

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

2 -----

3 JOINT LEGISLATIVE HEARING

4 In the Matter of the
2023-2024 EXECUTIVE BUDGET ON
5 HUMAN SERVICES

6 -----

7 Hearing Room B
Legislative Office Building
8 Albany, NY

9 February 13, 2023
11:35 a.m.

10

PRESIDING:

11

Senator Liz Krueger
Chair, Senate Finance Committee

12

13

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

14

PRESENT:

15

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

16

17

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

18

19

Senator Jabari Brisport
Chair, Senate Committee on Children
and Families

20

21

Assemblywoman Maritza Davila
Chair, Assembly Committee on Social Services

22

23

Senator Roxanne Persaud
Chair, Senate Committee on Social Services

24

Assemblyman Ron Kim
Chair, Assembly Committee on Aging

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3 PRESENT: (Continued)

4 Senator Cordell Cleare
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging

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

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

9 Assemblyman Khaleel M. Anderson

10 Senator John C. Liu

11 Assemblyman Eric M. Dilan

12 Assemblywoman Jennifer Lunsford

13 Senator Samra G. Brouk

14 Assemblywoman Yudelka Tapia

15 Senator Andrew Gounardes

16 Assemblywoman Grace Lee

17 Assemblyman William Conrad

18 Assemblywoman Jo Anne Simon

19 Senator Jake Ashby

20 Assemblyman Jeff Gallahan

21 Assemblywoman Taylor Darling

22 Assemblyman Brian Maher

23 Senator Dean Murray

24 Assemblyman Chris Eachus

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3 PRESENT: (Continued)

4 Assemblywoman Sarah Clark

5 Senator Rob Rolison

6 Assemblywoman Marcela Mitaynes

7 Assemblyman Chris Burdick

8 Assemblywoman Jessica González-Rojas

9 Assemblywoman Karines Reyes

10 Senator Alexis Weik

11 Assemblywoman Phara Souffrant Forrest

12 Assemblyman Tony Simone

13 Assemblywoman Pamela J. Hunter

14 Assemblywoman Jenifer Rajkumar

15 Assemblyman Sam Pirozzolo

16 Assemblywoman Marjorie Byrnes

17 Senator Peter Oberacker

18 Assemblyman Juan Ardila

19 Assemblywoman Alicia Hyndman

20 Assemblyman Andy Goodell

21 Assemblyman Lester Chang

22 Senator Rachel May

23 Assemblyman Angelo J. Morinello

24

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5	Suzanne Miles-Gustave, Esq. Acting Commissioner		
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7	-and-		
8	Daniel W. Tietz Commissioner		
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15	Early Care & Learning Council -and-		
16	Steven Morales NY Policy Director		
17	All Our Kin -and-		
18	Krista Hesdorfer Government Relations Manager		
19	Hunger Solutions New York -and-		
20	Kate Ryan Executive Director		
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10	Beth Finkel State Director	
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12	Trudy Morgan Policy Director	
13	NYS Network for Youth Success -and-	
14	Bonnie Landi Chair	
15	NYS YouthBuild Coalition -and-	
16	William T. Gettman, Jr. CEO	
17	Northern Rivers Family of Services	
18	-and- Timothy Hathaway	
19	Executive Director Prevent Child Abuse New York	
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21	President & CEO Council of Family and	
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5 Joan Gerhardt
Director of Public Policy
6 and advocacy
New York State Coalition Against
7 Domestic Violence
-and-
8 Emilia Sicilia
Managing Attorney
9 Empire Justice Center
-and-
10 Dede Hill
Director of Policy
11 Schuyler Center for
Analysis & Advocacy
12 -and-
MJ Okma
13 Senior Manager of Advocacy and
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14 SAGE-Advocacy & Services for
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15 -and-
Stephen Piasecki
16 Upstate Coordinator
Supportive Housing Network
17 of New York
-and-
18 Melinda Mack
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19 New York Association of
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5 Gavin T. Walters Sr.
NYS Dwyer Coalition Facilitator
6 Hudson Valley National Center
for Veteran Reintegrating
7 -and-
Kirby Hannan
8 Board Member
New York State Council of
9 Veteran Organizations 459 467

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1 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Good morning.

2 I am Helene Weinstein, chair of the
3 New York State Assembly's Ways and Means
4 Committee and cochair of today's hearing.

5 Today we begin the sixth in a series
6 of hearings conducted by the joint fiscal
7 committees of the Legislature regarding the
8 Governor's proposed budget for 2023-'24. The
9 hearings are conducted pursuant to the
10 New York State Constitution and the
11 Legislative Law.

12 And 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 I'll now introduce the members who are
17 here from the -- in the majority in the
18 Assembly, and then Senator Krueger, chair of
19 the Senate Finance Committee, will introduce
20 her colleagues. And then our ranking members
21 will introduce their colleagues.

22 So first we have the chair of our
23 Social Services Committee, Assemblywoman
24 Maritza Davila. We have Assemblyman Conrad,

1 Assemblywoman Lee, Assemblywoman Lunsford,
2 Assemblywoman Simon.

3 And I just wanted to mention that some
4 of our -- that Assemblyman Hevesi
5 unfortunately -- chair of our Children and
6 Families Committee -- couldn't be here today.

7 We have Assemblywoman Clark with us.

8 Senator Krueger?

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
10 much.

11 Good morning. We are joined by
12 Senator Jabari Brisport, Roxanne Persaud,
13 John Liu.

14 Senator O'Mara, from the Republican
15 rankers side, is running a little late, but
16 we are joined also by Senator Murray,
17 Senator Weik, Senator Ashby, and
18 Senator Rolison.

19 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblyman Ra,
20 if you can introduce your colleagues.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Yes, good morning.

22 We are joined by Assemblyman Gallahan;
23 Assemblywoman Byrnes, our ranker on Children
24 and Families; and Assemblyman Maher, our

1 ranker on Social Services.

2 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

3 I just want to -- so we have
4 Assemblywoman Darling, who's joined us. And
5 I do think -- oh, sorry, and
6 Assemblyman Eachus, who's joined us.

7 And with that, let me go over the
8 ground rules for today. For both witnesses
9 and members, I just want to mention the time
10 clocks and the times. That's -- well,
11 actually for the governmental witnesses, let
12 me start there, you'll each have your panel,
13 but you each have 10 minutes to make your
14 presentations. And after both of you have
15 concluded, we will then have questions from
16 the respective members of both houses.

17 Nongovernmental witnesses, many of
18 whom are I believe sitting here will have
19 three minutes to make their presentation.
20 And I believe everyone will be in a panel.
21 Each member of the panel gets three minutes,
22 and then members will have an opportunity to
23 ask questions.

24 In terms of the legislators, in terms

1 of asking questions of the governmental
2 witnesses, they're 10 minutes for the
3 chair -- that's 10 minutes for the panel, not
4 each individual witness. For the rankers of
5 those -- of the respective committees, it's
6 five minutes to ask questions and answers.
7 All other -- and the chairs do get a second
8 round of three minutes if they need it.

9 All other members, it's three minutes
10 to ask questions. And when I say ask
11 questions, it's questions and to get the
12 answer.

13 Senator Krueger and I have needed to
14 have a gavel handy after we had an incident
15 at our first -- at one of our early hearings.
16 We've yet to have to use it. And as Senator
17 Krueger says, we haven't figured out if it's
18 to bang the gavel on the table or to throw it
19 at unruly individuals.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Legislators, not
21 the audience.

22 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Not the
23 audience, yes. The legislators.

24 So I just encourage my colleagues,

1 don't make us have to make a decision on
2 that.

3 (Laughter.)

4 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So with that, I
5 believe -- and I know there will be a number
6 of members coming and going. We do ask the
7 members to please indicate, by the time the
8 governmental panel has finished making the
9 presentation, if you want to ask a question.
10 Because otherwise we find that people come in
11 an hour into it and start asking questions
12 that have already been asked.

13 So with that, I'd like to introduce
14 our -- and welcome our first presenters for
15 today, Suzanne Miles-Gustave, acting
16 commissioner, New York State Office of
17 Children and Families, and Daniel Tietz,
18 New York State Office of Temporary and
19 Disability Assistance.

20 So if -- Suzanne, if you can go first,
21 and then we'll move on. Thank you.

22 Oh, and just before you go, I'm sorry,
23 I just want to -- both -- for everyone
24 listening, all of your testimony has been

1 distributed and received by the members, so
2 please don't read your full testimony. The
3 time goes much faster than people think it
4 does, and then we end up not hearing the meat
5 of what you want to present to us.

6 So thank you.

7 Senator Krueger, did you want to
8 introduce some colleagues?

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I do. I just
10 want to introduce Senator Cordell Cleare.

11 Did any other Senators sneak in? I
12 think that's it. Thank you.

13 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. I'm
14 sorry, Suzanne, if you can begin.

15 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
16 Thank you. Good morning, Chairs Krueger and
17 Weinstein, and Children and Families
18 Committee Chairs Brisport and Hevesi -- in
19 his absence -- and distinguished members of
20 the Senate and Assembly.

21 I am Suzanne Miles-Gustave, the acting
22 commissioner of the New York State Office of
23 Children and Family Services. I appreciate
24 this opportunity to present Governor Hochul's

1 fiscal year 2024 budget and its potential to
2 enhance our mission -- a mission I know is
3 near and dear to each of you as well --
4 ensuring all of New York's children, families
5 and communities are served and uplifted.

6 This year's Executive Budget makes
7 smart, responsible investments and provides
8 ongoing support for OCFS's core childcare,
9 child welfare, and juvenile justice
10 programs while advancing a bold and ambitious
11 agenda to make New York more affordable, more
12 livable, and more equitable for all
13 New Yorkers.

14 The Governor's budget proposals
15 thoughtfully weave investments in children
16 and families into the fabric of the larger
17 human services network, rebuilding New York's
18 mental health care system and addressing the
19 housing crisis.

20 Never before in New York's history
21 have we had a Governor with such a deep
22 commitment to increasing access to quality,
23 affordable childcare than Governor Hochul.
24 From the moment she took office, it has been

1 among the Governor's top priorities to build
2 the strong and equitable childcare system
3 that New Yorkers need and deserve.

4 Building on the extraordinary momentum
5 of last year's budget, this proposal
6 increases the state's commitment to childcare
7 assistance to an unprecedented 7.6 billion
8 over four years. The budget would also
9 increase the income eligibility limits for
10 childcare assistance to 85 percent of the
11 state median income -- that's approximately
12 93,000 per year for a family of four. This
13 is the maximum allowable by federal law and
14 will make an estimated 113,000 children newly
15 eligible for childcare assistance. In total,
16 the Executive Budget invests over 1 billion
17 for the New York State Child Care Block
18 Grant, an increase from year to year of
19 \$137.5 million.

20 And we'll address the patchwork of
21 standards across the state, ensuring that all
22 of our most vulnerable families -- such as
23 those who are unhoused or those who are
24 caring for children in foster care or kinship

1 care -- are provided the childcare assistance
2 they so desperately need.

3 There's no doubt we need this funding
4 to make childcare assistance available to
5 more families. But we also know that less
6 than 10 percent of all eligible children
7 actually receive assistance. Although there
8 are many reasons this might be the case, one
9 barrier is New York's cumbersome and
10 antiquated application process, which makes
11 it far too difficult for families to apply
12 for assistance. This year's budget includes
13 important initiatives to streamline and
14 centralize the childcare assistance
15 application process.

16 First, we'll launch a statewide online
17 solution that will allow families to
18 pre-screen for eligibility and apply for
19 assistance electronically.

20 Additionally, for families that
21 already participate in other programs such as
22 SNAP, HEAP, Medicaid and WIC, the budget
23 proposes to eliminate the senseless and
24 redundant requirement that these families

1 also prove their income eligibility for
2 childcare assistance. This will provide
3 easier access for an estimated
4 83,000 children and families that are already
5 eligible.

6 Last year we invested in a second
7 round of stabilization grants for providers,
8 with at least 75 percent of those funds
9 dedicated specifically to supporting the
10 workforce. This year the budget invests an
11 additional 389 million for a third round of
12 stabilization grants for workforce retention
13 incentives.

14 The budget also maintains last year's
15 investment to support the increase in the
16 market rate to the 80th percentile, among the
17 highest in the nation -- which not only
18 broadens childcare options for families but
19 also dramatically increases payments to
20 providers, by over 40 percent for some.

21 Building off of last year's successful
22 \$100 million childcare desert initiative, the
23 Governor's budget also includes several
24 proposals aimed at rebuilding the supply of

1 childcare.

2 First, New York Homes and Community
3 Renewal will give priority to applications
4 for its low-income housing tax credit that
5 incorporate space for childcare facilities.
6 On top of that, the budget proposes a
7 flexible statewide business income tax credit
8 for businesses that create or expand
9 childcare slots for their employees.

10 The budget also provides 4.8 million
11 to launch a new Employer-Supported Childcare
12 Pilot Program in three regions of the state.
13 Employers would contribute a third of the
14 cost for low- and middle-income families, and
15 the state will match it, reducing
16 out-of-pocket costs for families who would
17 not otherwise be eligible for childcare
18 assistance.

19 Finally, the budget invests \$1 million
20 in state dollars for a new business navigator
21 program in each of the state's 10 Regional
22 Economic Development Council regions, to help
23 businesses identify childcare options for
24 their employees.

1 The Executive Budget also makes
2 important investments in New York's most
3 vulnerable children and families by investing
4 7 million for preventive and permanency
5 placement services for foster, adoptive and
6 kinship families. The 2.5 percent COLA
7 that's included in this year's budget will
8 also benefit families and the voluntary
9 agencies who care for New York's children in
10 foster care and adoptive parents.

11 The budget also increases the
12 appropriation authority for child welfare
13 payments, reinforcing the state's commitment
14 to this landmark funding stream that provides
15 an open-ended reimbursement for preventive
16 services, child protective services,
17 independent living services, after-care
18 services, and adoption assistance.

19 The budget includes 17 million to
20 support voluntary foster care agencies that
21 provide medically necessary care to children
22 and youth placed in congregate settings and
23 that are impacted by federal requirements
24 related to Institutions for Mental Disease,

1 or IMD. For impacted voluntary foster care
2 agencies, this funding will support the
3 hiring of necessary staff, mitigate the loss
4 of federal Medicaid reimbursement, and allow
5 them to invest in additional programmatic
6 needs.

7 OCFS applauds Governor Hochul's
8 proposal to index the state's minimum wage to
9 inflation, which will provide a vital
10 economic lifeline to New York's low-wage
11 workers, who are disproportionately women and
12 people of color, and many of whom work in
13 human services.

14 We continue to face a daunting
15 workforce crisis in careers that are critical
16 to OCFS's mission. The Governor's budget
17 also includes 3.8 million to supplement
18 state-funded contracts to mitigate the impact
19 of the wage increase on struggling human
20 services providers.

21 Before I close and take your
22 questions, I just wanted to take a moment to
23 say that I'm thrilled to work in partnership
24 with each of you to accomplish these very

1 lofty goals. It is my unwavering intention
2 that our services reflect the communities we
3 serve, that we hear the voices of children,
4 parents and providers, and that our work
5 promotes a safe, equitable and justice-driven
6 reality for all New Yorkers. This is OCFS's
7 mission.

8 In closing, this budget reflects our
9 commitment to the safety and permanency of
10 New York's children and families and to
11 uplifting all New Yorkers to a standard that
12 reflects the dignity and humanity of us all.
13 Thank you so much.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

15 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes. Yes, you
16 can go, and then we'll have questions.

17 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Thank you.

18 Good morning, Chairpersons Krueger and
19 Weinstein, Social Services Committee chairs
20 Persaud and Davila, and the other members of
21 the Senate and Assembly.

22 I'm Daniel W. Tietz, the commissioner
23 of the Office of Temporary and Disability
24 Assistance. I welcome the opportunity to

1 speak to you today about Governor Hochul's
2 2024 Executive Budget and its impact on the
3 important work our agency performs on behalf
4 of New Yorkers.

5 OTDA supervises programs that provide
6 economic and other assistance and support to
7 eligible families and individuals. This
8 includes helping New Yorkers living in or
9 near poverty meet their essential needs and
10 ensuring their economic security by providing
11 opportunities for stable employment, housing,
12 and nutrition. Our agency carries out this
13 mission in cooperation with local social
14 services districts and community-based
15 service providers.

16 The Governor's budget maintains the
17 essential funding of our agency's core
18 programs, which serve the critical needs of
19 millions of New Yorkers daily, while making
20 targeted investments for areas of particular
21 need.

22 Beyond what is proposed relevant to
23 OTDA's work, Governor Hochul's proposed
24 budget includes many important initiatives

1 that will undoubtedly improve the lives of
2 the families and individuals our agency
3 serves. The Governor's plan proposes
4 groundbreaking investments in mental health
5 care, childcare and housing, while focusing
6 on reducing and preventing gun violence and
7 helping workers meet increased costs for
8 household needs by indexing the minimum wage
9 to inflation.

10 Significantly, the Executive Budget
11 includes \$1 billion for OTDA to help New York
12 City provide shelter and services to support
13 asylum seekers who have been coming to New
14 York in record numbers over the last year.
15 This funding will help offset the costs
16 incurred through New York City's shelter
17 system and the Humanitarian Emergency
18 Response and Relief Centers.

19 The Governor's historic New York
20 Housing Compact, which aims to build
21 800,000 new homes over the next decade, is a
22 comprehensive and multifaceted approach to
23 addressing the state's housing shortage.

24 On a related note, the budget

1 continues the Governor's \$25 billion,
2 five-year housing plan to create or preserve
3 100,000 affordable units, including
4 10,000 supportive housing units. OTDA's --

5 (Protestors interrupt proceeding.)

6 (Off the record.)

7 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you all
8 for being here. And I just want to remind
9 people, we've let you have a few moments to
10 speak. We've done that at prior hearings. I
11 want to remind people that you can submit
12 written testimony. It will be posted on our
13 website, both the Assembly and the Senate,
14 and it will be available for all members and
15 all members of the public to be able to see
16 that.

17 So I would encourage those that are
18 here and other members of your organization
19 to do that, so that we have that information
20 in writing available to all of us.

21 UNIDENTIFIED PROTESTOR: We appreciate
22 that.

23 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for
24 being --

1 (Overtalk from protestors.)

2 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for
3 being here. Thank you for being here.

4 (Continued interruption.)

5 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for
6 being here. Thank you. Please send in your
7 written comments --

8 (Continued loud chanting.)

9 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So we will
10 restart -- we will in a moment start up the
11 clock now that everybody's woken up.

12 (Laughter.)

13 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: If we could
14 start the -- are you okay just continuing?

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yup.

16 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. So if we
17 can just restart the clock, please continue.

18 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I just want
19 to state my gratitude for the activism and
20 the participation in democracy that we just
21 witnessed.

22 On a related note --

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Pull the mic a
24 little closer, Dan.

1 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Sure.

2 I think I left off here.

3 On a related note, the budget
4 continues the Governor's \$25 billion,
5 five-year housing plan to create or preserve
6 100,000 affordable units, including
7 10,000 supportive housing units. OTDA's
8 Homeless Housing and Assistance Program, with
9 \$128 million in the proposed budget, is a key
10 part of this effort by funding capital
11 projects that provide permanent supportive
12 housing to families and individuals who have
13 experienced homelessness.

14 HHAP also is the only state resource
15 for the development of emergency shelters,
16 which often play a critical role in
17 communities' comprehensive homeless services
18 system. Supportive housing brings together
19 permanent housing and tailored services
20 necessary for individuals to achieve and
21 maintain stable lives in the community. The
22 budget also includes increased funding to
23 support these critical services and ongoing
24 operation of permanent supportive housing.

1 The budget further proposes changes to
2 public assistance that will improve the
3 economic stability and outlook of recipients,
4 and increases access to education and
5 training opportunities, by ending the
6 requirement for education to be combined with
7 other activities after 12 months of
8 post-secondary education.

9 Additionally, the budget authorizes
10 the disregard of income a public assistance
11 recipient receives from participating in a
12 qualified work activity or training program,
13 when calculating their monthly benefit. It
14 also provides for a one-time disregard of all
15 of a public assistance recipient's earned
16 income following job entry for a period of up
17 to six consecutive months, provided that the
18 recipient's total income does not exceed 200
19 percent of the federal poverty level.

20 These amendments will help ease the
21 effects of any benefits cliff by
22 strengthening the recipient's financial
23 footing when they become employed, before
24 their household is no longer eligible for

1 public assistance due to those earnings.

2 Unfortunately, we've been seeing
3 instances here in New York, and nationwide,
4 of thieves using skimming devices to copy
5 Electronic Benefit Transfer or EBT card and
6 personal identification number information
7 from SNAP and public assistance recipients
8 and steal their benefits.

9 In December, thanks to New York's
10 congressional delegation, the federal
11 government agreed to partially reimburse SNAP
12 recipients whose benefits have been stolen.
13 I'm pleased to say that the Executive Budget
14 includes language that will allow the state
15 to reimburse public assistance recipients who
16 have been victimized as well.

17 This proposal will ensure that both
18 SNAP and public assistance recipients can be
19 reimbursed up to the lesser of the full
20 amount stolen, or the amount of assistance
21 provided during the two most recent months
22 prior to their benefits being stolen.

23 The Governor is also committing
24 \$18 million in this coming year, growing to

1 \$37 million on an annual basis, to launch a
2 new Youth Opportunities Program that will
3 augment the Summer Youth Employment Program
4 during the school year, providing year-round
5 part-time employment to an estimated
6 2,500 youth. This program will operate in
7 localities that have experienced high rates
8 of violent crime.

9 Additionally, there's a \$1 million
10 increase for the Summer Youth Employment
11 Program to \$47.1 million, to accommodate the
12 most recent minimum wage increase and ensure
13 that the same number of youths can be served
14 this year as last summer.

15 As you know, the application portal
16 for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program,
17 or ERAP, closed on January 20. More than
18 225,000 payments have been made on behalf of
19 tenants to landlords, totaling more than
20 \$2.8 billion, and OTDA expects that we will
21 fully utilize all available funds with the
22 applications submitted through January 20.

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Dan, we're still
24 having trouble hearing you. Maybe another

1 microphone (inaudible).

2 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I'll put
3 this right in my face, how about that.

4 Where was I?

5 This program has overwhelmingly
6 benefited some of our most vulnerable
7 communities, with nearly nine out of
8 10 payments made on behalf of households at
9 or below 50 percent of the area median
10 income. When all is said and done, ERAP will
11 have provided more than \$3 billion in federal
12 and state funding to keep our fellow New
13 Yorkers who suffered financially due to the
14 pandemic in their homes when they were unable
15 to pay their rent.

16 The Child Poverty Reduction Advisory
17 Council, of which I'm a cochair, continues
18 its work to develop a plan for reducing child
19 poverty by 50 percent statewide over the next
20 decade. The council will have its third
21 meeting in a few weeks, and I expect the pace
22 of our work will increase moving forward.

23 I'm excited about the opportunity we
24 have before us to meet this goal. Poverty

1 remains a reality for millions of
2 New Yorkers, but we know it is a problem that
3 we can solve.

4 In closing, Governor Hochul's
5 Executive Budget outlines a bold agenda that
6 focuses on making New York State a more
7 affordable, livable, and safe place for all.
8 This plan includes sound investments and
9 forward-looking policy proposals that will
10 benefit all New Yorkers.

11 We look forward to our continued
12 partnership with the Legislature in the
13 coming months. Thank you again for the
14 opportunity to testify, and I welcome your
15 questions and comments.

16 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

17 Since the hearing began, we were
18 joined by Kimberly Jean-Pierre, chair of our
19 Veterans Committee; Assemblyman Kim, chairman
20 of our Aging Committee; and Assemblyman
21 Simone.

22 Did you want to introduce some people
23 before we go to questions?

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

1 Senator O'Mara, the ranker on Finance.

2 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: And Assemblyman
3 Pirozzolo has joined us.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'm sorry --

5 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Go ahead.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator
7 Scanlon --

8 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON:
9 Scarcella-Spanton.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you so
11 much. I did it backwards and I got myself
12 messed up. Thank you.

13 Oh, and Senator Gounardes just joined
14 us. Thank you.

15 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. So
16 now we'll go to -- and there may be some
17 other colleagues joining us as the hearing
18 continues.

19 So now we go to our first set of
20 questions and answers for 10 minutes, to our
21 Social Services chair, Assemblywoman Davila.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Good afternoon,
23 Commissioner Tietz. It's good to see you.

24 So my first question is directed

1 towards public assistance. And the public
2 assistance caseload for the safety net
3 singles is projected to decrease by nearly
4 19,000 statewide. What are the factors that
5 play into the decrease?

6 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I think
7 certainly an improving economy has made a
8 difference here, and that people have more
9 opportunities.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: What factors
11 are contributing to the increase of the
12 TANF families and the safety net public
13 assistance recipients, which are estimated to
14 increase by nearly 29,000 and 18,000
15 respectively?

16 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I think what
17 we're seeing here in part is the continuing
18 impact of the COVID pandemic. We saw an
19 increase in the last three years, and it's
20 certainly proven challenging for families in
21 particular.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: My next
23 question would be on youth opportunities
24 programs.

1 The budget involves funding for a new
2 Youth Opportunities Program for localities
3 participating in the Gun-Involved Violence
4 Elimination -- the GIVE -- initiative. How
5 will funds be distributed to the localities?

6 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: It's based
7 on the WIOA program from previous. So the
8 communities with the highest rates of gun
9 violence in the state will see additional
10 funds through this program.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Well, we have
12 seen gun violence in New York City -- the
13 increase is everywhere. Will this program be
14 a sort of program that is -- that not-CBOs
15 can apply for?

16 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: In New York
17 City?

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Yes.

19 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: No. This
20 program -- the expansion here is for
21 communities outside of New York City.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Okay. Thank
23 you.

24 The next question is on emergency

1 rental assistance. The Executive Budget does
2 not include additional funding for the
3 Emergency Rental Assistance Program, the ERAP
4 program. In fiscal year 2023 and '24, how
5 many rounds of additional federal
6 reallocations can we anticipate?

7 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I believe
8 that there are a few more reallocations from
9 the federal Treasury. In the last
10 reallocation, which was a few weeks ago, we
11 received \$63 million. I think that our
12 expectation is that that's in the ballpark of
13 what we may see going forward. But I think
14 we're in the low tens of millions, maybe, and
15 not more than that.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Is it not true
17 that the applications have closed down now
18 in -- starting January 2023?

19 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yes.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: So people can
21 no longer apply for ERAP?

22 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: That's
23 correct, Assemblymember.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Okay. The next

1 question is on the Migrant Resettlement
2 Program. The executive proposed 5 million to
3 support a new enhanced Migrant Resettlement
4 Program. How will these funds be allocated
5 regionally?

6 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: So in the
7 Governor's budget we've of course proposed a
8 billion dollars overall, some in cash and
9 some in kind, to help support migrants in New
10 York State.

11 The single largest part of that,
12 \$767 million, will help cover the cost of
13 shelter and services in New York City. There
14 are significant costs here involved in terms
15 of the approximately 900 National Guard that
16 are right now helping to serve in those
17 sheltering locations in New York City. There
18 are costs with regard to Medicaid,
19 significant investments that the state is
20 making.

21 Among the resources we're providing
22 here will be \$25 million for resettlement in
23 welcoming communities elsewhere in the state.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Okay. The next

1 question would be on eviction prevention
2 assistance.

3 The Executive Budget proposes to move
4 the funding for eviction prevention legal
5 assistance to your agency. Will this
6 impact -- how will this impact the contract,
7 and how will it be administered? How many
8 people have received service under the
9 program? How many evictions were prevented
10 as a result of legal assistance?

11 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Thank you
12 for the question.

13 The initial \$25 million has been
14 increased to \$35 million, and in the last
15 budget it was moved from HCR to OTDA. So
16 OTDA has actually managed these contracts
17 from the beginning. And it's largely through
18 Legal Services Corporation providers across
19 the state.

20 To date, I believe about 9500
21 households have been assisted.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: I am going to
23 ask this last question because I've been
24 asking a lot of questions today. I think

1 this is extremely important.

2 The Executive Budget includes
3 assistance to recipients who had their
4 benefits stolen as a result of card skimming,
5 cloning and other similar fraudulent
6 activities. What will the application
7 process be? What would be the steps for an
8 applicant filing to receive their benefits?

9 And one of the reasons why I think
10 this is extremely important is because it's
11 taking an awful long time, once people have
12 suffered the fraud, to go back to PA and ask,
13 you know, to restore their benefits. It's
14 taking a long time. And we know that a
15 person can't be an extra month, two months
16 without benefits and not suffer any
17 consequences.

18 Going forward, will there be more
19 safety measures to ensure the recipient's
20 benefits will not be stolen again? As the
21 Article VII states, then applicants cannot --
22 can seek reimbursement no more than twice in
23 a fiscal year. So that maybe a little
24 problematic.

1 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: So in the
2 federal omnibus that was passed near the end
3 of December, it included for the first time
4 granting the USDA authority to permit
5 reissuance of federal SNAP benefits. Until
6 now, no state has been able to reissue
7 federal SNAP benefits. A handful of states
8 have had state funds to reissue benefits for
9 some reasons, but the federal government
10 until now hadn't permitted this, the use of
11 federal funds.

12 So for the first time we are -- we
13 will soon be able to issue the lesser of the
14 actual amount stolen or two months, twice in
15 a year. The goal here would be to keep folks
16 from going hungry. So the idea would be
17 until you get your next regular benefit, you
18 would have something to sustain you.

19 The USDA just in the last week issued
20 guidance to states on submitting a plan. We
21 expect to submit our plan to USDA before the
22 end of the month. It would appear, on the
23 face of it, that the requirements for
24 demonstrating that loss will be pretty

1 achievable, fairly modest. We won't know for
2 certain until we actually submit that plan
3 and obtain their approval.

4 So our hope is that within the next
5 few months that the USDA will approve our
6 plan and we'll begin to then roll that out to
7 local districts so that they can in fact
8 reissue the benefit.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Thank you.

10 No further questions.

11 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

12 We've been joined by Assemblyman Anderson.

13 And we go to the Senate.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

15 We'll start off with our chair,

16 Jabari Brisport.

17 SENATOR BRISPORT: (Mic off;
18 inaudible.) Okay, I think okay. Great.

19 Well, thank you, Madam Chair.

20 Thank you, Commissioners. My
21 questions are all for OCFS. Good afternoon.

22 Thank you for being here, Commissioner.

23 My questions -- I want to start out by
24 talking about the continued and accelerating

1 collapse of the childcare sector. We
2 conducted a hearing on the childcare crisis a
3 few weeks ago, and the Children's Agenda
4 estimated that New York State has lost
5 roughly 20,000 childcare slots as a result of
6 childcare programs closing since 2020. That
7 would be 10,000 from March of 2020 through
8 July of 2022, and then an acceleration of
9 another 10,000 on top of that just from July
10 of 2022 through the start of 2023.

11 Does that match OCFS's assessment?

12 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
13 we can -- I don't have that data with me
14 here, but I'm happy to bring that back to
15 you.

16 The additional acceleration from July
17 2022 sounds not like the numbers that I know
18 of, but we'll confirm that and get back to
19 you.

20 But I do hope you know that after the
21 pandemic, coming out of the pandemic and all
22 the federal funds that we were so gracious to
23 receive, we did issue, as I mentioned in my
24 testimony, that \$100 million childcare desert

1 grant. So that desert grant is meant to help
2 build supply, because we do recognize we lost
3 supply.

4 But that desert grant is not the only
5 supply building we're doing. Our office has
6 quite frankly almost doubled because we have
7 so much focus on not only getting the money
8 out the door for assistance and getting more
9 families into the system, but also building
10 supply. So we're laser-focused on that
11 build. But it's -- it's not easy, so it's --
12 the pandemic was devastating to our industry,
13 and we're continuing to work on building that
14 back up.

15 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you. And not
16 just the pandemic, you know, the Children's
17 Agenda noted that this had been a long-term
18 trend over the past decade with collapsing
19 childcare slots across the state, some
20 regions losing over 50 percent of their
21 childcare slots in the past decade. Does
22 that match OCFS's assessment?

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
24 I will agree with you that it is not just the

1 pandemic. I think the pandemic put a
2 spotlight on this incredible infrastructure
3 priority that no one else really knew about
4 or cared about until after the pandemic. So
5 good for OCFS, because we've always known it
6 was important.

7 But yes, childcare has needed support
8 for many, many, many years. I know many
9 states like New York were also
10 super-disappointed with Congress when they
11 couldn't get Build Back Better passed. So I
12 think nationally, again, the spotlight is on
13 childcare. Hopefully next year -- we'll
14 cross our fingers -- that Congress will also
15 recognize. Because I know the focus is
16 looking towards universal childcare, and the
17 states just can't do that by themselves. We
18 definitely need the federal support.

19 But we're doing a million things by
20 ourselves. We're doing what we can with the
21 money that we have.

22 SENATOR BRISPORT: Gotcha. And I just
23 want to clarify that despite these annual
24 stabilization grants, we continue to see an

1 exodus of childcare workers and providers
2 from the sector, yes?

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

4 Data that I would need to get back to you on.

5 But the childcare workforce is in
6 crisis, I would not disagree there, as are
7 many other workforces after bleeding out from
8 the pandemic. This is a very difficult time.
9 And I know that we are focused on not only
10 providing the childcare workforce with
11 stabilization grants -- we get that they're
12 one-time incentives -- but we're working
13 towards, as you know, the Childcare
14 Availability Task Force that will -- has been
15 reimaged by Governor Hochul -- will come
16 together shortly.

17 And one of their tasks is to look at
18 the impact of the pandemic on the childcare
19 industry, including the workforce crisis.
20 And also including, phased in, a rollout of
21 universal childcare. That, granted, we
22 likely can't do by ourselves, but I do
23 believe that we look forward to having all
24 the advocates and all the experts help us.

1 This is a huge problem that we need all of
2 our partners to help solve.

3 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

4 And I just want to keep circling back
5 to this notion of stabilization. We're in
6 multiple rounds of stabilization grants now.
7 At last year's hearing I asked your
8 predecessor if she considered the childcare
9 sector as stable. She said no. Would you
10 say the childcare sector is stable now?

11 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

12 No, it's not stable now. I think this
13 Governor's budget proposes that additional
14 \$389 million as a round 3 for stabilization,
15 to help try to stabilize it. But we have --
16 we're -- we've done many things over the past
17 two years. We have much more to do.

18 SENATOR BRISPORT: In taking the same
19 strategy, though, of using a one-time
20 infusion of federal funds for one time
21 bonuses, do you think that the 389 million
22 will stabilize the childcare sector this
23 year?

24 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: I

1 think it will help. I think -- as you know,
2 we've increased the market rate to the
3 80th percentile. I think that's helped
4 stabilize some providers. I think the
5 stabilization grants, as I've gone on tours
6 myself, providers were very thankful. It
7 helped them greatly.

8 So I think these sometimes one-time
9 funding we get -- we're using our pandemic
10 funding as effectively as we can. It is
11 helpful. But I think we have a lot more to
12 do.

13 SENATOR BRISPORT: Where did the
14 \$389 million figure come from?

15 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: I
16 would need to get back to you on the analysis
17 of that dollar amount.

18 SENATOR BRISPORT: I have some other
19 questions about reimbursement rates and
20 compensation. I've been looking at the
21 OCFS's market rates survey, and I've also
22 seen reports from Cornell University and
23 Ed Trust-New York regarding the true cost of
24 care, and it seems like there's a big gap

1 between the true cost of care and what
2 New York is reimbursing its childcare
3 providers. Would you agree that there's a
4 gap?

5 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: I
6 would agree there's a gap. And we were in
7 collaboration with Ed Trust, and I think they
8 did a great job with their report.

9 But again, that's one of the questions
10 that we have for our reimagined Child Care
11 Availability Task Force. I think we all
12 recognize that these questions aren't
13 answered, and they have a big charge.

14 SENATOR BRISPORT: Do you think there
15 are any benefits to our current practice of
16 paying childcare providers less than what it
17 costs them to provide care?

18 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: I
19 do not think it makes sense. I do know that
20 we are -- with the 80th percentile change, it
21 increased payments to providers by an average
22 of 33 percent. Some regions got 40. So I do
23 think that's helpful, absolutely.

24 I think we can see in the budget,

1 because we have this third round of
2 stabilization, that yes, we need more. We
3 need to support our workforce and our
4 industry as much as we possibly can.

5 SENATOR BRISPORT: In the OCFS
6 analysis for its market rates survey, does
7 that include a living wage for the childcare
8 workforce? Or does it assume a low wage for
9 childcare workers?

10 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: If
11 I understand your question, the market rate
12 doesn't contemplate wages. It speaks to the
13 rate that providers charge families. That is
14 the survey that we take. The rate providers
15 charge families, those who only receive
16 families that get assistance. That is then
17 tabulated by region, by modality, and the
18 market rate is then set.

19 We are at the 80th percentile, so it's
20 eight to 10 providers are accessible to our
21 families who receive our childcare
22 assistance.

23 SENATOR BRISPORT: Has OCFS calculated
24 how much more it would take to pay providers

1 what it actually costs them to provide care?

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

3 No, we have not engaged in a cost-of-care
4 study. That, again, was in Build Back
5 Better. The funding for that was in
6 Build Back Better; that unfortunately did not
7 pass.

8 So as I mentioned, we were working
9 collaboratively, providing data that we had
10 to Ed Trust, and we're familiar with their
11 report.

12 I know there are some think tanks
13 looking to assess what that -- what that
14 would cost, and Ed Trust is one of those.
15 So, you know, the -- again, the childcare
16 task force will look at this issue as well,
17 one of their charges. And my hope is that we
18 get additional federal support.

19 SENATOR BRISPORT: I had some
20 questions about eligibility and who gets
21 childcare.

22 The Governor's proposal continues to
23 exclude undocumented children from childcare.
24 Why is that?

1 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
2 unfortunately our childcare dollars, our
3 federal dollars did not allow -- well, they
4 dictate who can get assistance and who can't.

5 Our current regulations do allow
6 children with favorable immigration status to
7 get assistance or be eligible for assistance,
8 regardless of the eligibility of their
9 parents. But that is federal law.

10 So our CCDF funds do not allow --

11 SENATOR BRISPORT: I'm just going to
12 interrupt you briefly just for a time.
13 Federal funds cannot be used for undocumented
14 kids, I understand that. But even in
15 New York City, they use city funds. And
16 there is the option to do state funds.

17 So my question is, why has the
18 Governor refused to use state funds to give
19 access to childcare to undocumented children?

20 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
21 Well, I mean, I think this budget makes
22 really difficult choices. I know that there
23 is an access point for undocumented families
24 in our New York State Head Start, or federal

1 Head Start, and Early Start, of which we have
2 about 278 in the state. So that is a federal
3 program that does allow children to get care
4 even if they're undocumented.

5 SENATOR BRISPORT: I have more
6 questions about eligibility and waiting
7 lists. We saw a letter from the New York
8 City ACS to OCFS from May. It was requesting
9 to amend their response whenever there is a
10 waiting list when there are not sufficient
11 funds to open all eligible cases from yes to
12 no, essentially saying that they did not want
13 to have a waiting list. Do you know if OCFS
14 granted that request for ACS?

15 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
16 I'm not familiar with that specific letter,
17 but I can talk to you a little bit about
18 ACS's previous waitlist that no longer
19 exists.

20 So there are federal requirements to
21 operationalize the federal funds for
22 childcare, and one of the primary focuses is
23 parental choice. So the concept of a
24 waitlist was problematic, and New York City

1 recognized that. And so now there is no
2 waitlist and they are addressing the requests
3 for assistance as they come in.

4 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
6 Assembly.

7 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We've been
8 joined by Assemblywoman Mitaynes.

9 And we go to Assemblywoman Byrnes for
10 five minutes, the ranker.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: All right.
12 Thank you.

13 I want to thank both of the witnesses
14 that are here. My questions, though, will be
15 directed, ma'am, to the acting commissioner
16 of OCFS.

17 First I want to just make one
18 statement, and that is -- and I'm sure that
19 everyone can agree on this -- the Minority is
20 having an inability to actually contact our
21 legislative coordinator, John Divito, and
22 it's been for quite a while. And as a
23 result, we can't get any answers to our
24 questions.

1 So I just would respectfully ask that
2 when we go back to the office, if there's
3 anything you can do to try to make it so that
4 our inquiries of him are responded to. I'd
5 be most appreciative.

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: I
7 really thought you were joking, I'm sorry.
8 John Divito is incredibly responsive. But if
9 there is something open, we will absolutely
10 respond to you.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: No, no, I was
12 given specifically his name, that we've been
13 trying to reach out, and we haven't.

14 All right, I'm going to move on,
15 because I do have questions. But I wanted to
16 make sure that was not lost in the shuffle.

17 Look, obviously childcare is a major
18 part of this budget, and so I want to talk
19 about that and ask some questions about it,
20 ma'am. No disrespect to you, sir, but.

21 Look, how many more families, how many
22 more children are going to be eligible for
23 childcare by changing the income threshold to
24 85 percent of SMI?

1 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

2 Sure. Currently, what, 300 percent of the
3 federal poverty level and about half of
4 New York's children are eligible.

5 Once we, per our proposal, increase it
6 to 85 percent of SMI, which is the highest
7 allowable, another 113,000 children will be
8 eligible.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: All right.

10 Now, you made a comment in your opening
11 statement that less than 10 percent of the
12 eligible children currently receive, but yet
13 apparently 50 percent would be eligible but
14 only 10 percent receive.

15 Now, if you propose and if it goes
16 through that this is increased dramatically
17 so that many more people, children, would be
18 eligible, how would you go about trying to
19 make sure that these children, now expanded
20 exponentially, will be actually receiving
21 services?

22 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

23 Sure. So we know that there's like several
24 reasons why only 10 percent of our uptake has

1 been standard, and one is reflected in our
2 proposal this year. So we have a mishmash of
3 requirements for childcare assistance. It is
4 an antiquated system. So we are trying to --
5 the purpose is to make it electronic, make it
6 easier for families to receive assistance.

7 There is money out there. Counties
8 have lots of money to open cases. So raising
9 the eligibility just provides a larger pool
10 for those counties to create those slots.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: I know that you
12 mentioned, again, in your opening statement
13 that one of the avenues would be a statewide
14 online solution, quote, unquote.

15 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
16 Yes.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: You do
18 realize -- and I'm sure you do -- but I come
19 from a very rural district. Many people here
20 do. There are significant parts of my
21 district that don't have internet access.
22 It's not a question of affordability, it's a
23 question of literally have no access.

24 How in the world are you going to be

1 able to reach out to these families through
2 an online solution to vast portions of our
3 state that have no internet?

4 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

5 Mm-hmm. Sure. I mean, we do intend to roll
6 out a multilayered solution. So a family can
7 still go down to the social services district
8 and request a paper application and apply for
9 assistance --

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: They would have
11 to know that they were eligible. They would
12 have to know that there was a reason to go
13 down and do that.

14 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

15 Correct. So last year we entered into like a
16 multimedia campaign. So -- and that is
17 ongoing this year as well. So it was radio
18 ads, TV ads, bus ads, billboards. We do
19 recognize that not everyone knows that
20 they're eligible for childcare.

21 So we are -- we began that media
22 campaign last year, and we will continue that
23 this year. The goal is to get the word out,
24 for sure.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: Now, are there
2 actually enough daycare providers to provide
3 services for this increased pool of people?

4 And even if we have enough actual
5 providers, are there actually workers, people
6 that can work for these providers, that are
7 sufficient to handle this dramatic increase
8 in people who are -- children who are
9 eligible?

10 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
11 Yes. Well, we do think it's going to be a
12 slow rollout. We do not think that
13 113,000 children will come to the doors of
14 social services this year. Again, half of
15 New York's children are already eligible and
16 our uptake really is 10 percent.

17 So we do believe it will be a slow
18 rollout, but we're encouraging to recognize
19 their eligibility, come down to the social
20 services district --

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: But even if
22 they're eligible, even if they come down -- I
23 mean, at some point you have to have bodies
24 to take care of them.

1 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

2 Yes.

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: And that is a
4 major problem in every aspect of our lives.

5 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

6 And supply is something that's a main focus
7 of ours, increasing supply.

8 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

9 Before we go to the Senate, we've been
10 joined by Assemblywoman González-Rojas and
11 Assemblyman Ardila.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

13 Tom?

14 SENATOR O'MARA: We've been joined by
15 Senator Rolison and Senator Oberacker.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

17 And next up is Senator Roxanne
18 Persaud, chair, 10 minutes.

19 SENATOR PERSAUD: Good morning,
20 everyone.

21 Commissioners, it's always great
22 seeing you. And I just want to first thank
23 you and -- both of you and your staff for
24 everything that you do for us whenever we're

1 calling. And, you know, we constantly call.

2 I would like to start with
3 Commissioner Tietz. And my first question to
4 you, Commissioner, you know, is always the
5 COLA. We have this COLA that we talk about
6 that's now proposed at 2.5 percent. But not
7 everyone qualifies for the COLA, even though
8 they're all doing the same work.

9 Can you give me your opinion of that
10 and justify why someone who's doing the same
11 work is not qualifying for the same COLA?

12 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yeah, the
13 COLA as proposed in the Governor's budget
14 covers one of our programs at OTDA. It's the
15 Nutrition Outreach and Education Program.

16 But you're correct that it doesn't
17 reach to others.

18 We believe, of course, that everyone
19 deserves a livable wage. And I can't say
20 more on that, I guess.

21 SENATOR PERSAUD: Do you think --
22 would you say if you're having conversations
23 about that? Because across human services,
24 the need for a wage increase is great. These

1 are people who are taking care of the most
2 vulnerable people in our communities. And
3 we're not treating them the same way even
4 though they are doing the same work.

5 So I really would love for the
6 Governor to look at that and see how can we
7 rectify that so that everyone who's doing the
8 job receives the COLA.

9 Can you tell me, also, stolen public
10 benefits in the Article VII. As you know,
11 we've been talking about it. People -- the
12 money is placed on their card, and two
13 minutes later it's gone and there's no way of
14 them receiving a refund or the funds being
15 replaced.

16 Can you tell me, are there any plans
17 in place -- we know we're working with the
18 federal government to rectify the problem,
19 and for the federal government to fund it.
20 What is OTDA doing about that?

21 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: So there's a
22 few things that we're doing. So as I'd
23 mentioned earlier with regard to the SNAP
24 benefits, we now have -- soon, you know, when

1 we submit that plan later this month and
2 hopefully soon thereafter receive USDA's
3 approval on that plan, we will then roll that
4 out to the districts so that they can replace
5 up to two months of benefits twice a year for
6 those who've suffered losses.

7 On the public assistance side, we're
8 doing something very similar. It's much the
9 same idea. We expect to be able to roll that
10 out soon as well. We've essentially made
11 these two efforts look similar, which I think
12 is both helpful for recipients and helpful
13 for the staff in the local districts who are
14 charged with handling the matter.

15 In addition, we've taken several steps
16 with regard to getting messages to recipients
17 as well as to local districts. We've had
18 some campaigns on how you can protect
19 yourself. Among the ways in which you can
20 protect yourself is to change your PIN
21 frequently or change your PIN after every
22 use.

23 In addition, we're speaking with our
24 vendor that handles the EBT cards to permit

1 recipients to turn their card on and off, to
2 essentially lock it as they would like, as
3 well as to prevent out-of-state transactions
4 as well.

5 So there are several steps that we've
6 done to help ensure that people don't suffer
7 losses.

8 SENATOR PERSAUD: So talking about
9 that, have we spoken to the vendor about
10 updating their technology? Because, you
11 know, we've been asking about having chips
12 embedded in the cards. So what is the status
13 on that with the vendor?

14 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yes. With
15 regard to chip-enabled cards, which
16 essentially then we get away from this
17 problem of the PIN and magnetic stripes,
18 which can be copied.

19 So for -- for the -- there's no state
20 in the nation right now that actually has a
21 chip-enabled card. We of course would need
22 guidance and assistance and approval
23 ultimately from USDA to do this.

24 We are working right now with our

1 vendors on a contract matter, so there's --
2 there's a big dispute with regards to the
3 vendor that was awarded the contract going
4 forward. So once that's settled, we'll then
5 have -- which I'm hoping soon -- we'll then
6 have conversations with that vendor. We know
7 that that same vendor has begun such
8 conversations with California on chip-enabled
9 cards.

10 So we're -- I don't want to
11 overpromise here. I'll just be clear that
12 this will take a couple of years.

13 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you on that.

14 So we'll go to supportive housing.
15 The reimbursement rates are not the same.
16 Can you tell us the key difference between
17 the two models, say for NYSSHP and ESSHI, why
18 is it that the -- there's such a disparity in
19 the reimbursement rates?

20 And then while you're looking at that,
21 you can think about ERAP. What are we doing
22 for the NYCHA tenants in ERAP? I know we've
23 had this conversation; I just wanted to just
24 go it over again.

1 And would you agree with me if I say
2 that the time frame that we have for people
3 who are in a holding pattern is too long?
4 We're waiting for people to respond, and
5 we're waiting and waiting, they're not
6 responding, and we're still holding that
7 money -- while we have people who have
8 cleared everything and have qualified, but
9 they're not getting the money.

10 Meanwhile, they're -- so do you think
11 if I say that we need to shorten the time
12 frame, would you agree with me on that?

13 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yes.

14 To go back to your supportive housing
15 question, I actually can't explain why
16 there's a difference in the rates for those
17 two programs. I'm happy to get you an
18 answer. This predates me. The NYSSHP
19 program is certainly well-established and
20 older than ESSHI. But I'm happy to get you
21 an answer on that.

22 With regard to ERAP, so your first
23 question was with regard to public housing.
24 And, I'm sorry, repeat it.

1 SENATOR PERSAUD: Right now they're
2 just -- there are so many of them waiting
3 because they didn't qualify, they weren't in
4 the categories that were listed. What are we
5 doing -- is there a plan for us to assist
6 those people?

7 And would you -- if I say that the
8 state should say, let's just cover all of
9 that NYCHA arrears and then with the
10 understanding that NYCHA will say everyone
11 who fell under the pandemic arrears that, you
12 know, we paid and swiped out and they go
13 forward -- would you say that's something
14 that we should think about?

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: So for
16 subsidized housing, including for public
17 housing, in the program as given to us by the
18 Legislature as settled in the last two
19 budgets, it placed subsidized housing in a
20 low priority. Believing that, I suspect,
21 given that they already have a subsidy for
22 their housing, they were placed in a lower
23 priority than those who don't have subsidized
24 housing.

1 At this moment I would say that
2 there's approximately 73,000 subsidized
3 housing applications. Those are largely on
4 hold. Because they're a lower priority, they
5 haven't been actively reviewed in the same
6 way as the non-subsidized housing
7 applications.

8 I suspect that we're -- at this moment
9 we -- you know, we're working through the
10 applications we received right through
11 January 20. In the last three weeks of the
12 program we received more than 17,000
13 applications. Our expectation is that we are
14 a little shy of having sufficient resources
15 to fund the nonsubsidized housing and no
16 resources, therefore, to fund subsidized
17 housing.

18 We would leave to the Legislature and
19 Governor how best to address the shortfall
20 relative to subsidized.

21 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. So while my
22 time is running out, I just want to cover
23 TANF. You know, why does the proposal
24 continue to reimburse New York City for only

1 85 percent of expenditures? And, you know,
2 let me ask this question of you: Why is so
3 much of the cost being shifted to New York
4 City?

5 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: It's a fair
6 question. I appreciate the question.

7 This well predates me. I think that
8 this goes back maybe a decade to the prior
9 administration, that the share that -- we
10 cover 100 percent of TANF eligible in every
11 district except New York City, in which we
12 cover 85 percent of the TANF-eligible cost.

13 SENATOR PERSAUD: Well, we have to
14 continue fighting against that, pushing back
15 on it.

16 Then my final question, while my time
17 is going, there's \$1 billion that's being
18 allocated for the migrant population. Could
19 you cover that? Tell us, you know -- could
20 you go over that, what is it really covering?

21 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Sure. So of
22 the billion dollars, the vast majority,
23 767 million is to cover the cost -- a portion
24 of the cost of shelter and services. And

1 that includes both DHS and the Humanitarian
2 Relief and Response Centers.

3 Another \$130-some million is for our
4 cost on Medicaid. Somewhere around
5 \$150 million is our share of the cost for the
6 National Guard who are serving in those
7 shelters. And then there are smaller
8 amounts -- for example, for resettlement.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

10 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you very much.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. Sorry
12 to cut you off, Roxie.

13 SENATOR PERSAUD: That's okay.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: The ranker on
15 Social Services, Assemblyman Maher, five
16 minutes.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: How's everybody
18 doing? Thank you so much for being here.

19 The first question I have is for you,
20 Commissioner. I know my colleagues started
21 talking about the industry, childcare
22 services, and you had brought up in your
23 comments the desert grants, I know this is a
24 structure that's put in place to help that

1 workforce and to support these childcare
2 service agencies and daycares.

3 So there's actually a handful in my
4 district that are struggling through this
5 application. Is there any flexibility in
6 terms of the payments? I know that some
7 facilities are waiting on their next \$50,000
8 payment because they have to hit certain
9 thresholds to hire employees to have enough
10 seats. Has your office had this experience
11 statewide? And what is a potential solution?

12 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
13 thank you for that question. We have had
14 this experience statewide, and I do believe
15 we're trying to resolve it.

16 The purpose of the childcare desert
17 grant was to absolutely build supply, and the
18 first portion of that was for new providers.
19 So if you've gotten your license, you're
20 fulfilling the requirements of the
21 regulation, you are not in violation and
22 you're open, serving children, I believe
23 we're working through the issues with those
24 providers who are close to meeting those

1 milestones.

2 So if we are not in touch with those
3 providers, we can get in touch with them.
4 I'm happy to have my office reach out to your
5 office.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: So in a specific
7 case, if someone said, Hey -- and they had
8 real proof -- we're going to have to shut our
9 doors, we're really going to need this, you
10 would work with them and try to make that a
11 priority?

12 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: We
13 would have to look at, obviously, the
14 circumstance. But we are working with
15 providers who are open and serving children,
16 absolutely.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Okay, great.

18 The second part is if they hit that
19 10 percent number, individuals who are
20 receiving the childcare assistance. Now,
21 obviously a lot of that, as you explained, is
22 part of the process and there's some things
23 that you're going to work on internally. But
24 how much of it is also promotion? And what

1 kind of partnerships have you created with
2 counties, even elected officials, to try to
3 work with getting the information out there
4 appropriately?

5 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

6 Right. Well, I mean, I'm happy to work with
7 anyone here to get the word out for our
8 childcare assistance program.

9 But we did launch a huge campaign last
10 year -- again, as I said, a multimedia
11 campaign. And we have our community
12 partners, we have our CCR&Rs who are out
13 there in each region, helping our providers.

14 But we are open to any
15 recommendations, because getting the word out
16 truly is the priority.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: We look forward to
18 working with you to do that, for sure.

19 Another section in here with the
20 Employer-Supported Childcare Pilot Program,
21 you talked about three regions being
22 selected. How will that process take place?
23 Which regions will be awarded, and how does
24 that work?

1 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
2 all the details are still pending. But it is
3 a process that I know we are mirroring from
4 other states where it's been successful.

5 So I do think that we're still working
6 through the details, but the important thing
7 is that we've gotten the proposed funding in
8 the budget.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Okay. And I know
10 certain things are being developed. But
11 would a partnership with a large employer,
12 let's say a warehouse -- we have a lot of
13 warehouses going on for a lot of internet
14 sales going on -- would you creatively work
15 with a business like that to try to establish
16 potentially childcare facilities on the
17 premises to make it more affordable and to
18 create incentives for workers to take those
19 jobs?

20 Because as much as those jobs are
21 available, there's a lot of people who aren't
22 taking the jobs because they don't want to
23 work in that situation where they can't
24 provide childcare because they don't make

1 enough money.

2 So if there's incentives through a
3 public/private partnership with these larger
4 businesses, is that something that you guys
5 have taken a look at so far?

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

7 Well, that sounds like our business income
8 tax incentive. That's also in the budget.
9 So that program would have a business
10 significantly underwrite childcare for their
11 employees and then apply to the state for a
12 tax credit.

13 So also the details aren't quite
14 worked out there either. But yes, the point
15 is that we're looking at the economics of
16 this all. And we're looking at private --
17 public and private partnerships for both of
18 those two programs.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: I am excited about
20 that tax credit. And time's running short,
21 but we very much look forward to seeing those
22 details and hopefully working through your
23 office to see how we can make it a perfect
24 process -- as perfect as possible.

1 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

2 Yes. Thank you.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Thank you.

4 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

5 We've been joined by Assemblywoman
6 Tapia.

7 To the Senate.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

9 Senator Murray, ranker, for five
10 minutes.

11 SENATOR MURRAY: Thank you very much.

12 Thank you, Madam Chair.

13 Thank you for being here.

14 I'm going to piggyback, actually, on
15 what the Assemblyman was just talking about
16 as far as childcare and businesses and the
17 workforce.

18 First, just for clarification, when
19 you said the statewide business income tax
20 credit for businesses that create or expand
21 childcare access for their employees, do you
22 mean financially or do you mean on-site or
23 both?

24 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: I

1 think it can be both. We partner with
2 providers if they're looking to do an on-site
3 facility that would likely need a licensed
4 provider to come to their on-site location.

5 But yes, it's -- the point is to be
6 creative. We're trying to be as creative as
7 possible.

8 SENATOR MURRAY: And first, I don't
9 want it going without saying that I applaud
10 you, I applaud the Governor for taking this
11 seriously and doing what she's doing in this
12 budget, because we are in a crisis. And it's
13 a threefold crisis. It's a crisis of are we
14 reaching enough children and families.

15 When we do, are there providers
16 available and are there workers available?
17 And the answer is no to all of those.

18 So getting creative with the business
19 community. So when we talk about business
20 and private -- public/private partnerships,
21 have you been in contact with groups like
22 NFIB, the Business Council, MACNY, Ignite
23 Long Island, some of these that maybe can
24 create incentives. Because for any

1 businesses out there listening -- Pssst: If
2 you want a big advantage, offer this as a
3 benefit. You will attract the best and the
4 brightest to come there.

5 Because the ones that benefit the
6 most, other than the parents getting --
7 knowing they're getting good childcare for
8 their children, are the businesses.

9 We don't -- we have a problem getting
10 people back in the workforce now, and the
11 problem is because -- and I've talked to
12 several who've said "It will cost me to go to
13 work because of childcare."

14 Are we working with these groups,
15 again, getting creative -- because again, the
16 businesses are going to benefit from this.
17 Is there maybe an effort in place to create a
18 fund or something where they can contribute
19 to offer even more incentives?

20 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
21 love your ideas. We're going to write them
22 down and take those back to our office.

23 But I think those two public/private
24 partnerships that do involve business, that

1 really speaks to the economic infrastructure
2 issue we're trying to get at, and the
3 business income tax incentive program is
4 going to be throughout the 10 Regional
5 Economic Development Councils. The REDCs are
6 involved.

7 I don't know if we're working with
8 those specific people, but I'm sure someone
9 very smart in my office or the Governor's
10 office has.

11 SENATOR MURRAY: We'll definitely talk
12 on that and provide them.

13 But now I've talked to some in the
14 industry who have also said, Well, that's
15 great, but -- you had mentioned them, and I
16 quote, the cumbersome and antiquated
17 application process for families. But also
18 for providers. They're saying, Hey, you
19 know, we're jumping through a lot of hoops
20 here.

21 Is there an effort to streamline the
22 system?

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
24 Yes. So actually when we increased the

1 market rate to the 80th percentile, we tried
2 to streamline the process for the providers,
3 particularly those who serve 100 percent of
4 children that receive childcare assistance.
5 So we streamlined the application as much as
6 we could by state statute and regulation.

7 So we are. I mean, streamlining
8 really is the name, like the word of the day.
9 So our office has regional offices, we
10 contract with CCR&Rs, they work with
11 providers. So we have an infrastructure in
12 place to provide providers with that support.
13 We're trying to give as much flexibility now
14 to the parents.

15 SENATOR MURRAY: Okay, good.

16 In my remaining time I want to focus
17 on the funding too. Now, if I have my
18 numbers right, it says the Executive proposes
19 to utilize an estimated 800 million in
20 unspent and rollover funds in addition to
21 500 million in federal pandemic.

22 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
23 Right. Yes.

24 SENATOR MURRAY: How long will that

1 last? And then when that runs out, is that
2 going to shift onto localities, onto the
3 counties? Or how do we handle that?

4 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: I
5 think, as we mentioned -- even last year, the
6 Governor made this historic investment in
7 childcare at 7 billion. This year it goes
8 on. It's 7.6 billion over four years.

9 I don't think any of us thought we'd
10 be here four or five years ago. And I think
11 in last year's financial plan we saw the
12 investment in years out, and in this year's
13 financial plan we will also see the
14 investment in years out. So I think the
15 Governor has made a commitment to support
16 this industry.

17 So yes, our pandemic funds will
18 eventually run out. We want our local
19 counties to use their subsidy. But there is
20 significant rollover every year. So we're
21 just going to invest all of our funds as
22 effectively as possible.

23 SENATOR MURRAY: Okay, great.

24 Thank you again. And I look forward

1 to working with you together to maybe come up
2 with some creative solutions. So thank you
3 so much.

4 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

5 Thank you. Thank you, Senator.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

7 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

8 On the Assembly side we now move to
9 three minutes for members to both ask the
10 question and receive the answer. So make
11 sure you leave time for our commissioners to
12 respond as we go through the many members who
13 have questions.

14 So we go first to our Veterans Affairs
15 Chair Jean-Pierre, but only -- it's
16 three minutes now. Kimberly?

17 (Off the record.)

18 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to our
19 Aging chair, I'm sorry, for three minutes.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you. Thank
21 you, Chair.

22 And thank you, Commissioners, for
23 testifying today.

24 My first question is to Children and

1 Family Services. The 16 million in the
2 capital funding that the Executive is
3 requesting, is that for third-party provider
4 capital projects or is it for your agency
5 capital needs?

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

7 Thank you, Assemblymember. No, the
8 16 million is to support the state-operated
9 facilities, our juvenile justice facilities.

10 We have an aging infrastructure, and
11 we know we need to modernize our facilities
12 to really meet the needs of youth we have
13 now, with programming and education and
14 vocational and mental health services. So
15 that is for the state-operated facilities.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you. And in
17 your testimony you said that funding is to
18 support facilities that provide programming,
19 education, mental health, treatment services.
20 These are all in-house services that your
21 agency is servicing directly to constituents,
22 not third parties?

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

24 Yes. Yes. OCFS operates nine residential

1 juvenile justice facilities, and we staff
2 those facilities with clinicians, educators,
3 program leads. So it's fully state-operated.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Great. State
5 workers, public pension, the whole nine
6 yards.

7 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
8 Yup.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Got it, okay.

10 For the OTDA commissioner, my
11 colleague from Queens has done a wonderful
12 job -- Khaleel Anderson -- of highlighting
13 this problem with the scam involving SNAP and
14 EBT cards and PIN cards. And you point to
15 this problem in your testimony as well.

16 I think we all deal with these type of
17 scams in one form or another dealing with
18 vulnerable populations. And whenever we deal
19 with identity theft, it is such a challenge
20 to properly report it. We get punted from
21 the local police to the state, sometimes the
22 feds. It's a -- there's no one-stop place to
23 really understand what the problem is.

24 And is there anything you're doing

1 administratively to improve the situation?

2 And is there any kind of data that you
3 already have around the victims and what
4 vulnerable populations that we should be
5 focused on in trying to prevent these types
6 of scams?

7 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yes. As I'd
8 mentioned earlier, our messaging to
9 recipients as well as to local districts
10 about how to prevent this from happening to
11 them has been pretty extensive, and we're
12 happy to do more.

13 As I mentioned earlier, we expect to
14 roll out within the next few months, pending
15 USDA's approval of our plan, which we expect
16 to submit later this month. I don't believe
17 that that plan will necessarily require a
18 police report. We'll see.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Okay. Thank you.
20 Very quickly. The migrant services, is that
21 an in-house program that you're -- are there
22 OTDA personnel that's actually going to
23 support this population, or is this an
24 outsourced contract model you're adopting?

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: A quick yes or
2 no. There will be a later opportunity to
3 explain.

4 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: It's a yes
5 and a no.

6 (Laughter.)

7 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. We'll
8 take that up later. Thank you.

9 To the Senate.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. Three
11 minutes to Cordell Cleare.

12 SENATOR CLEARE: Good morning.

13 Commissioner Tietz, I hope I get this
14 right. This is my first hearing.

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Your mic.
16 Your mic.

17 SENATOR CLEARE: I have a question
18 about the employment opportunities for youth,
19 the GIVE initiative. Why is New York City
20 excluded from the program? And if -- how do
21 we increase, how do we get these
22 opportunities to young people in New York
23 City? We know that money is necessary for a
24 lot of our younger New Yorkers, year-round

1 employment is necessary.

2 Can you just answer?

3 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yeah, I'm
4 very pleased about the increase to the
5 minimum wage for the Summer Youth Employment
6 Program, to \$47 million.

7 Admittedly, as I had mentioned earlier
8 the new program is targeted to communities
9 outside of New York City with high rates of
10 violence. I would leave to the Legislature
11 and the Governor how best to address concerns
12 about the absence of that program in New York
13 City.

14 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. And on the
15 SNAP benefit or the public assistance benefit
16 reimbursements, I think -- how long does
17 verification or that determination take from
18 your agency to -- I just want to see how much
19 time is it between that and when someone gets
20 their benefits reimbursed.

21 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: So at this
22 moment we just in the last week received
23 guidance from USDA. So the next step here is
24 for us to submit a plan to USDA. That plan

1 will go to them by the end of the month.

2 Some of the basics around that will be
3 that you'd expect that a recipient would need
4 to report to the local district that -- the
5 loss of the benefits due to theft within
6 30 days.

7 SENATOR CLEARE: You said within
8 three days?

9 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Thirty days.
10 Thirty days.

11 But beyond that, we actually haven't
12 written that response to them yet. So I'll
13 say that the guidance we got from USDA
14 frankly doesn't expect a lot. So our goal
15 here is to keep the administrative burden for
16 recipients and the districts to a minimum and
17 to be --

18 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay, can you just
19 please follow up and let us know how long
20 that's going to take? Because that's very
21 important.

22 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Sure. Yes.

23 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. There were
24 some advocates in here earlier, and I am

1 concerned about what they were speaking
2 about. The plan for AIDS housing for the
3 rest of the state, is there a plan for AIDS
4 housing?

5 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: So a handful
6 of years ago when the blueprint to end the
7 epidemic was developed under the prior
8 governor, it included HASA-like benefits for
9 the rest of the state. The cost of that
10 would be borne at the existing city/state
11 split in terms of the share. So 71 percent
12 of that cost would be borne by the district,
13 and 29 percent would be borne by the state.

14 It was always an option, it remains an
15 option for districts outside of New York City
16 to expand services to people with HIV. None
17 have chosen it.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
19 Assembly.

20 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblyman
21 Conrad, three minutes. (Pause.)

22 Assemblyman Burdick, you're next.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Thank you.

24 And this is a question for the

1 commissioner of OTDA.

2 First, thank you for your testimony
3 and your work. I'm very pleased that OTDA
4 helped provide funding for Freedom Commons,
5 which provides housing for those released
6 from New York State correctional facilities.

7 You mentioned that the budget includes
8 \$128 million for the HHAP program. And just
9 three questions on that. Are there any
10 rollover funds for HHAP? And do you believe
11 that OTDA can help promote an increase in
12 such transitional housing as part of a
13 consortium with HCR and ESSHI and other
14 agencies? And lastly, does OTDA reach out to
15 Osborne, Fortune and other community-based
16 organizations for creating more transitional
17 housing?

18 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Thank you.
19 To your first question, of the \$128 million,
20 we pretty much annually get applications to
21 use those funds in the year, within the same
22 budget year. To the degree that they're not
23 all taken up in that year, they roll to the
24 next year. So the short answer to your

1 question is yes, they roll to the next year.

2 We expect to have applications and
3 approvals in the current year that will use
4 the available funds.

5 Your next question was --

6 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Well, I was just
7 trying to find out whether or not the -- it's
8 128 million plus any funds left over or any
9 reappropriation.

10 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Well, there
11 weren't from last year. So -- so --

12 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: So the answer to
13 that's no.

14 The second question is, you know, do
15 you reach out to Osborne, Fortune and other
16 community-based organizations to increase
17 transitional housing?

18 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: We know each
19 of those organizations well and respect their
20 work. We think that folks coming out of
21 prison are an important constituency and have
22 great needs. We're always happy to engage
23 with them about how best to meet those needs.
24 I'm certainly happy to take up any

1 conversations with them with regard to
2 expanding transitional housing.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: And if I may, do
4 the applications that you have for housing
5 exceed, you know, the available funds?

6 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: So both
7 projects have multiple funding sources.
8 Could include tax credits, could include --
9 so if they're in the city, for example, it
10 could include resources from HPD, what have
11 you.

12 So there's -- I would say that our
13 funds for sure help to encourage others to
14 come on board.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: But for the HHAP
16 program itself, do you have applications,
17 grant applications that exceed 128 million?

18 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Oh, I'm
19 sorry, exceed; I thought you said "seed."
20 Exceed 128 million -- yeah, I'm not certain.
21 I'd have to get back to you. I don't
22 believe --

23 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: If you could,
24 that would be great.

1 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Sure. I
2 don't believe we do in the current year.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Super. Thanks
4 so much.

5 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senate?

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

7 Senator Rolison for five minutes,
8 ranker.

9 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you.

10 It's good to see you. And I have some
11 questions for OCFS.

12 In reference to discussions that we've
13 had in previous Public Protection budget
14 hearings, and we also had conversations on
15 data as it relates to public safety, one of
16 the things that I have heard in my former
17 capacity as mayor of the City of Poughkeepsie
18 for seven years was the inability to find
19 secure beds in cases where individuals have
20 been taken into custody and are being brought
21 through the Family Court system now because
22 of Raise the Age.

23 And in one particular case, an
24 individual who was charged with three gun

1 crimes and there was inability to find a
2 secure bed in two of those cases.

3 And I know that in the Governor's
4 proposed budget there is additional upgrades
5 for capital costs for OCFS facilities. And I
6 know also, too, probably during the pandemic
7 a lot of this building was not taking place
8 because of all the restrictions that
9 everybody found themselves under.

10 Commissioner, can you give us an
11 update on where we are? Because we have had,
12 especially in the criminal justice system --
13 and OCA was here; I asked the same
14 question -- where we're at with that?

15 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
16 Absolutely. Thank you, Senator, for that
17 question.

18 You're correct, the pandemic put a
19 stop on much of our progress with respect to
20 Raise the Age implementation. And as you
21 know, detention is a local obligation. So we
22 are working with all -- at this point it's
23 six plus New York City, so seven counties
24 that operate detention. We have been talking

1 with them since 2017. But then the pandemic
2 hit. And they all, by the way, had expansion
3 plans.

4 So I think we all recognize that we
5 needed additional beds because Raise the Age
6 required that we open specialized secure
7 detention. That didn't exist prior to the
8 law. So all of these counties have expansion
9 plans that were pretty much put on hold.

10 So we do work with counties daily, we
11 provide 24/7 support to counties, to
12 sheriffs, to find beds where they don't exist
13 sometimes. But we often always find
14 solutions for our counties.

15 But currently we are working with our
16 partners' stock and expediting all of those
17 capital plans. Every single county that
18 operates has a capital plan for expansion.
19 They are all moving forward. All told,
20 within the next two to three years there
21 should be 150 additional beds, based on all
22 the plans from all the counties.

23 SENATOR ROLISON: So two to three
24 years, if I understand the time frame. And I

1 would say that, you know, obviously the
2 challenge is real right now, you know, as
3 we're here today.

4 And is it -- it might not necessarily
5 just be more money, it's just capacity in
6 trying to get these beds constructed. What
7 about staffing as it relates to staffing the
8 new beds and/or the new facilities?

9 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

10 Well, I'll tell you. So two to three years
11 is the capital timeline. But we hope to have
12 more beds open up way before then. Because
13 staffing also impacts the capacity issues.
14 So some of our counties, coming directly out
15 of COVID, have challenges in workforce just
16 like every other industry.

17 So we are working with them,
18 encouraging them to increase their salaries
19 for this critical workforce. And many
20 counties have done so. So there are some
21 counties that have really good data on their
22 vacancy rate increasing, and we have some
23 counties that are operating detentions that
24 have beds that they can't fill because they

1 don't have staff.

2 So we do think that the focusing on
3 the staffing will open up beds more quickly,
4 but then ultimately every county, as I said,
5 has a capital plan to expand their physical
6 footprint.

7 SENATOR ROLISON: Do you know -- and
8 if you don't, certainly we can talk offline
9 about this. You talked about the additional
10 150. Do you know currently in the state what
11 our bed capacity is for individuals that need
12 to be remanded for safety reasons, both for
13 themselves and also while they're, you know,
14 awaiting their time through the system?

15 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
16 Yes, I do, actually. For secure and
17 specialized secure -- there's additional
18 nonsecure beds, which I don't have. But for
19 secure and specialized secure, New York City
20 has about 212. And the rest of the state --
21 I'll get back to you. I think it's 179, but
22 I'll get back to you on that.

23 SENATOR ROLISON: Okay, good. And
24 thank you for your discussion with us here

1 today.

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: No
3 problem. Thank you.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
5 Assembly.

6 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to
7 Assemblyman Goodell, for three minutes.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN GOODELL: Thank you very
9 much.

10 For OTDA, thank you very much. I saw
11 in your testimony that you recognized the
12 fiscal cliff and one of the proposals you had
13 was a six-month income disregard, which I
14 think is great. So it helps people get their
15 feet on the ground and establish some
16 employment experience before they start
17 losing benefits.

18 But at the end of six months, you have
19 the same fiscal cliff facing you. Is there
20 anything in this budget that would phase down
21 the benefits on a coordinated basis so that a
22 person can afford to earn more money after
23 the six months?

24 And along the same lines, is there any

1 proposal in this budget to, for example,
2 reduce the premium charge once you lose
3 Medicaid and you go into the health exchange,
4 any discussion about changing the Earned
5 Income Tax Credit so it can jump, for
6 example, at fiscal cliffs? Or maybe even
7 replacing categorical aid with cash, which is
8 much easier to phase down.

9 So other than the six-month extension,
10 what in your budget proposal addresses the
11 fiscal cliff?

12 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Well,
13 Assemblymember, you came with a whole list of
14 ideas. I appreciate that.

15 So I'll note that in the last budget
16 of course you made some important changes
17 with regard to public assistance so that
18 folks could in fact have higher earnings and
19 remain on public assistance. So this is
20 taken together with that.

21 I appreciate your concerns about, you
22 know, more is needed here. And certainly I
23 would leave to the Legislature and the
24 Governor on what exactly more might be useful

1 or needed.

2 With regard to tax credits, I think
3 maybe it's relevant to some degree to the
4 work of the Child Poverty Reduction
5 Advisory Council, which I cochair with
6 Deputy Secretary Jihoon Kim. You know, there
7 were -- you know, we just have pulled that
8 together, had the first couple of meetings,
9 we expect the third meeting in early March.
10 And, you know, in a careful look using data
11 and New York-specific research, we're going
12 to come with recommendations, as charged by
13 the statute. And I would expect that tax
14 credits would likely be a part of that
15 discussion when the time comes.

16 Unfortunately, in advance of this
17 budget, we're not there yet.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN GOODELL: And I appreciate
19 your efforts with the Child Poverty Reduction
20 Task Force.

21 So I would hope as part of that you
22 also look at the impact of our current cash
23 system as it relates to two-parent families.
24 Because as you know, if both parents are

1 together, 100 percent of both parents' income
2 is included in calculating eligibility. But
3 if the parents are separated, the
4 noncustodial parent only has that portion of
5 their income that's attributable to childcare
6 counted. So it's 17 percent for one child,
7 24 percent for two, and so on.

8 It might make long-term sense to us to
9 expand the income disregard regardless of
10 whether you're together or not, as a way of
11 addressing child poverty.

12 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Appreciate
13 it.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

15 To the Senate.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

17 Senator Gounardes.

18 SENATOR GOUNARDES: Thank you.

19 Good morning. I actually want to pick
20 up where my colleague just left off on
21 talking about child poverty.

22 Obviously we're waiting for the
23 recommendations of the Action Council. We
24 know we're required by law to have our child

1 poverty rate halved by 50 percent over the
2 next seven or eight years. And by any
3 objective measure, we know that any way to do
4 that's going to require a substantial
5 increase in child tax credits or in funding
6 families so they can pay for their
7 necessities.

8 Setting that aside, because we know
9 that it's not in this budget, what in this
10 budget proposal -- and this is for both of
11 you -- can we point to that will actually
12 help tackle the child poverty crisis that we
13 have here in New York, where we are one of
14 the highest-poverty states in the nation for
15 children living in poverty.

16 What in this budget proposal can you
17 point to that would help do that, aside from
18 the lack of investment in the child tax
19 credit?

20 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: My fellow
21 commissioner just said that I should start.

22 (Laughter.)

23 SENATOR GOUNARDES: Eeny, meeny, miny,
24 moe.

1 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: So, look,
2 I'd say that there are a few things. One is,
3 of course, adjusting the minimum wage and
4 tacking it to inflation. To the degree that
5 folks can earn more money, it goes a long
6 ways here.

7 In addition, we've got a number of
8 options here. Certainly there are resources
9 to prevent homelessness that we've got on the
10 table which are pretty substantial. The
11 Governor's housing proposals, that new
12 housing compact to build 800,000 units.
13 There are a host of items like that in this
14 budget that, while maybe not specifically in
15 my budget, would in fact have an impact on
16 low-income households.

17 SENATOR GOUNARDES: Okay, thank you.

18 Commissioner?

19 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

20 Yes, thank you. Thank you for that question.

21 I can add that for quite some time
22 OCFS has been investigating the intersection
23 between poverty and child welfare. And we
24 know that poverty and loss of income and

1 material hardships have -- are the greatest
2 predictors, quite frankly, of the risk of a
3 family's involvement in the child welfare
4 system. So we've been looking at
5 anti-poverty tools for quite some time. We
6 are so happy to be part of the advisory
7 council and look forward to those
8 recommendations.

9 But outside of that, we've been
10 focusing on prevention, and most of the time
11 those prevention dollars are provided as
12 services to families. However, in our
13 Child Welfare Unit, we are doing really
14 innovative and creative things and looking at
15 economic and concrete supports as a way to
16 mitigate child welfare involvement. We have
17 a direct --

18 SENATOR GOUNARDES: Commissioner, I'm
19 going to have to cut you off there because I
20 have one more question and 30 seconds. I
21 appreciate it, though, and I'll follow up
22 with you more on those ideas.

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
24 Absolutely.

1 SENATOR GOUNARDES: This question is
2 for Commissioner Tietz, and it's about our
3 shelter allowance. It's my understanding all
4 of our local social service districts can
5 choose to propose to increase their shelter
6 allowance from the bare minimum, and only a
7 number have -- I think only about 20 or so
8 have so far in this state.

9 And I was wondering if you have any
10 insight as to why more jurisdictions have not
11 taken advantage of the opportunity to
12 increase their shelter allowance, especially
13 given that the state picks up the lion's
14 share of that investment.

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: You're out of
16 time; you'll have to answer him later.

17 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: All right.

18 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to
19 Assemblywoman Lunsford.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Thank you
21 very much.

22 My question is for Commissioner
23 Miles-Gustave.

24 OPWDD has been delegating much of its

1 responsibility for our most profoundly
2 disabled children, the ones that are not
3 adequately served by our school system, to
4 OCFS, and mainly our county CPS services. As
5 a result of this, children with profound
6 disabilities have been effectively living in
7 our emergency rooms, sometimes for months on
8 end.

9 Can you talk a little bit about how
10 that's been a burden on your agency, on our
11 county CPS services, and what if anything
12 this budget does to help address that issue?

13 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

14 Thank you so much for that question.

15 So we do see this issue coming up year
16 over year over year. But I will say that we
17 have been collaborating, as state agencies,
18 more now than I think I've ever seen. So we
19 are in constant conversation with OMH and
20 OPWDD and DOH to figure out not only funding
21 streams but potentially even new licensing
22 structures. Like how can we help and support
23 these youth with very complex needs?
24 Particularly coming out of COVID, like the

1 mental health needs are stunning.

2 So we are in constant contact with
3 OPWDD. We do know that child welfare is the
4 system of last resort, unfortunately. But I
5 think the recognition of that is there.

6 And as you know, we have a
7 cross-systems workgroup with our Council on
8 Children and Families. We look at, case by
9 case, children in the emergency room to try
10 to figure out what the next path is for their
11 permanency. So we look at every child and,
12 you know, try not to let any child fall
13 through the cracks. But we are looking to
14 systematize that -- that cross-collaboration
15 with respect to the potentially new funding
16 streams or new licensing structures.

17 So there's no specific funding in the
18 budget right now, but we've been known at
19 OCFS to use our existing funding quite
20 creatively. So we're committed to trying to
21 solve this problem.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: I think this
23 is a case that illustrates well the need to
24 start to blend some of our funding streams.

1 Particularly when you have these children who
2 have funds that come from different agencies,
3 it becomes very complicated, the
4 administrative cost is very high.

5 To that end, I also wanted to ask you
6 a little bit about the \$17 million for
7 voluntary foster care agencies. Can you
8 speak a little bit about the loss of the
9 Medicaid funding for that and what you're
10 doing to help alleviate that issue?

11 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
12 Absolutely. Thank you.

13 So the IMD concern -- IMD stands for
14 Institutions of Mental Disease. It's a
15 federal Medicaid concern. And so I'll make a
16 very long story short. But IMD facilities
17 are 17 beds or more, where the primary focus
18 is to diagnose and treat for mental disease.

19 In us rolling out Family First, our
20 volunteer agencies have increased their level
21 of care. They had to do that to continue to
22 receive Title IV-E funding. So we're at a
23 point right now where some of our voluntary
24 foster care agencies could potentially be

1 considered IMDs, and then they would no
2 longer be able to draw down federal matching
3 funds.

4 So the Governor recognized this. This
5 is a problem. We are talking with our
6 partners at DOH. We've been talking with
7 them for quite some time. And so we're going
8 to solve this problem. But the 17 million in
9 the budget is a recognition that this may be
10 an opportunity to transform our system. And
11 our voluntary agencies need investment to do
12 so. So that 17 million will go in a variety
13 of ways -- to hire more staff or make
14 programmatic changes or even some structural
15 changes to bypass the IMD definition.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Thank you.

17 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

18 To the Senate.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
20 much.

21 To Senator Jessica Scarcella-Spanton.

22 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you.

23 And I want to make sure I don't say
24 this incorrectly, so Commissioner

1 MILES-Gustave.

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

3 Yes, thank you.

4 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Okay,
5 good. Fellow hyphenated names.

6 (Laughter.)

7 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: I just
8 want to bounce back to the childcare stuff
9 really quick.

10 In November it was announced, after
11 the childcare desert funds had dried up, that
12 they were going to make the unused funds
13 available. We have a few facilities in my
14 district, one specifically which is expanding
15 her daycare facility --

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Jessica, I'm
17 sorry, you only get three minutes on this
18 panel. You do get 10 minutes a little later.
19 Sorry. Thank you.

20 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Yeah, that
21 one I knew.

22 (Laughter.)

23 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Oh, they
24 put it -- okay.

1 So yeah, for the childcare desert
2 funds. One of them, they let her know that
3 they were going to make them available and
4 they'll let those eligible providers know.
5 She's in the process of reopening a new
6 facility. Do you know when those grants,
7 those childcare desert grants, may be made
8 eligible again?

9 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

10 Sure. So our -- we had two specific RFPs.
11 So Childcare Desert 1 was for new providers
12 who wanted to open up new spaces in childcare
13 deserts. So those have been pre-awarded, and
14 people are working towards getting up and
15 running.

16 Childcare Desert 2 is for existing
17 providers who wanted to expand their slots.
18 So those have also been pre-awarded, but the
19 pre-awards are working towards getting the
20 licensure necessary to open up those
21 additional spots.

22 So I don't think we've made awards to
23 the second group, that Childcare 2, but we
24 can definitely get back to you. If you know

1 someone in your -- one of your constituents
2 was waiting for an answer, we can for sure
3 get back to you. But all that is moving.

4 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Okay,
5 great. And I guess my second question to
6 that was if you're doing more than just
7 expanding slots, so she's opening an actual
8 second facility nearby, same childcare
9 desert, to expand care, would she be eligible
10 for that? Since she's not technically new
11 and she's opening a new facility.

12 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: It
13 would depend on her modality of care, if she
14 was a center versus family-based. So we
15 would have to look at that specific scenario.

16 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Okay. So
17 I'll make sure I send the specifics over to
18 you. But thank you so much.

19 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: No
20 problem.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
22 Assembly.

23 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to
24 Assemblyman Simone. You need someone to give

1 you a chair. Thank you.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN SIMONE: Hi, I have two
3 questions, the first question for
4 Commissioner Tietz. Hi, Dan.

5 I thank the Governor for the
6 significant investment to assist New York
7 City providing aid to asylum seekers, many
8 who come to the Port Authority in my
9 district. Is your office also advocating for
10 additional federal aid and relief in the city
11 and across the state, and can the city count
12 on additional support?

13 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: So -- I
14 appreciate the question. The budget
15 contemplated essentially covering a third of
16 the estimated cost. And certainly the
17 Governor and governors from other states that
18 are so affected are speaking to the
19 White House and continuing to urge additional
20 funding and resources in coordination with
21 regard to migrants. So that -- that is
22 ongoing.

23 I think at the present moment the idea
24 was that essentially at the existing social

1 services share, as split between districts
2 and the state, we sort of kept to that
3 formula. So the sort of sheltering and
4 services related cost here represents about
5 29 percent of the estimate for the city's
6 expense to date.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN SIMONE: This is for
8 Commissioner Miles-Gustave.

9 Students are going to be recovering
10 from the COVID learning gap for years to
11 come. I often hear from after-school
12 programs on lack of funding in my district.
13 How does the budget reconcile filling that
14 need while offering no increases in the
15 Empire State After School Program and cutting
16 the Advantage Program by 5 million?

17 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
18 there is no actual cut in the -- either
19 Advantage or Empire. What the budget does
20 this year, it proposes to move the funding
21 from SED to OCFS, because we are in fact
22 operating those programs. We facilitate all
23 the contracts, we do them ourselves in-house.

24 So the Advantage After School and

1 Empire contracts have been troubled because
2 of COVID. Things shut down, as you know.
3 But we have been working with all of our
4 providers to try to get them back on track.
5 Like we had to be slightly nimble during the
6 pandemic, and the contract framework changed
7 from, say, an expenditure base to an
8 attendance base. But now, with talking with
9 the advocates, talking to providers, and at
10 their request, we are transitioning those
11 contracts back to expenditure-based.

12 So those providers are in the middle
13 of a contract amendment right now. And trust
14 me, we have tons of people at our office
15 working on this to make sure that those
16 payments get out.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN SIMONE: Thank you.

18 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senate?

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

20 Senator Persaud for three minutes,
21 follow-up.

22 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

23 Commissioner Tietz, I just want to go
24 back to you again. Could you tell us what of

1 the \$1 billion that's covering the migrant
2 services, the funding that's allocated to the
3 National Guard, could you tell us what it's
4 covering? What is it that the National Guard
5 is doing with that funding?

6 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yeah,
7 they're actually supplying National Guard
8 troops to assist with the sheltering and
9 services in New York City. So there's
10 approximately 900 National Guard troops right
11 now serving, and that represents the cost of
12 that service. They don't do security, they
13 do program-related work.

14 In fact, I think I was in your
15 district the other day visiting just one of
16 those locations, and I have to say that the
17 National Guard troop that was in charge there
18 was frankly extraordinary. I was like, do
19 you want a different job? I can give you a
20 different job.

21 (Laughter.)

22 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: He was quite
23 good. I was very impressed.

24 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. And can you

1 tell us, what is the status of the
2 applications to the federal government for
3 the hot meals program?

4 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yes, we are
5 expecting -- the application is in to them
6 for review. We expect to hear something
7 soon.

8 SENATOR PERSAUD: Like in a month, two
9 months?

10 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yeah, I
11 would say within the --

12 SENATOR PERSAUD: The end of the year?

13 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: No, no, I
14 think -- I think within the next 60 days we
15 can expect to have an answer, yeah.

16 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. And if the --
17 I'm not saying "if." When our application is
18 approved, how long do you think the program
19 will take to roll out?

20 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: It's well in
21 order. I would say that we've got a staffer
22 who you know well who is a go-getter on this,
23 and I expect that we'll have this up and
24 ready very quickly.

1 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay, thank you.

2 And Commissioner Suzanne, again, I'm
3 finally coming to you to ask you a question.
4 It's about the minimum wage.

5 And you heard me talk about the COLA.
6 What are you going to do for -- to push for
7 an increase in the COLA on your side?

8 And, you know, we have the
9 \$3.8 million to fund the minimum wage
10 increase, but that's not enough, because we
11 are -- we're bringing these workers, these
12 critical workers, up to a minimum wage, but
13 they're still dependent on social services.
14 What are we doing for that?

15 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

16 Thank you for that question, Senator. I know
17 every industry's workforce is suffering.
18 That is without a doubt.

19 I do know that -- if you recall,
20 several administrations ago, right, there was
21 no COLA. So we are happy that there is a
22 COLA, there was a COLA last year, and there
23 is a COLA in the budget this year.

24 You know, I know that we all want more

1 in the budget. But the COLA that's applied
2 to the OCFS programs will support the
3 voluntary foster care agencies, and they went
4 through challenges last year as well. The
5 good thing is that the budget also -- the
6 language in the appropriation recognizes like
7 the very unique nature of our foster care
8 agency rates. So we're hoping that this will
9 be a benefit to them.

10 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

11 I think I was cheated on my time.

12 (Laughter.)

13 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

14 Thank you.

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

16 Assembly.

17 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to

18 Assemblywoman Clark.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Hello. Thank
20 you. My questions are also for Commissioner
21 Miles-Gustave.

22 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

23 Gus-tauv, no "ay."

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: No "ay,"

1 Gustave. Got it.

2 So I have three quick questions on
3 childcare that I'm hoping I can get in.

4 I'm really looking forward to the
5 Childcare Task Force meeting and finally
6 getting to their very tough job of figuring
7 out how to get us to universal childcare here
8 in the state. What we have seen, I think, is
9 that right now we do have dollars in the
10 system and they're still not being used.
11 They're not being used by families, we have
12 providers start closing their doors.

13 I appreciate the investment into the
14 workforce, but I just think these continued
15 one-time investments or using these
16 stabilization grants isn't sustainable.
17 Truly if we're going to get sustainable, I
18 think we need to get to the true cost of
19 care, not market rate. The previous
20 governor -- we passed in the Assembly a move
21 to true-cost care, allowing that to replace
22 our market rate. That was vetoed by the
23 former governor.

24 Could we get support, if we get it

1 through the Legislature, to move to a
2 true-cost model for New York so that we could
3 start to raise wages?

4 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

5 Well, I can say that the market rate increase
6 I do think has been a significant increase
7 for all providers, like really cash in their
8 pockets.

9 And I would say that we honestly do
10 need the federal government. I mean,
11 increasing wages, absolutely, we all want to
12 do that. But we need the federal government
13 to pass that Build Back Better.

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Okay.

15 Second, I appreciate the also
16 increased -- I mean, I do want to just say
17 that we can't pay workforce more. No one can
18 afford to pay more. Families can't afford to
19 pay more. So how are we sustaining wage
20 increases without really looking at true
21 cost?

22 On the expansion of eligibility, I
23 think it's great, but at 93,000 even for a
24 family, what happens when that one parent

1 makes a dollar more? All of a sudden they go
2 from maybe paying \$200 a month to \$2,000 a
3 month -- we're going to lose that parent. I
4 understand this is the federal maximum, but I
5 really think we need to start looking at
6 state funds to have step-downs so we don't
7 lose parents out of the workforce the moment
8 they make a dollar more than eligibility. So
9 I'd just add that.

10 And then as for the employer piece --
11 and what we've heard from our hospitals and
12 other systems, our emergency workers, our
13 front-line workers during COVID is we need
14 24-hour drop-in centers. We need childcare
15 to work when overtime is all of a sudden
16 offered.

17 Can we start to really look at how we
18 pay through the subsidy system to make it
19 follow the child and the family, not
20 attendance, and really look at a way we could
21 support these 24-hour drop-in centers?

22 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
23 not aligned with our assistance, but aligned
24 with our providers, we do have nontraditional

1 hours, and that was an incentive in our
2 childcare desert grants.

3 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

4 Thank you, Commissioner.

5 We go to the Senate.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

7 We have Senator Ashby.

8 SENATOR ASHBY: Thank you,
9 Madam Chair.

10 Thank you, Commissioners, for being
11 here.

12 OCFS has a great innovative program
13 with the family-type adult homes. And I was
14 wondering if you could give me a policy
15 update with that, because one of the things
16 that's come up in my district is the hospice
17 waiver that goes along with that. So you
18 have elderly folks in place here who are used
19 to this family-type adult home being their
20 home, and then when they require hospice,
21 there's a very big gap in terms of being able
22 to remain in their home and receive treatment
23 there.

24 And it's caused a bit of turmoil, and

1 I'm wondering if you could give me an update
2 and comment on that.

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
4 thank you for that question.

5 I'm not familiar with your specific
6 scenario, but I can say that our family-type
7 home for adults has been the topic of our
8 conversation with DOH for quite a bit. So
9 we're collaborating with DOH to look at what
10 is needed -- is there a need for a change in
11 our licensing of our family-type homes for
12 adults? Because you're right, it is not
13 supposed to be nursing level of care. But we
14 do want people to be able to age in their
15 homes -- and that is really their home, for
16 all intents and purposes -- gracefully and
17 safely.

18 So we can get back to you. If you
19 have a very specific scenario, I'm happy to
20 get back to you.

21 But I also want to point out that you
22 all know the Governor issued the executive
23 order to create the Master Plan for Aging,
24 the state's first Master Plan for Aging, with

1 you, Commissioner and Acting Director, for
2 your work and your testimonies today.

3 I'm Assemblywoman Taylor Darling, and
4 I represent the 18th Assembly District in
5 Nassau County. I also currently serve as the
6 chair of the Subcommittee on Foster Care.

7 I'm grateful this year's budget
8 provides us some opportunities to attempt to
9 make the human services industries whole, but
10 we have some serious issues that we have to
11 really plan out this year. So we must
12 increase the salaries for foster care direct
13 care workers. At their current salaries,
14 foster care direct care workers aren't able
15 to live on the salary alone, requiring them
16 to have multiple jobs.

17 The turnover rate currently for these
18 workers across the state is around
19 50 percent. This is disastrous for a lot of
20 reasons, but we have to always stress the
21 continuity of care that is necessary for our
22 children and families, and we need these to
23 increase positive outcomes. So where we
24 stand right now, there is not a lot positive

1 happening in this industry with these workers
2 and the families they serve.

3 So I wanted to hear your thoughts
4 about the direct care workers.

5 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

6 Thank you for that question.

7 So I would agree that our foster care
8 population is also in crisis, that workforce
9 is in crisis. And we do recognize that the
10 voluntary agencies and the foster care
11 workforce, they are the backbone of what we
12 do. Like they are the frontline workers of
13 all of our work.

14 So I think we've done a couple of
15 things to help the industry -- not only just
16 foster care workers that work in congregate
17 settings, but foster boarding homes, like
18 foster families. So we have raised the MSAR
19 for foster family boarding homes. And you
20 may have noticed we had a settlement last
21 year where we required the local districts to
22 pay 100 percent of the MSAR for foster
23 boarding homes. So that's coming I think
24 full circle this year.

1 And then we did promise that we'd also
2 release an extraordinary rate, which would
3 provide foster parents with a higher rate to
4 support youth with complex needs so those
5 youth can still remain in that foster home.
6 So that extraordinary rate regulation will be
7 issued pretty soon. That was the third part
8 of our settlement promise.

9 So those rates will be out shortly.
10 We plan to follow that up with some policy.
11 So that's what we're doing on the foster
12 boarding home side.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DARLING: Great.

14 Okay, I have two more questions.

15 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

16 Sure.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DARLING: I'm concerned
18 about the restoration of the 65/35 child
19 welfare funding to 75/25, as well as OCFS's
20 shift from mandated reporting to mandated
21 supporting.

22 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
23 the 62/38 open-ended funding -- as you've
24 mentioned, just landmark funding -- with your

1 unwavering support, we were able to issue
2 that.

3 It's been one of the major tools for
4 the reduction in the foster care numbers.
5 Because counties use this open-ended funding
6 stream, New York has one of the lowest foster
7 care admission rates in the country. And we
8 do point to that funding stream for the
9 field.

10 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

11 To the Senate.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

13 Three minute follow-up for Chair
14 Jabari Brisport.

15 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

16 Thank you, Commissioner Miles-Gustave.
17 I know we've been all figuring that today.
18 But a pleasure. Thanks for taking my
19 questions again.

20 I think my first just follow-up about
21 the Governor's pilot program, the tri-share
22 program between the state, employer and
23 parent -- we've seen issues with tying
24 healthcare to people's jobs, including but

1 not limited to people staying in jobs that
2 are not good for them or that they don't like
3 because they want to keep their healthcare.

4 Do you see any similar issues coming
5 up with tying childcare to somebody's current
6 specific employment?

7 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: I
8 mean, I see your point. But I think it's
9 just an incentive.

10 I don't see it as a negative, I see it
11 as more of a positive than anything else,
12 because there's so many industries that do
13 not even recognize the importance of
14 childcare. So these employers will not only
15 recognize the importance but invest in their
16 employees. So I do believe the good would
17 outweigh the bad here.

18 SENATOR BRISPORT: Okay, thank you.

19 And my second question is just about
20 uptake rates. You know, in the Governor's
21 proposal she talks about how many more
22 children will become eligible, but the number
23 that is eligible is not the number that
24 participates.

1 What's the current uptake rate for
2 childcare assistance in New York?

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
4 there are 100,000 families that are eligible
5 for subsidy. About 66,000 get it every
6 month. Annualized was 100,000.

7 So no, we do have a lot of work to do
8 to get that number up. And I do think that
9 the streamlining of the application and
10 making things more electronic and accessible
11 will increase that.

12 SENATOR BRISPORT: I like
13 streamlining. I think eliminating
14 means-testing in general would be the best
15 way to streamline.

16 But in addition to streamlining the
17 application there's also the issue of not
18 enough providers, right? So while waiting
19 lists -- does OCFS keep a list of how many
20 kids are on waiting lists to even get
21 childcare around the state?

22 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
23 my understanding is that there are no
24 waitlists around the state. Counties don't

1 have waitlists anymore. It was more money to
2 open cases. And granted, a lot of providers
3 have low enrollment because we're still
4 coming out of the pandemic.

5 So I think ultimately we need more
6 childcare spots, absolutely. We have
7 deserts. So those deserts are being filled
8 right now. But there are many providers that
9 are out there that have open spots.

10 So we don't keep private-sector
11 waitlists. I'm sure there are some daycare
12 centers in New York City that have waitlists.
13 But OCFS wouldn't keep that.

14 As far as waitlists for subsidy, local
15 districts don't have waitlists. There are no
16 waitlists for any local districts that I know
17 of.

18 SENATOR BRISPORT: Okay, I wish you
19 had attended our hearing on the childcare
20 crisis a few weeks ago. You would have heard
21 providers saying that they've never seen
22 their waitlists so long in the history of
23 their time being a provider.

24 My last thing is in terms of child

1 welfare, New York State is still continuing
2 to fail to reimburse counties at the
3 statutorily required 65 percent. We're still
4 doing 62 percent. Why is that?

5 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

6 Well, 62/38 I believe is in the
7 appropriations. So that's the share that
8 gets appropriated year after year.

9 SENATOR BRISPORT: But do you think we
10 lose and do decreased services from doing
11 less than 65 percent?

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: You'll have to
13 follow up with him afterwards, sorry.

14 And everyone, remember, when you get a
15 clock, it's both for you to ask and for your
16 testifiers to answer. So testifiers, we're
17 hoping that you will follow up in writing on
18 questions you couldn't answer.

19 And if you get them to both Helene and
20 myself, we will make sure to get them to all
21 committee members. Thank you.

22 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

23 We go to Assemblywoman Forrest for
24 three minutes.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: Thank you.

2 My question -- thank you,
3 Commissioners. My question is for
4 Commissioner -- I'm not going to mess it up,
5 I promise -- Miles-Gustave.

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
7 Thank you.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: Okay. Just a
9 question on the stabilization grants, right?

10 The stabilization grants two years ago
11 were around \$1 billion, and we lost childcare
12 providers. Right? Will this year's proposal
13 of 389 million stabilize the sector?

14 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
15 Thank you for your question.

16 I think it will help. I think the
17 \$1 billion stabilization was in the height of
18 the pandemic, when we knew we couldn't have
19 childcare providers close even when schools
20 were closed. So that was a critical lifeline
21 for our community of providers.

22 And then last year's Stabilization
23 2.0, we've been hearing from providers that
24 helped a lot. A majority of that

1 stabilization incentive went towards
2 workforce.

3 So I do think this Round 3 will help.
4 We do have limited pandemic funds, so we're
5 using the remaining funds just -- wisely.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: Okay. But we
7 lost with 1 billion, and now we're going to
8 be okay with 398 million. Okay.

9 My next question for you is regarding
10 the data matching for children's benefits.
11 We had talked about it in the hearing over
12 the fall at the public assistance hearing.
13 But in the Governor's State of the State she
14 mentioned data matching for children's
15 benefits. However, her actual written budget
16 doesn't have anything regarding that.

17 Can you tell us more about this
18 program for data matching for children's
19 benefits? What would that mean for our
20 programs, and maybe the programs for other
21 vulnerable populations such as older adults?

22 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: Is
23 that for Commissioner Tietz? I'm sorry.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: No, it's for

1 you, yes.

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

3 Oh. I don't understand the question. Data
4 matching for --

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: So data
6 matching would be where if someone puts in
7 information about this program SNAP, it would
8 then populate and be able to say for --

9 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Okay.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: Oh, he's -- I
11 thought it was for you. I really was --

12 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I apologize.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: OTDA does SNAP.

14 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yes.

15 So yes, there actually is a unified
16 application now. It does that now.

17 So outside of New York City -- so
18 New York City has New York City Access, which
19 does much the same thing -- but if you put
20 in, you know, you apply for SNAP or you apply
21 for public assistance, you apply for
22 Medicaid, there is -- it's shared. So
23 there's a single application now.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: Have you heard

1 any reports on the effectiveness of this
2 single application? Because even in New York
3 City it has hiccups, but ...

4 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yeah, I
5 won't suggest this is perfect. I mean, I'll
6 note that the integrated eligibility system,
7 which we're working on now, and I think the
8 first bits will roll out in about three and a
9 half years, will do this much better.

10 But yes, we're all heading in that
11 direction.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: Thank you,
13 Commissioners.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.
15 To the Senate.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
17 I think I'm the last Senator, so to
18 speak.

19 So going back to the migrant services
20 and assistance money that the Governor put in
21 her budget, so is it a billion dollars for
22 New York City -- oh --

23 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Ten minutes on
24 the clock for Senator Krueger.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thanks.

2 Is it a billion dollars for New York
3 City or statewide?

4 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: It's largely
5 for New York City.

6 So it's a billion dollars. The vast
7 majority of it, some 75 percent of that money
8 is in the same kind of reimbursement that the
9 city knows well for shelter and services. So
10 that's the biggest chunk of it.

11 Some of this is in-kind, but it's
12 all -- even that in-kind is for New York
13 City. So that's referencing some Medicaid
14 costs and some National Guard costs and what
15 have you.

16 The only portion of this which is
17 somewhat arguably not New York City is the
18 \$25 million for resettlement.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So when my
20 paperwork says that 741 million of this
21 billion is used to provide New York City with
22 29 percent reimbursement for supportive
23 services and assistance, my mayor is telling
24 me that the costs are radically higher

1 already than what a third coming from the
2 state would be.

3 So is this really -- you're going to
4 pay 29 percent of supportive services and
5 assistance, so it could be more than
6 741 million in order to get to that -- keep
7 at that 29 percent level?

8 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: The budget
9 proposes to spend 741 plus the existing
10 \$26 million to get to \$767 million, for
11 essentially 29 percent of the city's estimate
12 for shelter costs from earlier in this state
13 fiscal year through June of '24. That's
14 what's on offer here right now.

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So you've
16 mentioned Medicaid costs and also safety net
17 costs. So those aren't really new dollars
18 because they're for migrants, those are
19 benefits that if you're eligible in New York
20 State, you get them. So we might see a
21 projected increase in some costs because of
22 this population.

23 But I don't think that should really
24 be counted as migrant funds, do you?

1 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: To the
2 degree that that Medicaid expense is in fact
3 for migrants, I think that it could be fairly
4 counted in that billion dollars.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And what about
6 the safety net money?

7 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: The same is
8 true there.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Why? There's not
10 a new program, safety net for migrants, is
11 there?

12 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: No, but
13 there is some tracking of course of migrants
14 within the HRAs, right? So doing the
15 eligibility, they are now keeping track of
16 who are -- you know, the piece of paper you
17 come with. Right? So these are all
18 documented migrants. They're mostly asylum
19 seekers. They are paroled into the country.
20 Based on that eligibility status they may or
21 may not get safety net assistance. That can
22 be tracked.

23 And so this represents a portion of
24 that cost.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So what I'm
2 trying to get at is trying to understand, of
3 the billion dollars defined as being for
4 migrant services in the budget, what
5 percentage of that billion is actually new
6 money versus dollars that would have been in
7 the budget anyway, we just call it something
8 different this year?

9 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I would say
10 again that the vast majority is new money, if
11 only because -- I mean, the 741 by itself is
12 clearly new money. It wouldn't otherwise be
13 in this equation.

14 I'm happy to take a look further and
15 answer your question maybe with greater
16 detail, but I think it is fair to describe
17 that billion dollars as largely new money.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: What are we
19 paying the National Guard \$162 million for?

20 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I think it's
21 covering the cost of the -- that personnel
22 and their services for a lengthy period of
23 time. It's 900 --

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So current or

1 going retroactive?

2 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yeah,
3 it's -- it's current. It's right through
4 that same period. So this is essentially
5 looking at -- this is an estimate of how much
6 National Guard troops we would need to
7 continue to serve in the way in which they
8 are now.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Starting
10 April 1st going forward, for the new year.

11 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yes.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Does the state
13 pay anything for them in the previous year?

14 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I'm sorry?

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Did the state pay
16 anything for their services for the current
17 fiscal year?

18 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I'm
19 uncertain. And we can certainly follow up
20 with you on that.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. And what
22 happens if the city's costs just continue to
23 grow and grow and grow for this population
24 far beyond what's projected in the Governor's

1 budget?

2 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I think it's
3 a very difficult equation all the way around.

4 Certainly we're concerned about the
5 capacity of the city to continue to take
6 migrants at this rate. I think we're
7 hopeful -- you know, myself here at OTDA, my
8 sister state agencies and the city are
9 hopeful that with the changes that the
10 federal government's made at the end of
11 December, beginning of January, that we'd see
12 a decrease in the number of migrants.

13 I'll note that last week we saw a
14 slight dip in terms of entrants to DHS or to
15 HERCs. So -- but for sure it will be
16 challenging going forward, and we stand ready
17 to assist further as needed.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Because of the
19 growth in the migrant population, there seems
20 to be almost a triggered new set of problems
21 for people who were in our homeless shelter
22 system already -- I think partly because of
23 just the volume of people, where they can
24 possibly go, how many providers there are who

1 actually can be in the business of operating
2 services within shelters and HERCs and
3 whatever else we call them next.

4 Does the state have any plan to help
5 us with that? I know we don't have enough
6 not-for-profit service providers to take the
7 contracts even for the new shelters for the,
8 quote, unquote, traditional homeless
9 population. So forget getting them to take
10 on all these giant HERCs. I mean, you
11 know -- you're shaking your head yes because
12 you also know this.

13 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yes.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And you worked
15 for the city previously, so I know you know
16 this.

17 How can the state be more helpful?
18 Because this is really a growing crisis
19 that's not going to go away tomorrow.

20 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I would say
21 that the National Guard troops' presence is
22 vital at this moment. It is 900 heads we
23 wouldn't otherwise have.

24 You're exactly right that there's not

1 a bottomless pit of nonprofit providers ready
2 and able, willing, right here, right now, to
3 staff up some new shelter. The city is in
4 over 80 hotels. The -- the -- rather than
5 traditional, how about nonmigrant shelter
6 residents -- actually there's been only a
7 slight uptick in this same period, mostly on
8 the families with children side. So there's
9 maybe around 49,000. But for migrants, the
10 shelter census actually wouldn't be much
11 changed from a year ago.

12 But with, you know, some 21,000 in DHS
13 and another 8,000 in HERCs that are overseen
14 by the city's Health + Hospitals, it's --
15 it's become a serious challenge to operate
16 the entire system.

17 I'll frankly admit that I worry at
18 times about the potential collapse of DHS.
19 But for what was -- what we did with regard
20 to the HERCs, which I'm very grateful for
21 emergency services in New York City and
22 New York State and for Health + Hospitals in
23 stepping up to do what was necessary. And I
24 think, you know, with my other state

1 colleagues, we will continue to step up as
2 necessary.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I am also very
4 grateful for all of their work. I am just
5 afraid that there's just going to be, at some
6 point in the next few months, a total
7 breakdown of these systems because they can't
8 absorb and handle this many assignments at
9 one time. So I share your appreciation, but
10 I also -- I really feel like we are literally
11 at the verge of just total chaos in trying to
12 operate these programs. And we need to come
13 up with more ideas and more assistance for
14 the City of New York on these issues.

15 Now, I'm biased, obviously; I
16 represent Manhattan, and everybody's in my
17 island. And I'm not saying they shouldn't
18 be, I'm just saying we need a lot more help
19 coming into the future.

20 I will give back my one minute. Thank
21 you.

22 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

23 We go to Assemblyman Gallahan,
24 three minutes.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN GALLAHAN: Thank you,
2 Madam Chair.

3 Thank you both for your testimony
4 today and all you do every day to make New
5 York a better place to live.

6 My question is for Commissioner Tietz
7 regarding ERAP and LRAP.

8 We know that 225,000 checks have been
9 cut and that the application period ended on
10 the 20th of January. It's my understanding
11 that only applicants who have applied through
12 October 31, 2022, are being reviewed. And
13 will applicants after October 31, 2022, also
14 be reviewed going forward?

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: So we're
16 reviewing applications received right through
17 January 20. We're currently paying for those
18 that are otherwise eligible and approved
19 through November 30.

20 Looking at resources available, my
21 expectation is that for the non-subsidized
22 housing we'll be in the ballpark.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN GALLAHAN: Okay. How much
24 of the appropriated money from the fiscal

1 year budget '23 has been awarded so far, and
2 how much is left?

3 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: So I don't
4 know off the top of my head in terms of the
5 amount of appropriation for '23. We've
6 distributed, as you noted, about
7 2.82 billion. I think the total is
8 somewhere -- leaving aside LRAP and the over
9 80 program, but ERAP alone, I think the total
10 is somewhere around 3.1 billion. So we have
11 around 300 million or so left.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN GALLAHAN: Thank you.

13 And as far as the LRAP, how much money
14 from the 125 million for LRAP in the fiscal
15 year '23 appropriation has been awarded to
16 recipients? And how much money would be left
17 there?

18 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Almost all
19 of it has. That -- there's a handful of
20 millions left in the LRAP program.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN GALLAHAN: Okay, thank
22 you.

23 And should the state reopen LRAP with
24 new funding?

1 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I'm sorry,
2 say again? Say again?

3 ASSEMBLYMAN GALLAHAN: Should the
4 state open LRAP again with new funding?

5 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I leave, of
6 course, to the Legislature and the Governor
7 on how best to address the need.

8 We've not -- the Governor's budget
9 doesn't propose to add any additional state
10 resources to this program. But certainly if
11 there is an interest, I leave to you all how
12 best to address.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN GALLAHAN: So I'll let you
14 know in my district that I hear quite
15 frequently from landlords saying "I've never
16 been made whole." They can't maintain their
17 properties and keep a good place to live for
18 their tenants. They're broke, they can't pay
19 their taxes, they can't pay the utilities.

20 So it's paramount that we do something
21 for those folks. Thank you very much.

22 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Of course.

23 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: The Senate is
24 finished with questioners, so we're going to

1 just keep calling on Assemblymembers.

2 Assemblywoman Simon.

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.

4 Thank you.

5 So, Commissioner Tietz, I have a
6 question to sort of follow up some of the
7 recent questions about the issues around
8 migrants and being able to work, which I know
9 is federal, but there have been relaxations.

10 What is the state doing to help kind
11 of push the feds into allowing people to be
12 able to work more quickly? Because right now
13 they're working off the books, they're not
14 protected. And they're not paying taxes.

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: So you're
16 correct that this is federal rules.

17 So the -- in the normal course for an
18 asylum seeker, as I understand it, you would
19 have to apply, and then it's essentially 180
20 days from receipt of your application that
21 you would have work authorization.

22 I know that the Governor, along with
23 sister state governors, is urging our federal
24 friends to permit work authorization, to

1 provide work authorization sooner.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.

3 And Commissioner Miles-Gustave, I have
4 two questions.

5 One is I notice that after-school
6 programs are being moved to OCFS. Advantage
7 After School is going to lose \$5 million. So
8 one question is, like what's the purpose of
9 this? Is there -- does anybody think we need
10 fewer after-school programs?

11 And then the other issue is the
12 proposed elimination of the Committee on
13 Special Education state share to those
14 residential programs. And my question is,
15 who's going to be picking up that tab, and do
16 they have that money?

17 And also, what about the out-of-state
18 placements that actually cost us more and in
19 some cases are highly problematic in other
20 ways?

21 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
22 Thank you for your question.

23 So just to clarify, the after-school
24 funding is moving from SED's budget to OCFS's

1 budget because we've functionally been
2 operating these programs for the past several
3 years. So it just made more sense for it to
4 come to our budget.

5 And there is not an actual decrease.
6 We are looking to consolidate the future RFP,
7 to consolidate the programmatic requirements,
8 which will help us consolidate the payments
9 and the claims. So there's Empire and
10 Advantage; our hope is to let a consolidated
11 RFP for the next contract year.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Like a cost
13 savings, you're saying.

14 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: I
15 don't think it was a cost savings, but we can
16 surely get back to you.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Okay. Please,
18 because we have -- and then the other thing
19 is the CSE state share on the residential
20 programs.

21 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
22 Yes, thank you.

23 So that was an extension, that that's
24 the current operations currently. We

1 don't -- the state does not pay that share.
2 It's to the CSEs and the local districts. So
3 under the proposal in the budget is to make
4 that permanent.

5 But for the past several years, I
6 think folks realized that these children are
7 in voluntary agencies placed by CSEs in the
8 custody of local districts. So that's the
9 current operation of the fiscal -- that
10 share.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: I'll follow up.
12 Thank you.

13 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

14 Assemblyman Pirozzolo.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN PIROZZOLO: Good
16 afternoon. Thank you both for being here. I
17 truly appreciate it.

18 My questions are really going to go to
19 Commissioner Miles-Gustave.

20 Unfortunately, you know, a lot of the
21 work that we get to do, some of it is
22 pleasant, some of it is unpleasant. And my
23 question is going to go into more -- probably
24 the most unpleasant things that come up.

1 But could you just give me a brief
2 overview of what your office does when it
3 comes to the abuse, exploitation and
4 trafficking of children?

5 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
6 we have the Safe Harbour laws in New York
7 State, I think one of the most supportive and
8 helpful.

9 So we have divisions in our OCFS
10 office that provide -- we have funding that
11 provides allocations to local counties. So
12 human trafficking is something that the local
13 districts provide services and support.

14 But again, we have Safe Harbour laws.
15 So the point of that is that we're not --
16 we're no longer criminalizing young women
17 for, say, prostitution if they've been
18 trafficked. And I think the point of
19 focusing on trafficking is to make sure that
20 we get to the trauma of that trafficked
21 individual. So we take trafficking and
22 trafficking prevention very seriously.

23 And in the rollout of our Family First
24 implementation, there are several voluntary

1 agencies that were interested in becoming one
2 of our QRTP exceptions, which is an EMPOWER
3 program specifically for youth who are at
4 risk of being trafficked. So there's now a
5 congregate setting for those potentially
6 trafficked youth.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN PIROZZOLO: So I
8 appreciate that. But do you have any
9 suggestions or any way we could work with you
10 so -- the victims certainly need as much help
11 as they can get, but what do you see that we
12 can do, or what can we do to go after the
13 people who are actually doing the abuse?

14 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
15 Yes. Such a huge issue. I do not disagree
16 with you.

17 I know that some of our voluntary
18 agencies and local districts are working in
19 partnership with their local law enforcement,
20 with the DA. There were situations that
21 happened maybe several years ago in one of
22 our voluntary agencies where the FBI was
23 brought into this specific case. So I know
24 there's partnership between the child welfare

1 system, our voluntary agencies, and local
2 county social services and local DAs, to try
3 to stave off this very -- it's very
4 troubling, a very troubling issue.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN PIROZZOLO: Well, I
6 appreciate all the work that you're doing. I
7 certainly look forward to working with you in
8 the future on ways that we can reduce the
9 amount of incidents that's happening by maybe
10 better prosecution of people who are
11 perpetrating these crimes against our
12 children.

13 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
14 Absolutely.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN PIROZZOLO: Thank you very
16 much.

17 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
18 Thank you.

19 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblywoman
20 Mitaynes.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Hello. Good
22 afternoon.

23 This is for the OTDA Commissioner.
24 This is about SNAP benefits fraud.

1 It seems that this state is allocating
2 the money it received from the federal
3 government to only replace the stolen funds
4 on or after October 1, 2022, through
5 September 30, 2023. And it seems that it may
6 only replace once in the federal fiscal year
7 for funds stolen after October 1, 2024.

8 Why hasn't OTDA looked into providing
9 more funding as well from the state so that
10 those with funding stolen before October 2022
11 are also covered and made whole? The federal
12 government has already committed to
13 addressing instances after October 2022, but
14 it seems that the state has not moved further
15 to supplement the existing aid.

16 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I think you
17 actually wanted me to answer that, yes.

18 So just to be clear, the federal law
19 as of late December permits states, once they
20 submit a plan that's approved by USDA, to
21 replace two -- benefits equal to two recent
22 months of your benefits, twice in a year. I
23 think it's through 2024, and thereafter once
24 per year.

1 And you're right that that law
2 begins -- that's for, you know, losses
3 October 1, 2022, going forward. Right? And
4 so of course we're doing the same, we've
5 proposed to do much the same with regard to
6 the public assistance benefits. This is not
7 confined to SNAP.

8 As I had mentioned earlier, our
9 expectation is that within the next few
10 months, following the USDA's approval of our
11 plan, which we're submitting later this
12 month, that we'll be able to begin reissuing
13 those benefits to the local districts.

14 With regard to earlier periods, of
15 course we leave to the Legislature and the
16 Governor how best to address that need. But
17 the proposal is what we have here on the
18 table now.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Okay, so we
20 would have your support to be able to do
21 that?

22 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I'm happy to
23 do at OTDA whatever the budget requires of
24 me.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Just very
2 quickly, a second question, and this is about
3 childcare and the fact that it leaves out
4 undocumented kids. Has OCFS calculated the
5 cost of a dedicated state fund to provide
6 childcare for undocumented children?

7 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
8 we don't have that data right now. I don't
9 know if we would even begin to know if that
10 would be statewide. But I'm happy to take
11 your question back to my team and get back to
12 you.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: I appreciate
14 it, thank you.

15 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to
16 Assemblyman Ardila.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN ARDILA: Thank you so
18 much, Madam Chair.

19 Thank you, Commissioner Tietz; thank
20 you for coming. And I really appreciate you
21 both for showing up today. I wanted to talk
22 to you a little bit about HRA predominantly
23 impacting New York City residents.

24 Maybe you can tell me a little bit

1 about this when it comes to SNAP benefits,
2 public assistance. When people are applying
3 and there's a wait time and they don't hear
4 back, and then when they try to contact HRA,
5 they can be on the phone for hours without
6 being in contact with anyone. Can you talk
7 to me about that, why that's taken place?

8 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I couldn't
9 speak to that specifically. I'm happy to get
10 you an answer about the wait times.

11 I can say, more broadly, that the city
12 of course has sought waivers from us for
13 federal or state rules with regard to
14 timeliness of issuing benefits or conducting
15 a certification or a recertification. We
16 have again -- as we have since early 2020,
17 we've again waived a bunch of those rules
18 after the city proposed taking some --
19 several actions to fill seats. They're
20 having a staffing problem.

21 And I think we were satisfied that
22 their proposal with regard to how best to
23 fill those seats was sufficient to further
24 extend by six months those waivers.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN ARDILA: Okay. And then
2 to that point, right, so when we have -- this
3 impacts a lot of seniors in my district, a
4 lot of people that are waiting for SNAP
5 benefits, SNAP assistance, and this is
6 essentially what makes or breaks -- so they
7 can help -- it helps them make ends meet.

8 So, you know, what can we do to work
9 together to ensure that we don't have those
10 staffing issues? What can the State
11 Legislature do to ensure that we have the
12 proper resources so people don't have to have
13 those wait times where their cases are
14 pending, they don't know the status, they
15 want to do check-ins in terms of where they
16 are in the application process?

17 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yeah, I'd
18 say that we're happy to take up any idea that
19 would both help the city fill the open seats
20 and to retain the staff they have.

21 Admittedly, much of this is within
22 their control alone, and not ours.

23 So if -- I would just say that if the
24 waivers in and of themselves were enough,

1 they'd have worked by now. So I think it's
2 important, because you want to keep people on
3 benefits, and for those who apply to get them
4 benefits and to limit the workload by issuing
5 those waivers, so you don't have, for
6 example, to do recertifications at the same
7 rate or pace as you would have in the absence
8 of those waivers.

9 But at the end of the day, it is on
10 the city to figure out how best to fill those
11 seats. We stand ready to help in any way we
12 can if there's some measure beyond issuing
13 those waivers.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN ARDILA: I appreciate
15 that.

16 And I do want to say appreciate the
17 work you do, and you have my full commitment
18 to reach those goals.

19 Thank you.

20 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

21 We go to Assemblywoman Lee, three
22 minutes.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Good afternoon.
24 Thank you. My first question is for OTDA.

1 I commend the Governor for recognizing
2 the need for more housing in the budget. But
3 I wanted to ask, what are the state standards
4 for the siting of homeless shelters and
5 ensuring that there's not a
6 disproportionate concentration in any
7 particular neighborhood, particularly in
8 low-income communities of color?

9 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: The siting
10 of -- I'm presuming you're asking principally
11 around New York City.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Yes.

13 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: So the
14 siting of shelters is really up to the city's
15 Department of Social Services -- and therein,
16 it's the Department of Homeless Services --
17 and other city officials.

18 Our role at OTDA is to engage in
19 oversight with regard to the services, the
20 quality of services, to certify shelters, and
21 to provide resources. But the actual siting
22 of them, the determination about where best
23 to place them, is up to the City of New York.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Understood. Thank

1 you.

2 And for OCFS, as you mentioned, local
3 districts can set different standards under
4 the Child Assistance Program, but
5 standardization doesn't necessarily mean
6 improved care.

7 So specifically for New York City, can
8 you please elaborate more on how
9 standardizing benefits and services will
10 impact how New York families will receive
11 care, and also how they will be applying?

12 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
13 for New York City they have a slightly more
14 complicated process. They have a contract of
15 care system, which is EarlyLearn for older
16 children. They still have typical standard
17 childcare assistance for infants and
18 toddlers.

19 So our hope is that for that
20 specifically for the infant and toddler
21 population, the systems will be standardized.
22 They have no waitlists, so in New York City
23 you might have heard from your constituents
24 with issues getting to childcare because

1 there was a significant waitlist. That is
2 now gone. They are giving waivers, and we
3 are monitoring that process.

4 So it really should be standardized
5 and should be beneficial to all families.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Okay, great.
7 Thank you.

8 And then when it comes to ERAP, I
9 wanted to focus specifically on the 73,000
10 applications that you said are outstanding
11 for subsidized housing. How many of those
12 are specifically for NYCHA residents?

13 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I don't know
14 off the top of my head, although it is a
15 substantial number. We can get it. We can
16 get that to you.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Okay, great. And
18 so would you know how much in need those
19 73,000 applications represent?

20 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: So because
21 they're of a lower priority, you know, given
22 the two previous budgets that set them at
23 that priority, we haven't thoroughly reviewed
24 them. They're essentially on hold.

1 If there were resources available,
2 then of course we would go through the
3 process of reviewing them. So we would have,
4 at best, you know, just an estimate. So I
5 couldn't tell you today exactly what the
6 value of those are.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Okay, thank you.

8 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

9 We go to Assemblywoman Gonzalez-Rojas.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZALEZ-ROJAS: Thank
11 you. Thank you both for being here.

12 Commissioner Tietz, benefits
13 skimming -- again, this is just a critical
14 issue. You're hearing this quite a bit
15 today. How much in dollars would you
16 estimate has been skimmed from New Yorkers at
17 this point?

18 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: The last
19 numbers I saw were somewhere in the ballpark
20 of \$5 million.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZALEZ-ROJAS: And is
22 there language that allows for the
23 replacement of SNAP in particular? As I
24 understand, this is about 50 percent of the

1 cases that have been happening in terms of
2 skimming.

3 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Actually I
4 think that the SNAP skimming represents a
5 significant majority of the losses, as
6 opposed to the public assistance cash
7 benefit. And, I'm sorry, your question was?

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZALEZ-ROJAS: The
9 replacement of that SNAP. I know that there
10 is money in partnership with the federal
11 government, but --

12 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Actually,
13 it's their money.

14 So to be clear, we couldn't -- we
15 cannot, even as of this very moment, we
16 cannot replace stolen SNAP benefits.

17 So in the budget, in the omnibus
18 budget the federal government passed in late
19 December, for the first time it's permitting
20 the replacement of those benefits, consistent
21 with a plan, a state plan that we submit to
22 them, which we're intending to do by the end
23 of the month.

24 Once approved by them, we will then

1 roll out guidance to the districts on
2 actually implementing that plan. So
3 essentially, as I've mentioned earlier, a
4 couple of months, an amount equal to the
5 lesser of the amount stolen or two months of
6 benefits, twice in a year thereafter.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZALEZ-ROJAS: Is
8 there a way to do more than just that
9 minimum? I know that minimum was standard --
10 the standard by the federal government. But
11 just, you know, the two replacements and the
12 two months, it just seems very limiting for
13 people who have maybe lost thousands of
14 dollars in skimming.

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Not with
16 federal resources. So that would be the
17 limit with regard to replacing the federal
18 benefit.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZALEZ-ROJAS: Could
20 we put in money at the state level to do
21 that?

22 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Well, I
23 leave it to the Legislature about how best to
24 address that.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZALEZ-ROJAS: And
2 given that SNAP is our number-one hunger
3 program, and that the NOEP has increased the
4 number of people on SNAP, why isn't there
5 more here for NOEP? We know that's just
6 incredibly effective programs. Many counties
7 stand to see a reduction altogether, or loss
8 of SNAP assistance.

9 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I don't have
10 it in front of me, but I know that we've
11 increased the amount to NOEP. I want to say
12 it's \$5 million. But I think we've carried
13 that on from previous.

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZALEZ-ROJAS: And in
15 my last seconds I want to go back to the HIV
16 out of state. Would you -- you know, there's
17 activists that joined us earlier. Is there
18 anything in the Executive proposal that would
19 provide housing? I know you mentioned some
20 of the counties haven't opted in. But what
21 can we do to ensure that there's greater
22 access to housing for people with HIV?

23 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Um --

24 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: I think you're

1 going to have to answer that offline.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZALEZ-ROJAS: Thank
3 you. Thank you so much.

4 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: You know,
5 again, as the Senator said, answers to any
6 questions that are posed here that there
7 isn't time to answer, please send us the
8 answers and we'll make sure all the
9 colleagues receive them.

10 So we move on to Assemblywoman Reyes.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYES: So this is for
12 Commissioner Tietz.

13 In 2020 we passed legislation to start
14 in New York State a restaurant meals program
15 through the SNAP program. Just wondering
16 where you guys are on the implementation of
17 that pilot program, if you have gotten the
18 necessary approvals from the U.S. Department
19 of Agriculture, and whether there are
20 resources that the state can provide to help
21 kind of move that along.

22 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yes, your
23 colleague asked it earlier and I had
24 mentioned that our plan is in to USDA and

1 that we expect in the next, I would say
2 within 60 days, to have a response from them.
3 I'm hopeful that it will be an approval.

4 And I would suggest that we're pretty
5 much all set to roll it once approved.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYES: Perfect.

7 My next question is so your office
8 works on child support issues along with the
9 courts. We are working on a proposal that is
10 currently being revised that would create a
11 streamlined, expedited settlement conference
12 process for families who generally agree on
13 child support in family courts.

14 Do you see the need for this sort of
15 new process and the value in helping families
16 who want to utilize this option to establish
17 child support orders as a more streamlined,
18 straightforward process?

19 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yes.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYES: Great. And it's
21 also my understanding that the state is
22 reimbursed for costs associated with the
23 child support program through the federal
24 Title IV-D Social Security funds. Would

1 those funds be available for a program like
2 an expedited settlement conference process
3 for child support in family courts?

4 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Now you've
5 gotten off of my page. So we'll follow up
6 with you on that.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYES: Okay.

8 Those are my questions. Thank you.

9 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

10 We go to Assemblyman Chang.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN CHANG: Thank you,
12 Madam Chairman.

13 Thank you, Commissioners, for being in
14 here. You have a thankless job. It's a very
15 tough judgment of this program. Thank you.

16 I represent Sunset Park, Boro Park and
17 Dyker Heights. I'm a 24-year veteran and I
18 served a tour in Afghanistan. So I have a
19 question about veterans; that's for
20 Commissioner Tietz.

21 Veterans are included as an eligible
22 group for the affordable housing program in
23 the Empire State Housing Initiative. How
24 many veterans have been recipients of this

1 program, and how much have they been awarded,
2 sir?

3 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I'm
4 uncertain, but I'm certainly happy to -- I
5 don't have that detail in front of me, but
6 I'm certainly happy to get it to you.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN CHANG: Okay, thank you.

8 And earlier in your testimony you
9 praised the National Guardsmen that had been
10 doing outstanding service in providing
11 immigrant services. You have the resources;
12 how would you expand their scope and mission
13 if you had that desire?

14 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I think
15 ideally, as much as we are grateful for the
16 presence of the National Guard, it is an
17 unusual -- I would suggest it's a somewhat
18 unusual use here. Ideally we would have
19 nonprofit human services, shelter providers
20 on contract to do the entire task.

21 So, for example, in the site that I
22 visited in Brooklyn last Friday, there is a
23 nonprofit partner there, they just don't have
24 all of the staff in place yet. So hence, the

1 National Guard to fill that gap.

2 Again, grateful for that. I don't
3 think that's the ideal approach. And we
4 would prefer that the nonprofit staffed up as
5 usual.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN CHANG: Okay, thank you.

7 And a question for the Landlord Rental
8 Assistance Program, the LRAP. How many
9 applicants have been completed -- I know that
10 the program's been closed, but how many have
11 been completed and processed and how many
12 have not, sir?

13 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: So as of the
14 end of last month, we made almost 28,000
15 payments to landlords totaling more than \$283
16 million. That was after last February we
17 moved some of the unexpended under-80 program
18 to the LRAP program because the LRAP program
19 was oversubscribed. So that's how much we've
20 put out to date.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN CHANG: And you were so
22 oversubscribed, so what's left on
23 oversubscriptions, sir?

24 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I don't have

1 the amount left. I know it's a modest sum.
2 That program is, you know, oversubscribed as
3 well, but it's a modest sum that's left.
4 We're working through existing applications.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN CHANG: I see. Thank you.

6 That's all the questions I have,
7 Commissioner.

8 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

9 We go to the Ways and Means ranker,
10 Assemblyman Ra, for five minutes.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

12 Good afternoon, Commissioner and
13 Commissioner. Commissioner Tietz, thank you
14 for that meeting last week to discuss some of
15 the budget proposals. And I appreciate your
16 answers today.

17 With regard to ERAP, though, I wanted
18 to get into a little bit, as we're winding
19 down this program, a few issues including
20 Guidehouse, the outside entity that was
21 contracted to -- obviously before your
22 time -- to administer this program. My
23 understanding is their contract is going to
24 expire in May, is that correct?

1 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yes.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: And will there be any
3 need to continue any type of contract with
4 them, or do you think everything will be
5 wrapped up by that point?

6 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Oh, it would
7 be nice if it were wrapped up. But no.
8 We're moving to extend that contract.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. Do you know
10 how long that would be for or what any of the
11 terms of that might be expected to be?

12 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I don't have
13 the term of the extension. I think our hope
14 is that by the end of calendar '23 that the
15 vast majority of this work on ERAP would have
16 been completed.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. So by the end
18 of the calendar year you're expecting to have
19 the program --

20 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Largely
21 done, that's right.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Yeah, okay.

23 So I know that as you're going
24 through, you know, these processes, a couple

1 of issues that have been brought to my
2 attention that are kind of recurring, one of
3 them being applicants who have been denied
4 multiple times but continue to apply.

5 Is there any process to streamline if
6 they've applied again and again?

7 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: Yes, we've
8 worked with the vendor to do an initial sort
9 for just such applications.

10 So in some instances folks have
11 reapplied because they didn't obtain, as an
12 initial matter, the full amount available to
13 them -- so 12 months of rent or three months
14 of prospective rent. In other cases there
15 may have been errors, what have you. But --
16 so in some instances.

17 But where they essentially have
18 applied in much the same way and it's
19 clearly, you know, not a fundable
20 application, then we would quickly move to
21 deny it. At which point, by the way, then, I
22 think what you're hitting at here is the
23 protections that come with the statute.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Yes.

1 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: In which
2 case the protections then are not in
3 existence.

4 So if -- I would just note that for
5 someone who's never had an approved
6 application, then -- for whatever sets of
7 reasons -- they don't have the protections
8 upon denial. But because, say, in the
9 instance in which someone had a previously
10 approved application, got some funding, then
11 they actually have the eviction protections
12 for a period of time going forward.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. And then
14 regarding owners, I've heard of situations
15 where owners have had payments and then they
16 get clawed back, you know, months later.
17 Why, you know, would this be happening to
18 some -- is there a change in information?
19 What requires that? And what if any recourse
20 does an owner have if, you know, they dispute
21 the reason that the money's being clawed
22 back?

23 OTDA COMMISSIONER TIETZ: I would --
24 you know, among the states with ERAP

1 programs, New York ranks high in terms of its
2 success rate here in terms of getting dollars
3 out the door to as many households as we've
4 done. I think some evidence of that is we've
5 obtained nearly \$400 million from the federal
6 Treasury in reallocations from unspent
7 dollars from elsewhere. So I think we've
8 demonstrated an ability to get these
9 resources out the door to those most in need.

10 There are errors, as there are with
11 any program. The error rate in this program
12 is at about 6 percent, which is frankly akin
13 to most public assistance programs. So, for
14 example, that's an error rate akin to SNAP.
15 And so that would be the instance in which we
16 would potentially look to claw back some
17 resource.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay, thank you.

19 And just with my limited time,
20 Commissioner Miles-Gustave, just relative --
21 you know, we've talked about the providers,
22 the childcare providers. And certainly, you
23 know, the minimum wage proposal, on the one
24 hand it's going to help lots of people

1 hopefully be able to afford childcare, but it
2 certainly has the potential to drive up costs
3 for providers.

4 So I hope that's something we can keep
5 an eye on with some of the things we're doing
6 with regard to ensuring there are adequate
7 opportunities for childcare.

8 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

9 Yes.

10 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

11 So this concludes this portion of the
12 hearing.

13 Just to restate that to the extent
14 that there are questions that there wasn't
15 sufficient time to answer, please -- to
16 Senator Krueger and myself -- forward those
17 answers.

18 And next we are going to be hearing
19 from the New York State Office for the Aging,
20 Greg Olsen, acting director; and New York
21 State Division of Veterans' Services,
22 Reverend Viviana DeCohen, director.

23 And while we are having a quiet
24 transition, if you have any conversations,

1 please take them into the hall. I just want
2 to remind people who are going to be
3 testifying later to make sure that you've
4 checked in with the desk at the top of the
5 stairs so that we know that you are here.

6 Commissioner, if we could --
7 Assemblywoman, if we could take the
8 conversation out in the hall.

9 (Pause.)

10 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: And while we
11 are getting ready to start, I want to
12 acknowledge we've been joined by
13 Assemblywoman Hunter. Assemblywoman
14 Jean-Pierre joined us recently. And I think
15 that's it for our new members.

16 So we're ready to start our second
17 panel of governmental witnesses. A reminder
18 to both of you that you each have 10 minutes
19 to make your presentation; then there will be
20 a number of members who have questions. And
21 hopefully they will be leaving you enough
22 time to be able to answer those questions.
23 Thank you.

24 So Greg, do you want to start?

1 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Sure,
2 happy to. Thank you.

3 Just let me know, is that close enough
4 for you guys? Okay, great.

5 Well, good afternoon, Chairpersons
6 Krueger, Weinstein -- Senator,
7 congratulations on getting the Senate
8 Committee on Aging -- and of course
9 Assemblyman Kim and all the distinguished
10 members of the Legislature.

11 My name is Greg Olsen. I'm the acting
12 director of the New York State Office for the
13 Aging, and I'm honored to testify today.

14 Governor Hochul's Executive Budget is
15 aptly named "Achieving the New York Dream."
16 The Executive Budget seeks to create a more
17 affordable, more livable, and safer New York,
18 while opening doors to the communities and
19 people who have historically been blocked
20 from equal chances at success.

21 I am pleased, as always, to testify on
22 provisions of Governor Hochul's proposed
23 budget that directly affect NYSOFA programs
24 and our services, along with additional

1 budget proposals that will positively impact
2 older New Yorkers and their families and move
3 towards the broader goal of creating a more
4 affordable and livable New York.

5 The Governor's State of the State
6 message and subsequent Executive Budget
7 proposal aims to make New York the healthiest
8 state in the nation through a multi-agency,
9 coordinated effort that's focused on
10 developing a Master Plan for Aging, improving
11 physical and behavioral health, combating
12 social isolation, preventive health care
13 strategies, expanding access to services and
14 training for LGBTQ individuals, supporting
15 informal as well as working caregivers,
16 addressing disparities, diversity, equity and
17 inclusion, and more.

18 Utilizing the state's 2019-2024
19 Prevention Agenda as the umbrella, and
20 instituting a "Health Across All Policies
21 approach," New York State agencies are
22 incorporating health considerations into our
23 planning, programs, and initiatives. As
24 agencies, we are committed to working

1 together and considering how our policies
2 fulfill New York's pledge as the first
3 age-friendly state in the nation.

4 Now we have an opportunity to further
5 strengthen and coordinate this vital work
6 through the Governor's priority of developing
7 a Master Plan for Aging. This master plan is
8 consistent with the goals and work that New
9 York has been engaged in to improve
10 communities for people of all ages and create
11 healthy environments in which to grow up and
12 grow old.

13 In 2018, as you know, New York became
14 the first age-friendly state in the nation to
15 receive that designation from AARP and the
16 World Health Organization. New York was
17 first because we rank pretty high in the
18 eight domains of age-friendly, livable
19 communities, and due to our comprehensive
20 plan to systematically build age-friendly and
21 smart-growth principles into how government
22 operates and functions.

23 Through much-needed investments, the
24 Governor's FY '24 Executive Budget expands

1 and strengthens the foundation with
2 initiatives that help individuals access
3 needed services and lead healthy lives by
4 maintaining funding for vital services like
5 the Community Services for the Elderly
6 program, or CSE; elder abuse and Holocaust
7 survivors funding; increasing funding for the
8 Master Plan for Aging; continuing the
9 historic \$23 million investment to help older
10 New Yorkers who are awaiting services;
11 continuing the \$2.9 million to expand our
12 efforts to combat isolation, bridge the
13 digital divide, address elder abuse, and
14 strengthen NYSOFA's stipend program for
15 volunteer recruitment and retention;
16 continuing our bill-payer service program in
17 10 counties in Western New York to prevent
18 and mitigate financial exploitation of older
19 adults; the continued improvements in our
20 New York Connects system, further increasing
21 access to long-term services and supports;
22 maintaining a half a million dollars that's
23 used to draw down more than \$2 million in
24 federal funds to combat elder abuse and

1 financial exploitation through our enhanced
2 increasing multidisciplinary team program;
3 continuing funding that was in the budget
4 last year for the Long Term Care Ombudsman
5 Program, and providing a 2.5 percent human
6 COLA for our providers.

7 The Governor's budget provides the
8 support necessary to continue our
9 trailblazing initiatives. Examples include
10 our award-winning animatronic pet project;
11 the GetSetUp platform that offers more than
12 900 lifelong learning and health and wellness
13 classes; our Virtual Senior Center to bring
14 senior center programming into the homes of
15 older adults; our Elli-Q program that
16 provides a proactive artificial intelligence
17 tool to combat isolation and loneliness and
18 improve connectivity to others as well as
19 improving overall health and wellness; our
20 GoGoGrandparent partnership, which provides
21 specialized ride-sharing to increase
22 transportation options; and our
23 evidence-based caregiver support platform,
24 TRUALTA, which is available to any New

1 Yorker, regardless of age, who provides some
2 type of uncompensated care to somebody else.

3 Further, the proposed Executive Budget
4 increases eligibility for those older adults
5 that wish to use services via a private pay
6 model. Legislation that we passed in 2019
7 allowed individuals and families for the
8 first time to purchase services directly from
9 their area Agency on Aging when their income
10 was above 400 percent of the federal poverty
11 level.

12 What we found is that created a gap,
13 and so we're pleased that this year the
14 Governor's proposal expands access to these
15 services for those individuals between
16 250 and 400 percent of the federal poverty
17 level.

18 NYSOFA has also launched several pilot
19 projects that expand outreach, communication
20 and engagement, as well as measure the
21 effectiveness of these new models. These
22 innovations will inform the Master Plan for
23 Aging. One such innovation is the launch of
24 a multicounty evidence-based intervention

1 pilot that uses complex analytics to identify
2 caregiver burnout. It's called TCARE, and
3 it's a leading cause of referral to higher
4 levels of care for older adults.

5 NYSOFA is also currently conducting
6 the state's first-ever statewide needs
7 assessment survey. The results of this
8 assessment will not only inform our federal
9 plan that is due to the feds this summer, our
10 county plans that will be due later in the
11 year, but also the Master Plan for Aging.

12 NYSOFA is also the nation's first
13 state unit on aging to partner with the
14 National Association of Home Builders to make
15 their Certified Aging in Place Specialist, or
16 CAPS, training certification available to our
17 case managers. This certification improves
18 the ability of our front-line staff to
19 assess, recommend, and incorporate home
20 safety features into care plans, helps
21 individuals age in place, and prevents
22 injuries and falls.

23 Finally, through our partnership with
24 the Department of Health, we will be

1 expanding a successful integrated care model
2 that coordinates aging services with health
3 services and physicians' offices and
4 strengthens the New York Connects data and
5 reporting system as well as the state
6 resource directory.

7 But the budget is much more than any
8 one program or service. It must be examined
9 holistically. Older adults, like all
10 New Yorkers, touch many different systems in
11 their day-to-day lives, not just the Office
12 for the Aging, which is why the Governor's
13 systemic investments are so important.

14 Key investments and proposals that
15 will further our ability to allow New Yorkers
16 to age in place include -- and some have been
17 mentioned already -- the New York Housing
18 Compact to build 800,000 new homes; expanding
19 access to behavioral health services;
20 strengthening EMS, which for many is the
21 first healthcare responders; making energy
22 more affordable to reduce out-of-pocket
23 costs; expanding food access -- and there's
24 many, many more.

1 So NYSOFA will continue to engage our
2 sister agencies, private partners,
3 not-for-profits, and community-based
4 organizations as we work to serve New York's
5 older population and their families as
6 effectively as possible.

7 I really appreciate all of your guys'
8 support and the opportunity to be here, and
9 I'm happy, as always, to answer any
10 questions.

11 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

12 Reverend?

13 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Good
14 afternoon, everyone.

15 Good afternoon, Chairs Krueger and
16 Weinstein and distinguished members of the
17 Senate and Assembly. My name is Viviana
18 DeCohen, I'm a Marine Corps veteran, and I
19 have the distinct honor of being the director
20 of the New York State Division of Veterans'
21 Services, or DVS.

22 Thank you for the opportunity to
23 discuss Governor Hochul's 2023-2024 Executive
24 Budget as it relates to New York State

1 Veterans' Services.

2 Governor Hochul has made clear in her
3 administration and in her budget the
4 importance of veterans, servicemembers and
5 their families here in our great state. As
6 we approach our agency's transition from a
7 division to a department, the Governor's
8 expansion and improvements in the veterans
9 services realm have been outstanding, and DVS
10 stands ready to continue providing the
11 highest-quality services for our New York
12 State veterans, servicemembers, and their
13 families.

14 Under Governor Hochul's
15 administration, New York continues to be a
16 state where veterans and their families are
17 proud to call home thanks to the continued
18 investment into veterans and their families.
19 These investments can be seen through new
20 programs, staffing, and additional funds for
21 peer-to-peer support programs such as the
22 Joseph P. Dwyer Program.

23 DVS has increased its economic impact,
24 which directly benefits the lives of

1 New Yorkers throughout each and every
2 community. Through these increases, DVS
3 assisted veteran families in bringing in over
4 \$900 million in tax-free federal dollars in
5 2022. This is in addition to the
6 \$400 million brought into New York with over
7 23,000 veterans utilizing educational
8 opportunities.

9 These funds filter their way into
10 every community across the state, to support
11 the over 688,000 veterans of New York. The
12 work of this agency delivers concrete results
13 and benefits for veterans and their families
14 in New York State in the form of federal
15 funds and healthcare access.

16 We know that we could not produce such
17 outstanding results alone. We are grateful
18 for the support of the Legislature, Executive
19 Chamber, and the tremendous work of DVS staff
20 which has enabled us to rise to the occasion.
21 No one is an island unto themselves, and we
22 do know that without all of you and our
23 incredible partners, the work we do would not
24 be possible.

1 Our work addressing food insecurity,
2 increasing access through digital
3 technologies and transportation, and
4 educating providers on veteran and military
5 competency is only possible through our
6 continued partnership.

7 Food insecurity has been repeatedly
8 cited as a concern for our military-connected
9 families. One in nine working-age veterans
10 lives in food-insecure households nationally.
11 We know that this is unacceptable, and in
12 New York State we're doing something about
13 it. We're very proud that this past year the
14 millionth meal was distributed -- between our
15 partners -- to our New York veterans,
16 servicemembers and their families through a
17 partnership between the New York State
18 Division of Veterans' Services and Hello
19 Fresh, which will continue on into 2023.

20 This builds on the successful Nourish
21 New York initiative, a multi-agency effort to
22 reduce food insecurity and support our food
23 producers.

24 Additionally, Governor Hochul has

1 committed to doubling the funds committed to
2 the FreshConnect checks program which allows
3 our veterans, servicemembers and their
4 families to receive food vouchers to use at
5 farmers' markets and stands across the state.

6 DVS continues to create and provide
7 additional points of access for veterans and
8 their families to learn about the benefits
9 they earned through their military service.
10 One of the most common issues we hear when
11 talking about bringing veterans into contact
12 with their benefits is transportation and
13 isolation. We want to pursue innovative
14 solutions to address that.

15 In her Executive Budget Governor
16 Hochul is supporting an initiative to help
17 DVS find and serve veterans in their
18 communities -- find and serve -- through the
19 dedication of \$300,000 for the purchase of
20 vehicles that will form our first-ever fleet
21 of Mobile Veterans Service Centers.

22 This initiative will allow us to reach
23 those with some of the highest needs and the
24 largest barriers to access by eliminating

1 transportation concerns. These mobile
2 centers will bring the DVS's accredited
3 veterans benefits advisors and their
4 best-in-class technologies on the road to
5 meet our New York veterans, servicemembers
6 and military families where they work, live,
7 where they thrive.

8 Lastly, DVS understands the immense
9 burden that finding quality, affordable
10 housing can pose to a veteran and their
11 family. This is why Governor Hochul's
12 administration is taking a twofold approach
13 to this with the required military and
14 veteran cultural competency trainings for
15 supportive-housing providers that receive
16 state funds for veteran-designated housing
17 units and a \$1.1 million investment to create
18 the Homeless Veterans' Housing Program, which
19 will be used for emergency housing, providing
20 temporary shelter, repair to homes damaged by
21 disasters, and renovating homes to house
22 veterans with certain special abilities --
23 some call them disabilities. This creates a
24 holistic and comprehensive approach to

1 address the unique needs that veterans, our
2 servicemembers and their families face with
3 housing.

4 Governor Hochul's State of the State
5 agenda and Executive Budget provide DVS with
6 the resources to build upon these successes
7 and to deliver more support than ever to New
8 York's veterans and their families. DVS
9 appreciates the continued support of Governor
10 Hochul and her administration in addressing
11 the needs faced by our veterans,
12 servicemembers and their families.

13 Thank you for the opportunity to
14 discuss the Governor's Executive Budget with
15 this committee. And on behalf of New York's
16 veteran families, thank you for your
17 continued support of the agency's mission. I
18 look forward to answering any questions that
19 you may have.

20 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

21 We go to Assemblyman Kim, chair of the
22 Assembly Aging Committee, first.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you. Thank
24 you both for your testimonies today.

1 According to a report by the Center
2 for an Urban Future, older New Yorkers grew
3 in population by 31 percent from 2011 to
4 2021. During this time the State Office for
5 the Aging's budget grew by approximately
6 25 percent. There seems to be about a
7 6 percent gap between overall growth of older
8 adults, older New Yorkers, versus SOFA's
9 budget, causing the delay in services and an
10 increase in waiting lists for vital services.

11 During this period, older New Yorkers
12 living below the poverty line, and who most
13 likely qualified and applied for Medicaid,
14 increased by 37 percent in the last 10 years.

15 My office ran some models, with the
16 help of the Association on Aging, based on
17 how much we would have saved on Medicaid if
18 we fully invested in non-Medicaid care
19 programs administered by SOFA. In the last
20 10 years, our conservative figures show that
21 we could have decreased older adults living
22 in poverty by up to 10 percent and saved the
23 state \$3.75 billion.

24 An additional \$390 million investment

1 in SOFA in the last 10 years would have saved
2 the state \$3.75 billion in Medicaid spending
3 and decreased the number of older adults
4 living in poverty.

5 Now, I know, Director Olsen, you
6 already know these numbers. And I wonder why
7 the former governor, the current governor,
8 and the Department of Health won't fully
9 invest in SOFA. Do they not care, or are
10 they just incompetent at taking care of older
11 adults?

12 You don't need to answer that,
13 Commissioner.

14 (Laughter.)

15 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: But what we do know
16 is that \$3.75 billion in Medicaid waste ended
17 up in the pockets of predatory nursing homes
18 and corrupt home care agencies that see older
19 adults as dollar signs, not humans. We
20 systematically, systemically force older
21 adults to spend down into poverty so we can
22 institutionalize them into facilities we
23 supposedly oversee to protect consumers
24 through an advocacy program called the

1 Long Term Care Ombudsman Program that we
2 purposely underfund.

3 And here you are, Director Olsen,
4 knowing all this, biting your tongue for
5 years, trying your best to make things work
6 under a broken and aged system, but offering
7 alternative solutions to finance SOFA's work.

8 So please tell us, for my first
9 question, more about the Executive's Article
10 VII private payment system and the impact
11 that could have on the state's waiting list.

12 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
13 thanks, Assemblyman. You know, the question
14 was directly about private pay. I just want
15 to, you know, just mention something in terms
16 of some other things you said.

17 I think this administration really
18 does care about older adults. So we've got a
19 couple of things we're working on now with
20 multiple state agencies. As I said, you
21 know, our partnerships with folks like DVS
22 are critical. We have 24,000 veterans in our
23 caseload; 63 percent of the state's veterans
24 are over the age of 60. And, you know, the

1 Reimagine Long Term Care is going to be --
2 once we get the appointments, we'll be
3 working on that.

4 But the private pay I think, you know,
5 I've heard a couple of folks back in '19 when
6 we passed this, and now that we're trying to
7 make it really a technical amendment, are
8 suggesting that we would be passing costs on
9 to low-income individuals.

10 As you know, Assemblyman, I've been
11 doing this work for 31 years. That is not
12 the intent of this, and that's not what it
13 is. We have never been allowed, the
14 network, to offer individuals that have the
15 ability to pay -- we have 1.6 million older
16 adults that have incomes of \$55,000 or more.
17 That's not a lot of money. But you have
18 people like me that could afford to purchase
19 a service on behalf of my mother or my
20 father -- we were literally barred, under
21 law.

22 So the only thing the private pay
23 allows is for the AAA network who wants to
24 opt in -- it's not mandatory -- to offer it

1 if they have already utilized their federal,
2 state and local dollars.

3 Ninety-nine-point-five percent of all of our
4 funding goes towards individuals who are
5 low-income, limited English, cultural and
6 ethnic minorities. That's by federal law,
7 state law. And those are folks we want to
8 protect. So this really provides an option.

9 And one last thing. Families are
10 already doing this. You do what you gotta do
11 to help the people in your family, your loved
12 ones, et cetera. We would rather that they
13 come to us because we can look much more
14 holistically, connect you to the hundreds of
15 programs -- federal, state and local -- that
16 Veterans provides, connect you to OMH or
17 OASAS if it's alcohol and substance abuse,
18 and so on and so forth.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: And I guess the hope
20 is that if we allow folks to purchase the
21 program who can, that may alleviate some of
22 the people on the waiting list so we can
23 promptly get to those on the bottom of that
24 income bracket who are still on the waiting

1 list. Correct?

2 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
3 that was the design. So, you know, there's a
4 cost to the service. And so like if a
5 home-delivered meal is \$7, what we allowed
6 but capped it was a max of, you know, the
7 cost of the service plus 20 percent. That
8 could be because you're contracting with
9 Medicare Advantage, an MLTC, Mainstream, or
10 just somebody in the community that finds
11 these things valuable.

12 What we required is all the accounting
13 to be separate and if there's any revenue
14 generated from this proposal for the
15 services, it is required by law to go back in
16 to serve lower-income people, because that's
17 our book of business.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: And since 2019,
19 since we allowed the network to purchase --
20 or charge older adults for the programs, how
21 many -- do you have data on how many older
22 adults actually purchase services from the
23 local agencies?

24 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: We do,

1 Assemblyman. The date that that was supposed
2 to go into effect -- so it passed in fiscal
3 year 2019, April of 2019. It was to go into
4 effect April 11, 2020, and we know what
5 happened in March of 2020. So I would be
6 tone deaf as an individual to be pushing this
7 during the middle of the pandemic. So we
8 didn't do that.

9 I think we're going to be reevaluating
10 where we wind up this year. But right now we
11 have five counties that chose the opt-in.
12 Most of it is for the personal emergency
13 response system, which has been shown
14 overwhelmingly to reduce hospitalizations, ER
15 visits, observation status. It's about
16 \$200,000.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: I mean, obviously if
18 we can find the necessary funding to cover
19 all, or other fundings and mechanisms, public
20 finance mechanisms to eliminate the waiting
21 list, it's best to pursue a path that we
22 don't have to charge any older adults seeking
23 SOFA services.

24 But here we are, because of some of

1 the references that I made earlier, that we
2 know what the impact this could be on
3 Medicaid and on Medicaid populations, we're
4 trying to find alternative solutions, trying
5 to get us there. But if we work together in
6 the coming weeks to figure out a different
7 pot of money, different revenue to fully fund
8 SOFA's programs, I'm hoping that we don't
9 have to charge any older adults.

10 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: You
11 know, it would be great to fully subsidize
12 everybody. And I don't think that we can do
13 that. And, you know, you and I have had this
14 conversation, Assemblyman. This body, the
15 Legislature, Governor's office and county
16 governments, have picked up all of the costs
17 where the feds have really let us down.

18 The Older Americans Act has been
19 amended 13 times and added a whole bunch of
20 work to us and to the network. All of it is
21 appropriate, all of it. But none of it came
22 with any money, so the least amount of money
23 that this state receives is from the federal
24 government, which is directing us on what we

1 need to do.

2 Which is why we developed an
3 Older Americans Act modernization proposal.
4 Senator Gillibrand is embracing that. We're
5 working with her to get really the due share
6 that we deserve that can really go a long
7 way. What we need is an annual increase
8 of -- in my opinion, of about \$2.7 billion,
9 which would bring the resources to New York
10 to allow this network to do what it does so
11 well: You know, promote happy, healthy
12 lives, living with dignity, avoiding
13 hospitalizations and so forth, but having a
14 strong infrastructure if people wind up in
15 those settings and then are discharged back
16 to the community.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: We're going to be
18 taking testimony from AARP later, and I think
19 they'll be releasing a report on the
20 ineffectiveness of the ombudsman program.
21 And the data just looks -- the initial data
22 that we're getting looks horrifying:
23 52 percent of nursing homes and other care
24 facilities failed to receive a long-term-care

1 ombudsman visit due to lack of resources and
2 staff. Nearly 80 percent of New York City's
3 nursing homes and other care facilities
4 failed to receive a single visit from an
5 ombudsman. You know, the data goes on and
6 on.

7 And, you know, we need -- my
8 colleagues and I, you know, we want to
9 professionalize, we want to reset the
10 ombudsman program, we want to rebuild it.
11 But every time, you know, we have these
12 discussions we run into institutional
13 pushback that people tell us, "Oh, if we
14 remodel this, we may not qualify for the
15 federal dollars."

16 It's my understanding the original
17 framers of the program at the federal level
18 wanted the LTCOP program to be independent.
19 And there are other states that even host
20 this under nonprofit organizations, not even
21 government agencies, to execute that
22 independence of this program.

23 So I think it's just a matter of
24 political will to get us to a better place

1 where we can truly have an advocacy program
2 for these facilities.

3 And I'll continue my questions in my
4 next five minutes. Thank you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

6 To the Senate.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

8 And to our new chair of Aging,
9 Senator Cordell Cleare.

10 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

11 And thank you for your testimony. I'm
12 looking forward to sitting down and speaking
13 with you, Commissioner.

14 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN:

15 Absolutely.

16 SENATOR CLEARE: I'm not on -- it is
17 on?

18 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes.

19 SENATOR CLEARE: Anyway, I'm going to
20 try to project.

21 I'm Senator Cordell Cleare. I
22 represent the 30th Senatorial District, which
23 is Harlem, East Harlem, West Harlem, a
24 portion of Washington Heights and the

1 Upper West Side.

2 And I listened to your opening remarks
3 about people who are historically blocked
4 from achieving success. And a group of those
5 people, I think, are home care workers. AARP
6 submitted testimony that I was reading;
7 nearly half of home care workers live in or
8 near poverty, and more than half depend on
9 public assistance to survive. These workers
10 are continuously training and developing
11 their skills and expertise to elevate the
12 level of care they can provide, only to
13 remain unable to support themselves and their
14 families because of low wages.

15 The proposed Executive Budget provides
16 for a 2.5 percent COLA for hardworking staff
17 that fall under SOFA as well as other
18 agencies. Why is this less than last year's
19 5.4 percent? And how is this low figure
20 expected to retain staff and provide
21 continuity of services? And also, what can
22 we do to link it to the rate of inflation so
23 this doesn't keep --

24 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah.

1 Well, as you know, Senator -- and it was
2 great talking to you last week, and look
3 forward to our partnership. You know, the
4 Governor proposed an increase that is tied
5 to -- why am I drawing a blank -- the
6 inflation rate.

7 So there was a couple of different
8 things that you mentioned in there. Our COLA
9 that we're provided this year was like 5,
10 5-plus percent last year -- 2.5, that was
11 used primarily to cover the rate increase for
12 personal care aides that we fund through our
13 in-home program, which is separate from the
14 Medicaid program.

15 And you're right, the wages are low.
16 I mean, many of our counties, we authorized
17 them to negotiate their own rates back in
18 2014 when MLTC kind of entered the
19 marketplace. It was originally tied to
20 Medicaid's rate. But in order to get aides
21 assigned to the individuals that we serve
22 that are just above Medicaid limit, they can
23 negotiate their own rates. So many of our
24 counties are paying a much higher rate,

1 between 30 and 40 dollars an hour.

2 And I think some of them are starting
3 to make sure that the contracts that they
4 have with the licensed home care services
5 agency has language that passes those
6 increases actually to the worker and not to
7 the administrative side.

8 So, you know, the COLA is developed
9 based on -- the three big areas are the
10 WIN program, Wellness in Nutrition; EISEP,
11 Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly
12 Program; and the CSE program. And that's --
13 and the value is about \$5 million.

14 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. I was going to
15 cut you off, but I wanted to hear everything
16 you had to say.

17 But right now this is not enough money
18 for our very valuable workers. And it
19 affects even the care and the amount of care
20 that people are receiving, and I'd like to
21 see us work toward increasing that rate.

22 I'm going to try to speed up my
23 questions, and you answered about private
24 pay.

1 The Master Plan for Aging. You know,
2 there has been a million-dollar appropriation
3 in the budget for the master plan. Can you
4 just explain such a large expenditure for the
5 development of the master plan and also, in
6 creating it, how much stakeholder input will
7 be provided or sought out? And if you know,
8 who is a part of that body right now? Who is
9 a part of the --

10 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I do.
11 I mean, you know, there's a partnership that
12 we have with the Department of Health, we're
13 cochairing. Health is taking the lead.
14 We're certainly a part of it.

15 But as was mentioned earlier, you
16 know, we have over 20 state agencies as part
17 of this. We have a stakeholder group that
18 has I think 25 people. We plan on -- you
19 know, what we have talked about over and over
20 in the first couple of meetings that we've
21 had is the responsibility that we ask of them
22 not only to participate but to make sure that
23 their partnerships and coalitions throughout
24 the state are also represented. And we have

1 an association group.

2 The original dollars that were put in
3 last year's budget was half a million
4 dollars, and so we -- you know, we're using
5 NYSTEC to coordinate. There's a lot that
6 goes on behind the scenes in getting this
7 together. Like we talk every day, every
8 morning; we have several calls during the
9 week.

10 So the million dollars is going to,
11 again, help us continue this, because the
12 effort's about 18 months long, and then
13 anything else that we identify that we need
14 to do. We plan on doing a lot of public
15 outreach. We need you guys engaged. We're
16 going to be out around the state. But we
17 really just started the -- the executive
18 order was signed in November. We've had a
19 couple of state council meetings. And moving
20 on, I think next week will be our second
21 stakeholder meeting, and then the
22 association. But there's a lot of moving
23 pieces and certainly I can give you the
24 website where we're starting to populate

1 that.

2 SENATOR CLEARE: When is that meeting
3 next week?

4 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: It's
5 the second stakeholder committee meeting. So
6 there's a state agency task force, there's a
7 stakeholder, and then there's an association.
8 And all will help, again, you know, populate
9 at least the beginning of the draft plan.

10 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay, thank you.

11 And over the last few years we've
12 passed a number of bills and pushed for
13 investments in the LTCOP program, with the
14 goal of increasing transparency, coordination
15 between DOH and LTCOP, and to increase the
16 number of paid staff.

17 Can you update us on these efforts
18 and, in particular, address what seems to
19 be -- and I know you spoke a little bit about
20 it with Assemblyman Kim -- but a continuing
21 problem of LTCOP staff or volunteers not
22 being in the facility that they're meant to
23 oversee?

24 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah.

1 So again, I thank you guys and the Governor
2 for adding that 2.5 million in last year's
3 budget that is baseline this year. That
4 allowed us to hire 35 staff. So we went from
5 30 percent of facilities visited to between
6 50 and 60.

7 You know, this goes back to my
8 original points on the federal government.
9 This is a required program that could either
10 be in-house or external, and we've looked at
11 a variety of ways to structure this. And
12 it's now, you know, with us. But we get \$1.4
13 million from the feds to run a statewide
14 program. I mean, you can't do that with the
15 number of facilities that we have in the
16 state.

17 The fundamental flaw of the
18 Older Americans Act when it was passed in
19 1965 is the heavy reliance on volunteers.
20 And volunteers are fantastic. We have almost
21 a million of them over the age of 55. But I
22 don't know how you could have a professional
23 network when you're relying on somebody
24 giving their time and energy.

1 And when you talk about the Long Term
2 Care Ombudsman Program or the Health
3 Insurance Information Counseling and
4 Assistance Program, those are really, really
5 intense programs and need to be -- you need
6 to have hired staff, not volunteers. We
7 lost --

8 SENATOR CLEARE: What was that annual
9 amount you said you needed?

10 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: From
11 the feds we get about \$1.4 million.

12 SENATOR CLEARE: And you need?

13 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: What's
14 that?

15 SENATOR CLEARE: And how much do you
16 need?

17 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: What we
18 need is to try to get to a ratio where you're
19 visiting every facility, you know, maybe 7:1
20 or 5:1 or something to that effect. So that
21 we can cover what we're supposed to cover.

22 And again, I think that that will be a
23 conversation I'm sure you guys will all have
24 over the next couple of months.

1 SENATOR CLEARE: Well, what's the
2 dollar amount? I'm sorry.

3 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: The
4 total dollar amount?

5 SENATOR CLEARE: Yeah.

6 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: We
7 receive about 6.9 million altogether. But if
8 only 1.4 of that is federal, then -- you do
9 the math.

10 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. We'll continue
11 the conversation. Thank you.

12 We've continued to hear a lot about
13 unmet need and waiting lists for services at
14 the county offices for the aging, which the
15 Legislature has provided increased funds a
16 few times to address. Can you walk us
17 through the state of things there? And is
18 there still unmet need? Are we making
19 progress?

20 And also, can you update us on the
21 Reimagining Long Term Care Task Force?

22 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
23 I'll start with the latter first.

24 So we're waiting for the appointments

1 to come in. I think all of the Governor's
2 appointments are done. It's the
3 Legislature's appointments. So we're hoping
4 to get that up and running soon.

5 So yes, you know, we had an original
6 baseline of \$15 million four budgets ago, and
7 then the Legislature added another eight to
8 it two years ago. So we receive about
9 \$23 million. That has provided services for
10 people who are on -- who are assessed and
11 needing services, 26,000 over the first two
12 years of that funding.

13 Yeah, waitlists are going up. A lot
14 of it is for the personal care aide shortage.
15 So, you know, we don't -- we don't, Senator,
16 wait for things to happen, we try to make
17 things happen. And here's what I mean by
18 that. So back in the day, all the county
19 offices for the aging hired their own
20 personal care aides, and then they all got
21 out of the business and contract with LHCSAs,
22 licensed home care services agencies.

23 We have been pushing with our
24 association trying to get the counties to

1 either hire their aides, so that we can
2 eliminate the waitlists in those particular
3 areas, or work with their LHCSAs to have
4 aides assigned. We have 12 counties now that
5 fit that mold. So there's other things that
6 we can do.

7 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. I'm going to
8 ask a short question. I think you mentioned
9 800,000 units of housing in your opening
10 remarks.

11 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes,
12 that's the Governor's --

13 SENATOR CLEARE: How much of that is
14 senior -- dedicated for senior housing,
15 assisted --

16 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well,
17 it's a five-year, \$25 billion plan. I'm not
18 sure which is -- why HCR is so important for
19 the Master Plan for Aging, because we need
20 all of those agencies that are working across
21 the age spectrum.

22 The Master Plan for Aging is not just
23 about aging, it's obviously inclusive. But
24 it's across all agencies. I was also sitting

1 here for the first two testimonies. The
2 impact of poverty on children and middle
3 income -- access to food, education,
4 et cetera -- is going to matter for -- as
5 people age, and so we need to really look at
6 this across the age spectrum.

7 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
9 Assembly.

10 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We've been
11 joined by Assemblywoman Hyndman.

12 And we go to our Veterans chair,
13 Assemblywoman Jean-Pierre.

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Well, good
15 afternoon. Thank you both for your
16 testimonies.

17 My question will go to Reverend
18 Viviana DeCohen. Thank you for meeting with
19 me and my staff just a few weeks ago to catch
20 up. But I have a few questions.

21 So last December the Assembly held a
22 hearing on veterans' services and the
23 assessment of going from a division to a
24 department. And one of the questions that

1 have been held is that there was no
2 representation from your office at the
3 hearing. And as we transition from a
4 division to department, some folks are
5 asking, What are going to be some of the
6 stronghold communications between the
7 department to the Legislature? And what type
8 of funding shifts will be necessary, needed
9 for the change?

10 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Thank you,
11 Assemblymember.

12 First of all, let me say good
13 afternoon again to all of you.

14 One of the things that happened with
15 that hearing is something that is innate when
16 there's technology. It was a lack of
17 communication, and we actually did not
18 receive our formal invitation. However, we
19 did listen to the hearing and heard all of
20 the thoughtful questions that were given by
21 you as well as our stakeholders.

22 One of the first things that we did
23 was to reach out to our stakeholders to
24 ensure that we were all on one page going

1 forward as we make this transition from
2 division to department. We know that more is
3 going to be needed on our part.

4 One of the things that I'm proud that
5 we were able to do as we move into this
6 transition -- and the communication will
7 continue with all of our stakeholders on our
8 monthly meetings that we have, with our
9 in-person visits that we have -- and
10 continues to be central on all of our media
11 platforms as well -- is to ensure that the
12 information, the communication is going to be
13 done before, during and after the process.

14 We've already begun to change all of
15 our forms as we move into that era. Our
16 forms that used to ask and be able to
17 ascertain assistance with benefits, we're now
18 asking crucial questions: Are you sheltered
19 now? Do you need help or assistance with
20 rent now? Do you have food in your home? So
21 that we can continue to meet all of our
22 veterans' needs across the board.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: So the
24 second part of my question -- thank you for

1 the first part. The second part of the
2 question was, what are going to be the
3 funding needs from -- because it is going to
4 be a department. So do you anticipate
5 funding needs, and what are those needs?

6 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: We're so
7 glad to tell you that the Governor's
8 Executive Budget just gave us \$300,000 for
9 the veteran-mobiles. We know that this is
10 going to be something that will allow us to
11 access those veterans who are often hidden,
12 and those who often will not walk into a
13 building for these services. That's the
14 money that's been given.

15 As we continue to go through the
16 process, we're going to know step by step
17 what we're going to be needing at that time.
18 But the money that's been released thus far,
19 we know that that's going to be huge in the
20 impact as we continue to move into the
21 department.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay,
23 thank you. And I look forward to being
24 one-on-one so we can talk more about those

1 funding needs.

2 But also during that testimony there
3 were some veterans who provided some
4 emotional testimonies as far as homelessness.
5 And in the executive proposal, there was
6 1.1 million to assist homeless veterans.

7 And so my question is, how many
8 veterans -- do you have a number of how many
9 veterans face housing insecurity in New York?
10 And with this funding, is there going to be a
11 joint program? How many veterans do you
12 think that 1.1 million is going to be served?

13 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: First of
14 all, let me say, as not only the director of
15 Veterans' Services but as a veteran who has
16 experienced this, if we have one veteran
17 who's served their country, God and country,
18 and then come out to continue the service
19 with family and the continued service with
20 community, it is one veteran too many that is
21 homeless.

22 We are so happy to hear that money is
23 coming not just for our veterans for this
24 program, who are unsheltered, but those again

1 who have received devastation. So many of
2 our veterans have experienced fires and end
3 up being unsheltered, and they've lost so
4 many other things. And then we have so many
5 of our veterans with chronic conditions that
6 moved them to where they have to have
7 accessibility to their homes, and this is
8 crucial.

9 So we are very excited about this
10 funding. You know, to a lot of people, you
11 know, it seems -- people say it's such a
12 little amount with what's out there. You
13 know, but there was a story of a woman who
14 had just a vial of oil, and she went and got
15 bigger vats and she began to pour the oils
16 into the vats. And as she did that, the
17 bigger vats were overflowing and overpouring.

18 And we feel that's what this
19 Governor's budget is, that what seems like
20 little is so much in the right hands. The
21 last year's budget allowed us to bring in
22 \$900 million of services to our veterans
23 across the state, with another 400 million in
24 educational benefits. So, you know, we're

1 very grateful for what we've been able to do.
2 We've been able to accomplish a lot together.

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: So just
4 for the essence of time, because I have a few
5 more questions. So on behalf of myself and
6 the Legislature, we thank you for your
7 service and your expertise here. But the
8 \$1.1 million we still, as a Legislature, need
9 to see numbers and who and how and where and
10 how many is going to be served under
11 \$1.1 million. Because dollars matter here,
12 and numbers matching dollars is critical.

13 So if you can get us what that
14 \$1.1 million is going to serve, and are there
15 any participating programs that's going to
16 support this \$1.1 million?

17 And my third question is: So
18 irregardless to last year's budget, again,
19 we're talking about dollars. Five million
20 dollars was a capital grant program. What is
21 the progress so far, approvals, how many have
22 applied? Do we have any stats on the \$5
23 million capital project?

24 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Yes, thank

1 you, Assemblymember Jean-Pierre.

2 The capital grants program was
3 announced by the Governor on November 11th,
4 on Veterans Day, which we had declared was
5 Veterans Month across the state. So that
6 made it even sweeter. We worked with DASNY
7 and our grants management partners, who
8 actually opened up the gateway, but made also
9 a very inclusive video on how to apply for
10 the RFP, how to fill out the applications,
11 and an intensive question-and-answer video
12 that they can replay. Many of them are still
13 replaying it.

14 As of right now, we have about a dozen
15 in-process applications. The application
16 period closed on February the 8th, and we're
17 looking forward to continuing the process so
18 that these grants can be disbursed. For so
19 many of our partners across New York State,
20 that will allow them to up-build and to
21 reenergize and strengthen the foundations and
22 continue to serve the veterans in their
23 communities.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Thank you.

1 I see I have a little bit more time,
2 so I'm just going to go back to something you
3 said about the 300,000. So that's in this
4 year's Executive Budget proposal, to
5 establish a fleet of mobile veterans'
6 services. How many veterans will they serve?
7 Again, it's going back to dollars and how
8 much is going to serve what population.

9 So what services will they provide? I
10 know you talked about regional one time we
11 met. But what is the 300 -- compared to
12 300,000, how many veterans is it going to
13 serve and where is it going to serve?

14 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Well, we
15 are going to begin this program -- and again,
16 we're very grateful and excited about it,
17 because for us this program is getting to
18 those veterans who were like myself, that
19 were not in areas where there was a local DSO
20 across the street.

21 So these mobile units are so important
22 to be able to go across the state. We're
23 going to begin with three -- one at the
24 beginning, New York City, one in the middle,

1 and one at the end -- so that we can get into
2 those places and spaces where our veterans
3 are.

4 One of the things that we're doing as
5 we transition into the department is a
6 program called Find and Serve. And Find and
7 Serve allows us to get on these mobiles and
8 take them into an area where a veteran will
9 know that every Wellness Wednesday at the
10 Piggly-Wiggly, between this time and this
11 time, there's a van there that can help them
12 to seek their services and all of the things
13 that they've earned through the services, and
14 be able to have someone there that can check
15 their health status and ensure everything
16 else that they're in need of.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Thank you.

18 My time is up. Thank you.

19 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

20 We go to the Senate.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

22 Our new chair of Veterans,
23 Senator Scarcella-Spartan -- Senator
24 Scarcella-Spanton. I'm making you a Spartan.

1 (Laughter.)

2 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Hi,
3 Reverend. Thank you so much for being here
4 today.

5 We had a wonderful meeting where we
6 got to discuss a lot of these ideas, and now
7 we're seeing them, you know, come to
8 fruition.

9 The one thing that I was concerned
10 about with this upcoming Executive Budget was
11 the cut of almost 14 percent to the Veterans'
12 budget. I do understand that a lot of those
13 legislative adds will be put back. But the
14 5 million for veterans nonprofit capital
15 funding is something I would love to see
16 continued as members also patch in with their
17 local district needs as well.

18 But the one thing I did want to start
19 with, which I think is wonderful, is the
20 300,000 for the mobile veterans advisor
21 clinics. As we discussed, it's really
22 important to meet people where they're at. I
23 think it's great, the Find and Serve motto.

24 I guess I wanted to ask, how long will

1 it take to actually get these mobile vans up
2 and running? And do we have a breakdown of
3 where they'll be going, which counties? Is
4 it every county? And how frequently?

5 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Thank you
6 so much for that question, Senator.

7 We're looking at all of the details
8 right now as far as having them wrapped, what
9 is going to be supplied on there. because
10 there may be a few surprises on there. We
11 may be able to not only give them some of the
12 services that they need on paper, but we just
13 may be able to supply them with a good pair
14 of warm socks on there as well.

15 And again, we're looking forward to
16 having them in all of those places. We've
17 been listening to our partners, and some of
18 our partners are looking forward to getting
19 these into areas where they feel may have
20 been a little large for them and conjoining
21 with them.

22 One of the wonderful things that I
23 have to tell you that I'm proud of the
24 Governor, but also so many of you that sit

1 here, is that we were allowed to go out and
2 to join with you and support so many of our
3 veteran partners at over 425 events just
4 between September and December.

5 And seeing you there and supporting
6 our veterans, and seeing their response, and
7 utilizing not veterans as a number -- because
8 we are not numbers -- but allowing all of you
9 and all of us to be able to listen to them
10 and not assume their voice, but to use a
11 qualitative, phenomenological approach to
12 asking them what their needs were -- when I
13 saw this, and we received the responses as to
14 the things that we need, that helps us to
15 know what it is that we need on these
16 mobiles.

17 Because some of them needed diapers.
18 Others needed the food coupons that our
19 Governor has invested in again. Some of them
20 did not need some of the other programs that
21 we were assuming that they need.

22 But I want to thank you again, because
23 we saw you out there at these over 400 events
24 in the past few months, and listening to what

1 it is that the veterans need. And I know if
2 we continue to do that, continue to listen to
3 them and allow them their own voice, then
4 we're going to do bigger and better even this
5 year than that 900 million that we brought
6 in.

7 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: So, you
8 know, I think that was a very positive piece
9 of the budget and something that everybody is
10 going to be able to utilize, and hopefully
11 our collective offices will be able to call
12 upon these mobile units to request them at
13 different VFW meetings in our own districts.

14 The one issue that I really took --
15 that I wanted to highlight was in the
16 Executive Budget it indicates that there's a
17 decrease in funding for veteran nonprofit
18 capital programs. Why are we decreasing this
19 funding? And which nonprofit capital
20 programs will be affected as a result of that
21 decrease?

22 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Thank you
23 for that question. I'm going to have to get
24 back to you on that because I'm not --

1 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: That's
2 okay.

3 And also the \$1.1 million in funding
4 for the Veterans Homeless Housing Program,
5 could you provide details on plans for this
6 funding? Is there supportive housing built
7 into this?

8 In our district in Coney Island we
9 have Surf Vets, which is affordable housing
10 for veterans. And one of the issues that we
11 run into is that these are people with
12 service-related disabilities, they may have
13 mental health issues, they're people who were
14 formerly experiencing homelessness. So
15 there's not a lot of support within that
16 housing -- within that affordable
17 housing system.

18 So I think that anything with housing
19 for veterans really does need to be
20 supportive. I say this as a military wife of
21 somebody with a service-connected disability.
22 And you need to provide resources for people
23 who have mental health conditions.

24 So I would love to see supportive

1 housing built into this. I don't think that
2 1.1 million could possibly provide the
3 support that it needs. So I wanted to see
4 what you do need to provide the supportive
5 housing.

6 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Thank you,
7 Senator. And I look forward to working with
8 you on that as we actually -- we're in talks
9 now for that program, because that's exactly
10 what we want.

11 This is not a one-tier with these
12 veterans. We have to meet them at the
13 several levels to where they are. And that's
14 why we're having this thoughtful discussion,
15 to ensure that that happens. I look forward
16 to continuing that work with you.

17 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Okay. And
18 if you guys could please get me a number on
19 what it would take to have a real
20 comprehensive and supportive housing program
21 for veterans, that would be great.

22 I also wanted to -- I know when we met
23 we discussed the funding for the Veterans
24 Memorial Registry, which is built in here,

1 which is wonderful. I wanted to see if there
2 was any comprehensive list of resources for
3 veterans and their families. I think
4 sometimes there's these great
5 organizations -- I met with one today,
6 Cohen Veterans Network, that provides mental
7 health services to not just veterans but also
8 their families, their children, spouses,
9 whoever may need it.

10 Is there a comprehensive list within
11 the state that veterans and their families
12 could tap into? And if there's not, would a
13 similar project like the registry for
14 memorials make sense?

15 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Thank you
16 for that question. And we're actually
17 working out the details of that. In fact,
18 after this meeting I have a meeting -- we
19 have a meeting to discuss that program as
20 well.

21 But we're looking forward to that half
22 a million dollars that the Governor has given
23 us to have this searchable database so that
24 our family members can continue to honor the

1 memories of their loved ones and have access
2 to that for their children and their
3 great-grandchildren. I happen to be a
4 grandmother of 10, so I will appreciate when
5 my grandchildren are able to look up Grandma
6 and see the services in there as well.

7 Thank you for that, and look forward
8 to working with you on this piece.

9 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON:

10 Absolutely.

11 And my last question will be about the
12 Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Program, which is a
13 wonderful program. I think that veterans
14 supporting veterans, especially upon their
15 return, is critical to their success in
16 reintegration into civilian life.

17 Do you feel that the Governor's budget
18 sufficiently covers it? There was a very,
19 very moderate increase to the funding for the
20 peer-to-peer program. Do you think that it's
21 sufficient or it should be increased?

22 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Well, as
23 you know, the Joseph P. Dwyer Program is an
24 essential program around this nation. And

1 for our state, we were happy last year when
2 the Governor doubled that budget to the
3 7.7 million, which allowed us to be able to
4 work with them and OMH to be able to get this
5 program out to our various counties
6 throughout the state so that they could erect
7 a program as well.

8 We work closely with OMH to be able to
9 do that, as well as our SUNY Albany
10 researchers and partners, to be able to put
11 together a concise listing, a guideline
12 booklet, a Q&A booklet on how to erect and
13 continue to strengthen and support them.

14 You know, wherever they are right now,
15 we are committed, I'm committed to -- because
16 this is a program that I used to send my
17 veteran students to many years ago. So we
18 know that this team is committed to
19 continuing to support them with where they
20 are, and we'll continue to push them as far
21 as we can to ensure that our veterans across
22 the state are serviced by that program.

23 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: And if you
24 could also just let me know -- I see that

1 there's a breakdown by county. We don't have
2 it quite as broken down for New York City, it
3 just has New York City listed as the county.

4 If you could send me a breakdown of
5 the peer-to-peer services and the funding
6 that are in both Kings County and Richmond
7 County, I think that would be really helpful.
8 We're happy to get the word out and, you
9 know, provide support to our local veterans.

10 And yeah, I just wanted to say thank
11 you for your service and I know I'm very much
12 looking forward to working together with the
13 mobile vans. I think it will be a great help
14 to veterans in need.

15 So thank you.

16 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Thank you
17 so much, Senator.

18 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So we go to
19 Assemblyman Eachus for three minutes.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Thank you,
21 Ms. Chair.

22 Reverend DeCohen, thank you for your
23 service. And I assure you your division,
24 soon to be department, has all my support.

1 I also want to thank you for your
2 optimism when you're sitting there eyeing a
3 governor's state appropriations of a decrease
4 of \$4.78 million, or approximately 14
5 percent, and you still seem to have a little
6 bit of a smile on your face.

7 So -- and relative to those new vans,
8 do please check with the counties. My county
9 is very, very concerned and gracious to all
10 veterans. We have vans traveling throughout
11 the county. We actually take veterans to
12 their medical appointments and to shopping
13 and so on like that.

14 But the question I have for you is I
15 would like to first let you know that for
16 40 years I was a high school teacher, and I'm
17 affiliated with many of the military service
18 organizations. And I was wondering if you
19 knew about something with the American
20 Legion -- I'm going to pick out one service
21 organization -- the Boys State and Girls
22 State program at all.

23 This is a program where posts across
24 the state can send kids for a week of

1 basically boot camp, and every student that I
2 have ever sent there through these
3 organizations and has returned has bragged
4 about it.

5 And we no longer support that -- we,
6 being the state, no longer support that. So
7 I am definitely going to ask for an
8 appropriation of 150,000 for the Boys State
9 and 150,000 for the Girls State to get us
10 back helping these programs, because I feel
11 they really need help.

12 Would your department support these
13 programs?

14 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: First of
15 all, let me happily and proudly say I am a
16 Legionnaire, and so I am very familiar with
17 these programs.

18 And as a Legionnaire -- listen, as a
19 department -- as a division to department, we
20 want to continue to support all of our
21 partners who are supporting our veterans.
22 Part of our veterans is their families as
23 well as the children. And there is no better
24 way that we know to continue to strengthen

1 our partnership than to ensure that the next
2 generation continues to have the fortitude
3 and the strength and the knowledge and
4 support them, you know, as they go into
5 adulthood, honoring our nation's heroes.

6 So I look forward to working with you
7 with that, Assemblyman.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Director Olsen, I
9 only have a half-minute, so I'm just going to
10 pose my two questions. There won't be any
11 time to answer them.

12 But the first is back to the LTCOP
13 program. Eighty percent of those
14 participants, those ombudsmen, are
15 volunteers, and I just would like to hear
16 specifically at some point in time what
17 you're doing to encourage these volunteers.
18 Because I didn't even know about the program,
19 and I was 12 years on the Orange County
20 Legislature.

21 And then the other question I would
22 have is you have in your key investments and
23 proposals "strengthening EMS," and I'd like
24 to hear how you're going to do that too.

1 Thank you.

2 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senate?

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

4 Senator Ashby, five minutes, ranker.

5 SENATOR ASHBY: Thank you,

6 Madam Chair.

7 Thank you, Director DeCohen. Thank

8 you, Commissioner Olsen.

9 Real quick, Commissioner Olsen, what's
10 the timeline for the master plan?

11 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: We're
12 supposed to have a draft early on in the
13 spring, and then it will commence --
14 hopefully after, you know, huge public
15 input -- sometime next year.

16 SENATOR ASHBY: Okay, appreciate it.

17 Director DeCohen, good to see you.

18 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Yeah, it's
19 good to see you, Senator.

20 SENATOR ASHBY: You know, I'm happy to
21 hear that we're starting to put something
22 forward with, you know, these -- the mobile
23 response. I think that's a good thing.

24 But in light of, you know, really the

1 lack of funding and the lack of effort that
2 we've seen with this Governor's
3 administration with this new department, I'm
4 kind of surprised to hear that, you know,
5 that's the only thing that's going on. I
6 mean, are there any other subdivisions that
7 you're looking to outfit? Is there any other
8 federal programming or federal dollars that
9 you're looking to get to implement into this
10 new agency?

11 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Oh, thank
12 you, Senator. Thank you for that.

13 Absolutely. And again, being into the
14 public and going across this state now, from
15 New York City, Bronx, all the way to Buffalo,
16 has allowed us to be able to listen to the
17 needs of our veterans. And so absolutely.
18 We're continuing to work with our veterans
19 who are incarcerated. As you know, we've
20 already put in programs and veterans benefit
21 advisors into so many of these correctional
22 programs, and we're doing the welcome back
23 with them as well so that they have a warm
24 handshake back into society when they come

1 in.

2 Our volunteerism, our programs for our
3 veterans -- as you know, volunteerism has
4 been a lifesaver for so many of our veterans
5 who have gotten their dignity back because
6 their self-worth is not only in God and
7 country and family, but now back into the
8 community with that.

9 Continuing to meet the needs of our
10 veterans who are expecting babies and
11 unemployed -- and this state has done a great
12 job in our --

13 SENATOR ASHBY: Director DeCohen, if I
14 could interrupt you, though.

15 Is -- are there any -- aside from the
16 prison program that you had mentioned, is
17 there any specific program that you know of
18 right now that you're looking to implement
19 with this new agency? I mean, other than the
20 volunteers, which are great, but -- the
21 elevation allows us to garner federal dollars
22 for this. What are we targeting?

23 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Well,
24 we're continuing to target our suicide

1 prevention programs. We're continuing to --

2 SENATOR ASHBY: I'm glad you brought
3 that up. And I -- because I only have five
4 minutes, I apologize for interrupting you.

5 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: That's all
6 right.

7 SENATOR ASHBY: But the Dwyer program,
8 part of the aim of elevating the division to
9 an agency is the hope that the Dwyer program
10 could be permanent funding, so we wouldn't
11 have to go back and do this each and every
12 year. Is that something that your department
13 is committed to?

14 Because right now, I mean, we're
15 seeing a modest increase in that. This is
16 something that needs to happen, that we hear
17 about it every day. And I know that we have
18 people here in the audience that are going to
19 provide testimony to this.

20 Why is the Governor not moving on this
21 issue the way that we need her to?

22 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Well,
23 Senator, we're glad for the movement that we
24 have because, again, so much has been

1 accomplished with the Dwyer program and what
2 they're doing, and the doubling of those
3 funds to \$7.7 million.

4 And we continue to work with them as
5 well as OMH and all of our other partners.
6 We're going to ensure that we continue to
7 support them in any way that --

8 SENATOR ASHBY: And I'm sure in your
9 role, Director, and as a veteran, you know
10 that that's not good enough. I know that
11 that's not good enough. Our veterans and
12 their families deserve better than that. And
13 we've worked too hard over the last years to
14 elevate this division to an agency to be
15 satisfied with that response. That's as
16 plain as it gets.

17 With \$30 million -- take a look at
18 these numbers. Thirty million in funding for
19 New York State veterans. We have roughly
20 700,000 veterans in New York. In New Jersey
21 they have \$104 million in state funding.
22 They have 300,000 veterans. In
23 Massachusetts, \$97 million in funding,
24 roughly 300,000 veterans.

1 There's a huge disparity there. And
2 we have a great opportunity here, and we have
3 a great leader in you. And we need to do a
4 better job for our veterans in making this
5 happen. I know that you recognize this, and
6 I know that you're pushing for it in a
7 variety of ways. But New York State's
8 veterans and their families deserve better.

9 What do we need to do as a Legislature
10 to make that happen? What do we need to do
11 to make the Dwyer funding permanent, to
12 capitalize on federal grants and programming
13 that could benefit our veterans and their
14 families? This is your opportunity.

15 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Thank --
16 thank you, Senator.

17 One thing that we need to do is to
18 continue to work together to allow the voices
19 of our veterans to allow us to know what
20 their needs are. But also we have to look at
21 what we've brought in. And again, the work
22 that we've done this past year with what we
23 were given has brought in so much and helped
24 so many that remain unseen to all of us.

1 And as we know, our service, as was
2 said earlier, is often unthanked, often
3 unknown to all of the things that you're
4 doing. But I want you to know that so much
5 has been done already with what we have
6 accomplished this past year, and we can only
7 continue to do more. And we will.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you,
9 Reverend. Thank you, Senator.

10 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Thank you,
11 Senator.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

13 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblywoman
14 Clark.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thank you.

16 Good to see you. This is to
17 Director Olsen at Aging.

18 I thank you for your testimony and for
19 some of the many good things that are in
20 there, but I know you were at -- in Rochester
21 last week, and I, at a breakfast that our
22 organizational group around aging issues was
23 there. And you heard firsthand, as I did,
24 that one of our amazing groups that does a

1 lot of work in this space said it was
2 probably one of the worst budgets she'd ever
3 seen for older New Yorkers. And so that
4 really does throw a huge amount of concern to
5 me.

6 I think that particularly when you
7 look at the issues we see around increasing
8 poverty in our older New Yorkers, when you
9 see the just huge population growth in older
10 New Yorkers, when you understand what COVID
11 has done in our long-term-care facilities,
12 that even holding flat is a disappointment
13 when we know we need to move forward to
14 really make this work.

15 And I want to focus on the Long Term
16 Care Ombudsman Program quickly, which we've
17 heard a lot about. And I get that we keep
18 saying we need federal support and we need
19 federal investment, but last I heard we were
20 39th in the country in terms of a state
21 investing dollars into that program. So if
22 38 other states are doing more than we are
23 right now, I think we owe it to do more as
24 well.

1 What do you think would be -- I mean,
2 you know we can't run this program on
3 volunteers. We can't have weekly visits
4 based on volunteers. We can't have
5 volunteers going toe-to-toe with DOH on
6 answers for complaints. Do you sort of
7 recognize that we have to get to the point
8 where we truly professionalize this and
9 invest dollars into it?

10 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I think
11 the entire network needs that. Again,
12 because the structure of the Older Americans
13 Act 50-something years ago really relied on
14 volunteers.

15 We are working with, you know,
16 physicians' offices, hospitals, plans,
17 long-term-care facilities, et cetera. And
18 you're absolutely right, you can't expect,
19 you know, 75-year-old, 80-year-old volunteers
20 -- who are unbelievably dedicated and smart
21 -- to do the job that a professional ought to
22 do.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Excellent.

24 And I just also want to say, you know,

1 some of the things to flag as we look
2 particularly at removing and getting --
3 continuing to get older New Yorkers who are
4 on these waitlists for critical basic needs
5 off these waitlists. You know, DOH had
6 2.1 million in its budget to create a new
7 program that is particularly or could be
8 considered duplicative to what we're already
9 doing. Why not put that into SOFA? Why not
10 get that extra \$9.5 million that we need to
11 remove waitlists, let alone go above and
12 beyond to see what we can do to really help
13 seniors in poverty?

14 Thank you.

15 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

16 To the Senate.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

18 Senator May.

19 SENATOR MAY: Thank you.

20 Hi, Commissioner Olsen, or
21 Director Olsen. Great to see you again.

22 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: You
23 too.

24 SENATOR MAY: I wanted to thank

1 Senator Cleare for asking a number of the
2 questions that I had.

3 But I wanted to follow up about the
4 NORC funding in the budget. And I'm glad to
5 see there's Neighborhood NORC as well as the
6 traditional NORC funding. But what are you
7 thinking about our upstate cities which don't
8 fall typically into either category? Is
9 there planning for a third category of NORCs
10 so we can have smaller apartment buildings,
11 for example, in our upstate cities
12 participate in this program?

13 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
14 Senator, good to see you as well.

15 You know, when we did the
16 modernization of the NORC program a few years
17 ago, it was at '14 or so, we did attempt in
18 there to create models that would serve rural
19 communities, urban communities and suburban.
20 We worked with you last year and some of the
21 NORCs, specifically for one in your district
22 in Syracuse, where a couple of other tweaks
23 needed to be made.

24 So, you know, I think that's something

1 that we should all look at. It's
2 budget-neutral, and what the Naturally
3 Occurring Retirement Communities does was so
4 ahead of their time in terms of bringing
5 together healthcare and social determinants
6 of health, social services that we provide to
7 serve people holistically. So it's not meant
8 to be exclusive, and I think that's what we
9 tried to do, and the modernization might need
10 a tweak.

11 SENATOR MAY: Okay, great.

12 And then following up to what
13 Assemblymember Clark said, I heard you say
14 earlier that we were hoping to get to about
15 60 percent coverage of nursing homes with
16 ombudsmen.

17 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: That's
18 where we are now with the additional 35 staff
19 that was negotiated, thanks to you and then
20 the Governor last year, to add that to our
21 budget.

22 SENATOR MAY: Okay. Because by law it
23 should be 100 percent, and so we've got to
24 start putting the money in to make sure that

1 we're getting to 100 percent. That's where I
2 am.

3 Thank you.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

5 Assembly.

6 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblyman
7 Gallahan.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN GALLAHAN: Thank you,
9 Madam Chair.

10 Thank you both for your testimony and
11 all that you do for us here in New York
12 State.

13 Director Olsen, I have one topic, and
14 it is constantly coming across my email
15 screen, it is constantly on my phone, and I
16 constantly get bombarded with it, and it has
17 to do with home healthcare aides. And the
18 biggest complaint I have is retention and
19 hiring, which we all are well aware of that.
20 The biggest problem I have is in my own
21 community. There's such a shortage, the
22 retention rate is -- it's just dysfunctional.
23 It's terrible. Because all these folks are
24 going to McDonald's and Burger King for two

1 and three dollars more an hour.

2 Now, you know, the state mandated
3 wages for fast food workers. Is there any
4 discussion about this situation with home
5 healthcare aides? And if there is, I would
6 love to know, so I can report that back to my
7 constituents. Because I'm really -- I'm
8 really catching it on this, and rightfully
9 so. I mean, our loved ones are not getting
10 the care that they need, and they're the most
11 important people in our lives.

12 So I would really respect your
13 response.

14 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
15 absolutely, Assemblyman. That is the
16 problem.

17 As you know, last year's budget
18 contained a \$2 increase for personal care
19 aides and home care aides, and another dollar
20 coming up in October of '23.

21 You're right, it's difficult work.
22 You know, you're not guaranteed a certain
23 number of hours, you don't get paid when you
24 travel. And the people that are in that

1 business really love the work that they do.
2 But you're right, when you have aides in
3 somebody's house, you can help them remain
4 independent with dignity for a very, very
5 long time.

6 I mentioned earlier, and I'm not sure
7 if you were here at the time, we have been
8 working -- because our in-home program is not
9 Medicaid. We serve people who are just above
10 Medicaid -- who could certainly spend down,
11 but they don't need to, because we coordinate
12 a package of services around them, including
13 PC 1 and 2, which is the personal care aides.

14 And what we have seen by, you know,
15 trying to work with our counties to hire
16 aides directly or have the licensed home care
17 services agencies provide a certain number of
18 aides just to the OFA, we've seen elimination
19 of waitlists, we've seen no turnover.
20 They're part of the care teams. Who's the
21 most important part of that care team is the
22 person that's in the home every day that can
23 report things in realtime.

24 So these are the kinds of things that

1 I think -- well, this one in particular, but
2 there's other models of things that the
3 Offices for the Aging do so well that really
4 we're excited to bring to the Master Plan for
5 Aging and the Reimagine Long-Term Care.
6 Because I think a real continuum starts at
7 the community level, and hopefully Medicaid
8 is the payer of last resort.

9 And there's things out there that have
10 been tried and tested and show a return on
11 investment, both in terms of savings but
12 really these are people, as you had talked
13 about. I would love to -- I know I'm done, I
14 was just going to offer in your district, we
15 should have a conversation and see if that's
16 something we can get the county executives to
17 do.

18 I also just want to mention that, you
19 know, as of this morning -- and vouchers may
20 be late -- our AAAs have about \$77 million
21 available to them for ARPA funds through '24.
22 That can certainly help.

23 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank --
24 thank -- thank you.

1 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I'm so
2 sorry, Assemblywoman.

3 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN GALLAHAN: Thank you.

5 Thank you very much.

6 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: To the Senate.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

8 To Roxanne Persaud.

9 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

10 Reverend, it's always great to see
11 you. And thank you for your passion and your
12 commitment to, you know, your colleagues,
13 your fellow veterans. I really appreciate
14 everything that you continue to do.

15 Director Olsen, are you aware of our
16 legislation where we're talking about
17 breaking up the 24-hour work rule for home
18 health attendants?

19 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah.
20 That's not applicable to us, Senator, I'm
21 sorry --

22 SENATOR PERSAUD: No, I'm just asking.

23 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
24 I'm familiar with it.

1 SENATOR PERSAUD: So we were talking
2 about -- why I brought it up is when we're
3 talking about the salaries for home health
4 attendants, and across the board they are not
5 being paid enough. They are working -- and
6 you have some -- who work 24-hour shifts
7 without being paid the appropriate amount of
8 money. As you know, they are only paid for
9 13 hours that they work. And so we're
10 looking to change that. I just wanted to
11 bring that up.

12 Could you tell me what is the plan for
13 the home-delivered meals? There are so many
14 people who are still on a waitlist. What is
15 being done to ensure that our seniors are
16 receiving the meals that they should receive?

17 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yup,
18 Senator, I'd love to know where the waitlists
19 are for home-delivered meals, because we
20 don't -- we're not seeing that. There's
21 pockets for sure, and there's some places in
22 the city.

23 As you know, we do operate and
24 administer with our partners the largest

1 nutrition program in the country.

2 I'll also just mention that, again,
3 meals are -- was the number-one service
4 provided from the beginning of the pandemic
5 to now, no question. And it's
6 extraordinarily important. Food is medicine.

7 SENATOR PERSAUD: We're still having
8 some -- so I have -- for example, I have a
9 couple, both of them are cancer patients, and
10 they're still trying to get it. They're
11 constantly calling about having meals
12 delivered. And, you know, we contact the
13 agencies and, you know, then we have a
14 stop-gap method, and then it happens again.

15 So, you know, we'll send -- we'll
16 follow up with you on that, because --

17 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
18 I'd appreciate that.

19 SENATOR PERSAUD: -- it's something
20 that, you know, we need to --

21 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I'd
22 appreciate that.

23 SENATOR PERSAUD: -- to address.

24 And one last thing for you -- no, that

1 was it, what we -- the home-delivered meals.
2 I think I covered it --

3 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Can I
4 just say something in 48 seconds really to
5 everybody here?

6 SENATOR PERSAUD: Sure.

7 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: SNAP
8 benefits are extraordinarily important that a
9 lot of older adults are eligible for that
10 don't use it. It could put an extra \$2,000
11 in their pocket.

12 Starting probably in the next month,
13 last year's budget raised the income level
14 for the Medicare Savings Program.

15 SENATOR PERSAUD: Right.

16 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: That
17 will serve 300,000-plus people, put \$7,000
18 back into their Social Security checks.

19 We could really use your help, in
20 addition to the networks that we're going to
21 engage, to get the word out so that -- again,
22 you put just those two together, that's
23 \$10,000 in people's pockets in this really
24 difficult inflationary time. So we could

1 certainly use all of your help as well to
2 advertise in your district offices and public
3 forums, that these exist.

4 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you. I hope
5 you will send that to DFTA so they can send
6 it to all our senior centers across the --
7 yeah, thank you.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
9 Assembly.

10 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblywoman
11 Forrest.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: Thank you.

13 Thank you, Reverend DeCohen, for being
14 here. We appreciate your service.

15 My question is for Director Olsen. As
16 you know, SOFA is required by law and statute
17 to submit a report to both the Assembly, the
18 Senate, and the Governor. Right? That was
19 due since September 1, 2020.

20 Now, you had spoken a bit about the
21 report, but I wanted to get some more
22 clarity. Who is leading the report at this
23 time? And when the report --

24 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Which

1 report are we talking about?

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: SOFA is
3 supposed to give a report.

4 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: You're
5 talking about an annual report?

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: The Master
7 Plan for Aging report, yes. And it's
8 supposed to be given.

9 But who is actually leading this --
10 the report? And do you have a time frame on
11 when this --

12 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: You
13 mean leading the development of the plan?

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: Yes.

15 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: So the
16 Health Department is leading that, and we are
17 working hand in hand with them.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: Do you know a
19 time frame? Is there a time frame, a month,
20 two months?

21 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Oh,
22 absolutely. Like I said, we were supposed to
23 have the draft report due in the spring, but
24 it's an 18-month process. The final report

1 will be in 2024. I'd be happy to tell you
2 what the timelines are that were laid out in
3 the executive order.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: In the
5 meantime, the \$1 million that is in the
6 executive report, is that part of that
7 \$1 million being spent on this plan as well?

8 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: It's
9 for development and technical support.
10 There's -- like I said, there's a lot that
11 goes on behind the scenes, from the
12 development of a website to organizing the
13 meetings and the calls and things like that.

14 So, you know, in last year's budget
15 and State of the State, the Governor had
16 announced that we would get 1.5 million. We
17 got 500,000 last year and then preserve that
18 commitment this year.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: All right,
20 thank you.

21 And then also the AARP says that
22 96 percent of New York City's nursing homes
23 and adult care facilities failed to receive a
24 single visit from the New York federally

1 required adult oversight program, the
2 ombudsman program. Right? And they said
3 that the -- you need one employee to visit
4 five different facilities. And I'm a nurse,
5 so I'm all for safe staffing, right?

6 Can you explain why this funding is --
7 I still don't understand, and I want to make
8 sure. Why is this funding still not properly
9 allocated? I mean, an only \$2.5 million
10 increase does not man the entire state, much
11 less just -- it doesn't man New York City,
12 much less the whole state.

13 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I
14 think, you know, it has traditionally been
15 underfunded. I talked to you about how much
16 we get from the federal government, and we
17 have cobbled together through a variety of
18 sources since at least I've been at NYSOFA,
19 to try to increase --

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: I'm not
21 talking about the federal, I'm talking about
22 the New York City -- New York State's
23 commitment.

24 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Again,

1 I can't comment on AARP's visits or not. I
2 can get you data directly from us.

3 I think budgets are hard because
4 they're big and there's a lot of different
5 things that people want, and this is the
6 beginning of the process where, you know,
7 Governor outlays her priorities, you guys
8 will do the same thing, and then, you know,
9 there'll be a dialogue over the next couple
10 of months --

11 (Inaudible overtalk.)

12 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

13 Senate?

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

15 Cordell Cleare, three-minute second
16 round, to close for the Senate. Oh, I'm
17 sorry, not to close for the Senate. I forgot
18 Senator Weik.

19 Three minutes, go ahead.

20 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. Director
21 Olsen, I just wanted to ask, did SOFA receive
22 any pandemic money directly or through
23 another agency? And if so, is it continued
24 in the '23-'24 budget proposal?

1 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Are you
2 talking about stimulus dollars?

3 SENATOR CLEARE: Any dollars that SOFA
4 received to --

5 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
6 we received five different packages of
7 federal stimulus dollars. That's what I was
8 mentioning; the largest one is the ARPA funds
9 that expire September 31, '24. And there's
10 still quite a bit of available resources to
11 the counties.

12 All of our money, except those that
13 are outlined in our budget, are required by
14 law to go to the counties. So I'm frustrated
15 that some of them are not spending dollars
16 that could help, again, with some of these
17 needs that we have.

18 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. And also a
19 little off-topic, you know, I have senior
20 centers in my district that provide
21 incredible service to the seniors that are
22 living there, who are living at home who
23 depend on them daily for social, health and
24 other resources. And they are literally,

1 many of them, falling apart. They're not in
2 good facilities, they are in need of capital.

3 How can SOFA help these very important
4 centers? In my district I have A. Philip
5 Randolph Center -- I mean, and they're
6 scrambling, they're providing really critical
7 services, as you know --

8 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: They
9 really are. And there's never been federal
10 or state capital dollars for senior centers.
11 They're mostly funded, besides the service
12 money we provide, they're mostly funded
13 locally, as you know.

14 But you're right. I've been around,
15 you know, for 31 years; I've seen a lot of
16 these centers. Some of them are amazing in
17 terms of their structure, and some of them
18 are really struggling.

19 SENATOR PERSAUD: Yeah, and we really
20 need it, because some -- they need to be
21 retrofitted, they need to have bathrooms
22 done, they need their kitchens --

23 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: They
24 need to be welcoming.

1 SENATOR CLEARE: They need to be
2 welcoming, and they need to be habitable for
3 the period of time that people are in them,
4 technology needs, and so forth and so on.

5 So that's just something I really want
6 to bring to you and talk to you about how we
7 can get those centers upgraded. I have
8 Central Harlem Senior Center, they're
9 operating in a basement. You know, that's
10 not -- it's just not cool.

11 So I just thank you for that. The
12 pandemic money -- you know, I saw senior
13 centers and senior programs happening during
14 the pandemic that really should have been
15 happening all along. So that's why I asked
16 that question about pandemic dollars, because
17 some of that needs to be continued. We
18 should have been doing it even pre-pandemic.

19 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: You're
20 absolutely right. We can talk afterwards
21 because there's a lot of things that we
22 launched with our association partners in
23 counties over the last two years that
24 absolutely are continuing.

1 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

2 And Reverend, I'd just like to thank
3 you for your service. I will contact you
4 about the mobile units.

5 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Thank you,
6 Senator.

7 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
9 Assembly.

10 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblyman
11 Burdick.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Thank you.

13 And thank you, Reverend DeCohen, for
14 your service and for your testimony.

15 And I have to confess that I do share
16 the concerns and being perplexed how your
17 testimony seems to describe an increase in
18 services and yet there's a substantial
19 decrease in the budget. And, I mean, it kind
20 of defies gravity.

21 And I'm wondering if you could try to
22 explain how that might be accomplished,
23 particularly with what I think is very
24 laudable, to have the new Homeless Veterans

1 Housing Program.

2 And, you know, the other question I
3 would ask in connection with the latter is
4 whether that's a program that you intend to
5 work in collaboration with OTDA.

6 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Oh, thank
7 you. Thank you, Assemblymember.

8 That program, as I stated, it's still
9 a new program to us, so we're still hashing
10 out all of the details.

11 Less, I don't know from this
12 administration, but I do know the dollar and
13 cents amount that we were able to bring in.
14 And again, that \$900 million in services to
15 our veterans across the state is a number
16 that exceeded the one on last year.

17 And we know that there's more to be
18 done, especially as we are moving into our
19 new nomenclature as a department. There's so
20 many levels and so many tiers. And we know
21 that that is not our area, but we are looking
22 forward to working with you to be able to
23 ensure that this is going to meet the needs
24 of all of our veterans across the state as we

1 move forward.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Well, I think
3 it's a daunting task, you know, with the
4 decrease in expenditures, as one of my
5 colleagues noted. And, you know, it's
6 commonly known that it's almost a 14 percent
7 cut in the budget at a time of high inflation
8 as well as increasing needs and a large
9 veterans population. And as one of the
10 Senators noted, it contrasts quite poorly, I
11 think, frankly, with Massachusetts,
12 New Jersey, other states in terms of the
13 funds that they devote in their state budgets
14 to their veterans services.

15 So I think there certainly will be
16 some interest in increasing the budget. I
17 don't know whether we'll be successful in
18 that. But I think that that's something that
19 we all would like to see.

20 But in any event, we certainly thank
21 you for your service and everything that
22 you're trying to do on behalf of the
23 veterans.

24 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Thank you,

1 Assemblymember.

2 I'd like to say, in this last
3 17 seconds, I remember the old adage of my
4 grandmother having a half a cup of rice and
5 looking like she could only feed herself, and
6 she ended up not only feeding the entire
7 family but she felt she was able to feed the
8 community as well. And that's what we're
9 hoping to continue to do with what we have.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Sounds like a
11 biblical reference.

12 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.
13 To the Senate.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
15 Senator Weik.

16 SENATOR WEIK: Thank you very much.
17 And I want to say thank you to
18 Reverend DeCohen. Thank you for your
19 service. Thank you for your testimony today.

20 I come from Suffolk County, which has
21 the greatest number of veterans in all of
22 New York State. I'm very proud to say that.
23 And I work very hard with our veterans to
24 make sure that we're providing however we

1 can.

2 We do have a lot of veterans who are
3 complaining of kind of the same thing over
4 and over again, which is that their posts are
5 in disrepair. They've been applying for
6 grants, they're waiting for signatures,
7 they've gotten that far. And these posts are
8 really vital to their services when they
9 provide Joseph P. Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Program
10 services. And if I heard you correctly, that
11 you'll be going around assisting to try to
12 help them apply for these grants. Is that
13 accurate, you're able to do that?

14 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Yeah. The
15 grants gateway is open and they have recorded
16 a video on how to apply for the grant and all
17 of the Q&A that are out there.

18 Just so that you know, Suffolk -- I
19 used to work in Suffolk and Nassau County,
20 and so I know so many of these
21 organizations -- and I have recused myself
22 from the actual process of who was applying.
23 But we did ensure that there was a
24 comprehensive video that has been made that

1 they can still access on how to, what to, and
2 all of the questions and answers. And thus
3 far, I've been told from a great many of them
4 that are applying, that is relatively easy to
5 follow.

6 SENATOR WEIK: I guess getting the
7 signatures at the end is the hard part; that
8 continues to be holding them up.

9 So of course if there's any way that
10 you can advocate for them as well, that would
11 certainly be much needed and truly
12 appreciated.

13 I know our homeless veterans is a big
14 issue as well in many areas. Are there any
15 other services that you're going to be able
16 to provide to assist getting them out of
17 these tents in the woods and into shelters of
18 any sort?

19 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: We were --
20 we were happy to be able to have the service
21 of Find and Serve and to utilize a platform
22 for more outreach, the Find and Serve. And
23 on Veterans Month we were able to access so
24 many, so many veterans. One of our advisors

1 walked over a couple of our veterans to the
2 Department of Social Services and was able to
3 get them the assistance that they needed.

4 One of them that I can tell you from
5 last year now has 100 percent of her
6 services, having been housed. We were able
7 to work with and continue to work with those
8 who have been sheltered with our resources so
9 that they can get things like furniture and
10 continue to get the food and other things
11 that they need -- and especially those that
12 have children, to be able to get them the
13 book bags that are fully slotted.

14 So absolutely. Listen, we could make
15 a list of a hundred things today and tomorrow
16 the list is going to be a thousand, and more
17 and more. Because I have to tell you, as a
18 veteran, I always say if I could bounce a
19 basketball and do a layup, everything that we
20 would need as a veteran would be in our home
21 free of charge.

22 SENATOR WEIK: Well, I look forward to
23 working with you in the future.

24 Thank you.

1 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: I look
2 forward to working with you as well, Senator.

3 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.
4 Assemblywoman Hunter.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN HUNTER: Thank you.
6 Thank you to you both.

7 Director DeCohen, at our
8 December hearing we heard from several
9 different witnesses. They were very
10 compelling, and I wish you had been able to
11 be in-person to hear the gentlemen talk about
12 being homeless, not having housing.

13 So while we're having aspirational
14 dreams about this budget and what both the
15 Assembly and Senate will have to put in --
16 because it is not adequate where it is right
17 now -- I'd like know what services are
18 available today while another veteran is
19 homeless. So that's my first question.

20 My second question -- and again, this
21 was from the hearing, but I live and breathe
22 it every day. As a veteran, I actually have
23 a case that spanned four years that was one
24 of the biggest issues that was brought

1 forward from our service providers about not
2 getting assistance from the state to help
3 them facilitate these claims from the feds.

4 So my second question is, what is your
5 relationship with the federal government in
6 aiding our veterans to get their claims
7 processed which have been languishing for
8 years?

9 And my last question is relative to
10 mental health and PTSD. We had a
11 conversation about 988 and you press 1 and it
12 will get you to someone who can speak to
13 someone who can help a veteran. They have
14 millions and millions of calls since that
15 number was instituted, and that leaves the
16 veteran hanging out, waiting. That's a lot,
17 millions and millions, just to get to someone
18 to talk to.

19 And so I'm looking for leadership.
20 I'd like to see the \$300,000 worth of vans.
21 Give them to the county, give them to the
22 direct service organizations. We don't need
23 to see the state-level people right in the
24 area, because our local people know where

1 these veterans are.

2 And so if you could answer my
3 questions in the time allotted. Thank you.

4 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Thank you
5 so much. And if you don't mind, I'll answer
6 them not directly in the order that you've
7 given.

8 With the 888 {sic} number, we've been
9 working with the American Red Cross. I'm
10 wearing the band today. There is actually a
11 committed and dedicated hero care line for
12 our veterans for not just emergencies with
13 fires, but all emergencies that they need,
14 whether it's housing, emergency housing,
15 emergency clothing, emergency cash for gas to
16 get to school.

17 We continue to work with our partners
18 at the VA right now, especially as the
19 PACT Act has become a reality. We've also
20 put out a video for that as well. We
21 continue to talk with them.

22 They're also having an aggressive
23 program right now where they've hired more
24 people to address homelessness by getting

1 dedicated workers and social workers and more
2 in the mental health.

3 And right now we're doing just what we
4 said. The 15 that we found and the 14 more
5 that just came to us, we have had them walked
6 over to shelter assistance ourselves, and
7 then we've put in resources to assist those
8 shelters to get the clothing and the things
9 that they need while they're in shelter.

10 We continue to work with the
11 Department of Labor to ensure the jobs, to
12 ensure the education and even to ensure that
13 their military transcripts are properly
14 translated into jobs and things that they can
15 get right now.

16 We're about the right amount of
17 services because so many of us have been that
18 homeless person.

19 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you,
20 Director.

21 Senate?

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senate is closed.

23 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay, we have
24 several more Assemblymembers.

1 Assemblyman Pirozzolo.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN PIROZZOLO: I'd like to
3 say thank you to both of you for being here
4 today. Reverend DeCohen, thank you for your
5 service.

6 This question is really for both of
7 you. Director Olsen, it kind of falls to you
8 under Aging, and then, Reverend DeCohen, it
9 falls to you because -- just because, right?

10 So last Friday I was sitting in my
11 office and a gentleman comes in through the
12 door, and he was a veteran from the
13 Vietnam War. And he had his tax bill with
14 him, and he said, "Could you do me a favor?
15 Could you go over this and see what
16 exemptions or tax breaks I'm not getting?"
17 And we were able to do that, and I think we
18 found two, if not three.

19 So as our veterans age, maybe using
20 the internet or getting this information or
21 emails, for some -- not all, absolutely not
22 all, right -- but for some veterans who are a
23 little bit older, it's more difficult to use
24 this system.

1 So how do we let these veterans know
2 or what are ways we can increase avenues to
3 let all veterans know that there are tax
4 exemptions, tax credits that they can be made
5 aware of? How can we do a better job of
6 doing that?

7 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: So I
8 guess I'll start.

9 And I know Beth Finkel is following us
10 at some point today from AARP, but AARP and
11 many other community organizations sponsor
12 free tax services. It's like here in Albany
13 they'll do that every Sunday during the
14 entire tax season for hundreds and hundreds
15 of people.

16 I think that there's a lot of things
17 that happen that either the state's working
18 on or the counties are working on that the
19 public generally doesn't know about because
20 we don't consolidate them somewhere to be
21 able to provide that this may be available
22 in, you know, the district that you work in
23 or what have you.

24 So there are those types of services

1 that are available free of charge for older
2 adults specifically. I'm not sure their
3 veteran status would matter. If you're just
4 an older adult and you need help, those types
5 of things are available.

6 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Thank you,
7 Assemblymember.

8 And Greg and I actually work hand in
9 hand with our seniors -- I am a senior now.
10 And so we've been able to partner together to
11 ensure, when we're having our seminars, that
12 those who are aging do get the information.

13 We have it not only posted on our
14 website, but now we have flyers that are
15 posted in places like laundromats and the
16 post office, with the names of our advisors,
17 that says, Call us and you can ask us any
18 questions -- especially for those who are
19 aging, as far as knowing what their benefits
20 are for home health aides for themselves
21 through aides and attendants, for themselves
22 and also for their spouses, anything that
23 they do.

24 You know, the municipalities are

1 serving so many with their own tax benefits,
2 and we're working with them to do the same --
3 some of the same things that we're doing to
4 get the message out in places and spaces that
5 they frequent.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN PIROZZOLO: Thank you very
7 much.

8 And I'd just like to say, once again,
9 thank you for your service. I'd like to
10 thank every veteran for their service. If
11 you think about it, if it weren't for the
12 service of veterans, hearings like this may
13 not be happening.

14 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Thank you.

15 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

16 We go to Assemblywoman Lee.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Good afternoon.

18 Thanks for being here.

19 I just had a quick question for
20 Director Olsen about NORCs. I wanted to get
21 a better understanding of how the services
22 for NORCs are provided. Is it mostly
23 privatized, or is there any of the services
24 administered from the county and state

1 agencies?

2 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yup.

3 So there are multiple -- so we have NORCs
4 throughout New York State, but most of them
5 are centralized in the city. The original
6 NORC SSP started there in '95, and then we
7 drafted, when I was in the legislature, the
8 Neighborhood NORC program in '05.

9 So what we did or have done on
10 multiple occasions is an RFP that provides
11 money to the community, and what they use is
12 the same community infrastructure in the city
13 that they would use for, you know,
14 home-delivered meals. The nursing could go
15 like VNS or others. But, you know, there's a
16 pretty large infrastructure in the city of
17 vendors that DFTA and others use to provide
18 the services, and that's how that would work.
19 They're not-for-profits and community-based
20 organizations.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: And how did this
22 model evolve? Like why is it that it's
23 mainly privatized or given off to -- you
24 know, farmed out to nonprofit organizations

1 rather than being serviced in-house?

2 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I'm not
3 sure I understand the question.

4 So all of the services that are
5 provided within a NORC building are also
6 provided in residential homes throughout
7 New York State. So what this model tried to
8 do in the beginning was recognize that people
9 had moved into a particular building at the
10 time, when they were much younger, and they
11 aged into the building. And so you have
12 density of ability to serve individuals with
13 both healthcare and social services.

14 So it's not farmed out, it's -- you
15 know, an organization would apply for the
16 funds and provide the services, based on the
17 geographic area.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Thank you.

19 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to
20 Assemblyman Ra for five minutes, ranker.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

22 Directors, thank you for being here.

23 Director DeCohen, I just want to
24 somewhat continue where my Senate colleague

1 left off, you know, in terms of the overall
2 funding. We did have a proposal that we
3 worked on last year putting forward that
4 would put \$250 million on the services side,
5 \$250 million on the capital side for our
6 organizations and all of that. And I think
7 that's more in the ballpark of where we need
8 to go.

9 But, you know, I hope with your
10 leadership and the passion of people like my
11 colleague Senator Ashby we can get there.

12 I will say, though, one of the -- I'm
13 happy with the expansion of the Dwyer funding
14 last year, happy to see it's in this, you
15 know, executive proposal. But there is a cut
16 that would potentially impact a bunch of
17 other programs, including Helmets to Hard
18 Hats, the Outdoor Prescription program which,
19 you know, gets veterans outdoors and has them
20 taking advantage of things that we think are
21 therapeutic for their mental health.

22 So, you know, while I feel like the
23 Legislature will advocate for those
24 restorations, you know, I wish that didn't

1 have to be the case, that they could be there
2 in the Executive Budget proposal. So I won't
3 even ask you to comment on that, because I
4 think you probably agree.

5 But I do want to ask about -- there
6 was some capital in the budget last year to
7 help our veterans service organizations,
8 which I think any of us in this Legislature
9 have heard from them about the need for, you
10 know, new roofs and paving the parking lot
11 and boilers and everything under the sun to
12 keep those places better places for veterans
13 to gather and access services and, you know,
14 be with people that have that shared
15 experience.

16 So could you tell me -- I know
17 applications are still open till the end of
18 March -- but how that's gone or how many
19 applications have come in? Do you think the
20 information has gotten out there to the
21 veterans' organizations that this capital
22 funding is available?

23 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Thank you,
24 Assemblymember. I'm going to go back to what

1 I stated earlier, that right now we have a
2 dozen in the process.

3 And we're continuing to put out the
4 word actually monthly on all of our
5 platforms, by snail mail -- we're still doing
6 that -- by email, on all of our social
7 platforms, including our website as well.

8 We were so happy to be one of the
9 first states to have the Outdoor Rx program,
10 and we have six people right now to be able
11 to get the \$25,000 to have an extensive
12 program in their natural lands to continue to
13 have those programs for our veterans, our
14 military, and our families, that we know it's
15 so vital to have these outdoor programs that
16 can help on a mental level, a physical level,
17 and on every level for our veterans across
18 the state.

19 So very happy that the Governor was
20 able to roll that out.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. And just going
22 back to the capital. So do you see a need
23 to, you know, maybe do another round of that,
24 put it -- you know, match that funding again

1 this year so that we can help more veterans
2 organizations keep roofs over their heads so
3 there's a place for those veterans to go?

4 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Listen, we
5 want everything and everything times 10 for
6 our veterans across this state. And so we
7 know that this is just the beginning of so
8 many programs that together we'll be able to
9 roll out more and more -- all of our
10 veterans, and especially our supporters who
11 are supporting our veterans and their
12 families.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Great. Thank you
14 very much.

15 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Thank you.

16 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.
17 Thank you both for (pause) -- for staying
18 here just for another three minutes --

19 (Laughter.)

20 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: -- while
21 Assemblyman Morinello asks a question.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN MORINELLO: Hi.

23 I want to thank you for your service.
24 I'm a veteran also, and that is -- and I've

1 been on the Veterans Committee since I've
2 been in the Assembly. And I'm very concerned
3 about a number of issues.

4 One is more financial. This may have
5 been asked, and if it has, I apologize,
6 because I was in another hearing, and you can
7 stop me. But the Governor removed funding
8 for 17 veterans programs totaling 2.6 million
9 that were added by the Legislature last year.
10 To highlight some of the programs which have
11 been very effective, Helmets to Hard Hats and
12 outdoor recreation programs, which are
13 healthy alternatives for veterans.

14 Is there any underlying reason as to
15 why these were removed and whether you're
16 intending to put them back? I mean, if we
17 lose Helmets to Hard Hats, we're losing an
18 incredible, incredible program to assist
19 those veterans that have difficulties coming
20 back, after they've been pretty much willing
21 to give it all just to protect us. So ...

22 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Thank you,
23 Assemblymember.

24 That question was asked earlier. And

1 again, for the RFP for the new \$25,000 apiece
2 for our new Rx program -- which is going to
3 be ending very soon, and we will be
4 disbursing the funds in April for those six
5 recipients of that \$25,000 grant. We're glad
6 that that's there.

7 The other program -- I'm sorry, sir --
8 I was not familiar with as --

9 ASSEMBLYMAN MORINELLO: Well, Helmets
10 to Hard Hats, I'd ask you to maybe look into
11 that.

12 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: That's
13 right.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN MORINELLO: Okay? Because
15 it's been a very valuable program.

16 And apparently it's probably been
17 asked also, the elimination of the 5 million
18 for capital improvements. The money from
19 fiscal year '23, it's still available in
20 appropriation -- reappropriations. How much
21 of that, do you know, has been
22 reappropriated, how much is available, and is
23 there still an opportunity to request?

24 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: The

1 \$5 million capital grants management program
2 is still in effect. And so we're still
3 working through all of the applications. We
4 have 12 in process right now.

5 And we're looking forward to being
6 able to disseminate those funds, and of
7 course looking forward to continuing the
8 program in the future.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN MORINELLO: Thank you.

10 And I want to compliment you on the
11 creation of the mobile veterans benefits
12 advisory clinics. I think you know rural
13 areas, there's many veterans that live in
14 rural areas. It just seems that a lot of the
15 rural individuals are those that are willing
16 to volunteer.

17 Will those be dispersed throughout the
18 state?

19 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: We do have
20 some counties that already have this program,
21 so we will continue to work with those
22 veterans service organizations and those
23 counties that have been asking for this, that
24 have been telling us that transportation

1 continues to be the number-one problem, that
2 they're looking forward to it. It's for
3 those that want it. And those that have it,
4 you know, we're so happy to be able to see
5 our veterans being served.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN MORINELLO: Let me just
7 add one last thing --

8 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: I'm sorry,
9 Judge. The time has expired.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN MORINELLO: Thank you.
11 I'm done.

12 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay.
13 Actually, I misspoke before. Assemblyman
14 Ron Kim, our Aging chair, has a second round
15 of three minutes.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you, Chair.

17 Director Olsen, just to wrap up my
18 questions from earlier. So in
19 Washington, D.C., the state's Long Term Care
20 Ombudsman Program is housed under AARP's
21 national office. The head of that program is
22 Mark Miller, who actually used to head the
23 New York State LTCOP program. In Michigan,
24 the LTCOP is housed under the Michigan Elder

1 Justice Initiative. And I'm sure there's
2 plenty of other examples like this in the
3 country.

4 And I bring these up because I just
5 want to demonstrate the flexibility of the
6 program. And depending on how we're able to
7 build capacity for these programs, we can do
8 a lot more. And I just want to give you an
9 opportunity to discuss what we need to be
10 doing together to fully fund and
11 professionalize the Long Term Care program,
12 which will save lives of nursing home
13 residents.

14 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I mean,
15 I think the short answer is you need to hire
16 staff, which, you know, we were able to bring
17 on 35 new people to take the place of, again,
18 asking people to volunteer for a very
19 complicated program. As part of our federal
20 Older Americans Act modernization, a huge
21 increase in workforce across the aging
22 network, but also included in the Long Term
23 Care Ombudsman Program for that reason.

24 So, you know, I think again -- I think

1 you were out, Assemblyman -- I see there's a
2 lot in the budget, there's a lot of needs.
3 We hear them from every single agency, from
4 every constituent, and it's a starting point
5 for a dialogue.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: And, honestly, going
7 back to the private payment system, it's a
8 very intriguing, you know, concept for me
9 because when you think about charging people
10 a fee-for-service model, we often think about
11 the MTA, the buses, the bridges, the tunnels,
12 and it's usually housed under public benefit
13 authorities or corporations who are able to
14 leverage those fees to borrow against those
15 incomes for -- to finance future projects.

16 And you're kind of -- because SOFA
17 doesn't deal with intermediaries like MLTCs
18 and through EISEP, counties are able to
19 directly administer the reimbursements. You
20 know, it's a unique situation for us to
21 experiment on how to properly finance
22 long-term care. And I'd love to stay in
23 touch with you about not only this, but
24 different mechanisms where we can rethink

1 about public financing long-term care.

2 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I
3 am always interested in having that
4 conversation.

5 And the other thing, just to point
6 out, is the service infrastructure that
7 we oversee with the counties and their
8 1200 partners intervenes a lot earlier. And
9 so you can help somebody get better or
10 maintain themselves and not have to devolve
11 to a point where they need a higher level of
12 care.

13 And that should be -- that's what a
14 real system of long-term care -- it goes from
15 information to skilled nursing, but that's
16 what a real system ought to look like.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Great. Thank you.

18 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

19 Thank you both for being here and
20 participating in today's hearing.

21 I know there's some questions that
22 there wasn't time to answer, so to the extent
23 that you have some answers to individual
24 members, please send them also to myself and

1 Senator Krueger so we can distribute to all
2 of the members.

3 Thank you.

4 DVS DIRECTOR REV. DeCOHEN: Thank you.

5 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank
6 you guys. Thanks, everybody.

7 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So now we will
8 go to -- we are completed with the
9 governmental witnesses, so now we will have
10 witnesses from the members of the public. If
11 you're following along, it's Panel A: Early
12 Care & Learning Council; All Our Kin; Hunger
13 Solutions New York; Adirondack Birth to Three
14 Alliance; and Docs for Tots.

15 If there is anybody here who hasn't
16 checked in -- I think most people have --
17 please let us know. I know people tend to
18 stay in the back, but the panel after this
19 will be AARP, New York StateWide Senior
20 Action Council, Project Guardianship,
21 Association on Aging -- so some of those
22 folks may want to, as this panel nears its
23 end, move a little further down.

24 We also have been joined by a member

1 of Ways and Means, Assemblyman Dilan. So you
2 have to do a little sharing of the
3 microphone.

4 Just a reminder, everybody gets three
5 minutes to make their presentation after all
6 members of the panel have completed their
7 presentation. Any members that wish to ask
8 questions, just let myself or Senator Krueger
9 know. And members, all members will have up
10 to three minutes to ask questions, and please
11 leave time for the answer.

12 So maybe just identify yourselves when
13 you speak. I think we'll -- I think
14 everybody's checked in. So why don't we
15 start with the Early Care & Learning Council,
16 the way I introduced people.

17 MS. CHIMENTO: Good afternoon. And
18 thank you, Chairs Krueger and Weinstein.

19 My name is Meredith Chimento. I'm the
20 executive director of the Early Care &
21 Learning Council. ECLC is the coordinating
22 body for the network of some 35 childcare
23 resource and referral agencies that you've
24 heard a lot about today.

1 We often refer to CCR&Rs as the
2 workforce behind the childcare workforce. At
3 the start of the pandemic, we worked directly
4 with OCFS to ensure that childcare stayed
5 open --

6 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Excuse me one
7 second.

8 The clock should say three minutes
9 because we are nongovernmental.

10 MS. CHIMENTO: As federal funds flowed
11 through OCFS, it was the network that ensured
12 that these childcare programs could access
13 much-needed financial relief. We are
14 grateful to the Governor and OCFS for their
15 commitment to childcare, but unfortunately
16 these investments do not go far enough.

17 In 2012, CCR&R state contracts were
18 cut and have remained flat-funded ever since.
19 Imagine no core contract increase in more
20 years than it takes to send a child through
21 the public school system. CCR&Rs are faced
22 with a more dynamic and complex system,
23 bigger problems -- funding levels have failed
24 to keep up.

1 Since 2012, inflation has risen at a
2 rate of 29.7 percent. What are we to do, a
3 resourceful group of nonprofits, one that
4 seeks out alternative funding streams and
5 continuously cuts cost. But now things are
6 too tight. Like our childcare providers,
7 many of our agencies are struggling.

8 It is with this in mind that ECLC and
9 the network of CCR&Rs respectfully request
10 that the Governor and Legislature support the
11 following increases:

12 Increase childcare resource and
13 referral contracts, including registration
14 contracts, by \$7.9 million annually to cover
15 increasing costs to staff the network who
16 train the 17,000 licensed and regulated
17 childcare providers serving 400,000 children
18 in our state. Last year we delivered
19 50,000 hours of technical assistance and
20 helped 32,000 families find quality,
21 affordable care through our referral
22 networks.

23 We also ask for \$6.5 million annually
24 to fund the Stabilization and Deserts Grant

1 technical assistance positions. The funding
2 for these positions will sunset in the next
3 year. CCR&Rs offer core business trainings
4 to assist providers who are often financially
5 unstable and at a risk of closing their
6 doors.

7 As you've heard, 64 percent of
8 New York State is a childcare desert.
9 Without the TA specialists working closely
10 with new and existing childcare providers,
11 the situation will only deteriorate,
12 undercutting parents' ability to work and
13 undermining the state's economic future.
14 These TA positions delivered grant assistance
15 to 10,600 existing childcare providers and
16 helped 846 prospective providers navigate the
17 grant process.

18 Additionally, we request \$4 million to
19 increase infant/toddler mental health
20 consultation programming to ensure that our
21 younger children get off to the start they
22 deserve, with nurturing and responsive care,
23 and an additional 5.5 million to provide DEIB
24 training to mitigate and address racism and

1 unconscious bias.

2 CCR&Rs were established into law in
3 1993. We are asking that you continue to
4 honor the critical role that CCR&Rs play in
5 the New York State economy through their
6 support of childcare businesses, employers,
7 and families, by increasing contracts that
8 have unfortunately remained stagnant for far
9 too long. Our work, which is critical to
10 keeping New York working, will struggle to
11 continue without this adjustment.

12 Thank you.

13 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Next, All Our
14 Kin.

15 MR. MORALES: Senators, members of the
16 Assembly, my name is Steven Morales, and I'm
17 the New York policy director at All Our Kin.
18 All Our Kin is a nonprofit organization that
19 trains, supports, and sustains family
20 childcare educators in New York City, and
21 we're also proud members of the Empire State
22 Childcare Campaign.

23 Family childcare, or home-based --
24 childcare in a home-based setting is a

1 critical part of New York's childcare
2 infrastructure, and many parents choose
3 family childcare for its ability to offer
4 flexible hours, mixed-age, culturally
5 responsive care in a family's home language.

6 In New York State, 40 percent of
7 children in publicly funded care are cared
8 for in family childcare settings.

9 Despite the demand for care across the
10 state in any type of setting, our childcare
11 system remains in crisis, with programs
12 across the state closing their doors. At the
13 core of the childcare crisis lies one simple
14 fact: Compensation for childcare
15 professionals is woefully inadequate. On
16 average, childcare educators in New York are
17 in the bottom 3 percent of all earners, and
18 when childcare providers struggle, children
19 and families suffer the consequences.

20 Since the beginning of the pandemic,
21 New York State has experienced a net loss of
22 over 1,300 childcare programs, which
23 translates to over 10,000 lost childcare
24 slots. That's thousands of working families

1 whose lives are disrupted daily because of
2 lack of childcare access. And the crisis is
3 ongoing.

4 In a December survey, one-third of
5 family childcare educators in New York
6 expressed that they are considering leaving
7 their jobs and closing their programs, and
8 the number-one reason for that is low
9 compensation.

10 So to begin addressing this crisis,
11 All Our Kin is calling for the following
12 investments. First, in the short term, a
13 childcare workforce compensation fund of
14 \$1 billion this year. We consistently hear
15 from childcare providers that past
16 stabilization grants temporarily helped keep
17 their business afloat, but when temporary
18 payments stopped, providers found themselves
19 back at square one wondering how they would
20 pay the bills.

21 The \$389 million in the
22 Executive Budget for stabilization grants is
23 a good start but is not enough to keep
24 educators from leaving the field for

1 higher-paying jobs in other sectors. So we
2 ask that you build on the Governor's
3 investment by increasing the amount to
4 \$1 billion this year.

5 Second, we know -- and a recent
6 EdTrust study confirms -- that our current
7 childcare subsidy system pays educators
8 thousands of dollars less than it actually
9 costs to run a childcare program. So we need
10 a long-term commitment to pay educators based
11 on what it actually costs to provide care so
12 they can be in the field for the long term.

13 And finally, we call on the state to
14 expand childcare access to all children,
15 regardless of immigration status, by
16 investing \$60 million in a childcare fund for
17 undocumented children. No child should be
18 denied access to childcare and an education
19 because of their immigration status.

20 In closing, despite the achievements
21 of last year's budget, the childcare crisis
22 in New York State is far from over, and we
23 urge you to seize the opportunity to invest
24 in children and families this year.

1 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. We
2 go to Hunger Solutions New York.

3 MS. HESDORFER: Good afternoon, and
4 thank you for the opportunity to testify
5 today.

6 My name is Krista Hesdorfer, and I'm
7 here representing Hunger Solutions New York,
8 a statewide nonprofit dedicated to
9 alleviating hunger for all New Yorkers by
10 maximizing federal nutrition assistance
11 programs, including SNAP, WIC, school meals,
12 and other child nutrition programs.

13 Today I'll focus on SNAP, our nation's
14 largest anti-hunger program, which provides
15 monthly food benefits to more than
16 2.8 million New Yorkers.

17 For over 35 years, through a contract
18 with OTDA, we have worked to maximize SNAP
19 through the Nutrition Outreach and Education
20 Program, or NOEP. Through NOEP, a network of
21 community-based organizations provide
22 outreach and assistance to help more eligible
23 low-income New Yorkers connect with SNAP
24 benefits.

1 Recognizing the importance of this
2 work amid an ongoing hunger crisis, last year
3 the Legislature successfully championed an
4 additional \$1 million in NOEP funding, for a
5 total of 4.22 million. That additional
6 funding supported 14 new SNAP assistors in
7 high-need and rural counties, and expanded
8 remote SNAP assistance statewide.

9 This year NOEP is on track to reach
10 134,000 New Yorkers. However, without
11 sustained funding, NOEP will be forced to
12 scale back. And unfortunately, the executive
13 proposal does not include the \$1 million that
14 the Legislature added last year.

15 Without added investment this year,
16 NOEP services will be reduced in Erie and
17 Monroe counties and all boroughs of New York
18 City. Chemung, Cortland, Essex, Franklin,
19 Lewis, and Schuyler counties will lose all
20 NOEP services.

21 To avoid these devastating cuts, we
22 ask the Legislature to restore and build on
23 previous investments, funding NOEP at
24 \$5.22 million to sustain and expand outreach

1 and assistance for SNAP and other federal
2 nutrition programs, all of which are
3 undertapped in New York.

4 This modest investment brings a
5 uniquely high return. Every dollar the state
6 invests in SNAP outreach is federally matched
7 dollar for dollar. And because SNAP benefits
8 are 100 percent federally funded, NOEP has
9 had a more than 27-fold return on investment
10 for New York.

11 And I must mention one other critical
12 anti-hunger proposal, outside of human
13 services on paper but not in spirit.
14 New York must provide free school buses and
15 lunch for all students across the state.
16 This is a critical step to support families,
17 providing an estimated \$140 per child in
18 monthly grocery savings, while also
19 supporting children's learning and
20 development.

21 We urge the Legislature to adopt these
22 vital anti-hunger proposals to support
23 families and alleviate hunger across the
24 state. Thank you.

1 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

2 Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance.

3 MS. RYAN: My name is Kate Ryan. I'm
4 the director of the Adirondack Birth to Three
5 Alliance, the signature program of Adirondack
6 Foundation. We're a coalition of providers,
7 organizations, and community members across
8 the Adirondacks. We appreciate the
9 opportunity to share with you the needs of
10 our region.

11 The Adirondacks are home to
12 approximately 7,000 children three years of
13 age or younger. Our population density is
14 14 people per square mile, compared to the
15 state average of 428. Although beautiful,
16 our landscape presents unique challenges.
17 Many families travel over an hour to access
18 services, including childcare.

19 The childcare crisis cannot be solved
20 for our region with centers serving 30 to
21 100 children. We need family or group family
22 childcare. This is a big undertaking, as it
23 requires eight to 12 family and group
24 childcare providers to serve 100 children.

1 Prior to the pandemic, nearly
2 80 percent of our census tract were already
3 considered childcare deserts, and since then
4 we've lost another 1200 slots. Investments
5 and recruiting and onboarding new childcare
6 providers are essential.

7 I'm proud to sit on this panel with my
8 colleagues. Much of my testimony seeks
9 investment in the work that they do. Local
10 childcare resource and referral agencies are
11 uniquely positioned to provide support to new
12 and existing childcare providers and assist
13 families in identifying programs.

14 CCR&Rs in the Adirondacks simply do
15 not have the capacity to recruit and support
16 the large number of families and group family
17 providers needed. The alliance supports the
18 Early Care & Learning Council's request for
19 new state funding of \$7.9 million to support
20 the CCR&R program.

21 High-quality early childhood education
22 systems rest on standards that are based on
23 longstanding and current research that
24 demonstrates improved outcomes for children.

1 QUALITYstarsNY provides support to program
2 staff and providers to achieve these
3 standards, and we request an additional
4 investment of \$20 million.

5 There is a need to invest in the
6 development of trauma-informed practices in
7 classrooms that incorporate appropriate and
8 social/emotional strategies implemented
9 through racial equity and multigenerational
10 poverty lenses. In 2018, the Infant/Toddler
11 Mental Health Consultation Project was
12 launched. An increased investment would
13 ensure that young children birth to five
14 would have access to nurturing environments
15 with the skills and resources to address
16 social, emotional, and behavioral needs. The
17 alliance supports the ECLC request for
18 4 million to support mental health
19 consultants.

20 Lastly, the Help Me Grow model works
21 to promote child development, makes
22 developmental and social and emotional
23 screening universally available, and provides
24 ongoing support for families. Help Me Grow

1 is a proven prevention model that fosters
2 strong families and ensures that all children
3 get the support they deserve. The alliance
4 supports an investment of \$500,000 to enhance
5 access in the existing catchment areas and
6 additional funding to expand the program into
7 regions like the Adirondacks.

8 On average, our families earn \$10,000
9 per year less than other New Yorkers.

10 Approximately 18.2 percent of our region's
11 children live at or below the federal poverty
12 level. Franklin County rates second in the
13 entire state for the percentage of children
14 ages 18 and under living in poverty.

15 The proposals I have mentioned only
16 address a fraction of the issues faced by the
17 Adirondacks, but each would be highly
18 impactful toward improving the services
19 offered to young children and their families.

20 Thank you.

21 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

22 And Docs for Tots.

23 MS. ISAKSON: Hi. Good afternoon,
24 everyone. Thank you for the opportunity to

1 speak today regarding New York State's Help
2 Me Grow model.

3 My name is Liz Isakson, and I'm the
4 executive director of Docs for Tots. Docs
5 for Tots is a nonprofit organization that
6 believes that every child under five deserves
7 a chance to reach their full potential. We
8 believe that working together, from family
9 members to Assemblymembers and Senators like
10 yourselves, we can ensure New York's zero to
11 five thrive their whole lives.

12 What is Help Me Grow? Help Me Grow
13 New York represents the four existing Help Me
14 Grow systems: Long Island, Western New York,
15 Finger Lakes, and Onondaga. Each Help Me
16 Grow is organized locally and respectively
17 organized by Docs for Tots, Community
18 Connections of New York, the Children's
19 Institute, and the Onondaga Early Childhood
20 Alliance. However, within each community,
21 there's a coalition or leadership team.

22 If you put together all the people
23 that are involved in overseeing and creating
24 this Help Me Grow system, over 100

1 community-based organizations over
2 17 counties in New York State are currently
3 working to build better systems for young
4 children.

5 Help Me Grow is a national
6 evidence-based model of community support for
7 families with children under five. It's
8 basically a form of primary prevention,
9 addressing things before they start. It
10 focuses on promoting optimal child
11 development by linking families to existing
12 community resources, identifying
13 developmental concerns early through
14 universal access to screening, and
15 celebrating the amazing transformation that
16 occurs from the time you take that newborn
17 home from the hospital to the day you're
18 sitting at their fifth birthday party and
19 they're blowing out the candles on their
20 cake.

21 The model works across sectors --
22 human services, healthcare, childcare -- to
23 help families at the community level
24 effectively navigate really unfamiliar

1 systems. In 2022 alone, the four Help Me
2 Grow systems reached 10,000 children.

3 Why is this needed? For too many
4 families in New York, whether because of
5 location, poverty, or systemic inequity,
6 access to vital services for the
7 under-five-year-old child are out of reach.
8 They're just unknown. Children thrive when
9 their families are informed and supported,
10 and Help Me Grow provides that information
11 and support to new families.

12 It doesn't replicate resources, it
13 elevates existing ones. The four Help Me
14 Grow communities in New York State are
15 serving a fraction currently of their
16 potential need. Yet additional communities,
17 like the North Country over there, are eager
18 to join the ranks and become Help Me Grow
19 communities. They see how the model improves
20 their community-level data, their services
21 and supports for young children.

22 We are disappointed that the
23 Executive Budget merely reappropriated
24 last year's investment of \$200,000 -- which

1 we haven't even got the chance to spend
2 yet -- and does not allocate continued
3 funding for Help Me Grow.

4 We request \$500,000 total to maintain
5 the four communities and add at least one or
6 two new communities. Ideally, with everybody
7 who's lined up to become a Help Me Grow,
8 something like \$2 million would really help
9 us.

10 Thank you.

11 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

12 So for questions -- just a reminder
13 colleagues, three minutes for both question
14 and answer. And we go first to Assemblywoman
15 Clark.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: I never get to
17 go first. Thank you, Chairwoman.

18 A couple of questions. First, Krista,
19 just -- I know it's not the committee of
20 jurisdiction, but I just want to uplift
21 universal school meals. No child should go
22 hungry in our state. Both of my school
23 districts that I talked to about this, one
24 went up 40 percent and one doubled when there

1 were universal school meals. We know we were
2 reaching children who were going unreached
3 before. So thank you for bringing that up.
4 We will continue that drumbeat.

5 This is a question for some of our
6 childcare experts. We do talk about the
7 stabilization grants, we talked about
8 different -- differential rates, we talked
9 about all these different things. What do
10 you see as sort of the real how we get to
11 really uplifting on a permanent, sustainable
12 basis for paying our workforce a wage -- I
13 mean, no one can afford it, right? Families
14 can't pay more, and providers don't have the
15 dollars to give their staff more money.

16 So the stabilization's great, but I
17 think you kind of touched on it a little.
18 And we've been trying to put a drumbeat
19 around this. So just wondering what you see
20 as a real answer to getting to that point
21 where we sustain wages at a higher level.

22 MR. MORALES: Absolutely. There we
23 go. Okay, yeah, absolutely. We need to get
24 to a place where we are paying providers

1 based on the actual cost of care.

2 What our current subsidy system does
3 is it pays them based on a collection of what
4 the state is able to charge families. And we
5 know that families are already not able to
6 pay what it costs.

7 And so there are studies out there,
8 multiple studies that show that it really
9 costs thousands more dollars per child than
10 we pay. So we need to do that, in addition
11 to the stabilization measures, and then we
12 need to continue expanding access to care to
13 more and more families.

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Excellent.

15 And then on the differential pay, we
16 would love to hear as well -- you know, one
17 of the things we're struggling with in terms
18 of not just -- I mean, providers are closing
19 their doors, but the nights and weekends are
20 really, really an issue. As far as we've
21 been told, the differential pay can be a
22 bump-up of 5 to 15 percent, but most counties
23 are paying 5 percent.

24 Do you see, if we actually got a

1 differential pay up to 15 percent across the
2 state, that it might make a difference
3 towards there being more spots available for
4 nights and weekends?

5 MR. MORALES: I mean, increases in
6 funding and reimbursement rates are always
7 great, and providers appreciate them. But
8 again, we're not going to get to the place
9 where we need to get to until we're paying
10 based on the cost of care. Because at a
11 certain point the mathematics for a childcare
12 provider, whether they are a center or a
13 home-based program, don't add up.

14 So we have to get --

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Well, we have a
16 bill for that. So we'll get you on it.
17 Thank you.

18 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

19 Senate?

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Jabari
21 Brisport.

22 SENATOR BRISPORT: Well, good
23 afternoon. Thank you all for sticking it
24 out. And a pleasure to see some of you

1 again.

2 My question is for the panelists in
3 the childcare space. Earlier this -- earlier
4 today I was speaking with OCFS; I asked them
5 about waiting lists, if they had more data on
6 just the need for childcare. And they
7 weren't able to give a number or any
8 sensitivity of waiting lists, what was going
9 on.

10 Could any of you speak to waiting
11 lists, what you're seeing? Are they getting
12 longer? Are people who qualify for
13 subsidized childcare on these waiting lists?
14 What can you share with us?

15 MS. CHIMENTO: Sure.

16 So the state doesn't require childcare
17 providers to maintain waiting lists. And our
18 referral database, which does the majority of
19 parent referrals, does not necessarily track
20 waiting lists. It's not set up to do that.
21 So it's the individual childcare provider
22 that maintains the waitlist.

23 With that said, I have three staff
24 coming back from maternity leave; they're two

1 years out to find infant care in the Capital
2 Region. It's not available. It's that
3 simple.

4 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

5 I also just had a question, too, for
6 All Our Kin, Mr. Morales. The gap in
7 between, you know, the cost of care and how
8 much we reimburse, how does that affect your
9 providers?

10 MR. MORALES: It makes our providers
11 make extremely difficult choices every day.
12 We've seen that. We've seen providers
13 themselves who have had to close or who have
14 lost staff members to other industries.

15 And so that gap is really taking money
16 out of the pockets of educators, because what
17 they are doing is they are then subsidizing
18 the system with their own dollars, with their
19 own time, when they're working extra shifts.
20 And so they're doing their best to care for
21 children. But when the money is not there,
22 they're making those really tough calls,
23 working 80, 100-hour weeks to make up for the
24 difference.

1 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

2 And with the time I have left, just
3 one more question for Adirondack. Ms. Ryan,
4 I believe someone from Adirondack gave us
5 written testimony for our hearing earlier on
6 the crisis, and basically gave us the data
7 that prior to the pandemic, around 80 percent
8 of your census tracts were considered
9 childcare deserts. And then since then,
10 you've lost 1200 more slots, or 25 percent of
11 your capacity.

12 Have the stabilization grants slowed
13 that down or reversed the trend of losing
14 childcare slots in the Adirondacks?

15 MS. RYAN: I don't have the data to
16 support that. But I will say anecdotally
17 that it was helpful, but we are still seeing
18 serious discrepancies and loss of slots.

19 Specifically, many of our centers that
20 have been able to maintain are no longer able
21 to do so, and we're seeing them closing.

22 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you. I
23 appreciate it.

24 I believe it was said earlier when

1 OCFS was here, but \$1 billion in
2 stabilization grants wasn't enough to save
3 the sector about two years ago. And we
4 definitely need more that 389 million this
5 year.

6 Thank you all.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

8 Assembly.

9 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to
10 Assemblyman Maher.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Thank you. Thank
12 you for painting this portrait of what you
13 all do on the ground level. And obviously on
14 behalf of all of us, thank you so much for
15 what you're doing. Hopefully our job is
16 going to be able to do what we can to support
17 you all to go back into the community and do
18 what you do.

19 I have three questions, and anyone
20 who'd like to jump out and answer, I just
21 would love to have your feedback.

22 First, we talked earlier -- my
23 colleagues and I asked some questions of the
24 Office of Children and Family Services.

1 Specifically, I would love to know your
2 interactions with providers on applying for
3 desert grants, how difficult that can be. It
4 can be frustrating in terms of receiving
5 funding and then not getting to the next
6 step. Do you have any recommendations that
7 we can pass on to our contacts at the Office
8 of Children and Family Services?

9 The second is promoting more folks to
10 let them know that they are eligible for the
11 expansion of childcare assistance, not taking
12 into account the fact that it's difficult to
13 apply for. Is there anything promotionally
14 that you guys are currently doing that we can
15 assist you with and we can collaborate on?
16 That's something we can do offline as well.
17 But if you have some specific things, I'd
18 love to have everybody hear from them.

19 And then public-private partnerships.
20 For the new tax credit that's going to be
21 coming out, have you guys already started to
22 engage with private businesses on potentially
23 having sites on-site for some of these
24 warehouse jobs and other locations that

1 people would work at if they had some relief?

2 MS. CHIMENTO: Thank you. Those are
3 great questions.

4 So as far as Stabilization and
5 Deserts, OCFS funded 70 positions through the
6 CCR&R network to have -- help them navigate
7 the process of applying for the grants. It
8 was at times laborious. And childcare
9 providers serve and care for the love of
10 children, which is why the business support
11 specialists that I spoke about are so
12 necessary. They are the ones that are
13 helping childcare providers run a business --
14 a losing-proposition business, but still a
15 business.

16 So I think the piece about
17 Stabilization and Deserts is increased
18 access, multiple languages -- all the things
19 that they've done -- but it's keeping these
20 70 staff in place to help them navigate the
21 process.

22 The second piece that you asked was
23 about business partnerships. That is
24 something that the CCR&R network also does.

1 It's another piece of what we'd like to do,
2 is to continue to employ business experts
3 that are able to navigate that public-private
4 partnership. And some of the Governor's
5 recommendations have funding identified for
6 that. We would like to see that funding --
7 some of that funding come to the CCR&R
8 networks.

9 I forget the third question.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: The third one was
11 promotion of the expansion of childcare
12 services, what we can do to kind of
13 collaborate, on some of the efforts you've
14 been making, to promote it.

15 MR. MORALES: I mean, I think I would
16 love to see a concerted effort on the part of
17 OCFS and working with local agencies in
18 making folks aware of the services that they
19 are eligible for.

20 I worked for New York City for a time,
21 in the Department of Education, on the
22 expansion of pre-K, and there was a dedicated
23 team whose job it was to go out into
24 communities and make sure folks knew that

1 the trends. We know that programs continue
2 to close. And they're going to continue to
3 do so without that sustained investment.

4 SENATOR BROUK: And we're talking not
5 10 years from now, five years from now. When
6 you're thinking about collapse, what's your
7 time frame you're thinking about?

8 MR. MORALES: So I'm pretty sure in a
9 recent survey in December, done by the
10 National Association for the Education of
11 Young Children, they surveyed providers in
12 New York. And they were worried that --
13 33 percent of family childcare providers said
14 they were worried about having to close
15 within the next year.

16 SENATOR BROUK: In the next year.
17 Thank you.

18 My next question is about something,
19 Mr. Morales, that you brought up around
20 children with specific immigration statuses.
21 And I was just curious -- I didn't catch
22 it -- how many children right now are not
23 covered because of their immigration status?

24 MR. MORALES: So I can follow up, or

1 someone from the Empire State Campaign can
2 follow up with that estimate. Because we
3 have -- we have some estimates which we can
4 share with you.

5 SENATOR BROUK: And your best guess,
6 maybe having talked to any of these families,
7 what do they do?

8 MR. MORALES: I -- I think there's a
9 range. They do what any parent who's
10 struggling to find childcare does. They
11 might have a relative. They might have a
12 neighbor. They might go to a family
13 childcare provider who might offer them a
14 discount out of their own pocket, which we
15 see a lot of times.

16 So really -- and a lot of times they
17 leave the workforce or they're unable to work
18 because of it. So there's a lot of negative
19 consequences for -- when we don't provide
20 care.

21 SENATOR BROUK: Thank you. I
22 appreciate it. Thank you.

23 MR. MORALES: Thank you.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

1 Assembly.

2 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We were joined
3 a little while ago by Assemblywoman Rajkumar.

4 And we go to Assemblywoman
5 Gonzalez-Rojas.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZALEZ-ROJAS: Thank
7 you all for your testimony.

8 Krista, these questions are for you.
9 Can you tell us how much families save per
10 month in groceries if we fund universal
11 school meals?

12 MS. HESDORFER: Happy to.

13 It's an estimated \$140 per child per
14 month in grocery savings.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZALEZ-ROJAS: Great.

16 And can you talk about some of the
17 other specific benefits in funding universal
18 school meals? As you know, I'm a champion
19 for this initiative, and I really want the
20 Assembly and Senate to really understand the
21 implications of something so profound and how
22 helpful it could be for our families and
23 children.

24 MS. HESDORFER: Yes, definitely, thank

1 you for your continued support.

2 It's really hard to imagine a more
3 impactful investment that New York State
4 could make. Providing universal free school
5 meals supports children's education. Kids
6 score better on tests, they're better able to
7 focus and engage, their attendance improves.
8 Of course it reduces food insecurity, which
9 is of concern to many folks here today. And
10 it also improves children's mental and
11 physical health.

12 There's also benefits for schools.
13 They're no longer spending administrative and
14 financial resources chasing down debt from
15 families who can't afford to pay.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZALEZ-ROJAS: Can you
17 talk about the way in which it could draw
18 down funds from the federal government if we
19 put our own money into this?

20 MS. HESDORFER: Yes. So our work
21 focuses on maximizing the federal Nutrition
22 Assistance Program. So I spoke a little bit
23 about how the NOEP investment would be
24 federally matched, all SNAP outreach dollars.

1 And part of the universal school meals policy
2 is maximizing federal and nutrition programs
3 as well. So making sure that any school
4 that's eligible for the community eligibility
5 provision is able to participate in that, and
6 maximizing those reimbursements for free
7 school meals as well.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZALEZ-ROJAS: Great.

9 And so can you share more about NOEP,
10 the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program?
11 Exactly how does it work, and what is the
12 return on investment in this program in
13 particular?

14 MS. HESDORFER: Sure.

15 So we manage, through a contractor,
16 through OTDA, a network of community-based
17 organizations across the state. They provide
18 outreach and free and confidential
19 application assistance to make sure that all
20 folks who are eligible for SNAP benefits are
21 able to receive those benefits. They're
22 friendly, hand-holding sort of folks, to get
23 people through that process.

24 The return on investment for New York

1 in recent years has been 27-fold, because
2 SNAP benefits are 100 percent federally
3 funded and because SNAP outreach dollars that
4 the state invests are matched dollar for
5 dollar by USDA SNAP outreach funds.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZALEZ-ROJAS: Great,
7 thank you so much.

8 I want to underscore how helpful this
9 is for children and families. But we heard
10 from the earlier panel that many seniors who
11 are eligible for SNAP are not enrolling
12 because they're not aware.

13 Thank you. Any comments there?

14 MS. HESDORFER: Yes. I'll just say
15 there is an estimated 200,000 seniors who are
16 eligible and not participating in New York
17 State, and part of our work is providing the
18 resources and assistance to help senior
19 service providers connect more of those folks
20 with SNAP as well.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZALEZ-ROJAS: Thank
22 you for your work. Thank you all.

23 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

24 Senate?

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

2 Senator Rolison.

3 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you, Chair.

4 We had a hearing a few weeks ago about
5 this very topic, which was described as a
6 crisis and is being described again as a
7 crisis by you, and I think we all understand
8 that. And I don't think we talked about this
9 in the hearing, so I wanted to get your
10 perspective, and anybody can really jump in.

11 Let's just say money became available,
12 staff could get hired based on the money
13 available and the wages paid, and to staff up
14 and create additional childcare slots and to
15 retain the employees that are currently doing
16 this great work throughout the state.

17 What goes into -- timewise and
18 finances -- to properly train someone in the
19 business of childcare? It is not something
20 where obviously you're going to bring someone
21 in at an entry-level position and say just,
22 you know: Go do the best you can, and we're
23 here to help you out. I mean, I know that
24 there are programs out there, but it seems to

1 me that that seems to be something sort of
2 new, that the emphasis on the training of the
3 individuals who are doing this critical work,
4 when we know statistically zero to three is
5 so important, right, in the development of a
6 child.

7 So could you just, in a minute and
8 45 seconds, just give us a brief -- give me a
9 brief understanding of what goes into this
10 and how the state can be helpful in that area
11 as well?

12 MS. CHIMENTO: Thanks, that's great.

13 So there's a variety of organizations
14 throughout the state that work on the
15 business of childcare and work on the quality
16 of childcare: The National Association -- or
17 New York Association for the Education of
18 Young Children, PDI, QUALITYstars, the CCR&R
19 network, the unions, to name a few.

20 There is a prescriptive career ladder
21 that childcare providers can follow to
22 maintain or to attain certain educational
23 requirements. The CCR&R network, through
24 Stabilization and Deserts, implemented a

1 seven-part core business training series to
2 focus on the business, the finances behind
3 the childcare business. But it's those
4 considerable investments in all of the
5 agencies that I spoke about that can really
6 bring that -- the educational piece of it,
7 along with the business support.

8 Funding for wages is great, but
9 funding for operations and infrastructure is
10 just as critically important. You had --
11 someone had asked why people were leaving or
12 what could happen with Stabilization and
13 Deserts. Just increased awareness about what
14 they are being held accountable for during
15 the process will improve what -- how
16 childcare providers are responding to these
17 investments.

18 SENATOR ROLISON: So there's a
19 corresponding system that needs to be
20 enhanced as well, just besides just raising
21 wages?

22 MS. CHIMENTO: One hundred percent.

23 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you.

24 Absolutely. Thank you.

1 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

2 We go to Assemblyman Eachus.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Thank you, Chair.

4 Krista, the first thing that I'd like
5 you to know is -- which my colleagues know --
6 I was 40 years in the classroom. Okay? I
7 was a teacher, and I absolutely know that
8 there's a difference between the kids who
9 know where their next meal's coming from in
10 the learning pattern versus those who are
11 worried about it and what they're
12 concentrating on, 100 percent. And so as
13 these folks know, I'm completely in on that
14 program, the universal breakfast and lunch
15 program.

16 I would like you, though, sometime, if
17 possible, to call or come to my office to
18 explain to me a little more about the SNAP
19 program and how the elders qualify for it --
20 maybe what process they need to go through,
21 so I can transmit that to them.

22 Meredith, hi. I must apologize, I had
23 to run up to session to make sure I was
24 checked in up there, and I missed it. But

1 when I walked back in, I heard a term, TA.

2 Is that what you use?

3 MS. CHIMENTO: Technical assistance.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Technical
5 assistance, okay. All right. Because I was
6 wondering exactly what that was, and I --

7 MS. CHIMENTO: Sure. As an educator,
8 you wonder.

9 It's the services that childcare
10 resource and referral agencies provide to
11 childcare providers. And it can be anything
12 from running a budget to social-emotional
13 development within our mental health
14 consultation project.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Okay. And
16 Senator Rolison just asked my question,
17 actually. I was wondering what it took to
18 train an individual to be a childcare worker,
19 you know, and specialist. And going from
20 testimony before, we realize that actually,
21 as of today, most of the people that are in
22 childcare, they're in there because they love
23 it and they love their children and they love
24 what they do.

1 But one of the things I was thinking
2 about -- because I heard this relative to
3 another program which I won't go into -- is,
4 are you making this available to college
5 students? Maybe training and so on like
6 that? Is -- you know, maybe that's a
7 resource if you're not taking advantage of --
8 especially when we talk about the Adirondacks
9 and all. We know we have SUNY schools up
10 there and all that, you know, I hope there's
11 some method by which we're advertising.

12 I had to work -- I won't tell you, but
13 I had to work three or four jobs to get
14 through college while in college. So, you
15 know --

16 MS. CHIMENTO: Yeah, I mean, there
17 absolutely is. SUNY Adirondack, all of those
18 programs have -- or were looking to implement
19 CDA prep programs, so that's the Child
20 Development Associate degree. After-school
21 programs, childcare centers definitely
22 attract the young college students, and it's
23 a great way for them to enter.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Yeah, because

1 that was one of the questions -- just real
2 quickly, that was one of the questions about,
3 you know, after business hours and through
4 the night hours. And of course most college
5 kids are up during that period of time
6 anyway.

7 (Laughter.)

8 MS. CHIMENTO: Why not, yeah.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: So -- yeah. So
10 okay. Thank you very much.

11 MS. CHIMENTO: You're welcome.

12 MS. ISAKSON: Do you mind if I take
13 the last 15 seconds and just jump in?

14 So I'm a pediatrician by training,
15 right? So when we're talking about
16 stabilizing the market of childcare, we
17 forget about stabilizing the care for the
18 children.

19 So turnover of care providers has a
20 real damaging effect on young kids. And so
21 we have to kind of -- I think actually Dr. --
22 Senator Rolison kind of mentioned that, the
23 impact.

24 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So -- thank

1 you, Liz. The time is up.

2 I don't believe we have any other
3 questions. Thank you for being here. I just
4 wanted to remind all of my colleagues and the
5 people who are going to be coming in the
6 panels after, that all of the written
7 testimony has been submitted, has been
8 received by all of the legislators. And
9 again, not to read your testimony so we have
10 time for the questions.

11 So our next panel will be AARP
12 New York; New York StateWide Senior Action
13 Council; Project Guardianship; and
14 Association on Aging in New York.

15 Gail, do you want to start?

16 MS. MYERS: I'm happy to.

17 Yes, thank you. Thanks. My name is
18 Gail Myers. I'm deputy director at New York
19 StateWide Senior Action Council.

20 Investments are needed now to ensure
21 access to services that are vital to
22 preserving the dignity of older New Yorkers
23 and their ability to age in their community
24 homes. Reports are coming, task forces will

1 be producing those, but we cannot wait.

2 We operate two programs that are
3 funded through the New York State Office for
4 Aging, through your good graces. We have
5 operated our patients rights hotline and
6 advocacy projects since 1987. The executive
7 proposal is \$31,500 in funding. You have in
8 the past added, which we appreciate,
9 \$200,000 -- a total funding of 231,500.

10 We implore you to let us keep the
11 lights on. Please restore that program.
12 It's a cut otherwise, and we really need to
13 continue to offer the services.

14 We also operate the Managed Care
15 Consumer Assistance Program. You heard
16 Director Olsen talk about the increase in the
17 income levels that you granted last year for
18 the Medicare Savings Program. An extra
19 300,000 people will be eligible for cash in
20 their pocket.

21 It doesn't happen just because you
22 pass those programs. Someone needs to do the
23 case finding, the outreach, the enrollment
24 assistance, make sure that they're being

1 followed up on, so that they get those
2 benefits that you have entitled them to and
3 that they so much need. So I'm asking you to
4 increase the funding for those programs to
5 help us to achieve the capacity we need.

6 So we are very concerned about the
7 private-pay program that is being proposed to
8 be expanded by reducing the income
9 eligibility in the budget. We are
10 particularly concerned that middle-income
11 residents will think that the network of
12 aging service providers are not available to
13 them unless they pay a 20 percent surcharge
14 or tax to receive those services. It's
15 120 percent of the fee. Otherwise, they --
16 now they get it for 100 percent.

17 So we ask you to look at that very
18 carefully. We don't think that the
19 justification to say there's not enough money
20 to support aging services is a justification
21 for doing these things. You make difficult
22 decisions during the budget based on your
23 priorities, and we ask you to make these
24 decisions that -- just like childcare needs

1 all your support, very, very important, we
2 need to make sure that elder care is being
3 supported as well.

4 Home care worker shortage. There's
5 12 hours to be said on this; I know I have
6 like four seconds. We support Fair Pay for
7 Home Care. We reject the Governor's cap on
8 wages for home care workers. And we ask you
9 to also reject the pay equity provisions in
10 the CDPAP program.

11 The ombudsman program, we certainly
12 support an increase in those services.
13 However, there's also a Part Z in the funding
14 in the Article VII bill that changes the way
15 the surveillance is for assisted living, and
16 we would ask you to make sure that the
17 ombudsman is included in those
18 recommendations.

19 Please see my written 27 pages of
20 testimony --

21 (Laughter.)

22 MS. MYERS: -- and I'm happy to answer
23 any of your questions.

24 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

1 Yes, go ahead.

2 MS. PREVE: Good afternoon, and thank
3 you all for hosting this very important
4 hearing.

5 I'm Becky Preve. I'm the executive
6 director of the Association on Aging in
7 New York, and I have the pleasure to
8 represent the 59 Offices for the Aging that
9 you heard Director Olsen testify about today.

10 I want to make you all aware, as I'm
11 sure you are, the population of older
12 residents in the State of New York is rapidly
13 growing, as is the demand for our services.
14 The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the
15 older population, and the need for services
16 has substantially increased without adequate
17 investments to support the 4.6 million
18 individuals over the age of 60 in the State
19 of New York.

20 On behalf of the network, we were very
21 shocked that the proposed budget does not
22 include any significant investments for the
23 New York State Office for the Aging. The
24 state has proudly announced a Master Plan on

1 Aging with executive order language stating,
2 and I quote: Ensure older New Yorkers can
3 live fulfilling lives in good health with
4 freedom, dignity, and independence to age in
5 place as long as possible.

6 However, the proposed budget refuses
7 to acknowledge or address the funding needs
8 that have been presented repeatedly. In
9 fact, the budget continues to harm aging
10 services providers specifically regarding
11 home care services.

12 We serve individuals that are above
13 income from the Medicaid benchmark to receive
14 home care services, but they can't afford to
15 privately pay for the care. We use the exact
16 same licensed home care provider network as
17 the Medicaid system, and we're also mandated
18 to pass a \$2 rate increase on October 1st for
19 all the personal care aides serving the older
20 population, with no investment from the state
21 to absorb this cost.

22 This obviously has created a huge
23 issue within this aging services
24 infrastructure, because we also are facing a

1 \$1 mandated rate increase for October 1 of
2 2023. And again, the proposed Executive
3 Budget completely ignored the fact that we're
4 serving thousands of older New Yorkers with
5 our home care program and did not receive
6 these investments.

7 I also want to put into perspective
8 that the individuals that we're serving in
9 the aging services network absolutely qualify
10 for nursing home placement. Our traditional
11 client is an 83-year-old female who lives
12 alone, is low-income, and has four or more
13 chronic conditions, and needs assistance with
14 activities of daily living such as going to
15 the bathroom or taking a shower.

16 We know that our aging services
17 infrastructure serves that individual for
18 less than \$10,000 per year, on average for
19 six and a half years -- versus \$150,000 per
20 year in a skilled nursing facility.

21 We know that people waiting for the
22 services through the aging services network
23 on waiting lists, 10 percent of them will go
24 directly to a nursing home, another 7 percent

1 will spend down to MLTC. On the current
2 waiting list right now we have in the State
3 of New York for services, it's going to cost
4 \$70 million for those 10 percent of
5 individuals to go to nursing homes.

6 Additionally, the proposed
7 Executive Budget completely disregards the
8 rising costs of inflation that severely
9 impacted the largest nutrition program in the
10 country, which is ours. We know the cost of
11 raw food, transportation and workforce has
12 substantially increased, along with an
13 increase in the older population. Coupled
14 with inflation and the loss of federal
15 stimulus dollars, the aging services network
16 in the State of New York is facing severe
17 issues and very long waiting lists for
18 services.

19 Again, under the context of the
20 Master Plan on Aging, we wanted to ask the
21 Legislature to really take into consideration
22 the fact that we have to make sure that the
23 basement isn't flooded before we can build
24 the fourth floor. And we really need to look

1 at our current infrastructure, which I
2 outlined in my written testimony.

3 Thank you.

4 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

5 Project Guardianship.

6 MS. GEORGE: Hello? Hi. Thank you,
7 Chairs Krueger and Weinstein and committee
8 members.

9 My name is Kimberly George. I'm the
10 president and CEO of Project Guardianship.
11 We are a nonprofit organization providing
12 person-centered, court-appointed guardianship
13 services to hundreds of limited-capacity
14 New Yorkers.

15 Our clients are living with
16 disabilities, serious mental illness,
17 dementia, substance misuse disorders,
18 traumatic brain injury, and other conditions
19 that negatively impact their ability to make
20 decisions.

21 We serve clients regardless of their
22 ability to pay and provide services for some
23 of the most compelling and complex cases in
24 New York. We also share research and policy

1 recommendations for a better guardianship
2 system and advocate for more equitable
3 service provision for people in need of
4 decision-making supports.

5 For New Yorkers with limited capacity,
6 the New York Mental Hygiene Law provides for
7 the appointment of a guardian to help manage
8 personal and/or property needs. Guardianship
9 is a critical link between supportive
10 services for New Yorkers whose functional
11 limitations have prevented them from
12 accessing those services. And while New York
13 is fortunate to have strong legal protections
14 that entitle individuals access to
15 guardianship services, this mandate is
16 underfunded, and there's currently no direct
17 funding stream to ensure statutory
18 compliance.

19 If a family member cannot serve as
20 guardian, nonprofits, county social services
21 districts, and private attorneys must step in
22 to provide services in a patchwork manner.
23 But the demand for assistance greatly
24 outpaces capacity. In some regions there's

1 no access to these resources, especially for
2 low-income individuals with family, without
3 family, and unable to pay for a private
4 attorney.

5 At the same time, our state's older
6 population is growing, becoming more diverse,
7 and increasingly living in poverty. You know
8 the stats, and they're in my written
9 testimony so I won't go through them now.
10 But because of them, guardianship petitions
11 are on the rise.

12 Guardianship itself encompasses many
13 services, including legal services, financial
14 management, healthcare coordination, and
15 other vital tasks to promote the overall
16 health, safety, and stability of the
17 individual.

18 An effective guardian works to prevent
19 institutionalization and supports these
20 populations in their own communities. Not
21 only do these efforts support the local
22 economy by redirecting funds back into the
23 community, but guardianship also saves public
24 dollars by decreasing Medicaid spending on

1 avoidable hospitalizations and
2 institutionalizations.

3 Guardianship services are also
4 critical in achieving the goals of the
5 Master Plan for Aging. With data that
6 clearly reflects the imminent need of growing
7 guardianship, it is crucial that
8 community-based guardianship programs be
9 robustly funded to ensure that New Yorkers
10 are able to access the services that they
11 need.

12 We, along with a coalition of
13 guardianship providers and advocates called
14 Guardianship Access New York, are asking for
15 a \$15 million investment to provide nonprofit
16 community guardianship services to 1,500
17 people annually across the state. This
18 funding would help us provide technical
19 assistance, quality assurance, data
20 collection, and a statewide guardianship
21 prevention and support helpline.

22 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

23 AARP?

24 MS. FINKEL: Can you hear me? Sorry.

1 Good evening. Thank you so much,
2 Senator Krueger and Assemblymember Weinstein.
3 So much of the data -- and all of you for
4 hanging out with us. I really appreciate it.

5 I know a lot of data has been given.
6 I appreciate -- many of you have quoted
7 AARP's data, and I'm very appreciative of
8 that. As you heard, 65-plus is the fastest
9 growing, and it grew by 31 percent in the
10 last decade. We just commissioned a report,
11 which we will share with all of you -- there
12 are now more people 65-plus in New York State
13 than 15 and under. Which is kind of a sad
14 thing in some ways, and a good thing in other
15 ways.

16 But we're here today because we really
17 need to talk about how the budget is going to
18 address this demographic shift. We talked
19 about caregivers; my colleagues have talked
20 about home- and community-based services. We
21 really feel like we need a stable home care
22 system so people can age in place so we can
23 get those savings that were just documented
24 before.

1 We also want to make sure that we have
2 fair pay, that we make sure that the money
3 that was allocated in the budget that you did
4 last year actually ends up going to the home
5 care workers, because we know it's getting
6 caught up with the insurance companies and
7 it's not getting through. And that's just, I
8 think, appalling to everybody.

9 We also want to make sure that we
10 relieve the pressure of the home care family
11 members, like all of us -- there's two and a
12 half million of them in New York who are
13 feeling this pressure.

14 We know that -- Becky talked about the
15 10,000 waiting list. But we also know that
16 we don't actually have a true reading on that
17 number because there's no transparency. SOFA
18 is supposed to report those numbers every two
19 years, and they haven't. We need to do that
20 so that all of you can decide how the budget
21 should be spent and where, so we can really
22 document where people are waiting for
23 services and what they need.

24 We need to make sure that we're

1 cost-effective and compassionate about all
2 this home care. We also -- I want to just
3 hit the LTCOP really quickly. We're asking
4 for 15 million in LTCOP. Again, we know that
5 people have not been going in to visit --
6 it's supposed to be one every week, and we
7 know that only 9 percent of the facilities in
8 New York State are getting that one visit a
9 week, which is unconscionable.

10 Finally, we want to talk about data
11 matching. I know that came up earlier.
12 There is over \$4.4 billion of federal funds
13 that are not coming into New York State as an
14 economic stimulus because of SNAP, Medicare
15 Savings Program, and HEAP benefits -- that
16 are federal dollars, for the most part -- and
17 they're not reaching seniors. If they did,
18 there would be as, I said, the 300,000
19 Medicare Savings Program beneficiaries -- who
20 would, by the way, get on the average \$7,000
21 back every year in their Social Security
22 checks. And just the economic stimulus from
23 that alone is over \$2 billion.

24 So I know you're all going to help us

1 in this fight, so I thank you all.

2 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

3 We go to Assemblyman Kim.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you. It's
5 good to see everyone. Thank you for your
6 patience today. And a couple of quick
7 questions.

8 Rebecca, the -- I just wanted to
9 simplify the numbers for a minute. So if we
10 put in a dollar toward SOFA programs, we can
11 save, in my calculation, up to \$8 in the
12 back end on Medicaid savings. Does that
13 sound about accurate?

14 MS. PREVE: It does, yes.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Okay. And I just --
16 I mean, the number is so stunning to me,
17 that -- and there are between 7 to 10 percent
18 of people on the waiting list that if we
19 don't serve today, they will spend down to
20 poverty level so that they can qualify for
21 Medicaid. So we are systemically fueling
22 older adults into poverty by not fixing this,
23 correct?

24 MS. PREVE: I 100 percent agree. And

1 I would say -- and I know I've had this
2 conversation with you numerous times -- we
3 look at prevention in every other system's
4 infrastructure. Right? We want to make sure
5 that pregnant moms know about the WIC program
6 so they can prevent health disparities moving
7 forward.

8 We're doing nothing to prevent
9 impoverishing people down to Medicaid. And I
10 can tell you from direct practices -- I used
11 to be a director that did home visits -- if I
12 knew I had 200 people on my waiting list but
13 I had an 85-year-old who really needed home
14 care, I would get them a full trust that week
15 and get them on Medicaid coverage because
16 they needed the care, and that's exactly a
17 backwards system.

18 And if the state is very concerned
19 about savings overall, we know the efficacy
20 of our programs. Why are we not investing on
21 the front end to make sure we're keeping
22 people in homes and communities, as the
23 master plan outlines, and keeping them off of
24 the Medicaid system so that Medicaid can

1 serve the purpose that it's been intended to
2 do, to support low-income older individuals.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Right. And as far
4 as the EISEP non-Medicaid home care services
5 and the problems with reimbursement of wages,
6 it's further exacerbating the problem because
7 if you don't take care of the reimbursements,
8 people will again try to go to Medicaid
9 health care and not wait for SOFA's EISEP
10 program.

11 So it's urgent, it's incumbent upon us
12 to make sure that we put in funding for the
13 non-Medicaid to make sure that the entire
14 home care universe of older adults are
15 properly serviced.

16 Gail, you mentioned the ZZ
17 surveillance around LT -- can you just expand
18 on that? I want to give you 30 seconds just
19 to expand on that.

20 MS. MYERS: Yeah. There is a
21 provision within the Governor's budget that
22 she says is about improving quality, and it
23 changes -- it lays out a system for allowing
24 industry to self-regulate and to say that

1 they have met quality measures, which would
2 allow the Department of Health to extend the
3 frequency of surveillance inspections.

4 And there's no -- while you need to
5 examine that on its own, if you agree to do
6 that, we really would like you to see the
7 ombudsmen play a role in establishing
8 quality.

9 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

10 To the Senate.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Cordell
12 Cleare.

13 SENATOR CLEARE: I want to thank you
14 all for coming today and hanging around this
15 long.

16 So I just have a couple of questions
17 maybe AARP can answer. You know, I know
18 you're strong supporters of Fair Pay for Home
19 Care, as I am. And if you could tell me what
20 that looks like for your members. And also,
21 you know, have you seen the crisis getting
22 worse or getting easier? And also I'll
23 just -- let me give you -- no, I'm going to
24 stop right there.

1 MS. FINKEL: Absolutely. I hear it
2 from everywhere I go. It's probably the
3 number-one call that I get. When I'm out
4 with my own friends and relatives, it's the
5 number-one thing that I hear.

6 So yes, there is a dearth of home care
7 workers. And it's mostly because they are
8 not getting a decent wage and they can't
9 support their own family. We're not being
10 respectful of the worker, and we're certainly
11 not being respectful of the person who needs
12 the care, is desperate for the care.

13 MS. MYERS: And if I can, from our
14 patients' rights helpline, the two biggest
15 concerns that we have are on the lack of
16 home care workers, both the people who need
17 to stay at home and for people who want to
18 exit the nursing home and then go back home,
19 and they can't get discharged because they
20 don't have a safe environment.

21 The second thing, of course, is the
22 quality of care in nursing homes, which
23 increasingly the ombudsman program certainly
24 will help to address.

1 SENATOR CLEARE: The Association for
2 the Aging, if you could just tell me more
3 about the rates for home care workers. We're
4 hearing that some counties are not increasing
5 the funding to agencies to meet the mandated
6 wage. Can you speak to that?

7 MS. PREVE: What I can tell you -- and
8 I think the commissioner spoke to this
9 earlier -- most of our counties are actually
10 paying well above Medicaid rates. And that's
11 why I really talk about an un-level playing
12 field.

13 So because our authorizations are
14 traditionally lower than the Medicaid system,
15 we're not as attractive to a licensed home
16 care provider because you're not getting a
17 block of hours at one individual's home.

18 So again, I surveyed the members last
19 month; we're paying anywhere between 35 and
20 \$40 an hour for personal care services. We
21 were mandated for the \$2 rate increase above
22 the minimum wage benchmark. On October 1st
23 we got no revenue in the State Budget to
24 absorb that. We have no revenue forecasted

1 for the additional \$1.

2 Again, it's an unfunded mandate on the
3 non-Medicaid system for a solution that
4 didn't solve the problem. Because now as you
5 index minimum wage, you're going to see the
6 same thing -- home care becomes a
7 minimum-wage job once again, in competition
8 with retail, fast food, et cetera.

9 So it's really done nothing to
10 alleviate the long-term problem, which is why
11 we support Fair Pay for Home Care.

12 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

13 And to StateWide Senior Action
14 Council -- and you can send this answer to
15 me -- I just need -- I want a breakdown of
16 the private pay and why it's not a good
17 thing. Why is that something that -- because
18 it was confusing to me when I heard it, and I
19 heard it again and it's still confusing. And
20 I'd like to get some more clarity, because I
21 think I'm right.

22 (Laughter.)

23 MS. MYERS: I think you're right too.

24 Let's talk.

1 Just very quickly, just if you look at
2 the EISEP services, EISEP is a sliding scale
3 up to 250 percent of the federal poverty
4 level. At 250 and above, it's 100 percent
5 pay. This proposal would say it's
6 120 percent pay if the county opted into
7 providing it in this particular way.

8 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.
9 Assemblywoman Clark.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thank you.

11 It's been a long day, so I'm going to
12 do some rapid-fire questions so that --

13 Can we ever get to once-a-week visits
14 across all our long-term care facilities
15 without the trustful eye of our volunteers?

16 MS. FINKEL: Absolutely not.

17 And that's why we need the \$15 million
18 in the budget for the long term care
19 ombudsman. We can't have what happened in
20 COVID again. We have to have transparency.
21 We have to have advocates looking out for --

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thank you. You
23 answered my second question, so I'll move to
24 my third question for you.

1 We get the visits, we understand that.
2 Are we getting clear access to the reports
3 and data on the visits from SOFA, what the
4 visits entail, and if the complaints are
5 resolved?

6 MS. FINKEL: I'm going to have to get
7 back to you on that one, but the complaints
8 do go to DOH.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Are you getting,
10 are we as a state getting good access to the
11 data on those visits, on those complaints?

12 MS. FINKEL: I will get back to you.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Okay. I think I
14 know the answer, but we will keep working on
15 that.

16 I have some questions on elder abuse.
17 So first and foremost, are we seeing more or
18 less cases of elder abuse right now?

19 MS. PREVE: We have seen an explosion
20 in elder abuse -- most predominantly,
21 financial exploitation and scams. I think
22 all of you have heard in your district
23 offices of very, very well-rehearsed, very
24 tangible scams that are targeting older

1 individuals.

2 And again, I'm glad you raised this,
3 Assemblymember Clark. When you look at the
4 Executive's proposed budget, there was a
5 \$375,000 cut to Lifespan of Greater
6 Rochester, who host the Statewide Elder Abuse
7 Coalition. And again, when you look at a
8 million dollars being invested into a
9 planning committee for the Master Plan on
10 Aging, and yet you're going to cut the
11 service organization that protects the one in
12 24 older New Yorkers that actually report
13 that they were exploited, it's kind of hard
14 to wrap your mind around that.

15 So, you know, again in my testimony we
16 fully support full implementation of
17 restoring that funding for Lifespan.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: And these
19 complaints are getting more or less confusing
20 and complicated -- more?

21 MS. PREVE: Absolutely.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Last but not
23 least, on the prevention piece of this, if we
24 were to reach more seniors' basic needs, if

1 we were able to take care of them, if we were
2 able to hand-hold them through some of the
3 complex issues, would we or would we not save
4 money in the long run on healthcare?

5 MS. PREVE: We would save an
6 extraordinary amount of money.

7 And when I -- every year I come in and
8 talk at these budget hearings, we're talking
9 about the high need, right, that 85-year-old
10 who needs home care? That doesn't take into
11 account the thousands of other older
12 New Yorkers that we serve through wellness
13 programs and prevention through volunteer
14 activities.

15 So, you know, again, I would love to
16 be able to talk about the fact that our
17 transportation program gets older individuals
18 to medical appointments, which we know then
19 reduces emergency department visits. We know
20 that 80 percent of home-delivered meal
21 participants self-report that the reason
22 they're able to stay in homes and communities
23 is because of a meal that costs \$7 a day.

24 So again, we desperately need the

1 investment.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thank you.

3 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

4 To the Senate.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Tom

6 O'Mara.

7 SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you,

8 Chairwoman.

9 Good evening. Thank you for your
10 testimony here today.

11 I've just got one question, with
12 regards to the change in the -- I guess the
13 number of ADLs needed for home care. Have
14 any of you received any justification for
15 this change and why they're going about it?
16 Because it seems to me it's going to -- it's
17 going to cost a lot more money.

18 MS. MYERS: Well, we've seen the
19 Medicaid Redesign Team put this forward as a
20 cost saving for the state. There were not
21 consumers on that panel to be able to say,
22 Here's what happens if you reduce our
23 benefits.

24 In other words, if -- you're saying

1 the only time you can get home care under
2 Medicaid, under that provision -- which may
3 soon go into effect -- would be if you were
4 otherwise eligible to be in a nursing home.
5 And it just flies in the face of good
6 prevention to be able to say some
7 housekeeping, some assistance with bathing,
8 some food services in the home may be able to
9 keep a large number of people off of
10 Medicaid. And also, it keeps them active in
11 their houses of worship and their social
12 programs locally. And that ending isolation
13 is incredibly important in terms of the
14 prevention piece as well.

15 MS. PREVE: And I would just add,
16 Senator, that the changes on the Medicaid
17 side will actually create more customers on
18 the aging side, because we did not change our
19 triggers for home care services. So we still
20 provide Personal Care Level 1, which is
21 housekeeping, grocery shopping, bill paying.
22 And when that's carved out of the Medicaid
23 benefit because of the ADL requirements,
24 we're going to get customers that come to our

1 service infrastructure.

2 Additionally, when Medicaid home care
3 puts into effect the 30-month lookback
4 period, people that traditionally would have
5 been able to access Medicaid for home care
6 services will no longer be eligible. And
7 guess where they're going to come? They're
8 going to come to Office for the Aging for the
9 care. So ...

10 SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you. Thank you
11 very much. Very concerning.

12 MS. MYERS: One of the things that --
13 just if I may, one of the things that you did
14 last year, which was great, was you expanded
15 the income eligibility for Medicaid.

16 So some of the most needy people
17 within the Office for Aging services will now
18 become Medicaid-eligible under that
19 expansion. That's a good thing for them
20 getting comprehensive benefits. It's also a
21 good thing to allow more dollars to go to
22 people above the Medicaid level.

23 But if the ADL piece goes through and
24 they are newly eligible for Medicaid, they're

1 not going to get the services that they had
2 the day before under the EISEP program.

3 SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you all.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to
6 Assemblywoman Rajkumar.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN RAJKUMAR: Thank you.

8 My question is about the waiting
9 lists. So there have been calls for an
10 increase in the provision of public
11 information, specifically regarding waiting
12 lists. And according to you, the Association
13 on Aging in New York, over 10,000 seniors in
14 our state who are not Medicaid recipients are
15 waiting for essential services such as adult
16 day care, meal delivery, and transportation.

17 I understand that there's a call for
18 clear information on how many seniors are
19 waiting and what services they are waiting
20 for, as well as requesting a change to
21 reporting on a county-wide level versus a
22 statewide aggregate.

23 So can you tell this legislative panel
24 what you're seeing on the ground with regards

1 to waiting lists and how it's affecting
2 families?

3 MS. PREVE: So I can tell you that we
4 have roughly about 10,000 people that are
5 waiting for services. It's nuanced, because
6 you might have someone waiting for a meal and
7 personal care services, so you could have
8 duplicate services within that catchment.

9 But I can tell you, just for case
10 management, these would be unique customers.
11 We have 7,713 that are waiting for services
12 today. And what that means is those
13 individuals are seeking alternate ways to get
14 care, whether that be spend down to
15 Medicaid -- unfortunately, many times, by the
16 time someone gets to our service network, if
17 they're told you might have a six-month
18 waiting period, the family automatically
19 looks towards assisted living or skilled
20 nursing facility placement out of necessity.

21 And it also means that specifically
22 regarding home care services, because the
23 home care workforce is in such crisis -- I
24 can tell you I surveyed all of the AAAs:

1 100 percent of them reported waiting lists
2 for personal care services due to the lack of
3 direct care professionals.

4 So this is something, you know, we've
5 talked about at a state perspective. It's
6 also a federal issue; you're seeing a
7 national shortage as well. But we're never
8 going to be able to serve individuals if we
9 don't have funding to do so, but also if we
10 don't have an infrastructure to serve them.

11 And that's why Fair Pay for Home Care
12 to actually raise these wages to a livable
13 wage, and getting 50 percent of home care
14 workers off public service benefits, is so
15 important for the state, because it's going
16 to save us money long-term.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN RAJKUMAR: Thank you.

18 And also I'd like to ask you about
19 data matching again, which has already come
20 up. Last month Governor Hochul announced a
21 new data matching policy to help connect
22 recipients of one benefit to other benefits
23 to which they are entitled. And the plan
24 identified families receiving benefits who

1 are eligible for childcare assistance.

2 So do you support basically a similar
3 data matching program for seniors --

4 MS. PREVE: Yes.

5 MS. FINKEL: Yes.

6 MS. MYERS: Absolutely.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN RAJKUMAR: -- to connect
8 them to SNAP, HEAP, and the Medicare Savings
9 Program? I assume you do. But can you speak
10 to how that expansion of data matching would
11 help?

12 MS. FINKEL: Well, we know there are
13 300,000 New Yorkers 65-plus who are now newly
14 eligible for MSP. We also know that there
15 are 200,000 older New Yorkers that are now
16 eligible for SNAP that are not getting it.
17 And we know that there are a lot of people
18 that are struggling out there to pay their
19 utility bill.

20 So when you put all of that together,
21 yes, we know that it would help. Why you
22 would just single out family and children and
23 leave out older adults is something that we
24 really can't understand.

1 And you saw, when we asked -- when
2 someone here asked the OTDA commissioner, he
3 said that it's going to be three and a half
4 years. Well, I've been hearing it's going to
5 be five years for the last 20 years.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN RAJKUMAR: Okay.

7 MS. FINKEL: So honestly, I don't
8 understand it. We're making people struggle
9 personally when they don't have to. They
10 could have upwards of seven or eight or nine
11 thousand dollars back in their pocket every
12 year. And --

13 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

14 MS. FINKEL: Sorry.

15 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

16 MS. FINKEL: This is an issue I'm very
17 passionate about.

18 (Laughter.)

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN RAJKUMAR: Thank you for
20 that information.

21 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you,
22 Beth.

23 So we move on to the Senate.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Murray.

1 SENATOR MURRAY: Thank you, Chair.

2 Thank you all for being here in this
3 kind of late hour.

4 I want to touch on something -- I hear
5 the frustration in your voice, we hear it all
6 the time as far as home care workers and pay.
7 But I want to take it from a different angle.

8 Can you tell me, first, how long does
9 it take to properly train a home care worker
10 and how much investment does it take to do
11 that?

12 MS. PREVE: So you have to become
13 certified through a licensed home care
14 agency. And I can follow up -- I believe the
15 requirement is a six-week-long in-person
16 training for the personal care worker.

17 And we've really seen a variety. So
18 there's many licensed home care providers
19 throughout the state. Predominantly, they're
20 not-for-profits that absorb the cost of the
21 training because they have to.

22 Specifically in upstate, those
23 licensed home care agencies are also trying
24 to reimburse travel time, which they don't

1 get reimbursement for on the Medicaid side.
2 And specifically in my district, you could
3 drive 50 miles in between cases.

4 So the licensed home care providers
5 are absorbing those costs to get individuals
6 trained, but then what you run into is
7 extensive competition with healthcare.
8 Right? Because the CNA at a nursing home can
9 make much more than a community home care
10 worker can.

11 So it's -- and then with recruitment
12 and retention bonuses, you also run a risk of
13 then having an aide that's trained who then
14 has to jump agency to agency to get that
15 benefit.

16 So again, you know, the CUNY research
17 report that came out two years ago clearly
18 outlined that a significant state investment
19 of about 4 billion would reach \$7 billion in
20 return by raising those wages to 150 percent
21 of poverty.

22 SENATOR MURRAY: And there's also the
23 problem of the quality of care, because I've
24 heard from seniors who they'll get a home

1 care worker, they feel very comfortable with
2 them, they trust them -- and before you know
3 it, they're gone. And now they have to get
4 to know someone else, maybe they're not as
5 comfortable. You start shifting who you're
6 sending, causing all sorts of problems.

7 So as much as recruiting is a problem,
8 would you say retention is also as high or
9 higher?

10 MS. PREVE: Retention is a huge issue.
11 And again, competition with other markets.

12 And again, we believe everyone should
13 get a living wage. But I find it
14 disheartening that my 16-year-old son works
15 at a local farm and he makes more than a
16 home health aide does for an hour of care
17 where they're giving someone a bath.

18 And, you know, I think to talk about
19 the home care workforce, these people are so
20 dedicated, they are so in love with the
21 position that they work two or three jobs to
22 support their families because they believe
23 in the cause.

24 But again, you raise a great point.

1 These are personal relationships. Home care
2 workers are social workers, they're nurses,
3 they're physicians, they're therapists, and
4 they need to be paid in a way that we can
5 retain them and have them part of a
6 long-term-care team.

7 SENATOR MURRAY: And I'm wondering if
8 something like -- I mean, we have IDAs and we
9 have Economic Development Councils for
10 businesses. Is there something we can do for
11 the workers similar to what we do for EMS and
12 all, where we give maybe retirement credits
13 or something, but somehow thinking outside of
14 the box to offer some sort of a longevity
15 bonus or something to that effect? Would
16 that be helpful?

17 MS. PREVE: I completely agree. And I
18 think that the model that Director Olsen
19 referenced this morning in the 12 counties
20 that are directly employing aides, we've seen
21 100 percent retention of those home health
22 aides.

23 In Putnam County specifically, they
24 had over 80 people on a waiting list. Their

1 waiting list has been cleared for two years,
2 and they have the same aides.

3 SENATOR MURRAY: Wow. That's great.

4 Thank you very much.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

6 Assembly.

7 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We have no

8 other questioners.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: We have one final
10 questioner, Roxanne Persaud.

11 SENATOR PERSAUD: Good evening,
12 everyone.

13 I just wanted to ask a question to
14 follow up on something Director Olsen said.
15 When asked if -- because we were saying many
16 agencies and aging reports were saying there
17 are wait lists for home delivery meals,
18 et cetera. And he said that he was not
19 hearing that.

20 But you just said the opposite of what
21 he said. Could you clarify that for me,
22 please?

23 MS. PREVE: I can tell you we have
24 362 people waiting in the State of New York

1 for a home-delivered meal.

2 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

3 MS. PREVE: You're welcome.

4 MS. MYERS: You know, and in part
5 they're waiting for an assessment, they're
6 waiting for case management to be able to say
7 they've done a home visit, they see that this
8 person is homebound, that they need these
9 services in order for that spigot to start.

10 So you were talking about somebody who
11 was getting emergency home-delivered meals
12 and then it runs out and then they try to get
13 it again and it runs out?

14 SENATOR PERSAUD: No, it's just a
15 person waiting for home delivery.

16 MS. MYERS: Right. Waiting and
17 waiting.

18 SENATOR PERSAUD: The whole process,
19 yes.

20 MS. MYERS: So part of it that
21 connects together with all of the workers
22 that are needed in the aging network are also
23 to make sure that there are enough case
24 managers to do that assessment so that people

1 are getting the services that they have
2 earned after so long living in our community.

3 SENATOR PERSAUD: What's the average
4 time for the 300-plus people who have been
5 waiting?

6 MS. PREVE: It really varies based on
7 your geographic area and population density.
8 So we can absolutely talk offline if you want
9 further information specifically about your
10 constituents.

11 SENATOR PERSAUD: Absolutely.

12 MS. PREVE: But traditionally,
13 especially post-discharge from an acute care
14 facility, we try to start meals within seven
15 days. There are some areas of the state
16 where that's not possible, based on geography
17 and also waiting lists. But it's definitely
18 more prevalent in the New York City region
19 than it is in other parts of the state.

20 But again, when you talk about the raw
21 cost of food, everybody feels this at the
22 grocery store right now. We're feeding, you
23 know, hundreds of thousands of older
24 New Yorkers, and the food cost has gone up

1 with no revenue to offset it. Gasoline for
2 meal delivery -- again, a huge expense that
3 we haven't been reimbursed for.

4 So I think you're going to see that
5 waiting list grow if we don't do something to
6 address those ongoing issues.

7 SENATOR PERSAUD: Ongoing.

8 Thank you very much. We'll talk.

9 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you to
10 all the members of this panel.

11 And we're going to now ask Panel C to
12 come: New York State Network for Youth
13 Success; New York State YouthBuild Coalition;
14 Northern Rivers Family of Services; Prevent
15 Child Abuse New York; Council of Family and
16 Child Caring Agencies; and Children's Health
17 Home of Upstate New York.

18 And so that we don't mess up -- so we
19 get your name correctly on the broadcast, if
20 we can go in that order, starting with
21 New York State Network for Youth Success.

22 MS. MORGAN: Hello. Thank you for
23 allowing me to testify today.

24 My name's Trudy Morgan, and I'm the

1 policy director at the New York State Network
2 for Youth Success. Our goal as a statewide
3 network is to build an effective and
4 integrated statewide system of high-quality,
5 expanded learning programs in New York.

6 Decades of research shows that
7 after-school and summer expanded learning
8 programs play a critical role in improving
9 student outcomes. Research spanning several
10 states shows that every dollar invested in
11 our school programs saves at least \$3.

12 In New York, an overwhelming majority
13 of caregivers are satisfied with their
14 child's after-school and summer school
15 experience. It is no surprise that the
16 impact of after-school spans across critical
17 issue areas. For many students and families,
18 after-school goes beyond after-school hours.

19 After-school provides a safe haven for
20 some, a support system for others, academic
21 empowerment for leadership development or
22 career exploration or youth development.
23 After-school is integral to students'
24 education. These programs complement what

1 students learn in school by providing more
2 time for deeper learning, creative spaces for
3 hands-on projects, and opportunities to
4 explore careers.

5 After-school is also integral to
6 New York's childcare system. After-school
7 services, through high-quality school-age
8 childcare programs, promote stability in
9 families who rely on them to balance work and
10 life. That is why any improvements to the
11 childcare system must include support for
12 school-age childcare and children.

13 After-school is integral to youth
14 development. In after-school, children and
15 youth are surrounded by caring adults and
16 mentors that help create a safe space for
17 participants to express themselves, along
18 with a sense of belonging and discovering
19 their passions while fostering an environment
20 that supports healthy development.

21 Over the last few years New York's
22 after-school programs have experienced many
23 crises, and that's why we have presented a
24 roadmap in this year's budget to reimagine

1 the system. And among our priorities we ask
2 for your support to reorganize after-school
3 through a \$219 million investment.

4 And this is a critical year to align
5 the Empire State After-School Program and
6 Advantage After School Program, as both
7 programs follow very similar objectives and
8 benchmarks. Streamlining these programs will
9 mitigate the many barriers providers face
10 when accessing after-school funding.

11 And as we take this critical step, we
12 must do more and do things differently to
13 ensure that our programs are better
14 resourced, by adopting a higher per-student
15 rate of \$4,300 and engaging the expertise and
16 experience of after-school stakeholders to
17 develop and access program success, and
18 guaranteeing the current base funding for
19 these programs, including the restoration of
20 Advantage by \$5 million.

21 We also ask that you dedicate 500,000
22 through the CCDBG grants to support technical
23 assistance for after-school providers that we
24 provide support for as the statewide

1 after-school network. Currently the state
2 does not provide any dedicated funding to
3 support TA for after-school, and this funding
4 can help sustain these programs while helping
5 us to partially pay the statewide landscape
6 analysis for after-school, summer, and
7 expanded learning programs, which is
8 currently lacking and much needed.

9 After-school, summer and expanded
10 learning programs help keep students safe,
11 support working families, and empower youth
12 success. We count on your support to
13 continue these programs.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

15 New York State YouthBuild Coalition.

16 MS. LANDI: Thank you, Senator
17 Krueger, Assemblywoman Weinstein, for the
18 opportunity to provide information on the
19 value of YouthBuild programs in New York
20 State.

21 First, on behalf of the thousands of
22 vulnerable youth we serve, thank you for the
23 '22-'23 budget support we received in the
24 amount of \$10 million in ESD Pay for

1 Performance Workforce strategies funding and
2 2.5 million appropriated for the Legislature
3 to fund YouthBuild program wraparound
4 services, such as addressing mental health
5 and substance use issues, addressing
6 community gun violence, housing insecurity,
7 food insecurity, job coaching, resume
8 writing, self-care, proper hygiene, how to
9 dress appropriately, how to speak
10 appropriately, and leadership development --
11 all of which have been determined as integral
12 to the outstanding outcomes YouthBuild
13 programs achieve.

14 We are requesting the same level of
15 budget funding that we received in the
16 '23-'24 budget.

17 Recently, YouthBuild participated in
18 an OCFS Workforce Development Demonstration
19 Project. The outcomes from that project
20 clearly indicate the effectiveness of the
21 comprehensive training provided. Those
22 outcomes were:

23 Programs exceeded the number of
24 required enrollments by 6 percent, serving

1 more than what was expected;

2 Placement rate in a job or a
3 post-secondary education program after
4 completion, 100 percent;

5 HSE and industry-recognized
6 credentials earned, 99 percent;

7 Youth with prior justice system
8 involvement, no rearrests -- zero recidivism.
9 We're very proud of that.

10 As a point of information, YouthBuild
11 began right here in New York State, in 1978
12 in East Harlem. In 1992 it was replicated by
13 the federal government and expanded across
14 the nation into 44 states. Today there are
15 over 225 YouthBuild programs nationwide.

16 Currently in New York State there are
17 programs, located from Long Island to
18 Buffalo. Additionally, we have requests from
19 Hudson, Monticello, Syracuse, and Yonkers,
20 who are seeking to start a YouthBuild
21 program.

22 As you are aware, the aftermath of
23 COVID has exacerbated the inequities facing
24 young people of color. One of the most

1 troubling issues facing these young people is
2 community gun violence. YouthBuild programs
3 across the state have already begun to take
4 the necessary steps to address the issue and
5 its adverse effects on our young people.

6 The highly successful YouthBuild
7 program model. Our efficacy rates indicate
8 YouthBuild has the ability to address the
9 very issues leaders and U.S. state
10 policymakers are grappling with for young
11 people. However, program resources are
12 limited. We need the willingness of the
13 state to continue to invest in our efforts.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

15 MS. LANDI: We must stop reinventing
16 the wheel and keep these youth working --

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

18 MS. LANDI: -- toward what they need
19 for success.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Next, Northern
21 Rivers Family of Services.

22 MR. GETTMAN: Good evening, members of
23 the Legislature and chairs.

24 My name is Bill Gettman. I'm the CEO

1 of Northern Rivers Family of Services. I'm
2 here representing the 18,000 children,
3 adults, and families that we serve in
4 40 counties across New York State.

5 I'm also here today to talk on behalf
6 of the 1400 employees who work for Northern
7 Rivers -- seven days a week, 24 hours a
8 day -- 25 percent who have a second job,
9 10 percent who have to have a third job to
10 make ends meet.

11 I'm here today to talk about while we
12 appreciate the Governor's investment after a
13 decade of poor investments in the areas of
14 mental health and childcare and other areas,
15 we need to go a step further.

16 First, we need to go ahead with the
17 8.5 percent COLA that has been advocated by
18 many associations around New York State. Our
19 workers need to hear from the Legislature and
20 the executive branch that they are respected,
21 they are cared for, and the work they do is
22 important to the future of this state.

23 Our staff take care of families and
24 kids when no one else will do it. Just

1 Friday night, we admitted an 11-year-old who
2 was in the hospital who had no place to go.
3 They ended up at our doorstep, and we
4 admitted them. We will place them in a
5 foster home, and we will get them back to a
6 permanent and safe situation someday.

7 But you don't do that if 25 percent of
8 your staff have to work a second job, if you
9 have a turnover rate of 30 percent. And I
10 have 105 vacancies today. I have over 1,000
11 on my waitlist for mental health services and
12 community-based services. We need a trained
13 and experienced workforce to meet those
14 community needs.

15 Mental health and child welfare are a
16 single item. The Governor's proposal for
17 mental health we applaud. However, in child
18 welfare we provide mental health every single
19 day. And as part of that, we need to correct
20 some of the deficiencies in the Governor's
21 budget related to rate-setting and the
22 underfunding of the childcare agency budgets.

23 Our rates will end on April 1st this
24 year unless the Legislature takes decisive

1 actions. I don't know how many
2 businesspeople can provide services without
3 knowing what they're going to get paid.
4 However, we have thousands of kids in our
5 care, and we need to improve the
6 rate-setting.

7 We also need to look at prevention.
8 And so I call to your attention the bills in
9 the Legislature to increase primary
10 prevention to 75 percent, and also to the
11 Poverty Agenda that the Governor's task force
12 has worked on. We need to make long-term
13 investments so that we can change the curve
14 and create a better place for kids in this
15 state.

16 Kids are our future. They will take
17 care of all of us. They will take care of
18 our grandchildren. They are the people that
19 are going to care for us, and we need to
20 invest in them now if we want to make
21 New York a great place to live, work, and
22 raise a family.

23 So thank you for your time. I applaud
24 you for what will be some tough decisions in

1 the next few weeks, but thank you for your
2 dedication and your service, because you also
3 are heroes.

4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

6 Next is Prevent Child Abuse New York,
7 Timothy Hathaway.

8 MR. HATHAWAY: Good afternoon.

9 My name is Tim Hathaway. I'm the
10 executive director with Prevent Child Abuse
11 New York. Thank you to the members of this
12 committee for your dedication this afternoon
13 and throughout this legislative session.

14 Prevent Child Abuse is a training and
15 technical assistance organization serving
16 folks across the State of New York, as well
17 as providing policy and advocacy work.
18 Primarily, we're looking at how do we build
19 strong families in the state. And that work
20 is critical to avoid the downstream impacts
21 that we all know are extremely
22 cost-prohibitive.

23 So our testimony outlines a number of
24 different priorities. They're bulleted on

1 the first page of my testimony, and I want to
2 just take a couple of minutes and dive into
3 some specifics on a couple.

4 The first one is around the Child and
5 Family Well-Being Fund. We know that the
6 best solutions to prevent child abuse come at
7 a neighborhood level. The research tells us
8 that. When families are strong, when
9 neighborhoods are strong, kids do better.
10 This fund is aimed at directly that.

11 How do we get more money directly down
12 to the faith-based communities, the
13 organizations that are operating on a
14 shoestring budget? How do we make sure that
15 they receive a part of the funding that
16 really helps get them to the next level so
17 that they can do what they do best, help
18 families in their neighborhood do this work?

19 We also want to talk about maternal,
20 infant, and early childhood home visiting.
21 We applaud the state's investment in
22 Healthy Families New York. We do have a
23 concern, and we want to urge restoration of
24 the \$200,000 line item for ParentChild+.

1 This is something that was in the budget, has
2 been taken out.

3 We also want to encourage the
4 restoration of \$200,000 for Help Me Grow.
5 You've heard from those folks earlier today.

6 We also are pushing forward this large
7 investment around universal home visiting.
8 We know this model works, we've seen it work
9 in other states. It's an investment in the
10 future of New York and in our children and
11 families.

12 Childcare, we continue to support --
13 and love the testimony from our earlier
14 folks -- after-school programs. We know this
15 is critical to what we do in terms of
16 prevention and building strong families. The
17 work that Mr. Gettman already outlined around
18 75/25 is very important; we urge that.

19 And then relative to housing, the
20 right for counsel bill that will be coming
21 before you folks. Again, strong families
22 need safe housing. They need good housing.

23 And I'll close with that.

24 (Laughter.)

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

2 Appreciate it.

3 Next up is the Council of Family and
4 Child Caring Agencies, Kathleen
5 Brady-Stepien.

6 MS. BRADY-STEPHEN: Hello. My name is
7 Kathleen Brady-Stepien. I'm the CEO of
8 COFCCA. We represent the state's child
9 welfare nonprofit organizations.

10 This past year the state took action
11 to diminish funding for foster-care programs
12 and services. It was an unacceptable action
13 that has left our foster-care programs in
14 free fall, unable to plan ahead for their
15 budgets. And still right now, today, these
16 programs do not know what rate they're going
17 to receive from the state as of April 1st to
18 provide care and services for young people in
19 foster care.

20 We are asking for the Legislature's
21 support in ensuring that these programs are
22 fully funded through the end of their current
23 fiscal year, which goes to June 30th, so that
24 they don't receive a midyear rate reduction,

1 and also that we invest meaningfully in
2 salaries to support the very hardworking
3 foster-care staff, of which we have a
4 49 percent turnover rate across the state.
5 This is a Darling/Brisport proposal that we
6 strongly support.

7 Human services programs have had to
8 contend with incredibly rising costs, and so
9 we have to not only get to an 8.5 percent
10 COLA to support these programs, but we also
11 have to make sure that those programs that
12 have been left out of this human services
13 COLA in the past are included going forward.
14 And for us, in our world, that's prevention
15 services programs, it's also health home care
16 management supporting children. Let's make
17 sure that they're included going forward
18 also.

19 And not only do we need the COLA for
20 prevention services programs, but we want to
21 make sure that we invest meaningfully in
22 doing more prevention across the State of
23 New York so that families are kept safely
24 together and are supported in the challenges

1 of state-only Medicaid until such time that
2 there is a federal solution to ensure that
3 children and youth in residential foster care
4 can receive federal funding for their
5 healthcare and their behavioral healthcare.

6 Thank you for the opportunity to
7 testify.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
9 much.

10 Okay, and our last testifier on this
11 panel, the Children's Health Home of Upstate
12 New York, Nicole Bryl.

13 MS. BRYL: Good evening.

14 My name is Nicole Bryl, and I'm the
15 CEO of the Children's Health Home of Upstate
16 New York, also referred to as CHHUNY.

17 I would like to thank Chairs Krueger
18 and Weinstein and all members of the
19 Legislature for allowing me to provide
20 testimony today.

21 CHHUNY is the largest upstate health
22 home designated to serve children and youth
23 under the age of 21. We serve over
24 13,500 members each month and almost

1 18,000 unique members annually. CHHUNY
2 provides health home care management services
3 in 55 counties and upstate New York through a
4 network of over 90 care management agencies.
5 Our population consists of seriously
6 emotionally disturbed children, medically
7 fragile children, children with multiple
8 chronic conditions, developmentally disabled
9 children, and children who have experienced
10 complex trauma.

11 I want to start by commending
12 Governor Hochul for the significant
13 investments in mental health services as
14 proposed in her Executive Budget. With over
15 75 percent of the children and young people
16 we serve experiencing at least one mental
17 health condition, we applaud her
18 acknowledgment of the dire need to support
19 this sector.

20 Today I'm here on behalf of the
21 1,000-plus individuals that make up our
22 children's health home care management
23 workforce and the children and families we
24 serve. I am here to ask for your support in

1 ensuring that our Children's Health Home
2 Program is specifically identified as an
3 eligible program for the proposed human
4 services COLA, and that the COLA be
5 consistent with the Consumer Price Index,
6 which would equate to 8.5 percent instead of
7 2.5 percent.

8 Over the last six years, care
9 management services for children have been
10 consolidated under the health home model to
11 streamline and simplify the children's system
12 of care. OMH Targeted Case Management
13 transitioned in 2016, and then six waiver
14 programs previously under OMH, OCFS, and
15 OPWDD state agencies transitioned in 2019.

16 With these transitions came immense
17 responsibility and new requirements to
18 understand all systems of care for children,
19 truly breaking down silos by consolidating
20 pathways to care and ensuring no wrong door
21 for struggling youth and families.

22 Unfortunately, over the past six years
23 the state has failed to support our program
24 through these transitions and added

1 responsibility. Since the inception of this
2 program, our rates have increased by only
3 1 percent. Children's health homes were
4 excluded from the 5.4 percent COLA last year,
5 and without your support to explicitly
6 identify our program as eligible in this
7 year's budget, we again will be excluded from
8 a COLA, while our colleagues who serve health
9 home members in OPWDD or the adult Health
10 Home Plus world are benefiting from the COLA
11 the past two years. So due to the
12 bifurcation of this program, and under our
13 DOH oversight, Children's Health Home is
14 consistently left out of funding
15 opportunities.

16 Children's Health Home services are
17 not adult health home services. Our systems
18 are multifaceted, and our care managers are
19 expected to know how to navigate state plan
20 services -- OMH, OCFS, OPWDD, OTDA, State Ed,
21 Early Intervention, managed care waiver, and
22 so much more.

23 And although the lift is a lot for one
24 person, our care managers are doing it

1 successfully. We are seeing positive
2 outcomes such as increased annual
3 primary-care visits and annual dental visits,
4 increased compliance with metabolic
5 monitoring when a child is on two or more
6 antipsychotic medications, and improving the
7 completion of post-hospitalization outpatient
8 appointments.

9 Thanks.

10 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

11 So we go to Assemblyman Maher, for
12 three minutes.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Sorry about that.
14 I actually did not have any particular
15 questions at this time.

16 I do plan to reach out to all of you,
17 and just thank you so much for all that you
18 do. Such amazing information you give us,
19 also -- thank you.

20 MS. BRYL: Thank you.

21 MR. GETTMAN: Thank you.

22 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senate?

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Jabari Brisport.

24 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you,

1 Madam Chair.

2 And thank you, panelists. I really
3 appreciated your testimonies.

4 I just had a question about public
5 safety. You know, a lot of times in Albany
6 when we discuss public safety the
7 conversation gets framed around policing,
8 prisons, the criminal legal system. But many
9 of the programs that you offer and advocate
10 for seem like they could serve a much more
11 expansive vision of what keeps us safe. So
12 I'm just curious, how could these investments
13 that you're talking about help make our
14 communities more safe?

15 And this is for everyone. I'm
16 certainly interested in the YouthBuild
17 answer, Northern Rivers, CHHUNY, but it's
18 open to everybody.

19 MR. GETTMAN: So let me start. We
20 have partnered with the City of Albany and
21 the County of Albany to look at how we can
22 use our prevention staff and our
23 community-based staff to reduce the
24 occurrence or reoccurrence of the violence in

1 the community.

2 And it goes back to what Tim was
3 talking about: It's about prevention. It's
4 about housing. It's about having the care
5 manager in partnership with the family to
6 create means of a plan for alternatives to
7 perhaps stress, inappropriate reactions to
8 conflict.

9 But it's about investing in our
10 workforce, who is out there every day. So
11 it's the prevention workforce, it's our
12 health home workforce, it's our YouthBuild
13 partners, who do great, great work keeping
14 kids meaningfully employed and then getting
15 them jobs in the future.

16 MS. LANDI: I would like to address
17 the gun violence issue as well.

18 When gun violence became prevalent
19 amongst YouthBuild programs, we did not wait
20 to have somebody come in and tell us what we
21 needed to do. We took the bull by the horns,
22 and we went in and we tried to address those
23 issues by providing the preventative care
24 that the young people need.

1 It comes out of their neighborhoods.
2 They come into the program every single day
3 talking about being afraid to walk to the
4 program. So we have staff that will go pick
5 them up to make sure they get there.

6 We are regularly meeting and bringing
7 in workshop leaders to help us with
8 prevention. We work closely with the
9 police department and the sheriff's
10 department.

11 The young people in a YouthBuild
12 program know they're safe there. They aren't
13 safe anywhere else when they leave. So we
14 try to do whatever we can to help them
15 understand what they need to do to be able to
16 cope with the things that are providing them
17 the problems and the issues that they face
18 every single day.

19 MS. MORGAN: I'll share that for
20 after-school, one of the main benefits for
21 after-school is that it keeps young people
22 safe.

23 Our research actually shows that the
24 hours between 3 to 6 are the times where

1 young people are most likely to engage in
2 juvenile crime or be victimized by crime.
3 And so we recognize that the after-school
4 hours are a critical part of students'
5 development and also their safety as well.

6 And I'll also share that in addition
7 to this, after-school provides protective
8 factors such as self-management,
9 self-control, and enables them to have the
10 social networks to help them thrive.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

12 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

13 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

14 We go to Assemblyman Ra.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you. Can you
16 hear me? There we go. Sorry about that.

17 So I just wanted to go, Kathleen, with
18 regard to the COLA and all of that stuff.
19 Because I think it's important, but it's
20 technical as to where we are.

21 So you have -- last year we have this
22 COLA, but it's not in the normal rate-setting
23 that you go through. So we hit the end of
24 our budget year, and now you have a gap

1 between the end of the state budget year and
2 the calendar year -- or the budget year that
3 you would -- the providers operate on,
4 correct?

5 MS. BRADY-STEPHEN: Right.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: So there's -- you
7 don't know what it looks like for that gap
8 between April 1st and, what, June 1st?

9 MS. BRADY-STEPHEN: That's right, yup.

10 So we're six weeks out from April 1st,
11 and we don't know what rate the programs will
12 get. Because of what happened last year,
13 yes.

14 MR. GETTMAN: And we will not take the
15 money back from our workforce. If anything,
16 we need to invest in them. So this is a
17 double whammy.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: But, I mean -- so
19 really what we need in this budget is, you
20 know, something to plug that gap in that last
21 quarter, correct?

22 MS. BRADY-STEPHEN: Yup, that's right.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: And then a COLA for
24 next year.

1 MS. BRADY-STEPHEN: Yup.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: But we have to make
3 sure this all ties together so that we don't
4 at some point go back to a rate-setting that
5 looks at a number from two or three years ago
6 at that point, correct?

7 MS. BRADY-STEPHEN: That's right. And
8 so what we need to accomplish is making sure
9 that the programs have their full funding
10 through the end of the fiscal year to
11 June 30th.

12 Then we have to make sure that the
13 COLA continues forward into the rate so that,
14 as Bill says, you know, nobody is pulling
15 money back from their workforce. In fact,
16 we're here talking with all of you about the
17 need to build on that, right?

18 And so what we have to accomplish
19 together really is making sure that we have
20 the funding not only for right now, but
21 building into the future, so that we can give
22 these staff the increases that they need.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Yeah. I mean, if you
24 don't -- I mean, I would look at it this way.

1 If you don't carry a COLA forward years into
2 the future, really it was a one-year bonus,
3 not --

4 MS. BRADY-STEPHEN: Right.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: -- a COLA, correct.

6 MR. GETTMAN: And they will go find
7 another job. Because the message that will
8 be sent is "Your work is not valued. We love
9 you, but we're not going to pay you." They
10 will go find another job, especially if we're
11 being -- indexing minimum wage. That's one
12 of the harsh realities that our workforce
13 faces.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: All right. Well,
15 thank you, guys.

16 MS. BRADY-STEPHEN: Thank you.

17 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senate?

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Cordell
19 Cleare.

20 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you, all of
21 you. I -- that -- you took my question. But
22 some of my question, you answered it. But I
23 do want to just thank all of you for the work
24 that you do. It is very important that every

1 child should have after-school.

2 And YouthBuild, I've got to shout you
3 out, because it started in my district,
4 East Harlem. Nina Saxon is a big cheerleader
5 for you over there. And I know how important
6 that work is, not just because it provides
7 something for young people to do, but it also
8 gives them a skill, something that they will
9 make money from and they will be able to live
10 off of. So I support the work that you do a
11 hundred percent.

12 MS. LANDI: Thank you. It supplies
13 affordable housing, too.

14 SENATOR CLEARE: Absolutely, that
15 part.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
17 Assembly.

18 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblyman
19 Eachus.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Thank you very
21 much.

22 And I want to thank all these groups
23 for what they do.

24 Just to let you know, I had 13 foster

1 brothers and sisters, so --

2 MR. GETTMAN: We could reenroll you,
3 if you'd --

4 (Laughter.)

5 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Thanks.

6 But what I would like to say is that
7 earlier in the hearing there were some folks
8 talking about like the GIVE program, if
9 you're familiar with that, and, you know, why
10 isn't it in New York City and all. New York
11 City has a number of programs which are great
12 and hopefully address that. But I want you
13 to know that I taught in the second most
14 violent city in all of New York, and that's
15 in upstate New York: Newburgh. Okay? And
16 so we definitely need these programs in
17 upstate also.

18 And so I think I'm just going to make
19 an ask of you folks. I hope that you will
20 visit my office at some point in time, come
21 in, talk to me in depth, and let's find out
22 what we really can do to, you know, get you
23 out there. Because I have to honestly say
24 that I have not heard of a few of your

1 programs. I'm unaware of them. Not that I'm
2 supposed to know everything, but I would love
3 to learn more, so --

4 MS. LANDI: We just started one in
5 Newburgh last year.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Okay, great.
7 Thank you.

8 MR. GETTMAN: Thank you.

9 MS. MORGAN: Thank you.

10 MR. GETTMAN: We'll be there.

11 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senate?

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I don't believe
13 we do have any other Senators, no.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: And no further
15 Assemblymembers.

16 So thank you all for being here.

17 Thank you for the work that your
18 organizations do for New Yorkers.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

20 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Next we have
21 Panel D: New York State Coalition Against
22 Domestic Violence, Empire Justice Center --
23 and if you're keeping score, we have a --
24 Jessica Radbord couldn't be with us today

1 because of illness, and Emilia Sicilia is
2 replacing her. Then we also have the
3 Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy;
4 SAGE - Advocacy & Services for LGBTQ+ Elders;
5 Supportive Housing Network of New York; and
6 New York Association of Training and
7 Employment.

8 So if you can go in that order,
9 starting with the New York State Coalition
10 Against Domestic Violence.

11 MS. GERHARDT: That would be me.

12 Hello, everyone. Thank you.

13 I'm Joan Gerhardt, director of public
14 policy and advocacy at the New York State
15 Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

16 NYSCADV is recognized by the U.S.
17 Department of Health and Human Services and
18 the U.S. Department of Justice as the
19 information clearinghouse and resource center
20 on domestic violence in the State of
21 New York.

22 Domestic violence advocates are
23 dedicated and passionate professionals.
24 Their work is challenging and requires unique

1 skills and training. It is a 24-hour-a-day,
2 seven-day-a-week obligation, meeting domestic
3 violence survivors where they are at the
4 police station, in the hospital, and in
5 court. We provide crisis services which are
6 often life-stabilizing and lifesaving.

7 Recognizing this critical need,
8 domestic violence advocates were included in
9 New York's pool of essential frontline
10 workers at the start of the pandemic. And
11 it's a good thing, because during the
12 pandemic and even since, the demand for
13 domestic violence services is incredibly
14 high. In fact, it's the highest in the
15 nation. In the nation. On just one day last
16 year when the national count was conducted,
17 more than 9100 adult and child victims
18 received services. Extrapolate that for a
19 full year -- we're talking about thousands of
20 New Yorkers in need.

21 That's why it's so frustrating that
22 far too many domestic violence advocates do
23 not earn a living wage. Their compensation
24 is tied to restrictive contracts with

1 New York State which are not sufficiently
2 funded. At current salaries, most domestic
3 violence staff do not earn enough to afford a
4 two-bedroom rental.

5 DV advocates were not included in the
6 pool of human service workers who received
7 additional salary, bonuses and COLA
8 adjustments last year. Nor are we included
9 in this year's COLA proposal. These
10 employees are mostly women providing support
11 to other women and children. They should be
12 first on the list to receive a wage increase.

13 At the beginning of the pandemic a
14 tremendous number of domestic violence staff
15 left their jobs for fear of working in
16 congregate settings. Now thousands of
17 positions are still vacant because domestic
18 violence agencies can't offer a living wage.
19 NYSCADV urges the Legislature to increase the
20 minimum wage of all domestic violence staff
21 and provide us with a COLA.

22 I also want to mention our request
23 that the Legislature carry forward a
24 \$14.4 million transfer to OVS for victim

1 service providers, as well as appropriate
2 11.7 million for the 87 providers who
3 received significant cuts in the most recent
4 round of awards. Over the three-year course
5 of those contracts, these legacy providers
6 stand to lose 35.1 million. New York's crime
7 victims will bear the brunt of these costs.

8 These are certainly described more in
9 our written testimony. I will leave it at
10 that. Thank you.

11 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

12 Empire Justice.

13 MS. SICILIA: Hello. My name is
14 Emilia Sicilia, and I'm a managing attorney
15 at the Empire Justice Center. I want to
16 thank Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, the
17 committee chairs, and other members here
18 today.

19 The Empire Justice Center is a
20 nonprofit law firm that seeks to make the law
21 work for all New Yorkers, especially those
22 who need it the most. We teach the law by
23 providing training, support, and technical
24 assistance; we practice the law by providing

1 direct civil legal assistance and undertaking
2 impact litigation; and we change the law by
3 engaging in policy analysis, research, and
4 advocacy.

5 Support for human services has never
6 been more essential. As we work to recover
7 from the pandemic, we must strengthen access
8 to healthcare and other benefits and address
9 the disparities laid bare. We must also
10 prepare thoughtfully for coming changes,
11 including the end of the public health
12 emergency and the expansion of the
13 Medicare Savings Program.

14 Our written testimony includes more
15 details about the following priorities. For
16 public benefits, the need to increase the
17 basic needs grant amounts, the need to
18 address skimming of public benefits, and the
19 need to expand and improve the rental
20 supplement program.

21 The need to increase the shelter
22 allowances for households with children.
23 OTDA has not updated the shelter allowance
24 schedule since 2003, even though rents have

1 doubled since then. For households without
2 children, OTDA has not increased the shelter
3 allowance since 1988, but rents have tripled
4 in the last 35 years.

5 The opportunity to support children
6 who have lost parents and family members
7 caring for these children by establishing a
8 kinship legal network pilot program.

9 The need to increase funding for the
10 Managed Care Consumer Assistance Program --
11 notably, to be prepared to respond to the
12 expansion of the Medicare Savings Program.

13 The importance of maintaining funding
14 of \$35 million for OTDA's Emergency Rental
15 Assistance Program, which provides legal
16 representation to low-income renters outside
17 of New York City facing eviction, and where
18 there's no right to counsel.

19 I'd like to spend the rest of my
20 allotted time discussing the need to increase
21 funding for the Disability Advocacy Program,
22 known as DAP. This year marks the
23 40th anniversary of DAP, which was created by
24 this Legislature in 1983. And for four

1 decades, DAP has been providing civil legal
2 assistance to low-income disabled New Yorkers
3 denied or cut off from their federal
4 disability benefits -- Supplemental Security
5 Income, known as SSI, or SSD, Social Security
6 Disability.

7 DAP services help stabilize people's
8 income, which in turn helps to stabilize
9 health, housing, and quality of life overall.
10 And for every dollar invested in DAP, at
11 least \$2 is generated to the benefit of
12 New York State and local governments in the
13 form of public assistance costs avoided and
14 in money spent in local economies.

15 The disability appeals process is
16 complex and becoming increasingly more
17 challenging. Financial issues, homelessness,
18 inadequate healthcare, and sometimes the very
19 symptoms of the disability often make it
20 exceedingly difficult to gather the evidence
21 needed for a claim.

22 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

23 MS. SICILIA: Thank you.

24 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Schuyler

1 Center.

2 MS. HILL: Yeah, hi. Good evening,
3 and thank you to the chairs and members of
4 the respective committees for the opportunity
5 to present our testimony.

6 My name is Dede Hill, and I'm policy
7 director at the Schuyler Center. For more
8 than 150 years we have been advocating for
9 policies that strengthen and improve public
10 systems that serve low-income and
11 disenfranchised New Yorkers, with a real
12 focus on children and families.

13 I'll begin with a general observation
14 about this Executive Budget. While it
15 includes some important investments to
16 improve child and family well-being -- absent
17 our key poverty-reducing proposals -- also
18 missing are the significant sustained
19 investments that are truly needed for
20 New York's child-serving systems, which have
21 been chronically underresourced for many
22 years. But there is time and we think real
23 opportunity to craft a final enacted budget
24 that centers New York children and families.

1 First, I want to talk about childcare.
2 We welcome and support the Executive Budget
3 proposals to continue expanding
4 income-eligibility levels for childcare
5 assistance and cutting copays, and the
6 proposals to break down unnecessary and
7 burdensome administrative barriers.

8 However, these expansions will be
9 meaningless if New York does not act quickly
10 to halt the exodus of the workforce. And you
11 have heard this many times already today, but
12 it's worth repeating: What the workforce
13 needs is an investment of \$1 billion this
14 year, and that will support a wage supplement
15 of \$12,500 per member of the workforce.
16 Nothing less will stop the exodus.

17 The Governor has proposed
18 \$389 million. This is a good step, but it is
19 not enough. We need \$1 billion.

20 And further, to be effective, the
21 supplement must continue until New York has
22 transitioned to a new provider-reimbursement
23 model and pay scale. Providers simply cannot
24 retain staff or recruit new staff with a

1 small one-time bump in pay.

2 Also missing from the Executive Budget
3 is an expansion of childcare assistance to
4 children currently excluded due solely to
5 their immigration status. Among those
6 children who are excluded currently are many
7 children who are lawfully present. Many of
8 the children who are here seeking asylum are
9 among that group who are excluded. New York
10 should end this exclusion immediately.

11 Other missed opportunities: New York
12 is overdue to increase the monthly
13 foster-care housing subsidy and index it to
14 inflation. We haven't changed that housing
15 subsidy since 1988.

16 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

17 SAGE?

18 MR. OKMA: Good evening. My name is
19 MJ Okma, with SAGE.

20 SAGE has been serving LGBTQ+ and
21 HIV-affected older New Yorkers for over
22 four decades, providing comprehensive social
23 services and community-building programming
24 through a network of LGBTQ+-welcoming older

1 adult centers across New York City. We are
2 also the on-site service provider of the
3 state's first LGBTQ-affirming elder housing
4 developments and run the statewide SAGE
5 Veterans Program.

6 As they age and need more assistance
7 and care, LGBTQ+ and HIV-affected elders have
8 fewer biological family caregivers than older
9 people in general. Because of thin support
10 networks, they are more likely to rely more
11 heavily on community service providers, yet
12 they're often distrustful of providers after
13 facing a long history of stigma and
14 compounding discrimination.

15 For many of these elders in New York,
16 SAGE is their lifeline. It is because of
17 them I'm here today, respectfully asking for
18 your support in the fiscal year '24 budget
19 for restoration of our programming. This
20 includes restoration of 300,000 to support
21 LGBTQ+ residents and community members in and
22 around New York State's first
23 LGBTQ+-welcoming affordable elder housing
24 developments; a restoration of 150,000 to

1 increase our multilingual programming
2 services; a restoration of fiscal year '22
3 levels of funding of 260,000 for SAGEVets,
4 after receiving a smaller designation last
5 fiscal year; and, finally, a new funding
6 designation of 150,000 to help meet the
7 growing demand for services among
8 HIV-affected older people across the state
9 through the expansion of our SAGEPositive
10 program.

11 With the support of the New York
12 Legislature, SAGE has been able to evolve and
13 expand to best address the widespread
14 disparities facing LGBTQ+ New Yorkers. SAGE
15 has redesigned our program and service
16 delivery models to provide a variety of
17 in-person, virtual, and hybrid options. This
18 helps draw elders in for in-person services
19 while addressing the direct needs of
20 homebound elders, those with mobility
21 challenges, those with caregiving and work
22 responsibilities, and those elders who have
23 health concerns about returning to in-person
24 programs and services.

1 As noted, SAGE works with prominent
2 developers to directly address the housing
3 insecurity experienced by many LGBTQ+ elders,
4 by building the first LGBTQ+-welcoming
5 affordable elder housing developments. Here
6 we provide on-site services to residents and
7 surrounding community members, including
8 programming, wellness checks, a food pantry,
9 grocery delivery, and coordinated care with
10 other providers. We have also expanded our
11 multilingual programming into Spanish,
12 Mandarin, and Cantonese.

13 Utilizing state funding and the
14 momentum of the passage of the Restoration of
15 Honor Act, our SAGEVets program helps older
16 LGBTQ+ veterans navigate the VA to get the
17 benefits they deserve, aiding in their
18 overall health and wellness and providing
19 referrals to counsel for discharge status
20 upgrades. SAGE provides this life-changing
21 support while saving New York significant
22 amounts of funding by ensuring veterans
23 access all their federal benefits instead of
24 relying solely on state programs to address

1 their housing and healthcare needs.

2 SAGE respectfully requests for the
3 restoration of our funding to continue this
4 vital work. We also request the new funding
5 designation to replicate the success of the
6 SAGEVets program and similarly provide
7 statewide support for older New Yorkers
8 living with HIV through the expansion of our
9 SAGEPositive program.

10 Thank you so much.

11 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

12 Supportive Housing Network of
13 New York.

14 MR. PIASECKI: Hi, everyone. I'm
15 Steve Piasecki, with the Supportive Housing
16 Network of New York. And thank you,
17 Chairs Krueger and Weinstein and all the
18 members of the committee, for this
19 opportunity to thank you for a bunch of other
20 stuff, to start with.

21 The Governor's budget has really got
22 lots of bright new, shiny new things for
23 supportive housing. I'll focus on the ESSHI
24 program that we've been working on for the

1 past decade or so.

2 But now, Year 7, I'm happy to report
3 that (a) the funding for ongoing services and
4 operations for the existing ESSHI units that
5 are up and running -- which are now over 7400
6 in total -- meeting the Governor's obligation
7 for that supportive housing plan, is fully
8 funded in the OTDA budget. So that is
9 excellent news for us.

10 We're happy that the recommitment for
11 the Affordable Housing Fund last year in the
12 HCR budget is present, and that will help us
13 build the next 1400 units worth of supportive
14 housing.

15 We're also happy for the new
16 initiative around the mental health housing
17 in the OMH budget.

18 But really what I'm here today to talk
19 about is our legacy programs, or the first
20 generation of supportive housing, that have
21 gone underfunded to an extent that dwarfs
22 imagination -- in particular, the NYSSHP
23 funding program.

24 NYSSHP, the New York State Supportive

1 Housing Program, has been around for almost
2 30 years. It funds a little bit of services
3 in a lot of different supportive housing
4 programs, about 20,000 units statewide. Half
5 of them are a joint project with New York
6 City DHS, and the other half are spread all
7 around the state. They serve individuals and
8 families at this point. The families were
9 added in 2002.

10 These programs are funded at about
11 1/10 of the rate of the funding that the
12 ESSHI program has -- maybe \$2400 to \$3500 per
13 unit per year, as compared with \$25,000 for
14 ESSHI. So we're really looking to fix that.
15 The total price tag to fix it, to be honest
16 with you, would be about a little less than
17 \$150 million.

18 But we're also looking for a technical
19 fix, as many others are. For some reason,
20 even though this program funds strictly
21 staffing that provide direct services to
22 homeless people in supportive housing, it has
23 never been in the COLA, so it didn't receive
24 the 5.4 percent last year like many of my

1 colleagues have already talked about.

2 And once again, we really need to have
3 that added as an ongoing program to the COLA
4 legislation that is being proposed this year,
5 and carried forward in the future, as another
6 means to catch up.

7 We're also advocating for additional
8 funding to support the state's Preservation
9 Plan that was funded last year. It's sort of
10 the same thing -- there is just not enough
11 support for programs that really need to be
12 physically rehabilitated without expanding
13 the services.

14 Thank you.

15 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

16 New York Association of Training and
17 Employment.

18 MS. MACK: Hi. Good evening,
19 everyone. Let me know if you can't hear me.
20 Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to
21 testify again this year. I always appreciate
22 the chance to share with you what our members
23 care about.

24 My name is Melinda Mack. I am the

1 executive director at NYATEP, which is the
2 statewide workforce development association
3 representing the education, job training and
4 employment providers across New York State.

5 As I'm sure you are speaking to folks
6 in your districts, you're hearing that people
7 just don't want to work and people should
8 just go out and get a job. I'm here to tell
9 you that over the last decade our labor force
10 participation rate has begun to slide, and
11 it's been happening long before COVID.

12 And it's predominantly due to
13 retirements, lack of birth rate -- sort of,
14 you know, folks don't have 10 kids, like they
15 used to -- and also the challenges we're
16 having around educational attainment across
17 New York as well as, you know, low-wage work.
18 You're hearing about some of it today. Some
19 of it is grossly underpaid, and in many ways
20 it's something that we absolutely need to
21 rectify if we're going to recruit and retain
22 folks.

23 In our last four annual State of the
24 Workforce Development reports we basically

1 laid out the fact that the vast majority of
2 jobs in New York are low-wage work. In fact,
3 2 million jobs from the top 10 largest
4 occupational groups pay less than a living
5 wage.

6 In addition to that, when you take
7 those two points between low-wage work and
8 the fact that 36 percent of our population
9 has a high school diploma or less, we
10 understand why we're not getting more folks
11 into good or better jobs.

12 One of the challenges we have
13 identified as a major hurdle that keeps
14 low-income New Yorkers not able to access
15 economic mobility is the benefits cliff. And
16 the benefits cliff, for those who are
17 unaware, is a sudden or gradual loss of your
18 benefits because you took a job, because you
19 decided to go into an apprenticeship program
20 that gave you a wage, because you are taking
21 a subsidized job training program. A lot of
22 folks make the decision not to participate
23 because they will lose their benefits
24 immediately.

1 Thankfully, both the Governor and the
2 Legislature have put forth proposals to
3 support a six-month income disregard. We are
4 fully supportive of that income disregard and
5 thank the leadership here that has supported
6 that on our behalf.

7 In addition to that, you already heard
8 earlier that the Office of Strategic
9 Workforce Development at Empire State
10 Development has also provided support to many
11 community-based organizations on the ground.
12 This year in the Governor's budget the
13 Governor, despite saying they support
14 workforce, it provided zero dollars. There's
15 no money going to ESD this year for the
16 Office of Strategic Workforce Development.

17 That's a problem because without job
18 training, again, that 36 percent of
19 New Yorkers who have a high school diploma or
20 less will not be accessing good or better
21 jobs.

22 Thank you.

23 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

24 Assemblyman Eachus.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Thank you again,
2 Ms. Chair.

3 Joan, I'm going to pile on here a
4 little bit of stuff. Your call for an
5 increase in wages and benefits is absolutely
6 important, because domestic violence is
7 generational. It gets passed from one
8 generation down to the next, down to the
9 next. And when you're talking about that,
10 you're sometimes talking about parents to
11 many children.

12 And we've seen this with the increase
13 in teen violence, with relationships, and
14 that's something that we need to stop now, as
15 it may be.

16 I'm going to do a little dirt here and
17 do a little PR for a program that I have
18 locally. It's called FEARLESS. It used to
19 be called formerly Safe Homes. My wife
20 worked for it for years as a volunteer, but
21 they do have professionals that are paid
22 there. But they do function a lot on the
23 volunteers.

24 And I encourage anybody who can avail

1 themselves to it to see what's called their
2 T-Shirt Project. It is hundreds upon
3 hundreds of T-shirts from folks who were
4 affected by this domestic violence. And you
5 should take the opportunity to view that if
6 you can. Thank you.

7 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senate?

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Jabari
9 Brisport.

10 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you,
11 Madam Chair.

12 And thank you all for being here and
13 your testimonies. I have questions for SAGE
14 and for Schuyler Center.

15 For SAGE, I just want to express my
16 gratitude. You do incredible work in my
17 district in Fort Greene. I actually just
18 feel guilty that others don't have a SAGE to
19 help out their LGBTQ+ seniors.

20 I'm just curious, in any of your
21 analysis, if you have a way to share a sense
22 of like the need throughout this state, like
23 if you have any numbers of how many LGBTQ+
24 seniors are not being served at the moment.

1 MR. OKMA: I will say that it's really
2 hard to get adequate data about this
3 population, so there isn't a good number of
4 how much.

5 We have data that says that there is
6 everywhere from 250,000 to like 800,000
7 LGBTQ+ elders in New York State. So there's
8 a big disparity. And part of that is we
9 really do need more sexual orientation and
10 gender identity data collected on all places
11 where demographic data's collected, to get a
12 sense of how big this population is.

13 I will stress, though, specifically
14 with the new funding designation that we're
15 asking for SAGEPositive, is that we do have
16 data that shows that by 2030, 72 percent of
17 New Yorkers living with HIV will be over the
18 age of 50. And quite frankly, the state just
19 is not adequately prepared to make sure that
20 we're serving that population.

21 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you. So we
22 have a long way to go.

23 And for Schuyler Center, thank you for
24 reiterating the need for workforce support.

1 As you know, and I just want to repeat
2 it for everyone here, the Executive Budget is
3 once again attempting to stabilize the sector
4 by doing -- using one-time federal funds.

5 And I'm just curious if you've heard in your
6 advocacy from any providers anywhere if
7 they've used this one-time limited infusion
8 to create long-term wage increases.

9 MS. HILL: No, I have not heard that.

10 What I can say is that what we heard
11 from providers who received the first round
12 of stabilization, and the second round, where
13 they had -- they could use those funds in a
14 real broad variety of ways, they used almost
15 all of it for workforce. I mean, that is the
16 number-one issue. And they've poured it all
17 into workforce, and they're still losing
18 workforce every day. It's not enough.

19 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

21 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblyman
22 Burdick.

23 (Pause.)

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Is he here?

1 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: He left.

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I don't see him.

3 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So the Senate.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Oh, okay. We
5 have Senator Murray.

6 SENATOR MURRAY: Thank you, Chair.

7 And thank you all for being here.

8 I'd like to ask Ms. Mack a couple of
9 things.

10 First, when we talked about the
11 benefit cliff and you talked about holding on
12 to the benefits for six months, we're just
13 looking for a little clarification. Were you
14 talking about the benefits they currently
15 have with the state, or would it be
16 transitioning to the benefits they would have
17 when they go?

18 MS. MACK: Yeah, so the benefit cliff
19 is really around losing your public benefits,
20 so the public assistance that you're already
21 receiving.

22 What we find is that again, even with
23 the Summer Youth Employment Program, it was
24 again the Legislature that really helped us

1 out, because we had young adults who were
2 unwilling to participate in SYEP because, if
3 they did, that couple hundred bucks they'd
4 earn over the summer, it would likely kick
5 their family off of public assistance.

6 It makes no sense for us to keep
7 people poor, especially folks who are trying
8 to do all of the right things to get out of
9 poverty.

10 SENATOR MURRAY: Right. I wanted to
11 talk also about when we talk about the
12 different types of jobs, I've spoken to many
13 manufacturers who are saying their number-one
14 problem -- it's not taxes, not
15 infrastructure -- they can't find a trained
16 workforce.

17 Are we investing enough in BOCES,
18 CTE programs, things like this?

19 MS. MACK: Absolutely not.

20 And again, in the Governor's infinite
21 wisdom she opened this new office of
22 Strategic Workforce Investment, but they are
23 providing zero dollars, zero flexible
24 dollars for workforce development this year.

1 So the vast majority of workforce
2 development funding is federal funding that
3 has very specific requirements in terms of
4 how you can spend it.

5 We need to meet people where they're
6 at. Again, everybody who is available to
7 work should be able to get a good job in
8 New York, and we have great programs that are
9 not being attended because people can't cover
10 the cost of their childcare, because they
11 can't cover transportation, they don't have a
12 car, they don't have a driver's license.

13 Think of all the places in your
14 district that you need to get to with a car.
15 And I lived in Brooklyn for a while -- try to
16 get to Kingsborough without a car.

17 (Laughter.)

18 MS. MACK: It will take you the whole
19 day.

20 SENATOR MURRAY: And I was also going
21 to ask, when you mentioned -- so you
22 mentioned childcare, you talked about the
23 workforce and reasons that people aren't
24 getting back into the workforce. How big of

1 a problem is the childcare issue?

2 MS. MACK: It's one of the number-one
3 issues. Childcare, transportation,
4 workforce, housing. So, you know, affordable
5 rents, but then also, again, this benefits
6 cliff.

7 The vast majority of people who are
8 underutilized are either utilizing public
9 assistance or have low basic educational
10 skills and often can't step away from the
11 low-wage job they have for job training.

12 SENATOR MURRAY: Thank you very much.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblyman
15 Burdick.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Thank you.

17 This is a question for Joan Gerhardt.
18 And I first want to apologize for not being
19 here at the time of your testimony, but I did
20 read it.

21 And I'm wondering if you could explain
22 more fully what you have experienced or what
23 agencies have experienced with respect to the
24 loss of funding, these legacy agencies that

1 have been handling victim services for quite
2 some time and I think were just totally
3 shocked that they didn't get the funding
4 levels that they had before -- actually, at a
5 time when Linda Rosenthal and I thought that
6 we had gotten the money into the budget that
7 we thought would do the trick so that those
8 agencies would not sustain some drastic cuts
9 in funding.

10 What was the outcome? I mean, what
11 have you heard? Have victims been turned
12 away? Have staff been cut? Can you describe
13 a little bit what those outcomes have been?

14 MS. GERHARDT: Absolutely, and thank
15 you for the question.

16 It's been devastating. It's really
17 been devastating for those 87 programs.
18 We've heard of vacant positions. You know,
19 we've heard of layoffs. We've heard of job
20 postings that have been pulled back because
21 they can't offer the position any longer.

22 For the legal service organizations
23 that are included in that mix, we've heard
24 that they've been unable to take on new

1 clients because they are ethically required
2 to be able to follow that client through the
3 end of their proceeding. And with those
4 cuts, they're not sure how long those
5 employees will still be in their rolls.

6 So yeah, it's \$11.7 million to the
7 state's infrastructure, this critical
8 infrastructure of victim service providers.
9 And like you said, we thought we had dealt
10 with this in last year's budget, but
11 unfortunately, with OVS's recent round of
12 awards for these 87 programs, we didn't
13 resolve anything. So I think it's a dramatic
14 impact.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Well, thank you
16 for that.

17 And, you know, we will try to see what
18 we can do, because I think that the Executive
19 just wasn't aware. Some may take a cynical
20 view; I don't. I think that they just didn't
21 realize that it wasn't enough to go up by
22 14.4 million, because the whole process of
23 the competitive bidding that was required by
24 the Comptroller resulted in new agencies --

1 which I'm sure are doing a good job scoring
2 very high for the desert areas.

3 And so we're going to work very hard
4 to try to get the funding in for the legacy
5 agencies.

6 MS. GERHARDT: I appreciate that.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Thanks for your
8 work.

9 MS. GERHARDT: Thank you.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

11 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senate?

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Excuse me.

13 Senator Jessica Scarcello-Stanton -- I'm
14 going to get it right, I promise, yes.

15 (Laughter.)

16 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: I know,
17 it's a tough name. It's Jessica
18 Scarcella-Spanton.

19 Hi. My question is for you, Joan. I
20 just wanted to thank you for the work that
21 you're doing.

22 I know that incidents of domestic
23 violence have gone up significantly from the
24 pandemic. How are you balancing the uptick

1 in domestic violence cases?

2 And I also want to say I think you're
3 doing a really wonderful job highlighting
4 different kinds of abuse. We often talk
5 about physical abuse. I'm happy to see that
6 you're highlighting stalking, emotional
7 abuse -- there's all sorts of abuse which
8 you're talking about, which I also imagine
9 results in more cases for you.

10 So how are you balancing an uptick in
11 caseload with a loss of workforce, especially
12 given that they can't afford it, is the first
13 part of my question.

14 My second part of my question is I
15 think domestic violence victims often have a
16 hard time trusting people. So if a domestic
17 violence victim is working with a certain
18 caseworker or an advocate, and then through
19 that process they lose that advocate, how
20 does that impact the progression of the case?
21 Which we know a lot of times victims of
22 domestic violence tend to take -- I believe
23 it's eight times before they finally go. So
24 how does that impact the case?

1 MS. GERHARDT: Great. I don't think
2 we are balancing that difficulty between the
3 increased demand and the loss of -- the
4 increase in job vacancies. I think it's
5 every program in the state -- there's
6 100 programs with about 250 facilities that
7 they operate -- is struggling with this,
8 whether they received cuts or whether they,
9 you know, are maintained. It's a case by
10 case.

11 And I want to point out, too, it's not
12 just the increase in numbers of requests for
13 service, it's the lethality that's connected
14 to those requests. Because what we're
15 hearing as well is not only the increase in
16 number, but they're much more volatile
17 incidents.

18 So I agree with you, it's not just
19 physical violence, but of the individuals who
20 are in that circumstance, the lethality
21 factors are very, very high. So I agree with
22 you there.

23 And I would say we need more help.
24 We're not balancing it well. And victims are

1 going to be the ones who bear the brunt of
2 that.

3 And I forget your second question, I'm
4 sorry.

5 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Oh, my
6 second question was, you know, if -- because
7 of the lack of COLA increases, because of the
8 lack of a pay raise, if a victim is working
9 with an advocate -- I think a lot of times it
10 takes a victim of domestic violence a while
11 to actually trust who they're confiding in
12 and who they're working with. It's -- like I
13 said before, it can take up to eight times
14 for a victim to leave before they finally
15 actually leave.

16 So if you lose an advocate while
17 you're in the middle of working with a
18 victim, how does that impact the progression
19 of some of your case -- of your caseloads?

20 MS. GERHARDT: Thank you.

21 Often they won't come back for
22 services. So if they're working closely with
23 an advocate and they've developed a
24 relationship and that advocate for whatever

1 reason is no longer there, that could be
2 enough for them to say, You know what, I
3 didn't get the assistance I needed, I don't
4 want to start over again.

5 And I think that is one of the issues:
6 We ask survivors over and over and over again
7 to tell their story, which is very
8 re-traumatizing.

9 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON:
10 Absolutely. Thank you so much.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

12 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

13 No more Assemblymembers. Any
14 Senators?

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay, we have
16 Senator Cordell Cleare.

17 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you, everyone,
18 for your testimony.

19 I just -- you know, you all do a
20 fantastic job of talking really fast --

21 (Laughter.)

22 SENATOR CLEARE: -- so I missed a few
23 things a little bit.

24 And SAGE, you know, I'm a fan of your

1 work and you're also in my district, so I
2 feel really lucky to have you there. You
3 said \$300,000 for housing and then I think
4 there's some -- \$150,000 for HIV-impacted
5 older people. But I missed the other 150.

6 MR. OKMA: Yeah, of course. Thank you
7 so much.

8 The restoration of 150,000 to support
9 our multilingual programs and services.
10 So we currently offer programs and services
11 in English, Spanish, Cantonese, and Mandarin.
12 And the support of the Legislature really
13 helps us provide that, and we'd love to
14 expand for more language options as well.

15 And then the other designation was for
16 our SAGE --

17 SENATOR CLEARE: 250,000.

18 MR. OKMA: 260 for SAGEVets. And I
19 will say that that is fiscal year '22 funding
20 levels -- we saw a reduction last fiscal
21 year, where we got 150,000 -- and we saw a
22 really big impact in what we were able to do
23 specifically in being able to partner with
24 more providers and affiliates outside of

1 New York City to make sure that we provide
2 the service.

3 It is the only program that
4 specifically serves LGBTQ+ older veterans,
5 and we would really like to see it restored
6 back to those fiscal year '22 levels.

7 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you so much.

8 I'm sorry, I don't know your -- could
9 you tell me about the DAP program?

10 MS. SICILIA: Yes.

11 SENATOR CLEARE: Yeah.

12 MS. SICILIA: Yes. From Empire
13 Justice, Emilia Sicilia.

14 SENATOR CLEARE: I wanted to hear a
15 little bit -- you went down a little bit and
16 I didn't hear everything.

17 MS. SICILIA: Thank you for -- I'm
18 happy to talk at length about DAP.

19 (Laughter.)

20 MS. SICILIA: So we in the DAP program
21 are facing many obstacles in helping our
22 clients overcome many of the hurdles that
23 they're facing. And they've been compounded
24 by the pandemic and compounded by the

1 difficulties at the Social Security
2 Administration with severe understaffing that
3 has resulted in a lot of difficulty in our
4 clients accessing those services.

5 So although --

6 SENATOR CLEARE: Just tell me what DAP
7 was for, because the {inaudible} --

8 MS. SICILIA: Excuse me?

9 SENATOR CLEARE: DAP, what is that?

10 MS. SICILIA: Oh, DAP is the
11 Disability Advocacy Program.

12 SENATOR CLEARE: Oh, okay.

13 MS. SICILIA: So we're assisting
14 individuals who have been denied benefits and
15 representing them in their appeals.

16 And so we are -- it is a -- the
17 appeals process is really difficult, lasts a
18 long time. And at this moment we're
19 really -- we're addressing a lot of
20 COVID-related obstacles due to closures of
21 Social Security. They were closed for two
22 years and reopened with real severe
23 understaffing.

24 And we also are representing many

1 people with Long COVID claims. That's
2 something that is amounting to new
3 challenges, in that it's not very well
4 understood. Those claims present a lot of
5 difficulty also in obtaining the evidence
6 that's required. And again, there's just a
7 lot of access issues for our clients.

8 And so although we've -- we're really
9 grateful for the executive funding increase
10 last year, we really do need the Legislature
11 to restore the \$3 million add-on in order to
12 continue to meet the current demands that
13 have been compounded -- presented by the
14 pandemic.

15 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

16 MS. SICILIA: Sure.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay.

18 Senator Rolison.

19 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you, Chair.

20 This question is for Ms. Gerhardt.

21 There was a time when crime victims
22 were essentially voiceless -- and I'm going
23 back many years, as a retired police officer
24 of 26 years. And there was the term "crime

1 victim-centered approach," which we were all
2 trained in and we needed to really do more
3 for the victims. And this was through the
4 entire system. And systems were put in
5 place, money was allocated, groups got
6 together, we collaborated, we weren't in
7 silos because it was about the crime victim.

8 In the Executive Budget there is
9 additional money for DCJS in a variety of
10 areas that are important. There is a small
11 increase, I think, in the Crime Victim
12 Compensation Fund, probably -- definitely not
13 enough. But now we're hearing from you,
14 we've heard this from others in other
15 hearings and other testimony, where we're
16 stagnant and we're going backwards in the
17 area of domestic violence and crime victim
18 services.

19 And speaking with my colleague from
20 the Assembly, I think we're talking a little
21 over \$11 million. Is that the number, what
22 needs to be restored, reallocated, or
23 increased to make sure, as we've heard from
24 all of the members of the Legislature today

1 about the importance of having those
2 advocates, having people you can go to, even
3 creating places that -- where every service
4 was brought together so you weren't going
5 from one place to another, because people
6 wouldn't go. Or they'd go to the first step
7 and they wouldn't go to the second or to the
8 third.

9 I'd like to take the position, too, as
10 my colleague, that maybe this is an
11 oversight. Because if you think about the
12 money that's committed in DCJS and other
13 agencies related to public safety, that's not
14 a whole heck of a lot of money, in my
15 estimation. And I hope that when this budget
16 is debated and people work together to try to
17 create some changes, that will be one of
18 them.

19 I'd like to be helpful to the extent
20 that I can. But I realize, as a freshman
21 Senator, I won't have probably those
22 opportunities other than to advocate for you.
23 But we're going backwards. We've made a lot
24 of strides, and now here we are in 2023 and

1 it sounds like we're talking about what we
2 were talking about in the '80s and in the
3 early '90s when these changes were made.

4 MS. GERHARDT: You know -- thank you,
5 Senator. We're doing a lot of talking about
6 public safety and increases in crime rates,
7 and very little about crime victims. Very
8 little about crime victims.

9 SENATOR ROLISON: Right. Because
10 they're there no matter what the crime rate
11 is. Somebody is a victim. And that is the
12 loneliest place in the world to be if you
13 don't have people there to help you through
14 it.

15 I give you all the credit in the world
16 for what you're doing -- all of you. Thank
17 you.

18 MS. GERHARDT: Thank you.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

20 I believe I'm the last Senator.

21 So for Stephen, Supportive Housing.

22 MR. PIASECKI: Yes.

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So you described
24 the continuing saga of the older programs

1 getting so little reimbursements instead of
2 the newer ones.

3 So I've been telling people for years,
4 just don't do the older contracts. Move your
5 resources to the newer contracts. Trust me,
6 the state will come up with the money rather
7 than have nobody provide those programs.
8 Because it's ridiculous that you've been
9 strung along like this forever and that we
10 don't make progress on this. So that's just
11 my advocacy position.

12 Shelter allowance. Seriously, they're
13 paying you almost less than -- a little more
14 than half of what they're paying the newer
15 contracts. You're supposed to be doing the
16 same services for --

17 MR. PIASECKI: It's 10 percent.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Pardon me?

19 MR. PIASECKI: Ten percent of what is
20 in the newest contracts.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Far less.

22 So, you know, the punch line is
23 apparently we think you can keep doing it
24 because you keep doing it. So stop doing it.

1 MR. PIASECKI: Well, some of --
2 there's been some erosion. There's certainly
3 erosion in the physical plants of many of the
4 early supportive housing buildings.

5 And that's why last year you guys were
6 gracious enough to create the Preservation
7 Program.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Because you know
9 what, we're desperate for supportive housing.

10 MR. PIASECKI: Yeah.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: No one's letting
12 those really go. You just have to -- we're
13 playing a game of chicken, and -- if I'm the
14 government in this conversation, and we're
15 winning. And that's wrong, in my opinion.

16 Shelter allowance also. How many
17 families might not be evicted every year in
18 New York State if we just adjusted the
19 shelter allowance, even just for inflation?

20 Does anybody -- do you have any
21 calculations on that?

22 MS. SICILIA: I would be happy to
23 bring that back to my colleagues who prepared
24 our written testimony on that point and be in

1 touch with you with the specifics.

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Because I'm
3 almost going to guarantee we are spending so
4 much more money on the emergency rents in
5 assorted programs that we're paying because
6 we just won't pay a realistic shelter
7 allowance.

8 So it's -- but I would like you to --

9 MS. SICILIA: We'd agree with you.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: -- get back to me
11 with any data you have.

12 And on domestic violence, you talked
13 about the number -- the demand going up so
14 much during the pandemic and post-pandemic.
15 Are you also seeing growth in the number of
16 victims of sex trafficking coming to you for
17 help? And are they eligible for the same
18 kinds of services that your other --

19 MS. GERHARDT: Yes. So that the pool
20 of service providers that I've been talking
21 about includes providers of services for
22 trafficking victims.

23 I'd have to give you some more -- you
24 know, go back and research if there's been a

1 bump in the number of trafficking survivors
2 that have been provided assistance. I'm
3 happy to do that.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Great. I
5 appreciate it.

6 And thank you all for the very hard
7 work you do.

8 Thank you.

9 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.
10 Thank you for being here with us. And I want
11 to echo the thank you for the work you do to
12 help New Yorkers.

13 MR. OKMA: Thanks.

14 MS. GERHARDT: Thanks.

15 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Our last, our
16 final panel, Panel E, Hudson Valley National
17 Center for Veteran Reintegrating, and
18 New York State Council of Veterans
19 Organizations.

20 (Pause.)

21 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So sometimes we
22 say we save the best for last. Thank you
23 both for staying with us throughout this day.

24 And we can go first with

1 Hudson Valley.

2 MR. WALTERS: Thank you. My name is
3 Gavin Walters. Thank you, Senate and
4 Assembly members, for allowing me to sit here
5 and represent our military community.

6 I sit here on behalf of the
7 Ulster County Dwyer Program, which is under
8 the Hudson Valley National Center for Veteran
9 Reintegration, and have the great privilege
10 of sitting here as the facilitator of the
11 New York State Dwyer Coalition, also known as
12 the Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer Support
13 Project, which is officially a state program.

14 2022 was a tremendous year for the
15 PFC Joseph Dwyer Program because it was
16 expanded to every county in New York State.
17 This will allow every veteran and their
18 family to become connected to veteran peers.

19 The Dwyer program has allowed
20 servicemembers to feel equally represented,
21 because time, duty, and length of service do
22 not matter when you put on the uniform. If
23 you're homeless, let's pay for a day or two
24 for a hotel. If you enjoy the outdoors,

1 well, let us take a hike or camp out. Equine
2 Encounters, Mindfulness, and groups help
3 continue the camaraderie that we experienced
4 in the service. That is what the Dwyer
5 counties represent, and that is what was
6 brought to every county in New York State.

7 Now, for every Dwyer county to be
8 represented, we knew a united front and a
9 collective body were needed. In
10 December 2020, the New York State Dwyer
11 Coalition, under the Hudson Valley National
12 Center for Veteran Reintegration, was
13 created. We have been meeting once a month
14 to discuss challenges that we have seen in
15 our communities. Guest speakers as well as
16 representatives from our New York State
17 Assembly and Senate sit at the table and hear
18 our voices. Our open and well-represented
19 meetings give our community a large voice.

20 With the support and leadership of
21 OMH, DVS, the Dwyer Evaluation Team, and the
22 Governor's Office, the Dwyer Coalition uses
23 its voice to help with the collaboration to
24 assist new counties to develop their

1 programs. The collaboration amongst these
2 departments reflects the unity that was
3 created within the Dwyer Coalition.

4 Our importance for being at any table
5 means that we are being represented
6 collectively, as one voice, when issues may
7 bother us or challenges might affect us. For
8 each of the counties that house a
9 Dwyer program, representation is very
10 important, because every Dwyer program in
11 their respective county is supposed to
12 service their community uniquely and with
13 100 percent autonomy. Those two caveats have
14 allowed every program to help an armed forces
15 member that received a dishonorable or
16 honorable discharge.

17 Collectively, many Dwyer programs have
18 shared the concern of the program never
19 receiving an increase in funding since its
20 enactment in 2012. The Dwyer program has
21 evolved into peers transporting veterans,
22 assisting with food insecurities, advocating
23 for housing, and many more. With inflation
24 and the cost of living increasing, some

1 programs have been able to offset the
2 additional cost with fundraising and
3 community generosity, which sometimes doesn't
4 cover the cost of many services.

5 Sitting here as a Jamaican-born
6 immigrant that honorably served in the
7 U.S. Air Force and now who is a disabled
8 veteran with invisible wounds fighting for a
9 service connection, I understand the
10 advocacy. That is why funding the
11 Dwyer Coalition and an increase in funding
12 for Dwyer programs would positively impact
13 each county.

14 Thank you for your time.

15 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

16 Kirby?

17 MR. HANNAN: Well, don't be fooled by
18 Gavin's title, Hudson Valley National Center
19 for Veteran Reintegration. That's his job,
20 okay? But what he does with Dwyer is he's
21 got at least 30 to 40 counties that are
22 participating on a weekly basis -- on a
23 monthly basis in his furthering of --
24 {cellphone interruption}.

1 Yeah, I know. Don't worry about it.
2 You know, it has to happen. I apologize.

3 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay.

4 MR. HANNAN: And what he's done is
5 he's brought the Dwyer program to a brand-new
6 level. It went from 30 counties to
7 60 counties. Thank you so much, okay.

8 And what is Dwyer doing now? Every
9 peer-to-peer situation is something that's
10 happening at a post level. You don't walk
11 into a brick building and say, I'm here to
12 get peer-to-peer mentoring. No, it's
13 something that happens through a veteran's
14 service officer, it's something that happens
15 in a whole variety of ways.

16 So first of all, thank you, Gavin, for
17 bringing this. We've been talking about this
18 for about eight years. And some folks here
19 recognized the Dwyer program eight years ago
20 in four counties -- and I won't mention what
21 counties they were. But nonetheless, Dwyer
22 has now migrated to the whole state.
23 Terrific. All right?

24 Having said that, at every county

1 there's a veteran service officer, there's
2 county veteran service officers, there's VFW
3 veteran service officers, there's DAV veteran
4 service officers, AMVET veteran service
5 officers, and Legion veteran service
6 officers. The funding was just increased for
7 them to about \$25,000, the state's share.

8 But where we're going from here is
9 keep an eye on the veterans service officer,
10 because not only does that person perform a
11 claims function -- and you heard from DVS
12 earlier today -- but that person is also a
13 leader, a veteran leader in their community.

14 So when we talk about veteran service
15 officers, you've got to understand that
16 that's also an integral part of Dwyer's
17 peer-to-peer program. So keep in mind
18 funding for that.

19 Finally, Veterans Treatment Court and
20 the Veterans Defense Program. Okay, you've
21 got two pieces of that. Veterans Treatment
22 Court is mostly for misdemeanors, all right?
23 I'm going to say that the Veterans Defense
24 Program is largely felony level, all right?

1 And the Veterans Treatment Courts need
2 monitors. So funding for monitors. If
3 any -- that's found in different places in
4 the budget, but not a lot of money.

5 Okay, funding for Veterans Treatment
6 Court monitors is incredibly important,
7 because they're all volunteers. We've heard
8 about volunteers today. So when you see an
9 opportunity to increase the funding for
10 Veterans Treatment Court monitors, seize on
11 it, because it's saving the state money.

12 And then, finally, the Veterans
13 Defense Program, that's the last stop for a
14 veteran who gets himself in serious trouble
15 with the law. And they have been -- the
16 Veterans Defense Program has been very, very
17 successful in pleading those down, using --
18 educating the court system and using the
19 jargon in a way in which the court can
20 understand it so that they know what kind of
21 a veteran they're dealing with.

22 That's it. That's all I got.

23 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank --

24 MR. HANNAN: I do have one more thing,

1 come to think of it.

2 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Go ahead.

3 MR. HANNAN: I have to give you guys,
4 everybody up there, the Hard Ass Award.

5 (Laughter.)

6 MR. HANNAN: Yeah.

7 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: How'd you know?

8 (Laughter.)

9 MR. HANNAN: Seriously.

10 (Laughter.)

11 MR. HANNAN: You've heard it before
12 but, you know, you people are just fantastic.
13 And thank you very much.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: We'll take it.

15 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yeah, we'll
16 take it.

17 We go to Assemblyman Ra.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you two very
19 much for your patience today, and certainly
20 for your service and serving our veterans.

21 So Mr. Walters, quickly, I mean, I
22 think it's so great to hear from somebody
23 like you that the state has now invested to
24 grow this program. And it takes people like

1 you to, you know, make this program great.
2 And that's why we know it's always worked is
3 because of the people who've walked in those
4 same shoes that are working with our
5 veterans.

6 But what have you seen in those
7 counties that are, you know, putting this
8 into effect for the first time as a result of
9 the funding last year? Is there just a
10 growing need to continue investing in this?
11 I would think there is.

12 MR. WALTERS: Investing financially or
13 just investing --

14 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Financially and
15 otherwise.

16 MR. WALTERS: Definitely financially,
17 yes. Time, yes.

18 I sit with the individuals from OMH,
19 DVS, as well as the Dwyer Evaluation Team,
20 where we sit and discuss what can be done
21 regarding the counties that's trying to
22 figure out what to do if they're a different
23 process -- because every county is unique,
24 every county is different. So each county

1 has their own, you know, challenges or, you
2 know, questions about, okay, what should I
3 do, how can I run this, you know, who can I
4 hire. You know, it goes through a different
5 process. So it's an ongoing thing.

6 But financially, absolutely. One of
7 the things that, you know, I sit here is
8 because the Dwyer program has not been --
9 since its enactment about 10 years ago, it
10 has not been increased. So just from the
11 program's deliverables of people doing things
12 like going and helping individuals with
13 groceries or sitting with someone at the
14 store or whatever it is, you know, the
15 service has increased just from the
16 peer-to-peer, but just -- you know, they've
17 actually turned into like case managers, but
18 without being case managers. Advocates. You
19 know, speaking with someone at 2 o'clock in
20 the morning, where I've taken a phone call
21 from someone suicidal.

22 Those are things that we've done
23 beyond, you know, just our office hours or
24 just beyond what we have to do.

1 But absolutely, the need for
2 financial -- you know, a monetary gain would
3 be great for a lot of the programs.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Great. Thank you.

5 And Mr. Hannan, I don't know if you
6 were here earlier, but when we were talking
7 to the director --

8 MR. HANNAN: DVS?

9 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Yes. We mentioned
10 the grant program that was in the \$5 million
11 in grants that was put in for veterans
12 service organizations.

13 MR. HANNAN: That's for infrastructure
14 improvements and the like.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Yeah, in last year's
16 budget.

17 And the number of applicants seemed to
18 be very low. So are local veterans
19 organizations aware of this? I just --

20 MR. HANNAN: You just asked my
21 favorite question.

22 You know, the problem as I see it --
23 and, you know, I'm outspoken, and I apologize
24 for that. But DVS is treating it as a

1 procurement program, not a grant program. So
2 if it's a procurement program, they can't
3 answer any questions.

4 Have you ever navigated that grants
5 gateway? I have. It's a bear. It's
6 incredibly counterintuitive.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

8 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

9 To the Senate.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

11 (Slowly.) Senator Jessica
12 Scarcella-Spanton.

13 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Ooh, very
14 good. Thank you.

15 (Laughter, applause.)

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I have been
17 making mistakes with her name all day.
18 That's why we're laughing.

19 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: It is --
20 it's tough.

21 But Kirby, Gavin, I just wanted to
22 thank you both so much for being here today
23 and being patient and making us laugh at the
24 end of the day also.

1 (Laughter.)

2 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: But the
3 Assemblyman asked the question I was going to
4 ask -- is, you know, how is that \$5 million
5 that's not being allocated in the
6 Executive Budget going to affect you?

7 And I also wanted to ask if the -- if
8 it's sufficient, the amount of peer-to-peer
9 funding that you have to include all the
10 counties this year -- if it's enough, if you
11 need more. I just wanted to -- I know it's a
12 very, very important program, so I want to
13 make sure that it's being appropriately
14 funded.

15 MR. HANNAN: Well, it's different
16 things for different people. Gavin said it,
17 all right? So, you know, you have to look at
18 it in terms of one county maybe is adequately
19 funded and another county has obviously
20 significantly more needs. Rural versus
21 urban, et cetera. Transportation versus
22 homeless, you know. So all of that is going
23 on.

24 I can't say whether more funding needs

1 to -- my testimony says that Dwyer ought to
2 be allowed to evaluate this in a grassroots
3 way with SUNY, and that at the end of some
4 budget period you need to take a second look
5 at, okay, where do we allocate our funds.

6 Because I think that it's a very
7 important question, and I don't -- I think
8 that there's not a clear-cut answer for it.
9 Certainly I don't have one.

10 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: And that
11 makes sense. If you're in an area that is
12 more densely populated with veterans, whether
13 it's, you know, if you're near a VA, or if
14 you're up in Fort Drum, and maybe that's just
15 the area that they tend to gravitate to, they
16 may need more funding than an area who
17 doesn't have as many veterans.

18 So it gives you the opportunity to
19 have more flexibility with how you spend that
20 money. Is that correct?

21 MR. HANNAN: Well, yes.

22 And I think a lot of people don't
23 realize that Dwyer is actually -- a lot of
24 people think that it's connected with DVS.

1 It's really not. OMH contracts with Dwyer,
2 with the county OMH as well as the county
3 Division of Veteran Services, and that's how
4 they figure out what CBOs and what
5 not-for-profits are out there that can
6 provide some of the services that are
7 specific.

8 Do me a favor, don't listen me. Just
9 Google "WHY6Vet." WHY, 6, Vet.

10 MR. WALTERS: We Have Your 6. It's
11 called "We Have Your 6." It's an
12 organization that helps veterans in need that
13 are suicidal and just going through the
14 issues that so many of us, you know, have
15 experienced.

16 But they are one of those
17 organizations that's out there that have been
18 helping many veterans. But it's WHY6, but
19 it's We Have Your 6.

20 MR. HANNAN: And for your information,
21 because I've heard several people asking
22 about New York City and certainly
23 Staten Island, Senator. And DVS just --
24 New York City, just issued how they're going

1 to administer Dwyer for New York City. So
2 it's -- and if anybody wants it, just give me
3 a shout and I'll --

4 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: I want it.

5 (Laughter.)

6 MR. HANNAN: Okay. All right,
7 Senator.

8 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you
9 so much.

10 MR. HANNAN: You bet. Okay.

11 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: I
12 appreciate it.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblyman
15 Eachus.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: There we go.
17 Thank you.

18 Thank you for your service, and thank
19 you for helping out vets. It's very
20 important.

21 Just recently when I was home, one of
22 the complaints I heard from a member of the
23 posts has to do with brick and mortar, and
24 that is the fact that there really are no

1 funds out there that are available for posts
2 to fix their facilities unless they spend the
3 money first.

4 And many of them told me: You know
5 what, if we had the money to spend, I
6 wouldn't go through all the paperwork to try
7 to get grants from New York State to work on
8 these buildings.

9 MR. HANNAN: Let me -- let me correct
10 you on something.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Sure.

12 MR. HANNAN: The way DVS has worked it
13 out, and the way I know DASNY, Dormitory
14 Authority of the State of New York, has
15 actually interacted on this issue is that
16 they've got a method by which they can
17 reimburse the contractor.

18 So the 5 million that we were talking
19 about before for infrastructure improvements,
20 that can actually be contracted for with the
21 contractor, and then DASNY will take over and
22 execute the contract and will actually pay.
23 So you don't have to spend the money first.

24 That was the case a while back, in the

1 last round of -- I'll call them crest
2 fundings -- but not this time.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Well, I thank you
4 for that. I deal with a number of folks that
5 are even older than myself, and maybe they
6 remember from those points in time.

7 Gavin, I just wanted to ask you real
8 quickly, how does the Dwyer program work with
9 the county service officers?

10 MR. WALTERS: So depending on which
11 county you go to, you know, it might be
12 different.

13 I could speak about Ulster County. We
14 have a great relationship with Mark Cozzupoli
15 at the Ulster VSA, where we will meet --
16 actually, last year we met once a month just
17 to speak about the veterans in the community,
18 the veterans that are being impacted, such as
19 the ones that were homeless or just had some
20 type of need of services. But we always will
21 work with one another.

22 We have luncheons that we'll actually
23 sit at different tables together to share
24 each other's resources. If a veteran -- we

1 know a lot of servicemembers will not go to
2 the VSA. So when they do actually come to
3 our office, we'll actually speak to them and
4 say, Hey, you know, have you gotten your
5 service connection? Or what do you know
6 about benefits? And we'll actually escort
7 them to there, speak to them collectively and
8 say, Hey, this is the person that you should
9 speak to regarding service connection, and
10 then come back to our office and then see
11 what you want to do.

12 So that relationship really blends,
13 you know, when you work really well with your
14 VSA.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: That's great to
16 hear.

17 The final thing that I would say is
18 you mentioned about OMH. It is my hope that
19 OMH is working very closely with you.
20 Because when you have a veteran that calls up
21 and has an immediate, serious problem, there
22 should be somebody in OMH, a professional --
23 I mean, thank you for what you do, thank you
24 for all the volunteers and so on like that,

1 but there should be a professional also
2 available to answer the questions and help
3 that particular --

4 MR. WALTERS: They actually sit at our
5 coalition meetings monthly. So they sit at
6 our meetings, and anytime we have an issue or
7 anything like that, they actually will
8 address us and speak to us. So their
9 relationship is really close to us now.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Good.

11 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Tom
13 O'Mara.

14 SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you, gentlemen,
15 for the great work you do day in and day out
16 for our veterans.

17 I think, as we've heard testimony
18 throughout the day today, kind of the state's
19 attention to veteran services is woeful and
20 could be a heck of a lot better. But you're
21 doing a great job with what you have.

22 Can you comment at all, are we making
23 any progress in the treatment of
24 post-traumatic stress and how that fits into

1 the whole equation of our mental health and,
2 frankly, addiction issues of so many
3 veterans? What kind of progress is being
4 made there?

5 MR. WALTERS: Well, I think the
6 biggest hurdle is the reintegration. Because
7 we know once someone's in service and once
8 they get out is two different attitudes.
9 Because we'll see someone when they're in the
10 most harsh situation.

11 And because there's not that piece of,
12 like, connecting them right before they get
13 to our county, then it becomes that challenge
14 of trying to reach out to them and say, Hey,
15 how you doing, what's going on, are you
16 experiencing any issues?

17 And we know the young veterans will
18 not reach out to anybody unless -- until, you
19 know, they need to get somewhere. But the
20 older veterans, we do know that they will --
21 you know, they're more willing to reach out
22 to someone. If we go to the VA or wherever,
23 they'll be willing to speak to us.

24 But the younger veterans are the ones

1 that we're always trying to reach out to,
2 because they're the ones that's usually not
3 willing because -- as a young veteran that
4 came out myself, that didn't have any service
5 connections, just got -- you know, just
6 was I'll say booted out, I didn't want to
7 speak to anybody because I didn't feel like I
8 qualified, as well as I didn't think anybody
9 understood.

10 It took a long time until another
11 veteran talked to me and said, Hey, Gavin,
12 you might qualify for some VA services, speak
13 to someone. And that connection with another
14 peer actually connected me. And that's what
15 usually happens with a lot of the veterans.

16 So just for the PTSD, or just speaking
17 to someone with that, it's about the
18 reintegration part where we actually -- if we
19 just speak to somebody if like when they --
20 you know, if we knew that they were in
21 combat, if we knew that they were deployed
22 somewhere and we were able to talk to them
23 right before they got -- came back to the
24 States, that would be a big impact.

1 That would be so good that we could
2 say, Hey, we know that you're going through
3 something, come to our office. Or, listen,
4 if you're not able to come to our office,
5 we'll talk to you, we'll talk to your
6 family -- or educate their families, which is
7 the biggest component where eight, nine times
8 out of 10, it's the families that's reaching
9 out to us.

10 So if we could educate the family
11 members to say, Hey, listen, if you know your
12 sister, brother, cousin, or whoever is in
13 this situation, these are the tools that you
14 should have. Have a number that's on text or
15 speed dial that you could just reach out to
16 somebody while you're comforting that person
17 in the corner and they're crying. Listen,
18 don't make them feel like they're, you know,
19 isolated or anything like that, just give
20 them the necessary tools to understand that
21 they're not alone, and then reach out to that
22 person or that friend that they might have
23 that could get connected to them.

24 So it's an interesting process. It

1 just depends on where you might -- who you
2 might speak to, who you might go to. But
3 there's no real good answer for that. I just
4 say I always go back to the reintegration
5 part, where if we can actually speak to
6 someone when they leave service, that will be
7 the biggest component to actually dealing
8 with that.

9 SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: We do have
11 Senator, I believe, Ashby. Senator Ashby.

12 SENATOR ASHBY: Thank you,
13 Madam Chair.

14 Gavin, Kirby, thanks for being here
15 today. Thanks for your testimony. Thanks
16 for all the work you do every day.

17 The Dwyer program in Ulster -- is it
18 growing?

19 MR. WALTERS: Yes, it's growing. With
20 the funds and with the individuals and the
21 individuals that see what we're doing, it is
22 absolutely growing.

23 SENATOR ASHBY: And the other members
24 across the state in your program, are their

1 Dwyer programs growing as well in terms of
2 participation?

3 MR. WALTERS: I believe so, yes.

4 SENATOR ASHBY: And when you look at
5 the increase that we saw in this
6 Executive Budget, do you think it's
7 commensurate with the growth that we're
8 seeing in Dwyer throughout the state? Or do
9 you think it should be more?

10 MR. WALTERS: It should be more,
11 absolutely.

12 The 7.7 million was a great impact
13 because it actually gave every county a Dwyer
14 program, which was huge. But it didn't cover
15 what the Dwyer programs were actually doing
16 in the counties.

17 Like for us, I'm the actually only
18 full-time individual in the county, and then
19 everybody else is part-time. And then we
20 have one person part-time on Monday and
21 another person three days part-time, and then
22 one two days part-time. And it's all around.

23 But then when you have a veteran
24 that's in crisis, I'm usually the one that

1 would actually default to that. And then if
2 someone's in crisis at nighttime, I'll be the
3 one that will default to that.

4 So the burden will actually default to
5 the program managers, anyone in that
6 full-time role, to really do -- you know,
7 interact with someone. Where if we had
8 individuals to really cover a lot of this
9 stuff, it will be a big impact.

10 SENATOR ASHBY: Yeah.

11 MR. WALTERS: And a lot of our funds
12 even go to paying for hotel fees and stuff
13 like that. So it's through fundraising that
14 we actually -- that we can pay for a hotel
15 for our veteran.

16 SENATOR ASHBY: Right.

17 And when you see how much the
18 Dwyer program has grown over the years and
19 the effectiveness that it's had, you know, at
20 this point, with the division being elevated
21 to an agency, it gives us the opportunity --
22 more of an opportunity, I believe, to make it
23 a permanent part of the budget. You know, so
24 that way, you know, we don't have to come

1 back and ask for this.

2 And I think the other programs that
3 Kirby had mentioned, the legal funding -- and
4 reintegration really as a whole, right, we
5 have the opportunity to take, you know, a
6 50,000-foot-level perspective on this and
7 really mold this.

8 So I really hope that you're in
9 contact with Director DeCohen on this and
10 some of the other people that made this
11 program -- made this, you know, elevation
12 happen behind the scenes. Because we do have
13 a real opportunity here, and I hope that the
14 Governor hears what you have to say on this.

15 MR. HANNAN: Senator, you asked if the
16 program is growing, and I believe it is. I
17 don't think we have specific statistics that
18 can point to that.

19 But women are getting left behind
20 right now because they don't go to the post
21 to engage in peer-to-peer-type activities on
22 a regular basis. So if you're expecting this
23 program to grow, I think you have to take a
24 look at women veterans. They're 17 percent

1 of the veteran population right now, okay?

2 But hey, you know, I'm part of the
3 veteran population that -- at sixty -- at
4 79 years old -- trying to give myself a break
5 there -- you know, I got eight years of life
6 expectancy. So what's going to happen to
7 that veteran population? It's going to rise
8 to at least 25 percent women.

9 And what we need to do now is start to
10 plan so that women veterans have the type of
11 peer-to-peer counseling activities that make
12 sense -- childcare, women's health, all of
13 those things. Because this is just the tip
14 of the iceberg in terms of the changing
15 dynamic.

16 SENATOR ASHBY: Thank you.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

18 One more Senator, Cordell Cleare.

19 SENATOR CLEARE: My questions were
20 mostly answered.

21 First of all, thank you so much for
22 your service. Thank you for hanging in there
23 with us today. You get an award, too.

24 (Laughter.)

1 SENATOR CLEARE: This is the first one
2 I've ever gotten.

3 But I just wondered, is there a place
4 where all the posts are compiled? Lists of
5 posts. Are they registered in one place?

6 MR. HANNAN: Yes.

7 MR. WALTERS: Yeah.

8 SENATOR CLEARE: I would like to know
9 all the posts in my district.

10 MR. HANNAN: That's yet another thing.
11 I'll send you the DVS New York City
12 information. And I'll send -- there are not
13 enough posts in New York City, but I'll send
14 you the posts in New York City.

15 SENATOR CLEARE: Right. Right.

16 I'd like to know which ones are there
17 and where the need might be. I'm interested.
18 So thank you.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So I think the
20 Senate is closed.

21 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thanks.

22 So I want to thank you both for being
23 here, sticking with us till the end. And --

24 MR. WALTERS: Would it be okay if I

1 submit some other information? Because I --
2 that I've brought to you guys as well on your
3 email?

4 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Sure. You
5 know, if you have anything you want to add,
6 you can send -- make sure to send information
7 to myself and Senator Krueger's office, and
8 we will make sure it's distributed to all the
9 members.

10 In fact, anybody can submit
11 information regarding -- before the hearing
12 ends, people can submit testimony. So we may
13 have some other written materials that have
14 been submitted, but we'll make sure that it's
15 distributed to all of the members of the
16 respective committees.

17 I want to thank you for the work you
18 do and staying with us till the end of this
19 hearing.

20 MR. WALTERS: Thank you.

21 MR. HANNAN: Thank you.

22 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So the
23 Human Services hearing is now over.

24 We ask you to join us, if you're

1 listening, and colleagues, tomorrow morning
2 at 9:30, when we will have the
3 Environmental Conservation hearing.

4 The hearing is adjourned.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

6 (Whereupon, the budget hearing
7 concluded at 7:09 p.m.)

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