

2A



Office of Temporary
and Disability Assistance



Testimony
Sharon Devine
Executive Deputy Commissioner

Before the
Legislative Fiscal Committees' Joint Budget Hearing
State Fiscal Year 2016-17 Executive Budget
Human Services

Tuesday, February 9, 2016

Introduction

Good morning to Finance Committee Chairs Farrell and Young – and also to Social Services Committee Chairs Hevesi and Carlucci – and to all the committee members here today.

I'm Sharon Devine, OTDA's Executive Deputy Commissioner. Unfortunately, Commissioner Sam Roberts is unable to be here today due to an emergency.

OTDA's core mission is to help our most vulnerable New Yorkers get back on their feet. The agency oversees a range of the State's most important programs for low-income residents, focusing on employment wherever possible. Those programs serve over 4.5 million New Yorkers and include: providing cash, food and heating assistance; overseeing the State's child support enforcement program; supervising homeless housing and services programs; inspecting homeless shelters; and providing assistance to certain refugee and immigrant populations. The agency also provides funding to local social service districts and non-profits to assist low-income families in finding and retaining employment.

Over the past year, major agency accomplishments include: providing more than 70 million dollars to create over 800 homeless housing units, launching a statewide shelter inspection initiative, collecting a State record \$1.83 billion in child support payments, and increasing the State's SNAP participation rate to 86 percent of all eligible New Yorkers – up 6% from the previous year.

Governor's \$20 Billion Housing Plan, Executive Order and Shelter Inspection Initiative

Governor Cuomo – who started working to help homeless people over 30 years ago – says he's deeply troubled by our homeless crisis. We need to rally around the Governor's unprecedented \$20 billion housing plan in his 2016 Built to Lead agenda. I know my colleague – Commissioner Rubin from HCR – covered the details of that plan in his testimony, so I'm focusing on the important steps my agency is taking immediately to make sure homeless people come in from the cold and are housed in safe, clean shelters.

OTDA is working closely with local social service districts to help each county comply with Governor Cuomo's Executive Order to protect the homeless when temperatures drop to 32 degrees or below.

My agency has also launched an unprecedented initiative to inspect homeless shelters statewide. This effort is designed to ensure that shelters are safe and well-maintained, as well as fully compliant with all laws and regulations. To support these inspections, OTDA introduced new regulations that strengthen the state's oversight authority over the emergency shelter network.

\$25 Million Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative

Reducing poverty is critical, and we've made historic economic progress in New York State since Governor Cuomo took office five years ago. Unfortunately, concentrated pockets of poverty remain. The statewide poverty rate is less than 16 percent, however some cities have poverty rates double that. The Governor's Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative will provide \$25 million to target 10 high-poverty areas around the state. Each of the 10 communities will receive half a million dollars in implementation grants. Then government stakeholders and nonprofits will partner to apply for the remaining \$20 million in capital grants.

Extend SNAP Benefits to 750,000 Households

Governor Cuomo wants to help up to 750,000 more households gain access to the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – often called SNAP. So he is adopting a recommendation of his Anti-Hunger Task Force, and raising the Gross Income Test from 130 percent of the federal poverty level to 150 percent for all households with earned income. Those additional households could receive nearly \$700 million in federally-funded SNAP benefits each year. They'll spend those funds in local markets, creating an estimated economic impact of \$1.27 billion annually.

Conclusion

I'm looking forward to collaborating with you – along with the Governor and our partner agencies – as we work to lift up and fortify all New Yorkers. My agency is dedicated to helping the most vulnerable – with no judgments attached. I welcome your questions and comments.

