



KATHY HOCHUL
Governor

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2023-2024 Executive Budget Proposal
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Denise M. Miranda, Executive Director**

Good morning Chairs Mannion, Brouk, Krueger, Seawright, Gunther, Weinstein, as well as other distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly.

My name is Denise Miranda, and I am the Executive Director of the New York State Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding Governor Hochul's Executive Budget proposal. I come to you today on the cusp of an important anniversary for the Justice Center. In June, the agency will mark 10 years since we began operations. That means a decade has passed since the legislature created the strongest protections in the country for individuals with special needs.

By creating the Justice Center, New York State overhauled a system that allowed abusers to commit bad acts, to move from facility to facility, and to abuse and neglect vulnerable people time and time again. These bad actors can no longer hide in the shadows. There is no stronger example of the Justice Center's work than the agency's Staff Exclusion List. 870 people have been barred from the service system for their horrific acts of abuse. Without the changes ushered in with the creation of the Justice Center, these 870 people could have continued their despicable behavior, leaving countless victims in their wake.

I would love to come before you today to say that our mission had been completed in the last decade, but we know our work must continue. The strain put on the workforce by the pandemic and magnified by the staffing crisis is having real impacts on the quality of care in the service sector. This only underscores the importance of the Justice Center's independent investigations and systemic reviews.

In order to carry out those investigations, the Justice Center looks for opportunities to leverage technology to make our processes more efficient and effective. This year, we created a virtual reality training video for Justice Center investigators. This immersive experience takes viewers into an incident as it unfolds. The user has a 360-degree view of the situation and gets a feeling for just how quickly issues can develop and escalate. The innovative training helps investigators identify all the areas of concern and avenues

to pursue during their investigations. We believe this training also has potential for providers to use for their workforce trainings.

As we know, the Justice Center's mission goes beyond investigations. The agency has taken on several initiatives to help stop abuse and neglect before it happens. At the top of that list is the Justice Center's prevention work. The agency analyzes data from our cases to spot trends. We use this information to create toolkits that providers, family members, and staff can use to prevent abuse and neglect from occurring. This past year, data analysis told us more guidance was needed for medical emergencies, so the Justice Center produced a new toolkit on that topic. We also continue to enhance our offerings on one of the most prevalent issues we encounter: maintaining professional boundaries.

Preventing abuse and neglect is not possible without the partnerships we have formed in the last decade with families and provider organizations. Our outreach to these communities remains vital to our success. This year, the Justice Center hosted a virtual summit. Eight workshops held across four days took a deep dive into topics such as our support available to individuals and families, investigative techniques, and trend analysis. In total, nearly one-thousand people across 53 counties registered to attend. The agency is already working on a similar event for 2023.

When we engage with both families and providers at events like our virtual summit, the workforce crisis comes up frequently. We hear about the challenges being faced in the service system and the strain being put on the workers who show up day in and day out to support vulnerable New Yorkers. We have started a series of roundtable discussions with providers across the state to discuss ways the Justice Center can support them and the dedicated staff they employ. Supporting the workforce through careful evaluation of the Justice Center processes will be a priority as we work through 2023.

A decade ago, the State made a promise to a million vulnerable New Yorkers: to maintain the nation's highest standards of health, safety, and dignity for individuals with special needs. It was a goal unlike any other across the country. The Justice Center appreciates your partnership in our relentless pursuit to fulfill this mission.