billion thanks to the UI reform laws passed a few years ago.

Our Unemployment Strikeforce is working to provide more intensive services to communities dealing with high unemployment.

These targeted efforts are in addition to the broad array of services our staff provide in the 96 career centers operated in your districts.

Businesses are the lifeline of our economy and the Department of Labor supports this relationship through the many positive actions we take on behalf of the business community.

In 2019, we served nearly 33,000 businesses.

Over the past three years, we've approved more than 300 new registered apprenticeship programs and 30 new trades.

Additionally, the NY youth tax credit program connects at-risk youth to jobs. These programs help us diversify our workforce to meet the needs of emerging sectors.

The Department of Labor is committed to protecting workers and leveling the playing field for all businesses.

Year after year, the Department has distinguished itself as a national leader in returning unpaid wages to workers.

Since 2011, we have returned nearly \$320 million to approximately 280,000 workers. We return over 80 percent of the unpaid wages reported to us.

We have accepted Governor Cuomo's challenge to tackle the problems affecting our most vulnerable workers.

The state recently adopted important reforms in the farming industry.

Following a statewide series of hearings to gather input from all stakeholders, Governor Cuomo signed a bill to establish the Farm Laborers Fair Labor Practices Act. It grants farmworkers overtime pay, a day of rest each week and protections that other workers have enjoyed for over 80 years.

We continue to lead the nation in protecting employees from sexual harassment in the workplace.

In 2018, the Governor proposed, and the Legislature passed legislation to protect all workers.

Department staff worked closely with representatives of the business community to develop the training materials that all businesses can use to comply with the requirements.

Last month, a new salary history ban, that was recommended in the Department's 2018 gender wage gap study, took effect. It breaks the cycle of unfair compensation by prohibiting all employers from asking prospective or current employees about their salary history and compensation.

Women are disproportionately prone to abuses in these areas.

In 2019, Governor Cuomo directed the Department to eliminate the sub-minimum wage for all workers in "miscellaneous" industries throughout the state.

These are car wash attendants, nail salon workers, dog groomers, and tow truck drivers, just to name a few.

By the end of this year, more than 70,000 workers will be in a better position to support themselves and their families.

Governor Cuomo wants to bring paid sick leave to 1.3 million workers who still can't take a day off to go to the doctor or recover from an illness without the fear of being fired.

It is in the best interest of workers, businesses, and the general public to have sick employees remain home and take care of themselves rather than bring their illness to work.

The upcoming Census is extremely important to our state and we need to ensure that everyone is counted, in spite of the negative rhetoric coming out of Washington.

The Department is actively engaged in the Statewide effort to count every New Yorker with a special emphasis on communities that have been identified as “hard to count.”

Where we are going is built upon the strong foundation of where we have been.

As Governor Cuomo has said, we must continue to transform our words into action – into tangible, positive change in the lives of all New Yorkers.

We intend to do just that.