

**Testimony of Michael Volforte, Director
on behalf of the Governor's Office of Employee Relations**

January 24, 2018

Chairwoman Weinstein, Chairwoman Young, and honorable members of the Assembly and Senate.

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today and address Governor Cuomo's Executive budget proposal for the State workforce. I am Michael Volforte and proudly serve as the Director of the Governor's Office of Employee Relations.

Since I last had the opportunity to address you, my office has reached collective bargaining agreements with both the Civil Service Employees Association and District Council 37. These agreements cover the period 2016 through 2021 and continue Governor Cuomo's commitment to balancing well-deserved, and fiscally responsible, increases in employee compensation with sensible adjustments to employee health insurance benefits.

I'm also proud to report that during 2017 we partnered with the Executive Chamber, the Department of Civil Service, the Workers Compensation Board and many other State agencies to implement the nation's strongest and most comprehensive Paid Family Leave program. This benefit is now available for all Executive Branch New York State Management/Confidential employees and my office, through negotiations with the unions that represent our employees, is seeking to expand it to our unionized employees as soon as agreements are reached.

We've also implemented the Governor's Empire Star Public Service Awards program that was approved in last year's budget. As you might recall, those awards will recognize exemplary New York State executive branch employees and their contributions to building a better New York. Awards will be given to employees from across the state and each winner will receive a \$5,000 professional development scholarship. Nominations for those awards are currently open we encourage everyone to nominate worthy and deserving State employees.

Along with our partners in labor, we've continued our long-standing tradition of providing superior benefit programs for State employees. Our Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which recognizes that employees are subject to stress and pressures that affect their performance at work, assists employees in identifying and resolving personal, family, and workplace issues so they can live healthier, happier, and more productive lives. We've also continued our multiple pre-tax programs (dependent care, health care and transportation expenses) and will look to further expand them into areas such as coverage for pre-tax adoption expenses. Support continues for our 30 plus child care centers that are located on the grounds of New York State offices and facilities. These child care centers enable parents to more fully participate in the workforce and to be more engaged and productive at work, recruit and retain employees, and serve as a model and resource to other employers.

We've continued with our commitment to professional development opportunities for our workforce. During the past year, we've expanded leadership training options for mid-level and upper level management; standardized supervisory training, rolled out an

online supervisory toolkit, and increased our professional development opportunities for human resource managers. We also continued our mandated training for employees.

This year's budget is a positive one from a workforce perspective. There are no layoffs in the Governor's proposed budget. For the sixth year in a row, the workforce is stable with a planned overall net increase of about 200 positions in agencies subject to Executive control. The overwhelming majority of State agencies will maintain their current fill level with only a handful of agencies reducing fill levels through attrition due to operational efficiencies.

As part of this year's budget, the Governor has proposed a series of sweeping actions to protect against sexual harassment and standardize the means and methods by which we investigate and root out this discrimination. GOER stands ready to do its part to ensure that all state agencies comply with this mandate, protect employees and ensure a safe and healthy work environment for all.

As we look toward 2018, my agency will continue negotiations with the remaining unions with open agreements to bring those negotiations to a close in a similar fashion to those agreements we concluded in 2017. Our focus will also include expanding our collaborations with the unions and ensure that government services are delivered in positive work environment and in a cost-effective manner. I'm confident that through these actions we will continue to ensure that vital services that are relied upon by New Yorkers continue to be provided. Thank you.