



**Justice Center for the
Protection of People
with Special Needs**

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

DENISE M. MIRANDA
Executive Director

**Testimony before the Joint Legislative Fiscal Committees
2020-2021 Executive Budget Proposal
February 3, 2020
Denise M. Miranda, Executive Director**

Good afternoon Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Carlucci, and Gunther, as well as other distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly.

My name is Denise Miranda, and I am the Executive Director of the New York State Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget proposal.

Today, I come before you on behalf of the more than one million New Yorkers in care with special needs. The Justice Center's work is directed by our steadfast commitment to protecting vulnerable people from abuse and neglect. It is our commitment to that focus, that drives every aspect of what we do and every decision that we make.

We refuse to deviate from our mission because history has proven that this opens the door to bad actors who, for years, worked the system while hurting people. Thanks to the leadership of the Governor and with your partnership, cases that previously had fallen through the cracks are now fully investigated and those responsible for abuse and neglect are held accountable.

Nearly seven years ago, the Justice Center was tasked with the important mission of protecting vulnerable populations and we have learned a lot in that time. Some look at the young age of this agency as a detriment. I see it as an advantage. Because we are young, we are not entrenched in how we operate. Our processes are still evolving.

Every day we work at evaluating where we can be more efficient and build collaboration both inside and outside of the agency. Time and time again, we search for better ways to serve individuals, families and stakeholders.

In our continual pursuit to build and improve the Justice Center, we recognized a need to renew our focus on one of our largest and most critical units – Investigations. We're getting back to the basics. The agency has implemented a new, intensive onboarding and mentorship program for all new investigators. The program provides the resources they need as they learn to navigate these very complex cases.

In the past 12 months, we have continued to explore new and better ways to serve those we protect.

The Justice Center's Sexual Abuse Response Team is now fully operational. This cross-disciplinary group is highly-trained in the latest investigatory techniques and strategies. Our team takes a trauma-informed approach so that individuals will not be revictimized. Creating a cohort that has been trained by nationally recognized experts ensures our ability to bring justice to the victims and hold bad actors accountable.

But investigating allegations is only one part of what we do. Our prevention work continues to expand. More than 350 corrective action plan audits, 40 site visits, and a dozen systemic reviews were conducted in 2019 to ensure providers are taking appropriate steps to stop abuse and neglect before it happens.

We continue to collaborate with our State Oversight Agency partners on the Interagency Abuse Prevention Workgroup but this year we're going even further. Recently, the Justice Center established its own internal workgroup solely focused on developing new prevention initiatives. We also introduced an in-person training for providers and staff on establishing professional boundaries. This past year, we added a new toolkit to our growing library of prevention resources- the Dangers of Intestinal Obstructions. Justice Center data highlighted this as a serious, sometimes life-threatening issue, for individuals receiving services. In addition, a toolkit featuring guidance on wheelchair securement will be coming out this year.

Engagement with stakeholders remains an ongoing need for the agency. This has been a priority since my arrival three years ago. In 2019, we focused on helping organized labor understand our role in the workplace. We engaged in several sessions around the state with members of unions to share information about the Justice Center.

Outreach to providers and families has also been a top priority. The Justice Center held five regional conferences throughout the state in 2019. These free, day-long events gave attendees the opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge of the agency. The conferences continue to open the dialogue between the Justice Center and those we serve.

Another way the Justice Center supports individuals and families is through our advocates. Our team assisted more than four-thousand people last year and provided accompaniment services to more than 400 people during interviews. We also helped hundreds of families access investigatory records. As a result of their hard work, we received additional grant funding and we were able to grow our staff of advocates in our high-volume areas.

Last but not least, we continue to build on our established foundation of collaboration with our State Oversight Agency partners.

The Justice Center now holds monthly meetings with each State Oversight Agency. We believe the work we have planned in the coming year will continue to improve the Justice Center.

The safety and well-being of the individuals under our jurisdiction remains the foundation of everything we do. We do not deviate from this mandate, but we seek opportunities to enhance it in any way we can.

I now welcome your questions.