



New York State Catholic Conference

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Testimony
of the
New York State Catholic Conference
regarding the
2019 – 2020
Human Services Budget

Submitted by:
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Legislative Office Building
Albany, N.Y.

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Senator Krueger, Assembly Member Weinstein, distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly, Ladies and Gentlemen.

My name is Michael A. Lawler and I am Director of Catholic Charities for the New York State Catholic Conference. I am representing the New York State Council of Catholic Charities Directors, the policy board for Catholic Charities and its programs operating in all 62 counties of this state. I am also on the Advisory Board of the Strong Nonprofits for a Better New York campaign. We are a group of over 400 human services agencies from every region of the state that has come together to work on human service workforce and infrastructure needs.

Our top priority over the past three years has been the human services workforce. The human services sector, broadly defined, is in crisis. Recruitment and retention is a serious problem across the board.

We believe that there are two ways to begin to address this crisis: fund a cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) for all human services; and reimburse the entire human services sector for the costs associated with the \$15 minimum wage. Unfortunately, the Governor has turned his back on the human services sector in this budget proposal.

A decade ago, a human services COLA was put into law. Upon its immediate passage, it was deferred. This pattern has continued year in and year out. To date, the human services sector has lost nearly \$700 million in state funding. This budget proposal, which he calls his “Justice Agenda” continues this trend and withholds \$140 million from the human services sector. Again, the Governor is balancing his budget on the backs of the human services sector. Withholding over \$800 million from the human services sector is far from Justice!

We all remember the “Fight for \$15” campaign. My organization endorsed the Governor’s proposal. The Governor saw this effort as a way to improve wages for many households struggling to make ends meet. Many of these struggling families are our workforce. Eighty percent of the human services workforce are women and approximately 45 percent are people of color.

Beginning in April 2016, when the law was passed, many in the human services sector, mainly health and mental hygiene agencies, were being compensated for the incremental cost of increasing the minimum wage. For whatever reason, agencies providing human services that are not under contract with health and mental hygiene agencies are being left out in the cold.

In FY 2019, the Governor finally recognized us and put \$15 million in the enacted budget to reimburse us for minimum wage costs. I want to thank you, the State Legislature, for approving this line item.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Governor in his Justice Agenda briefing book repeatedly touts the \$15 minimum wage and goes out of his way to say that \$1.3 billion is in his budget to pay for minimum wage costs for health and mental hygiene workers. The Governor also repeatedly touts his Women’s Agenda, yet he has turned his back on 80 percent of our workforce.

We, in the human services sector, are completely baffled as to why the Governor would not prioritize our workforce in this budget.

I know that each and every one of you reading this testimony believes in the nonprofit sector and the great work we do in your communities. We also know that you support us in our quest to get the COLA and minimum wage reimbursed.

We are asking the Governor to add \$150 million to the budget during the 30-day amendment process. I would ask you to add your voices to ours and ask the same thing. After all, \$150 million out of \$175 billion is a very small amount of funding (0.000857)

Governor Cuomo: please address this injustice in your Justice Agenda.

Thank you for your service to this state and thank you for supporting the Human Services sector.