



Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs

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Testimony before the Joint Legislative Fiscal Committees 2019-2020 Executive Budget Proposal February 7, 2019 Denise M. Miranda, Executive Director

Good afternoon Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Carlucci, and Gunther, 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 today regarding Governor Cuomo's 2019-2020 Executive Budget proposal.

Last year, the Justice Center marked five years of protecting people with special needs. The agency was created to address serious concerns that some of our most vulnerable populations were suffering abuse and neglect at the hands of the staff charged with caring for them. Today I can report those populations are safer than at any other time in the history of New York. All allegations of abuse or neglect are investigated to conclusion. Those found responsible for committing the most egregious acts are barred from service for life. And the agency's prevention efforts give care providers the tools they need to stop abuse and neglect before it occurs.

The Justice Center has spent the past year focusing on quality enhancements. I am proud to report this intense focus funded by the Governor's budget has created a better experience for all stakeholders and our goal is to continue to build on this good work.

Collaboration, efficiency, and consistency have been the three pillars upon which we have raised the bar in how we fulfill our mission. The agency has used its five years of data to investigate trends and, in collaboration with State and private providers, produce more prevention materials with the goal of stopping abuse and neglect. With available resources, the agency is also enhancing investigative techniques and practices, giving vulnerable New Yorkers every avenue possible to pursue justice when abuse or neglect has occurred. Last year alone, the Justice Center trained nearly 600 investigators and staff members at State Oversight Agencies. We also collaborated with OCFS and OASAS to provide co-training for provider staff.

The Justice Center continues to expand outreach efforts to stakeholders at all levels. This year, the agency began enhanced engagement with family organizations, including holding meetings with family groups in many areas of the state. Our goal is to expand the community's understanding of the Justice Center's role in the lives of people with special needs, as well as address community concerns and give stakeholders direct access to Justice Center executive leadership.

The agency is advancing its partnership with provider agencies and the dedicated workforce that serves individuals with special needs. In the past year, the Justice Center conducted nearly 70 presentations to providers and staff across the State.

The agency understands the partnership between the Justice Center and the dedicated individuals who care for people with special needs is vital for success. In response to common themes noted during the provider and workforce presentations, the agency produced a three-part video series intended to introduce the agency to the workforce, bring awareness to available prevention materials, and better explain the investigative process. The series has been viewed nearly 500 times since being posted to the agency's website.

The Justice Center also launched an online Code of Conduct training for the human services workforce. This allows workers to directly access the training, ensuring their understanding of the Code to help individuals receiving services live self-directed, meaningful lives.

Efficiency has been another focus of the agency over the past 12 months. We continue to improve case cycle time while enhancing the quality of our investigations. Last year, we placed intense focus on eliminating the backlog of appeals which accumulated over the first five years of operations. I want to emphasize the agency understands having a timely appeals process is vital to ensuring due process for the subjects of investigations as well as a final resolution for employers. We continue to evaluate areas where efficiencies can be applied to our appeals process in order to expedite cases for review. I am happy to report today that the backlog has been eliminated. Additionally, we have made operational changes to ensure appeals are dealt with in a timely fashion going forward.

Efficiency also applies to the geographical availability of resources across the state. With available funds, the Justice Center has created a fifth region for operations. This has allowed resources to be distributed to high-volume areas. Reallocating resources has allowed investigators and advocates to reduce travel time to provider facilities, more quickly respond to reports, and become more integrated into the communities in which they serve. All of this contributes to increased quality of investigations with reduced impact on providers and the workforce.

Finally, the agency's commitment to consistency ensures each individual investigation is subject to the same standards. The Justice Center has dedicated resources specifically for quality assurance purposes. The agency has also made significant investments in training for all staff. Diversity and inclusion, team-building, and continued professional development have been the main focus. These trainings allow the agency to level-set expectations for how business is carried out throughout the Justice Center, allowing all employees to provide consistent service to stakeholders.

We believe continuing to ensure collaboration, efficiency, and consistency can enhance the lives of those we serve and our partners in service.

I now welcome your questions.