

**Testimony of
Greg Olsen, Acting Director
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the Aging**

**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Conducted By
Senate Finance Committee
Assembly Ways & Means Committee**

**Wednesday, February 8, 2017
Hearing Room B
Legislative Office Building
Empire State Plaza
Albany, New York**

Good morning Chairpersons Young and Farrell, and distinguished members of the Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means committees. I am Greg Olsen, Acting Director of the New York State Office for the Aging, and I'm honored to testify on the portions of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo's proposed Budget that affect older New Yorkers.

The New York State Office for the Aging promotes and administers programs and services for New Yorkers 60 years of age and older as well as their families, friends, and neighbors, who help them remain as independent as possible, for as long as possible, in their homes and communities of choice. NYSOFA provides leadership and direction to an integrated, coordinated network of 59 county based Area Agencies on Aging and more than 1,200 public and private organizations that serve and help empower older adults and their families. Further, Governor Cuomo's priority to de-silo state agencies to reduce duplication; strengthen service delivery; increase efficiencies; and improve outcomes has created strong working partnerships between our office and the Department of Health, the Offices for People with Developmental Disabilities, Mental Health, Children and Family Services, Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, Victim Services, Division of Veterans' Affairs, and Office of Court Administration, among others.

The 2018 Executive Budget includes a host of initiatives that address primary areas of concern for older New Yorkers and their families. Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget helps older adults and their families by:

- Expanding transportation options throughout the state by proposing to expand ride sharing statewide;
- Extending the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) season to increase access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP);
- Leveraging additional federal funds to significantly increase outreach for SNAP to reduce the number of older New Yorkers who are eligible but not receiving the benefit;
- Increasing the number of low-income homes that are weatherized to reduce energy costs, save money, and prevent dangerous home heating situations, such as the use of ovens and stoves, which can be fire hazards;
- Advancing a "Health Across all Policies" approach that includes lower prescription drug costs; increasing access to healthy foods and locally-grown commodities; increasing opportunities for physical activity via the Empire State Trail; and encouraging healthy behaviors;
- Taking additional steps to make New York State the first Age Friendly/Livable Community state as designated by the World Health Organization and AARP and building the elements of Age Friendly/Livable Communities into the second round of Downtown Revitalization grants;
- Modernizing the workforce by focusing on skills development and training for the jobs of today and tomorrow, which will benefit older workers and workers of all ages;
- Advancing efforts to combat financial exploitation of older adults; modernizing cybercrime and identity theft laws; and safeguarding older adults from the risks of reverse mortgages;
- Eliminating the wage disparity, which will have a significant positive impact for future older New Yorkers in terms of retirement income; and
- Implementing a "Silver Line" program modeled after the UK to reduce social isolation and the negative health outcomes that result from it.

The 2018 Executive Budget honors the State's commitment to ensuring that those who are served by NYSOFA across the state have access to cost-effective, high quality, coordinated services that support independence. The Budget preserves funding for key programs including

the Expanded In-home Services for the Elderly Program (EISEP), which provides non-medical in-home services, case management, respite, and ancillary services to frail older adults, most of whom are low-income but not eligible for Medicaid. The Wellness in Nutrition Program (WIN) funds home delivered and congregate meals, and provides nutrition counseling and education to frail older adults who may be unable to shop or prepare meals for themselves. The 2018 Executive Budget includes the \$1 million increase provided last year for Community Services for the Elderly Program (CSE) and consolidates the \$1,210,000 transportation appropriation to CSE to streamline reporting. CSE is designed to improve the ability of communities to identify priorities, gaps, and needs, and assist older adults who need help to remain in their homes and to participate in family and community life.

The Governor's Budget proposal also makes a significant investment in New York Connects sustainability via partnership with the Department of Health. NY Connects is a statewide, locally-based no wrong door system that provides one stop access to free, objective, and comprehensive information and assistance on accessing long-term services and supports. The partnership with DOH will provide an investment of almost \$20 million to the 59 county-based programs and \$5.5 million to a network of regional partners in the disability community, to better serve those needing assistance.

The Executive Budget increases the Health Insurance Information Counseling and Assistance Program (HIICAP) to meet increased demand for objective, personalized, one-on-one counseling and assistance. HIICAP is available to Medicare beneficiaries of all ages, providing free and confidential counseling about:

- Medicare and health insurance benefits, options, paperwork, and resources;
- Programs that can help pay for Medicare and prescription costs;
- Medicare covered costs, deductibles, and programs;
- Information on insurance products that may help to pay for costs not covered by Medicare alone such as a Medigap or Medicare Advantage Plan; and
- How to evaluate Medicare Advantage, Medigap supplemental, and Medicare Part D prescription plans, and resolve health insurance problems.

These state certified health insurance counselors helped low-income Medicare beneficiaries put \$104 million into their pockets by helping them apply for and receive the low-income subsidy and Medicare Savings Program (MSP/LIS), which assists in paying for premiums, co-payments, and deductibles. More than 20,000 applications were approved by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

NYSOFA has and will continue to build partnerships with sister agencies to increase access to services and meet needs that cross systems. One such partnership includes working with the Office of Victim Services to increase statewide funding for elder abuse mitigation. This partnership, when fully implemented, will utilize \$7.5 million over three years to expand Enhanced Multi-Disciplinary Teams (EMDTs). Coupled with the proposals in the Executive Budget to combat financial exploitation through the Department of Financial Services, elder abuse prevention and mitigation will expand and be better coordinated among diverse agencies.

Almost 700,000 older adults last year received meals in their home or a congregate setting, received care and other services in their homes to help them maintain their independence and autonomy; accessed transportation services to medical appointments, dialysis, pharmacies and other community outlets; received legal assistance; received Medicare plan and prescription

counseling and assistance; and received support services and respite so they can continue to care for a frail loved one, among other services and supports.

NYSOFA will continue to work smart by engaging state agencies, not-for-profits, and other community-based organizations to serve New York's older population as effectively as possible. Thank you; I am happy to answer any questions.