

3

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

February 5, 2020

Chairs Weinstein and Krueger and honorable members of the Assembly and Senate.

My name is Michael Volforte and I serve as the Director of the Governor's Office of Employee Relations. Thank you for the opportunity to address you on Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2021 as it relates to the State workforce.

During the past year, the State concluded bargaining with 3 unions representing Executive Branch employees. The agreements reached continue to build upon the Governor's consistent theme – fair compensation increases for our hardworking and dedicated workforce while maintaining fiscal discipline through benefit enhancements and changes to health insurance and ensuring that State agencies are enabled to deliver the services that they provide to the public. Negotiations continue with two more unions which we hope to conclude in the coming months.

The State offers many negotiated benefit programs for Executive Branch employees resulting from a collaboration between the State and the unions that represent our employees. These programs are designed to increase employee productivity and morale by improving the quality of work and life for employees. Our Employee Assistance Program helped over 23,000 employees and more than 30,000 employees are saving money through our pre-tax contribution programs health care, dependent care, transportation and adoption expenses. Through our labor-management

collaboration, we've also distributed over 10,000 job and career related tuition benefit reimbursements and trained the workforce in both instructor-led and online programs. We've also continued our commitment to a well-informed and advised workforce with our suite of mandatory training which will add training on safe mail handling. Also, as part of the Governor's broad agenda to protect the LGBTQ community, cultural competency training regarding gender identity and expression will also be made available to all State employees. This will include updating other mandatory annual trainings to ensure that best practices for transgender and gender nonconforming cultural competency are integrated into all our training.

Through all of these programs we are able to serve the State workforce and provide assistance in maintaining quality of work life and career advancement.

We recently completed our first year of independently investigating complaints of protected class employment discrimination and harassment in Executive Branch agencies covered by Executive Order No. 187. With our team, we are actively investigating complaints of discrimination and harassment in order to ensure that all allegations are investigated, individuals are advised of the result of that investigation and appropriate action is taken in a timely manner against anyone found to have violated our policy.

The Governor has continued to be a strong supporter of public sector unions and continues to build upon past initiatives to aid in their fight with the anti-labor movement working to expand the impact of the Supreme Court's *Janus* decision. In this year's budget, the Governor has proposed additional protections for unions, clarifying the

intent of prior protection of personal information and expanding access to newly hired employees so they can learn about the benefits of union membership.

As we turn the page to the next fiscal year, the State's overall workforce remains stable for the eighth consecutive year. There are no layoffs proposed in the Governor's budget. My office will continue to focus on negotiating the few outstanding collective bargaining agreements to bring them to a conclusion and expanding the development and education of the State workforce in order to enhance their skills and deliver the services needed to the public. Given our past successes and our strong relationship with organized labor, I am confident that we will embody the theme of the Governor's State of the State address – Making Progress Happen. Thank you.