



**Office of Temporary
and Disability Assistance**

Testimony

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Before the Legislative Fiscal Committees' Joint Budget Hearing

State Fiscal Year 2019-20 Executive Budget

Human Services

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Legislative Office Building

Good morning Chairpersons Weinstein, Krueger, Hevesi and Persaud, and to the other members of the Legislature. I am Barbara Guinn, Executive Deputy Commissioner of the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, and I am honored to appear on behalf of OTDA to discuss the State Fiscal Year 2020 Executive Budget and the important work of our agency.

OTDA's mission is to help vulnerable New Yorkers meet their essential needs and advance economically by providing opportunities for stable employment, housing and nutrition. This is accomplished in cooperation with local social services districts. Each month, our efforts result in the issuance of critical benefits to help millions of low-income households meet their basic needs – including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), public assistance and State supplement payments for the aged, blind and disabled.

Under the Governor's leadership, progress continues in our efforts to provide New York's most vulnerable residents with affordable, safe and secure housing. The Budget continues the Governor's unprecedented \$20 billion investment in affordable housing, which is creating or preserving more than 100,000 units of affordable housing and 6,000 units of supportive housing over five years.

OTDA oversees numerous activities to address homelessness, including homeless prevention services, the provision of rent supplements, funding the construction and operating costs for homeless housing, and housing retention services.

The Executive Budget includes \$64 million for OTDA's Homeless Housing and Assistance Program (HHAP), which provides capital grants and loans to not-for-profit corporations and municipalities to expand and improve the supply of permanent, transitional, and emergency housing for homeless persons. HHAP projects serve a full range of homeless populations, including, but not limited to, victims of domestic violence, youth, veterans, and those suffering from mental illness and/or substance abuse disorder.

Last year, 22 projects were funded through HHAP, consisting of nearly 600 units and more than 1,300 beds of homeless housing. We expect to invest in a similar number of projects this year.

OTDA has also greatly expanded oversight of emergency homeless shelters in recent years. In 2018, OTDA completed inspections of all publicly-funded homeless shelters in New York, nearly 700 in total. OTDA is now working with districts and shelter providers to ensure the needed corrective action has been taken to address any cited deficiencies. As a result, improvements are being made in shelter safety, security and habitability, along with improved services to help residents secure permanent housing.

Last year, OTDA adopted new requirements for local social services districts to develop comprehensive homeless services plans to improve the coordination and delivery of homeless services, including outreach to homeless individuals. Local districts are also required to periodically report on outcomes to gauge the effectiveness of their efforts. This outcome reporting is expected to improve the delivery of homeless services and permit us to better assess what services are most effective. We will be monitoring these activities closely.

The Governor has continued to make a strong commitment to fighting hunger. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) plays a key part in those efforts, by helping more than 2.7 million low-income working people, older adults and others to feed their families each month. New York has taken numerous steps in recent years to extend food assistance to New Yorkers in need.

While New York has one of the highest SNAP participation rates nationally among older and disabled adults, we know there are likely tens of thousands who are eligible but still do not receive assistance. By simplifying the application process, OTDA can further increase participation among these groups, while simultaneously improving nutrition and reducing health care costs among these populations.

OTDA has requested a waiver from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to permit New York State to streamline the SNAP application and reduce reporting requirements for those who are elderly and disabled.

Additionally, New York will be the first state in the nation to participate in a SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot program that will allow recipients to purchase their groceries online using their SNAP benefits. This effort will expand access to healthy, affordable food -- particularly for those who are elderly, homebound, or who live in areas where access to healthy, affordable food is limited.

The SFY 2020 Budget provides \$44 million for the Summer Youth Employment Program, which provides low-income youth with constructive workforce experiences that can help expand their education and career goals. This amount represents a \$4 million increase to account for the recent increase in the minimum wage. The program will help more than 19,000 youth get a summer job this year, approximately the same number that were employed last year.

The Executive Budget also advances legislation permitting Public Assistance recipients to engage in 90-day job try-outs. If enacted, participants will work with for-profit, non-profit and public-sector employers, which will enable them to learn about their employer and their job while receiving training to learn skills specific to their workplace. This job opportunity will benefit individuals with barriers to employment, young adults, or individuals who have a limited work history, by offering a new pathway to employment. Participating employers will agree to hire those workers who demonstrate the necessary skills following the end of the job try-out period.

The Governor's budget invests in a new Refugee and Immigrant Student Welcome Grant, in recognition of the difficulties children of refugees and immigrants face in acclimating to their new communities. This will provide \$1.5 million a year, for five years, to schools with higher refugee and immigrant populations to improve the delivery of services, ensuring these children have the support needed to not only handle academic challenges, but social, emotional and health concerns as well. This underscores the Governor's commitment that New York will continue to welcome refugees and immigrants with open arms.

The Governor's budget also continues New York State's commitment to OTDA's other core programs.

This includes resources to support the agency's child support program, which collected more than \$1.8 billion on behalf of nearly 820,000 families last year. Child support is an important source of income that helps families achieve financial stability, reduces child poverty, and encourages parents to be more active in the lives of their children.

Additionally, the Home Energy Assistance Program helped more than 1.4 million older adults and low- and middle-income New Yorkers heat their homes last winter and reduce energy needs through energy efficiency investments. OTDA also continues to play an active role in the Governor's low-income energy task force, a collaborative effort among state agencies to develop new strategies to expand low-income New Yorkers' access to clean energy and ensure they are better served by the state's energy efficiency and assistance programs.

In the wake of uncertainty caused by the federal government shutdown, the State acted quickly to issue February SNAP benefits to 1.4 million households early, about 93 percent of the current caseload, to ensure sufficient federal funding for February benefits. This unprecedented action prevents, at least temporarily, the loss of nutrition assistance for 2.7 million New Yorkers, as the federal government fails to live up to its responsibilities.

We are honored to have a critical role in helping low-income households meet basic needs as they work to achieve financial stability.

Thank you again for this opportunity to speak with you today. I welcome your comments and questions.