

**Testimony of  
Greg Olsen, Acting Director  
New York State Office for the Aging**



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**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing  
Conducted By the  
Senate Finance Committee  
Assembly Ways & Means Committee  
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Good afternoon, Chairpersons Krueger and Weinstein, Chairpersons May and Kim and all the distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly standing committees. I am Greg Olsen, Acting Director of the New York State Office for the Aging, and I'm honored to testify on the portions of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo's proposed budget that affect older New Yorkers as well as to share the incredible on going work of the network of aging services providers as they respond to the pandemic.

Governor Cuomo and his administration's commitment to older New Yorkers is unprecedented, and New York is viewed as the trailblazer nationally for the work we are doing to support older adults and their families generally and through the pandemic. Our approach is so much broader than one agency—it is about making New York the healthiest state in the nation through a multi-agency, coordinated effort focused on improving physical and behavioral health; implementing preventive health care strategies; embedding healthy aging and livability principles into general government operations, implementing age friendly communities and age friendly health systems; expanding access to services and training for older LGBTQ individuals; supporting informal caregivers and working caregivers; and much more. Utilizing the state's 2019-2024 Prevention Agenda as the umbrella, and instituting a Health Across all Policies approach, all New York State agencies are incorporating health considerations into our planning, programs, and initiatives. We have been charged and are expected to work together and consider how all our policies further our efforts as the first age-friendly state. This approach is having a significant positive impact on New York's older population.

Under the Governor's leadership, New York State became the first state in the nation in 2018 to receive the age-friendly designation by AARP and the World Health Organization because we rank high in the eight domains of age-friendly, livable communities, and because we are implementing a comprehensive plan to systematically build age-friendly and smart growth principles into how government operates and functions. We are truly leading the nation in our collaborative and thoughtful approach.

The FY 2022 Executive Budget continues its ongoing commitment to older New Yorkers. It includes:

- Continuing the historic \$15 million investment contained in the past two year's enacted budget for older New Yorkers across the State who were awaiting services;
- Continuing the \$2.3 million increase to Community Services for the Elderly (CSE) that was contained in last year's enacted budget;
- Continued support for New York Connects systems reforms by providing \$27.2 million for statewide operation of these reforms to more easily access long term care services and supports;
- Continuing the \$4 million increase to NORC and NNORC programs that was contained in last year's enacted budget;
- Maintaining \$500,000 that is used to draw down more than \$2 million in federal funds to combat elder abuse and financial exploitation of older adults; and
- Maintaining all core funding at last year's level.

On the Pandemic front, NYSOFA received more than \$73 million in stimulus funding that we distributed to all counties to support the delivery of services that would meet a variety of needs during the pandemic. In addition to the more than 20 core services that the network provides on a daily basis, the key areas of focus for the network during this pandemic includes:

- Home delivered meals
- Shopping and supply delivery
- Prescription drug delivery
- Critical transportation, for example, to dialysis and cancer treatments,
- Combatting social isolation, and
- Elder abuse mitigation and scam prevention via education and outreach.

Under the Governor's direction, executive orders that were issued provided NYSOFA with the ability to offer maximum flexibility to the counties and community based providers to make available services in the most flexible way possible, so that bureaucracy and rules that don't make sense to respond to need in a pandemic were not barriers. The Governor included our direct-care staff as essential workers to be able to deliver basic needs services, secured and distribute more than 1.8 million masks to older adults age 75+ at risk of getting COVID-19 and more than 3,200 cases of hand sanitizer to older adults and their families, and to direct service providers.

On the National level our advocacy efforts assisted in:

- securing almost \$1 billion in the stimulus bills to support older adults;
- \$50 million carve out in HUD funding to support services in HUD buildings for older adults;
- getting counties emergency meals by utilizing our procurement process

Other high lights include working with businesses such as Sysco to deliver millions of meals to older adults, Enterprise rent a car to offer low cost or no cost rentals for transportation and food delivery and PureHappiness Farms in Cayuga County to deliver more than 2,000 cases of their nutritious Cowfee drink to older adults across the state.

COVID-19 also strengthened existing partnerships with state agencies, working even more closely to meet needs, such as Agriculture and Markets on access to food, Department of Labor on connecting working caregivers to local supports, the Department of Health (DOH) on all COVID related issues and the Office of Mental Health on combatting social isolation and addressing COVID related issues such as anxiety and depression.

NYSOFA also developed and implemented many pilots and projects to assist older adults during this pandemic. These initiatives lead the nation in combatting social isolation, which includes an animatronic pets pilot. Partnership with several tech platforms are bringing virtual programming to homes including the virtual senior center and other platforms to maintain health and wellness and to stay connected. NYSOFA has been working with a Go Go Grandparent out of California to increase transportation options and economic opportunities for older adults. NYSOFA is launching a multi-county pilot that includes an evidence-based intervention that uses complex analytics to identify caregiver burnout which is a leading cause of placing an older adult in a higher level of care. NYSOFA has partnered with the NYS Council on the Arts to bring arts programming into the homes of older adults. A project has also been launched in partnership with the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council to better equip and train the aging network to work with older adults caring for younger individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. NYSOFA is working with the Division of Homeland Security and

Emergency Services to bring FEMA resources to the state to continue to meet the nutritional needs of older adults. We have added to our comprehensive assessment tool a screen for social isolation and technology capacity. We have partnered with DOH and HANYS to better integrate clinical and community-based care to improve outcomes for older adults under the Age Friendly Health System priority. Changes to our business model have been made that allow the aging network to provide services differently in order to slow the spread of the virus, while meeting the needs of older adults and will continue to be nimble as a network and advance enhancements to improve services to meet expanding demand.

The 2022 Executive Budget proposal will continue to help hundreds of thousands of older New Yorkers maintain their independence; support the loved ones who care for them; reduce future Medicaid costs; and further demonstrate why New York is the first-age friendly state in the nation.

NYSOFA will continue to engage state agencies, private partners, not-for-profits, and other community-based organizations to serve New York's older population as effectively as possible.

Thank you—I appreciate the opportunity to be here, and I am happy to answer any questions.