



**Department of
Civil Service**

**Testimony of the
Department of Civil Service**

**Before the Senate Standing Committee on
Civil Service and Pension**

October 11, 2023

Good Afternoon, Chair Jackson, and distinguished members of the Senate Standing Committee on Civil Service and Pensions. My name is Timothy Hogue and it is my privilege to serve as the Commissioner for the Department of Civil Service and President of the Civil Service Commission. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you to highlight our efforts to recruit and retain a talented, diverse, and dedicated public workforce that serves all New Yorkers.

During my time as Commissioner, I have been struck by the dedication and unwavering commitment of New York State's public workforce. However, New York's workforce, over recent years, has experienced a reduction in size that requires a creative and coordinated approach to remedy.

Luckily, in addition to having a dedicated workforce, the State of New York employs innovative and talented individuals that think critically about our processes and integrate stakeholder feedback (from agencies and the public, alike) into a strategic approach to address these modern challenges. To help rebuild the public workforce, the Department of Civil Service team has been doing just that - taking many proactive steps to modernize and remove barriers to employment for all jobseekers.

When I presented my budget testimony earlier this year, the Department was in the beginning stages of implementing the Hiring for Emergency Limited Placement Program (HELP) to address the statewide workforce shortage in critical health and safety titles. The HELP Program temporarily waives the civil service exam requirement for approximately 100 direct care, health and safety titles (with nearly 40 additional titles being added this month as part of Phase 2) across State government for a 12-month period. This program is helping to address emergency staffing situations by allowing state agencies to more swiftly hire candidates that meet the minimum qualifications for those positions.

In addition, recognizing that local governments are having the same challenges, the Department implemented a similar program, the Local HELP Program, to provide a tool for local civil service agencies to address the emergency staffing crisis that they are also facing across health and safety positions.

I am pleased to report that, to date, more than 3,700 positions have been filled through the State HELP program across New York State. This number will continue to grow due to the expansion of the program. At the local level, there are currently 26 local civil service agencies participating, and more than 500 positions have been filled to date. These numbers will also continue to grow as more local agencies opt into this unprecedented program.

While the COVID-19 pandemic severely limited the Department's testing program and our ability to hold examinations, much progress has been made. We recently surpassed our pre-pandemic testing capacity and have also produced more eligible lists this year than the previous year, important steps that continue to help our agency partners in bolstering their workforce.

In addition, the Department is making our examinations more efficient and convenient for candidates by holding more online examinations that measure candidates' training and experience because life and work experience matter. For example, for the first time ever, we offered the Professional Career Opportunities as an online exam last year that reached more than 20,000 jobseekers.

Further, the Department continues to engage with agency partners to implement pay increases and salary differentials for a variety of titles to improve recruitment and retention efforts. As part of these efforts, the Department completed a major restructuring of nursing titles last year that resulted in upgrades for most titles and higher starting salaries and salary differentials. The Department has also worked with the Division of Budget to implement salary differentials for Dentists, Nurse Practitioners, Plant Utilities Engineers, Disability Review Psychologists, Body Repair Inspectors, and Automotive Facilities Inspectors.

Not only is the Department delivering new programs and rolling out more exams to help meet the State's needs for filling critical jobs, but we are also doing more than ever to reach jobseekers where they are. The Department has attended more than 200 outreach events engaging with more than 32,000 attendees across New York State, engaged with more than 27,000 constituents across social media channels, hosted three million visitors to our website, and have conducted paid social media campaigns for several programs. We are also engaging with community partners to expand our reach to help spread the word about public service careers.

While we are making great progress, we have more work to do. For the first time in many years, thanks to the leadership of Governor Hochul and the support of our elected officials, we are now making investments to improve and reimagine the civil service process.

First, we are developing our continuous recruitment examination program, which will better serve New Yorkers and make both state and local examinations more accessible and convenient for all. Rather than offering an exam once every couple of years, we will be offering exams both online and in-person exam on a continuous basis. We are establishing 12 state-operated computer-based testing centers where in person exams will be held six days a week. Dedicated testing centers will be located in all ten regions of the state, with two centers located in Albany and New York City. The Department is currently securing test site locations in the Capital Region, New York City, Central NY, the Finger Lakes, and Western NY, with plans for these sites to be open in late 2024. Additional sites will be located in other regions across the state to provide all New Yorkers with the ability to participate in exams, including individuals who do not have access to a computer or Wi-Fi services.

This paradigm shift in the testing program will make testing more accessible and allow New York State to become more competitive in our recruitment efforts with the private sector.

In addition to holding exams more frequently, this year's budget also removed the exam fee for state civil service exams through December 2025 to promote equitable access to careers in state government. As you know, civil service exam fees can serve as a barrier to entering public service, particularly for candidates from traditionally marginalized communities.

We are also doing more than ever to promote these exams widely to ensure that we reach a diverse audience by working with an array of community-based partners and institutions of higher education to share timely exam information with their communities. And we will build on these partnerships when we establish a presence at DOL Career Centers throughout the state to meet jobseekers where they are and serve as direct links to educational institutions, community-based organizations, and others.

In addition, we are developing a public awareness campaign to communicate the values of public service, the benefits of employment with New York State, and the diverse opportunities available across State government.

We have also worked closely with Kim Hill, our State's Chief Disability Officer, to increase job opportunities in the state for people with disabilities. This year's budget strengthens the Governor's 55-B program by raising the program threshold by 500 positions, significantly increasing job opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

And, we are undertaking a comprehensive study to modernize the civil service pay structure, which dates back to the 1950s. We will develop a job evaluation system that will review the statewide civil service structure for all job titles to ensure they meet the needs of employers, align with the current job market, consider title pay equity, and level the playing field with the private sector. We will be releasing a procurement to find a vendor to conduct the study shortly. We are also reviewing the educational degree requirements for a variety of titles to determine if they are truly necessary as a minimum qualification to participate in an examination.

Top of mind for all of the efforts the Department undertakes is ensuring that diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunity are at the forefront of all statewide initiatives. Under Governor Hochul's guidance and leadership, and in partnership with the State's Chief Diversity Officer, Chief Disability Officer, and each individual State agency, the Department is committed to building and sustaining a workforce and advancing programs and services that reflect the many unique faces, voices, backgrounds and ideas of those we serve.

Together, this robust package I have highlighted will help us eliminate barriers to entry for civil service jobs, meet jobseekers where they are, and attract and retain a pipeline of new diverse talent into the State workforce.

While Civil Service will be leading the way in these efforts, we cannot do this work alone. We need all of you, our partners across government to join us on this effort to make New York State an employer of choice for all New Yorkers.

I look forward to working in partnership with all of you to bring this vision to fruition.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.