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Governor**

**Testimony
of
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and Disability Assistance**

before the

**Senate Social Services and Housing Construction
and Community Development Committees on
“Ending the Perfect Storm: Finding Solutions and Identifying
Alternatives for New York’s
Section 8 Problem”**

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Good Morning Chairman Squadron, Chairman Espada and other members of the Senate Social Services and Housing Committees. Please allow me to introduce myself to those of you I have not met: I am Rus Sykes, the Deputy Commissioner for the Center for Employment and Economic Supports at the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. Thank you for inviting OTDA to testify here today on the topic of "Finding Solutions and Identifying Alternatives for New York's Section 8 Problem."

The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance oversees a range of the State's most important programs for low-income residents, including public assistance, food stamps, child support and shelter services. These programs are administered by local social services departments, including the Human Resources Administration and the Department of Homeless Services here in New York City, and the State plays a substantive oversight and supervisory role. Through these programs OTDA assists struggling New Yorkers working to pull themselves out of poverty through engagement in employment and training programs and connecting these vulnerable households to appropriate government benefits when necessary. Often, the complex situations low-income families face require a combination of employment services and work supports, such as food stamps, in order to attain and maintain economic security.

OTDA has an important role with regard to homelessness and the shelter system across the State. OTDA is the supervising agency responsible for oversight of the standards and safety of the shelter system and compliance with State rules and regulations. In addition, OTDA supervises local social services districts' public assistance programs, overseeing the use of public assistance funds to pay homeless costs on behalf of eligible clients and making sure assistance is provided to those in need. As you are aware, OTDA's oversight capacity, however, does not include the Federal Section 8 Program. HUD allocates Section 8 vouchers directly to Public Housing Authorities throughout New York State, including the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA).

While Section 8 is outside of OTDA's jurisdiction, OTDA has established programs to assist New York City and other local social services districts to find different ways to help the homeless find affordable, permanent housing. In November 2003, OTDA instituted both a new shelter allowance schedule and the ability to create a local rent supplement, at district option with State approval, to temporary assistance recipients with children. Most recently, in 2009, this authority was extended to allow rental supplements to be created for single adults and childless couple populations. These rental supplement programs provide a flexible and efficient means for local districts to respond to the housing problems of particular groups of families or individuals. They also provide the means to respond to unique housing issues and the availability of affordable housing within a particular district and can be structured to address the many differences in localities across the State including eviction rates, availability of public housing and the length of stays in homeless shelters.

As the oversight agency, OTDA reviews each submitted plan for compliance with State guidelines and the fiscal projections which must demonstrate cost neutrality or cost savings. OTDA does an in-depth review of rent supplement proposals that may include requests for modifications in order to meet shelter supplement regulations and other requirements. However, we operate under the general principal that local districts are the most knowledgeable of their

needy populations, housing availability and fiscal circumstances. Upon meeting all of the necessary requirements, OTDA may approve the local rent supplement plan. If approved we monitor each program on a monthly basis to ensure its compliance with these provisions.

Many localities, including Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester Counties, have implemented rental supplement programs to help their struggling residents cover the cost of appropriate permanent housing. In each of these cases a shelter supplement was customized to address unique problems or populations within a particular community.

New York City's current shelter supplement programs include the Family Eviction Prevention Supplement (FEPS) and the Advantage program. The FEPS program focuses on preventing eviction. Since its inception in 2005, FEPS has provided over 30,000 families with rent supplements thereby preventing imminent evictions. This program is widely considered a success and was cited in the final Jiggetts decision as an important consideration in the decision in favor of the State. The Advantage program, proposed and implemented in 2007, provides a short-term rental supplement to various populations, the majority of which are leaving the shelter system. Advantage is geared towards those individuals and families who are working and/or have stable incomes, as they are the most likely be able to maintain permanent housing with the help of a rent supplement. Current eligibility requirements for this program include engagement in employment or fixed income and a contribution of up to \$50 month toward rent. To date, this program has been responsible for moving thousands of families out of shelters and into permanent housing.

On Tuesday of this week, the City submitted a proposal to OTDA that would make changes to the current Advantage shelter supplement program. Given the recent media coverage, you are probably aware of the main elements of the City's plan. OTDA is currently reviewing and evaluating this proposal, and we are in the midst of discussions with the City regarding its components. We plan to work with New York City over the coming days and weeks to assist them in implementing a shelter supplement program that both fits within existing regulatory requirements and addresses the unique needs of the populations the City feels are most in need of assistance.

Thank you again for inviting OTDA to testify here today. I am more than happy to respond to any questions you may have.