

1 BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE FINANCE
AND ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

2 -----

3 JOINT LEGISLATIVE HEARING

4 In the Matter of the
2021-2022 EXECUTIVE BUDGET ON
5 HUMAN SERVICES

6 -----

7 Virtual Hearing
Conducted Online via Zoom

8 February 9, 2021
9 9:39 a.m.

10 PRESIDING:

11 Senator Liz Krueger
Chair, Senate Finance Committee

12
13 Assemblywoman Helene E. Weinstein
Chair, Assembly Ways & Means Committee

14 PRESENT:

15 Senator Thomas F. O'Mara
Senate Finance Committee (RM)

16
17 Assemblyman Edward P. Ra
Assembly Ways & Means Committee (RM)

18 Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi
Chair, Assembly Children and Families
19 Committee

20 Senator Jabari Brisport
Chair, Senate Committee on Children
21 and Families

22 Assemblywoman Linda Rosenthal
Chair, Assembly Committee on Social Services

23
24 Senator Roxanne Persaud
Chair, Senate Committee on Social Services

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3 PRESENT: (Continued)

4 Assemblyman Ron Kim
Chair, Assembly Committee on Aging

5
6 Senator Rachel May
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging

7 Assemblywoman Didi Barrett
Chair, Assembly Committee on Veterans' Affairs

8
9 Senator John E. Brooks
Chair, Senate Committee on Veterans,
Homeland Security and Military Affairs

10
11 Assemblyman Jeffrion L. Aubry

12 Assemblyman Khaleel M. Anderson

13 Senator John C. Liu

14 Assemblyman Harry B. Bronson

15 Assemblywoman Marianne Buttenschon

16 Senator Pete Harckham

17 Assemblywoman Taylor Darling

18 Assemblyman Eric M. Dilan

19 Assemblywoman Jennifer Lunsford

20 Assemblyman Demond Meeks

21 Senator Simcha Felder

22 Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara

23 Assemblywoman Rebecca A. Seawright

24 Assemblyman Kenneth Zebrowski

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3 PRESENT: (Continued)

4 Senator Patty Ritchie

5 Assemblyman Billy Jones

6 Assemblywoman Sarah Clark

7 Assemblywoman Marcela Mitaynes

8 Senator Daniel G. Stec

9 Assemblyman Jake Ashby

10 Senator Diane J. Savino

11 Senator Sue Serino

12 Assemblyman Mark Walczyk

13 Senator Brian Kavanagh

14 Senator James Tedisco

15 Senator Gustavo Rivera

16 Assemblywoman Inez E. Dickens

17 Assemblyman Matthew Simpson

18 Assemblyman Mike Lawler

19 Assemblyman Jeff Gallahan

20 Assemblyman Zohran Mamdani

21 Senator George M. Borrello

22 Assemblyman John T. McDonald III

23 Assemblywoman Jessica González-Rojas

24 Assemblywoman Karines Reyes

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3 PRESENT: (Continued)

4 Senator Alexis Weik

5 Assemblywoman Catalina Cruz

6 Assemblyman Kevin M. Byrne

7 Assemblywoman Kimberly Jean-Pierre

8 Senator Mike Martucci

9 Assemblywoman Phara Souffrant Forrest

10 Assemblywoman Alicia Hyndman

11 Assemblywoman Pamela J. Hunter

12 Assemblywoman Jenifer Rajkumar

13 Assemblywoman Marjorie Byrnes

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1 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Good morning.
2 I am Helene Weinstein, chair of the New York
3 State Assembly Ways and Means Committee and
4 cochair of today's hearing.

5 Today we begin the eighth in a series
6 of hearings conducted by the joint fiscal
7 committees of the Legislature regarding the
8 Governor's proposed budget for fiscal year
9 2021-2022. The hearings are conducted
10 pursuant to New York State Constitution and
11 the Legislative Law.

12 So today the Assembly Ways and Means
13 Committee and the Senate Finance Committee
14 will hear testimony concerning the Governor's
15 budget proposal for human services.

16 So let me introduce the members from
17 the Assembly, then I'll turn it over to
18 Senator Krueger, who is the chair of the
19 Senate Finance Committee, to introduce her
20 members, and then our rankers will introduce
21 their members.

22 So from the Assembly, I see we have
23 the chair of our Social Services Committee,
24 Linda Rosenthal; chair of our Veterans

1 Committee, Didi Barrett; chair of our Aging
2 Committee, Ron Kim. We have members
3 Anderson, Aubry, Bronson, Buttenschon,
4 Darling, Dilan, Lunsford, Meeks,
5 Santabarbara, Seawright and Zebrowski. And I
6 am sure we will -- Assemblyman Jones. I'm
7 sure we'll have some other members.
8 Assemblywoman Rajkumar. Assemblywoman Clark.
9 And I'm sure as the hearing goes on, we'll
10 have other members join us. We have a busy
11 day in the Assembly committees and hearings,
12 as well as session.

13 So Senator Krueger, you want to
14 introduce your colleagues?

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
16 much. Appreciate it. So, so far -- and
17 again, ours will be joining during the day as
18 well -- we have Senator Rachel May, Senator
19 Roxanne Persaud, Senator Diane Savino,
20 Senator Gustavo Rivera, Senator John Liu,
21 Senator Pete Harckham, Senator Simcha Felder.
22 I think that's the Dems at the moment.

23 And I will turn it over to Senator Tom
24 O'Mara, the ranker on Finance, to introduce

1 his colleagues today.

2 SENATOR O'MARA: Okay. Thank you,
3 Senator Krueger.

4 We are joined by Senator Ritchie, who
5 is our ranker on Veterans Affairs. We are
6 joined by Senator Dan Stec, ranker on
7 Children and Family Services. Senator Jim
8 Tedisco and Senator George Borrello.

9 Thank you, and good morning, everyone.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
11 Helene, back to you.

12 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes. So we're
13 going to go to Assemblyman Ra, our ranker on
14 Ways and Means, to introduce members of his
15 conference.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you. Good
17 morning, everybody.

18 We are joined by Assemblyman Simpson,
19 who is our ranking member on the Social
20 Services Committee, as well as Assemblymen
21 Lawler, Gallahan and Walczyk. And a couple
22 of our other rankers will be joining us
23 shortly; they are in committee meetings
24 currently. Thank you.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And we've been
2 joined by John Brooks, our Veteran Affairs
3 chair, since I last talked. Thanks.

4 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: And I believe
5 we've been joined by Assemblyman Mamdani.

6 And let me -- just before I introduce
7 the first witness, I want to remind all of
8 the witnesses testifying today to keep their
9 statements within the allotted time limit.
10 Everybody should, both witnesses and members,
11 keep your eye on the clock. With the
12 committee hearings being conducted virtually,
13 we are going longer than we have in the past.
14 We want to make sure everybody has an
15 opportunity to testify and members have the
16 opportunity to ask questions.

17 So sort of the ground rules, the
18 governmental witnesses get 10 minutes to make
19 an oral presentation. And we're going to be
20 starting this morning, in a few moments, with
21 Commissioner Sheila Poole of New York State
22 Office of Children and Family Services.

23 After hearing from the three other
24 governmental witnesses, we will go to the

1 nongovernmental witnesses who have asked to
2 testify here today. These witnesses will
3 each have three minutes to make an oral
4 presentation to us. They will be in panels.
5 And witnesses are reminded the testimony has
6 been submitted previously. It's made part of
7 the record and will be posted, so don't read
8 your testimony. And again, keep your eye on
9 the clock.

10 For members, just to be aware, the
11 chairs of the respective committees relating
12 to the governmental witnesses have 10 minutes
13 to ask questions and receive answers. The 10
14 minutes is for both question and answer. The
15 ranking members of the committees get five
16 minutes each. All other members of the
17 relevant committees who are here with us
18 today get three minutes. No second rounds
19 for questioning from members except for the
20 relevant committee chairs.

21 You know, and again, I just want to
22 emphasize it's both question and answer
23 within your time limit.

24 So Senator Krueger and I want to thank

1 everyone in advance for adhering to these
2 guidelines. Our hearings have been going
3 nine, 10, 11 hours. So we want to be just as
4 alert for the last group that speaks as we
5 were for the first, starting with the
6 commissioner.

7 So now I will call the -- oh, just a
8 reminder for members, Senators, use the
9 raise-hand function on Zoom. I also, and I
10 think Senator Krueger, will from time to time
11 post the order of Assemblymembers and
12 Senators speaking on the chat function, which
13 is enabled.

14 So I would like to now call our first
15 witness, Commissioner Sheila Poole,
16 commissioner of the Office of Children and
17 Family Services. So, Commissioner, you can
18 proceed.

19 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Okay, thank
20 you. Good morning, Chairs Krueger and
21 Weinstein, Children and Families Committees
22 Chairs Brisport and Hevesi, and distinguished
23 members of the Senate and Assembly.

24 Congratulations on your election,

1 Senator Brisport. And congratulations to
2 both you and Assemblymember Hevesi on your
3 appointments as chairs of the Children and
4 Families Committees.

5 My name is Sheila Poole, and I am
6 proud to be the commissioner of the New York
7 State Office of Children and Family Services.
8 And I thank you for the opportunity to
9 present Governor Cuomo's fiscal year
10 2021-2022 Executive Budget as it relates to
11 the Office of Children and Family Services.

12 This year's Executive Budget balances
13 ongoing support for OCFS's core child
14 welfare, childcare, and juvenile justice
15 programs with the fiscal realities faced by
16 our state during this extraordinary time.
17 The proposed budget also advances bold new
18 policies and initiatives to better serve New
19 York's children and families with an
20 intentional focus on addressing bias and
21 structural racism.

22 The Governor's budget maintains the
23 state's historic \$832 million in childcare
24 subsidies that serve more than 100,000

1 low-income families. In addition, it
2 proposes to invest \$40 million to cap
3 childcare copays so that no family will have
4 to pay more than 20 percent of their income
5 above the federal poverty level. This cap
6 will make childcare more affordable for
7 32,000 low-income working families.

8 Affordability and lack of access to
9 quality programs can be barriers to families
10 in need of childcare. To increase access in
11 so-called childcare deserts, this year's
12 budget proposes \$6 million in startup grants
13 for new programs and wage supports for
14 existing programs. Underserved areas will be
15 identified in a partnership with the Regional
16 Economic Development Councils.

17 Last year the Governor mandated that
18 the REDCs consider childcare as a component
19 of their region's overall economic
20 development strategy. The state awarded over
21 \$8 million to 15 projects aimed at increasing
22 access to childcare statewide.

23 To further emphasize childcare as
24 foundational to the economy and pandemic

1 recovery, the Governor proposes that the
2 state establish permanent childcare
3 workgroups in each REDC, and provides
4 businesses with a guide to subsidizing or
5 helping employees access childcare. Further,
6 the budget proposes enhanced tax credits to
7 help encourage businesses to provide
8 childcare for their employees.

9 The proposed budget would also ease
10 administrative burdens on childcare
11 providers. It eliminates unnecessary and
12 duplicative requirements and lessens costs
13 for childcare providers. We're excited about
14 these proposals and their potential to
15 increase accessibility to quality affordable
16 childcare for all families who need it.

17 Additionally, I am very excited to
18 share that just last week New York State was
19 awarded an additional \$469 million in
20 Childcare Development Funds as part of the
21 Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021.
22 These one-time funds will provide additional
23 assistance to our childcare industry as we
24 recover from the pandemic.

1 The proposed budget continues to
2 invest in both the Empire State After School
3 program and the Advantage After School
4 Program. We all know that the pandemic has
5 deeply impacted after-school programs, and
6 OCFS has been working with providers since
7 last summer to offer contract flexibility so
8 they can adapt their programs to these
9 changing times. So this new flexibility
10 accommodates 100 percent in-person, 100
11 percent virtual, as well as hybrid models,
12 and allows providers to meet changing needs
13 throughout the school year.

14 The Governor proposes to include child
15 welfare reforms to promote social, economic
16 and racial equity. The number of children
17 entering foster care continues its downward
18 trajectory, with children in care at
19 near-historic lows. However, we know that
20 the child welfare system disproportionately
21 impacts children and families of color. Last
22 year, New York took bold steps in requiring
23 counties to follow a blind-removal process
24 when considering whether to remove a child

1 from their home, in an effort to eliminate
2 implicit bias from decision making. We also
3 implemented a kin-first firewall policy
4 requiring an additional administrative review
5 before a child is placed in care.

6 We will now expand these efforts and
7 create a more safe and just child welfare
8 system by creating a "blind step-up"
9 procedure to determine whether a child needs
10 to be elevated into congregate care; by
11 eliminating the use of prone restraints in
12 all child welfare and residential juvenile
13 justice settings; and by requiring implicit
14 bias training for all child welfare staff
15 statewide.

16 The budget advances legislation to
17 expand the family assessment response -- or
18 FAR -- approach to certain child protective
19 services investigations. This collaborative
20 alternative response to a traditional CPS
21 investigation allows CPS to engage families
22 in assessing their unique needs and connects
23 them with more tailored services and
24 supports.

1 In counties currently using FAR,
2 families have experienced better outcomes
3 because of higher quality and more focused
4 caseworker visits, and a reduced need for
5 indicated reports, which we know can have a
6 lasting negative impact. And we're very
7 eager to expand this approach statewide.

8 In addition to promoting the
9 well-being of children in foster care and
10 addressing racial disproportionality in child
11 welfare, these ongoing efforts complement
12 federal Family First Prevention Services Act
13 implementation efforts. With your support,
14 New York provided \$3 million in Family First
15 transition funds in each of the last two
16 years, to help local social services
17 districts recruit and retain foster families,
18 including kinship caregivers.

19 This year's budget includes an
20 additional \$3 million towards these Family
21 First readiness efforts, and provides
22 continued appropriation authority for the
23 state, as well as New York City's
24 Administration for Children's Services to

1 access federal transition funds.

2 The budget also proposes to close four
3 OCFS state-operated juvenile facilities.

4 These facilities have been underutilized,
5 some have aging infrastructure, and there is
6 ample capacity in the remaining system to
7 serve youth. The time has come to right-size
8 our system to better serve youth in our
9 custody, and most importantly to reduce the
10 confinement of young people.

11 Although these are extremely
12 challenging times for our state and for the
13 people we serve, we must seize upon the
14 imperative this pandemic and related civil
15 unrest have presented. I strongly believe
16 that now is the moment, with additional
17 federal pandemic relief funding and
18 additional federal relief for human services,
19 to improve our capacity and sharpen our focus
20 to serve all children and families fairly and
21 equitably, regardless of race or social or
22 economic standing. I hope that I can count
23 on you and your support as we embark upon
24 these vital initiatives in the coming year.

1 I thank you for the opportunity to
2 address you today, and I look forward to your
3 questions and comments.

4 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you,
5 Commissioner.

6 And we have been joined, while you
7 were speaking, by our chair, Assemblyman
8 Hevesi, of Children and Families. He just
9 had to finish up his own meeting.

10 So I'm going to go now to our chair
11 for 10 minutes, Assemblyman Hevesi.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And as he starts
13 to talk, I just want to introduce our
14 chair -- excuse me, sorry. I'm chewing on a
15 carrot, that was rude. Jabari Brisport has
16 also joined us. Thank you.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you both to
18 Chairs Weinstein and Krueger, and also to my
19 friend and colleague Jabari Brisport.

20 And Commissioner Poole, good to see
21 you. How are you?

22 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Good
23 morning. Good morning, Assemblyman.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Good. Good

1 morning. Good morning. So first I'd like to
2 start by thanking you for all of the work you
3 do on behalf of children and families,
4 particularly this year. It was a rough year,
5 and I know that you're doing everything
6 possible, and I want to thank you and your
7 staff not only for that work, but also for
8 being helpful with me as I learn this field
9 to the best of my ability. So thank you for
10 that.

11 I do have some questions about the
12 budget. I don't love the budget, but I just
13 want to, before I get to the questions, put a
14 little context on it, because I think I was
15 expecting a little something different.

16 So from my perspective, Commissioner
17 Poole -- and we've talked about this a little
18 bit recently -- this has been a tough year
19 for kids. We now have 325,000 children who
20 are now at or near the poverty level who were
21 not near before. We have 4,000 kids who had
22 a parent or caregiver die; I believe 23
23 percent of those are on track to go to foster
24 care. Every adverse childhood experience,

1 every trauma that we're afraid of for the
2 development of our kids has skyrocketed --
3 domestic violence rates, you know, child
4 abuse.

5 So I was hoping for a different
6 response from the state. And so let me just
7 lead into some quick questions for you.

8 So first, the biggest one, the problem
9 that I have, it scares me a little bit, is
10 the cut to preventative services from the
11 statutory 65/35 split, where the counties get
12 reimbursed by the state at the tune of 65/35,
13 for prevention services. And for my
14 colleagues, when we say prevention services,
15 we're preventing kids from being abused and
16 from going into foster care.

17 But the Governor's Executive Budget
18 proposes to cut that rate down by 5 percent,
19 which will effectively get us to 59 percent.
20 So my question is, is this in the wrong
21 direction when you're considering the federal
22 Family First Prevention Act, which wants us
23 to do more prevention and get us out of the
24 business of congregate care?

1 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Thank you,
2 Assemblyman Hevesi. And as I think we all
3 know, right, that preventing children from
4 entering foster care has really been the
5 bedrock of our child welfare system in
6 New York State.

7 You know, as we also know, right, the
8 pandemic has wreaked havoc on our state's
9 economy. And, you know, while none of us
10 welcome any reduction to our core
11 programming, you know -- and I appreciate
12 your perspective, Assemblyman -- you know,
13 we're all, right, being asked to do some
14 small part -- and every small part is
15 painful, but we are all being asked to take
16 some small part until -- and I remain very
17 hopeful that federal relief is on its way
18 very soon. Assemblyman and others, you've
19 heard our State Budget Director as well as
20 the Governor talk about the relief we do need
21 from the federal government and the hope that
22 if that relief does transpire soon, right, we
23 will be able to have a different conversation
24 about restoration about some of these

1 proposed changes.

2 So as we've heard our administration
3 say, this is sort of the worst-case scenario,
4 assuming minimal federal aid. But I am
5 hopeful, and we're all listening every day,
6 about federal relief and bills before
7 Congress. And many of them, I am so excited,
8 really seem to be focusing on children and
9 families.

10 So, you know, none of us like any of
11 these, right, 5 percent proposed reductions.
12 But as you know, all of us across the entire
13 spectrum of executive agencies, as well as
14 the Legislature and, right, many others,
15 we're all asking to do our part until we do
16 have federal relief.

17 But yes, we need prevention. Family
18 First is coming, as you know, later this
19 year. And I do remain hopeful that soon we
20 will be able to have a more celebratory
21 conversation about restoration to many of our
22 programs.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. I
24 appreciate that, Commissioner. And I thank

1 you for that.

2 I will tell you, we have a different
3 read of, you know, how much money we have on
4 hand. I would suggest that it is a matter of
5 priorities in the Executive Budget. And my
6 fear is with -- particularly with the 5
7 percent cut, you're doing two things -- we're
8 doing two things that we really don't want to
9 do. One is you strip prevention services.
10 That means, number one, more kids are going
11 to get abused. That's just historically
12 accurate. And then second, those kids are
13 going to wind up and need more expensive care
14 in the future.

15 Which actually leads me to my next
16 question, if I can. Along the same lines,
17 the Executive Budget proposes taking the COPS
18 program, which is another primary preventive
19 care program, consolidating it with a program
20 called STSJP, which is a diversion program
21 for juvenile delinquents, putting them both
22 together and then dropping -- cutting both
23 programs by 20 percent, which I think may
24 effectively end the COPS program, yet another

1 prevention program.

2 Can you tell me why we did that or why
3 we think those two populations should be put
4 together?

5 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Sure. So,
6 you know, I think there's two parts to that.
7 One, obviously the more challenging part, is
8 the 20 percent reduction. So as you point
9 out, the consolidation does net a \$4 million
10 impact in reduction.

11 You know, I think the concept of the
12 consolidation is by bringing both of those
13 program models together -- and I believe the
14 appropriation language does also expand the
15 current definition of allowable programs and
16 services of STSJP to take into consideration
17 some of the COPS program models that have
18 been made available.

19 So the idea would be -- is that \$8
20 million is added to the current STSJP
21 appropriation, which would bring the total
22 available to just over \$16 million. That
23 through the Office of Children and Family
24 Services, which we administer, the STSJP

1 program through the municipalities, that it
2 would allow counties in a more coherent,
3 unified way to take into account if there is
4 a COPS program, in consideration of their
5 STSJP program.

6 The other thing I would just also
7 mention, Assemblyman, is that the Division of
8 the Budget has committed to continue to
9 support the current COPS programs through
10 September of 2021.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you for
12 that. Much appreciated.

13 Same concern, that we're getting out
14 of the business of prevention. So I just
15 want to flag that.

16 Another part of the budget that I
17 don't love is Raise the Age. Now, I
18 appreciate that we are two and a half years
19 into our three-year commitment for Raise the
20 Age. And by the way, historic victory to
21 everyone in the Legislature, all of my
22 colleagues, for Raise the Age, and the
23 Governor and you, Commissioner Poole. The
24 number of kids in detention has dropped

1 43 percent, less arrests. So it's a really
2 well-done program.

3 But my understanding is the state is
4 now stopping its commitment to reimburse the
5 voluntary agency providers for beds, which
6 scares me. I've nervous that we're not going
7 to have the beds we need.

8 And also that, you know, what's going
9 to happen to those kids if there's no beds
10 and, you know, are our providers going to be
11 able to survive. That's the question for
12 those voluntary agency providers.

13 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: So the
14 programs you're referring to, just so
15 everyone is aware, were 13 foster care
16 programs who at the state's request, at our
17 request, stood up specialized new
18 programming, some intensive programming, to
19 be able to serve a number of young people who
20 we anticipated would be coming through foster
21 care placements as a result of raising the
22 age of criminal responsibility.

23 And as the Assemblyman said, we've now
24 been at this for two and a half years. We

1 have been perhaps too successful in Raise the
2 Age, although that's not true, you can never
3 be more successful in having less kids coming
4 into the system. But nonetheless, the number
5 of young people coming into those beds was
6 far less than the state projected. And we
7 had made a commitment pre-pandemic, two and a
8 half years ago, as the Assemblyman has
9 referenced, regardless of whether or not
10 there was a youth in the bed, to hold the
11 agency harmless and pay them 100 percent of
12 the costs.

13 We as a state have continued to do
14 that up until now. That commitment is set to
15 expire in September of this year. So the
16 proposed budget is saying, given the
17 pandemic, we're going to have to hold back on
18 finishing up that last six or seven months of
19 our hold-harmless commitment.

20 I think it's important to note -- and
21 all reductions are painful. But what's
22 important to note, Assemblyman, is that these
23 beds are empty. We are not taking a service
24 away from a child who's currently in those

1 beds. So I think that was obviously a
2 consideration when needing to make this
3 adjustment.

4 I will also say that these agencies
5 have done a remarkable job. We are very
6 grateful to them. I know this is difficult.
7 We're also having some conversations about
8 this model of beds and are there other ways,
9 given Family First, given some of the
10 hard-to-place children we have across the
11 state, about creating a different paradigm to
12 be able to keep some of those beds viable.

13 So appreciate your comments, and
14 hopefully we will have -- we will have a good
15 option in the future.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. I
17 have many more questions, but I'm about to
18 get the hook from my chairwoman, so I'm going
19 to stop. I'll come back later. Thank you,
20 Commissioner.

21 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Of course.

22 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you for
23 following the time, Andrew.

24 Before we go to the Senate, I just

1 want to introduce a number of Assemblymembers
2 who have joined us since we began the
3 hearing: Assemblyman McDonald, Assemblywoman
4 González-Rojas, Assemblywoman Reyes,
5 Assemblywoman Mitaynes, and Assemblywoman
6 Cruz.

7 And we also are joined by
8 Assemblywoman Byrnes, the ranker at Children
9 and Families, and Assemblyman Byrne, a member
10 of the committees.

11 Now we go to Senator Krueger.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Great. Thanks.

13 We have also been joined by Senator
14 Brian Kavanagh.

15 And for all Senators, the testimonies
16 that we didn't have from the government
17 officials until this morning are now on your
18 web-based folders. So just reopen the folder
19 where you found your original group of
20 testimony, and you should also have the
21 commissioner's testimony as well.

22 And with that, I would hand it over to
23 our new Senator and new chair of Children and
24 Families, Senator Brisport.

1 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you so much,
2 Senator Krueger, for the introduction.

3 And Commissioner Poole, thank you for
4 everything in your testimony at the
5 beginning. I really appreciate seeing you
6 again.

7 My first question is about these
8 budget cuts and these service reductions.
9 Just diving into the nearly \$70 million that
10 is being reduced in funding for children and
11 families, the 5 percent reduction in child
12 welfare services translates to around a \$30
13 million decrease. The 5 percent reduction in
14 adoption subsidies leads to almost a
15 \$10 million decrease.

16 My question is based on the reasoning
17 that someone needs to pay for these services,
18 and this is effectively a transfer over from
19 the state's responsibility to localities. In
20 a sense, you could almost think of this as a
21 parent who's skipping out on child support
22 payments. Again, somebody needs to pay for
23 this.

24 So I guess my question is, do you have

1 a historical analysis of times we've shifted
2 over responsibility from the state to
3 localities and if they've had to scale back
4 on services because of that?

5 And my second question is, do you
6 agree that the state, not localities, should
7 be funding these and covering these costs?

8 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Certainly.
9 So again, with the proposed changes -- you
10 know, I'll use prevention as an example.
11 When you take \$30 million and extrapolate
12 that across all the local social service
13 districts, you know, including New York City,
14 I mean, you know, yes, it is possible that
15 there will be some impact on the services.

16 Again, I think we have to remember
17 that this is not a wholesale, whole cloth cut
18 in the services, it is a reduction in the
19 level. Right? Which is, generally speaking,
20 a pretty high level of reimbursement. I know
21 advocates would always love it to go back up
22 to 65 percent. We've been holding it at 62
23 percent, you know, during some very
24 challenging fiscal years. Obviously this is

1 a year like no other. And it's, you know, as
2 you pointed out, Senator, reducing it a bit.

3 And so, you know, counties will need
4 to make a decision, right, about continuing
5 to invest in local share. You know, first is
6 potentially needing to spend more money on
7 the foster care placement side, as
8 Assemblyman Hevesi pointed out.

9 So yes, as I said earlier, none of us
10 welcome any reductions to our child welfare,
11 childcare, or our youth justice services.
12 But again, these are collaterable, right,
13 collaterable outcomes of the pandemic and its
14 impact to our state.

15 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you so much,
16 Commissioner. Respectfully, I do suspect
17 that a running theme of the Governor's budget
18 is that we are not all being asked to do
19 more. Our working-class people are being
20 asked to, you know, chip in more, whereas,
21 you know, billionaires and the millionaires
22 are not.

23 But my second question is regarding
24 these youth facility closures. While I do,

1 you know, support having fewer youth in the
2 detention centers, my question is, you know,
3 this will impact a lot of youth. And, you
4 know, I've had many of my colleagues in the
5 Senate reach out to me about these. My
6 question is, do you know how many if any of
7 these youth will be further away from their
8 families, further away from home through
9 these closures? And also, truly, why close,
10 why not downsize?

11 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Sure. So
12 I'll take your first question, why close. So
13 two of the facilities that we are proposing
14 closures for are two nonsecure programs, so
15 the lowest level of care. I think it's
16 important for everyone to understand that the
17 vast majority of young people with these
18 profiles -- and we only have 12 of them
19 between two state-operated programs today.
20 So 12 kids in two separate physical plants
21 that cost the taxpayers millions and millions
22 of dollars. You know, there's no question
23 that those children, those young people, can
24 be served successfully closer to home.

1 As far as the geographic location to
2 the county of origin of those young people --
3 so, for example, at one of our facilities in
4 Long Island, in Brentwood, we have eight
5 young women there. Several of those young
6 people are actually from Erie County, from
7 Monroe County. They're pretty far away from
8 their families.

9 And so to your very point, the idea
10 here is to try and create transition plans
11 where those young people would be placed in
12 voluntary agencies or step-down closer to the
13 home. And there are many, many open
14 voluntary agency beds throughout the state.

15 The other nonsecure program we have
16 has three young people right now, young men.
17 And again, some of them are being placed in
18 Red Hook, right, far from home.

19 So I think it makes a great deal of
20 sense from an economic standpoint to
21 eliminate those facilities entirely. They
22 cost millions of dollars. And I do believe,
23 Senator, we can do a much better job of
24 serving those young people at the lowest

1 levels of care much closer to their
2 communities.

3 We're also calling for the closure of
4 two secure facilities. So one of them is
5 Goshen Secure Facility. That is in Orange
6 County. And again, we have young people
7 there, we have about 40 young people there.
8 They come from 18 different counties. Many
9 of them, right, again, upstate, Niagara
10 County, Erie County.

11 So our plan with those young people --
12 and we already have a number who will be
13 trading out and going to state parole. But
14 we also have a secure facility out in the
15 western part of the state. So our plan will
16 be, wherever possible, right, to transition
17 those young people to a secure facility
18 closer to their home.

19 We also plan to transfer a number of
20 them to our Brookwood Secure Facility, which
21 is an hour away from our Goshen facility.
22 And as I shared with you yesterday, we at
23 OCFS take a lot of pride in family engagement
24 and making sure that we do things so that

1 families have the ability to visit their
2 young people. So that facility is 10 minutes
3 away from the Amtrak train station. We use
4 our state transport team to try and
5 facilitate visitation. And we also
6 coordinate with DOCCS, because there's also a
7 prison.

8 So we're going to do everything, as we
9 have done in the past, to make sure that
10 families have the opportunity to remain
11 engaged with their young people.

12 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thanks so much,
13 Commissioner. And I'll just use my time -- I
14 think I have time for one more question.
15 This is specifically in relation to the
16 reduction in funds to the Foster Care Block
17 Grant. I think the reductions come to around
18 11.2 million. And specifically, I just want
19 to call attention to a really tragic story
20 that I think many of us on the call are
21 already aware of, of the death of a
22 4-year-old in Schenectady who was in foster
23 care.

24 And my question is, when we do

1 something like this, when we reduce, you
2 know, \$11 million for the Foster Care Block
3 Grant, does that impact the ability of the
4 state to screen potential foster parents?

5 And also, I just want to tack onto
6 that, you know, there are also proposed cuts
7 to the Child Fatality Review Team by around
8 \$41,000. So will that impact our ability,
9 the ability of the state to investigate the
10 death of this particular child in
11 Schenectady?

12 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: I want to
13 assure you the answer to both of those
14 questions is no. Those proposed reductions
15 to the Foster Care Block Grant -- again, I
16 know \$11 million, you know, sounds like a
17 lot, but our Foster Care Block Grant is a
18 multi-hundred-million-dollar initiative, so
19 it's a relatively, you know, small amount of
20 dollars.

21 That particular fund, Senator, has
22 nothing to do with our state regulations or
23 policies, you know, requiring foster parent
24 certification, training, and going through

1 all of those clearances.

2 And I will assure you that the state's
3 responsibilities for fatality reviews are not
4 at all impacted by the other reduction that
5 you mentioned. We still have our staff
6 intact who will continue to complete those
7 fatality reviews.

8 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you so much.
9 I really appreciate it. And I do have a
10 little bit more time, so I want to circle
11 back to a question from earlier, which if you
12 answered, I apologize if I just did not hear
13 or misheard. But I was curious, when we talk
14 about these, you know, larger budget
15 reductions, if there is any historical
16 analysis in the past previous years where
17 we've cut or transferred the responsibility
18 of payment from the state to localities, and
19 if these localities have had to scale back in
20 services because of that.

21 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: I am not
22 aware -- I think it's a good question. I am
23 not aware, Senator, of any analysis that we
24 have done. But happy to speak further with

1 you about that.

2 SENATOR BRISPORT: Okay. Well, I will
3 cede the rest of my time. So I just thank
4 you again for speaking to us.

5 And Assemblymember Hevesi, I didn't
6 say hi at the beginning, but hi, good to see
7 you. Thanks to all my colleagues who are on
8 the call.

9 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Thank you,
10 Senator.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
12 Assembly.

13 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So we've been
14 joined by Assemblywoman Jean-Pierre and
15 Assemblywoman Forrest.

16 And we go to the chair of our Social
17 Services Committee, Linda Rosenthal, for five
18 minutes.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Thank you so
20 much, Chair Weinstein.

21 Hello, Commissioner Poole. It's good
22 to see you virtually. I was very pleased to
23 have our meeting last week. And I have some
24 further questions about some issues, and I

1 only have five minutes, so I will read my
2 questions rapidly, and I hope you can answer
3 rapidly with all the sufficient information.
4 Thank you.

5 So, you know, for years I've been
6 trying to get an increase in funding for the
7 Runaway and Homeless Youth Program. In 2015
8 I and my colleagues got an increase to \$4.5
9 million, but the funding has been flat since
10 then, and the Executive Budget has a 5
11 percent reduction in funding for runaway
12 homeless youth, to \$4.2 million.

13 We know that upwards of 40 percent of
14 homeless and runaway youth across the state
15 are LGBTQ, and there are only 25 RHY programs
16 in 62 counties. I believe we need more money
17 for those youth because they are in
18 precarious positions, and we should be here
19 to help them. What is your thought on that?

20 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yes. So in
21 an ideal world, we would be adding more
22 money. And you're right, that that funding
23 has been flat for a number of years. You
24 know, we continue -- I have got a great youth

1 development staff here at OCFS. They work
2 hand in hand with all the runaway/homeless
3 youth providers, you know, to do whatever we
4 can. A number of the runaway/homeless youth
5 programs, you know, were impacted during the
6 pandemic, and a number of them did close
7 their doors.

8 But I think it's also important just
9 to remember that we do have other funding
10 streams to support youth across the state.
11 So we have our YDP program that is funded at
12 over \$15 million.

13 I also wanted just to mention as well
14 that we are, on the good news front, looking
15 to receive additional federal dollars to
16 support Chafee, aging-out youth, as well as
17 educational training vouchers. So some more
18 funding there.

19 And as I mentioned to you during our
20 conversation, Assemblywoman, that there
21 are -- also housing, of course, for runaway
22 young people, right, is a primary issue of
23 concern, and that our team here at OCFS has
24 been doing work with social service districts

1 to make sure that they're aware of new
2 federal HUD, it's called FYI, I think it's
3 Fostering Youth Initiative, that offers
4 Section 8 vouchers specifically to at-risk
5 young people.

6 So again, while we may not have a
7 growing runaway/homeless youth allocation, we
8 do do our best to sort of string together
9 funding streams and to make sure that we're
10 also taking advantage of additional federal
11 programs wherever we can.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Okay, thank
13 you. I still think we need more, but we can
14 talk about that later.

15 It's also my understanding that the
16 Governor's budget requires providers of RHY
17 services and others to submit claims to the
18 state for reimbursement within three months
19 instead of 12 months. But failure to submit
20 within the new three-month period would
21 result in losing the reimbursement.

22 So at a time when staff is being cut
23 because of cuts to their programs, how can we
24 realistically demand that they comply within

1 three months at peril of losing the
2 reimbursement, which is so crucial?

3 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Well, that
4 was not the goal at all, I can assure you.
5 And I think that had been a bit of
6 misunderstanding about what the goal was.

7 So, you know, right now the current
8 claim process for them runs January through
9 December, so it does cut across two fiscal
10 years, which requires a reappropriation. Our
11 idea was to move to claiming that's more in
12 line with the way that most of our programs
13 claim, which is at the end of a program year.
14 Right, you submit your claims -- you have
15 three months after the end of the program
16 year, you know, to submit your claims. So
17 it's not anything atypical, we were just
18 trying to bring these programs more in line
19 so that they didn't cross over the fiscal
20 years.

21 And it's my understanding that we've
22 had further conversation with the association
23 who raised those concerns, and I think we've
24 now come to a good place with that.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Okay. Well,
2 maybe we can talk offline about that. Or if
3 others want to hear, maybe later on you can
4 say. Because it really would be unfair to
5 cut their reimbursement, which they --

6 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: That's not
7 our intention at all, I can assure you. Yes.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Okay, thank
9 you.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
11 Assembly -- excuse me, Senate.

12 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senate.
13 Senate.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So sorry. Yes, I
15 know who I am.

16 Our next speaker is Roxanne Persaud,
17 who's the chair of Social Services, and so
18 she gets five minutes. Thank you.

19 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you,
20 Commissioner. It's great to see you. And
21 thanks for always speaking with us. And, you
22 know, it's a great conversation we had.

23 Assemblymember Hevesi, congratulations
24 on moving away from Social Services, not that

1 I liked you doing that. And Assemblymember
2 Rosenthal, great to be a partner with you.

3 So, Commissioner, as you know, every
4 year I speak of summer youth. And last year
5 the City of New York and the state, they were
6 at an impasse. Could you tell me how was the
7 money that was allocated to the City of New
8 York for summer youth spent last year? And,
9 you know, are we working on a plan for this
10 year's summer youth?

11 OCFs COMMISSIONER POOLE: You're going
12 to be the first person to stump me this
13 morning, Senator. I actually don't know the
14 answer to that.

15 I know that we share that program with
16 another state agency, so I will definitely
17 need to get back to you on the Summer Youth
18 Employment Program.

19 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay, thank you.

20 My other question is on workforce.
21 You know, the Governor has proposed your FTEs
22 -- there's a net decrease. Given the amount
23 of the demand right now for social services,
24 do you think that your staff is able to meet

1 the demands based on the decrease in staff?

2 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Well, like
3 every commissioner, we'd love to have more
4 staff, right? But, you know, state agencies,
5 as I think you know, have been asked to do
6 their part, right, to hold the line on costs,
7 and that has included us. Again, outside of
8 positions that are health and safety -- so,
9 for example, our facilities and for the State
10 Central Register. So we've not been getting
11 a lot of positions backfilled.

12 I will say to you, and this is the
13 truth, I have -- as Assemblyman Hevesi
14 referenced earlier, I have an amazing team
15 here at OCFS who is going to do whatever it
16 takes to do what needs to be done to do our
17 work here. And so like everyone, right,
18 who's faced reductions, we just work harder.
19 And the pandemic has brought about, as
20 someone mentioned earlier, a tremendous
21 amount of additional work on state agencies,
22 whether it's standing up call center lines to
23 help people get testing or vaccines or to
24 deliver PPE or to keep our facilities for

1 juveniles running. You know, we do whatever
2 is asked of us.

3 But again, we all look forward to a
4 day when we have additional funds and that we
5 can certainly restore some of our funding
6 levels. But by and large, like I said, I am
7 very grateful for the incredible workforce I
8 have here at OCFS and their commitment and
9 their sense of responsibility to serving
10 those who we serve.

11 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you. And I
12 appreciate everything that you and your staff
13 do.

14 Domestic violence. With shelters at a
15 reduced capacity and many victims remaining
16 in the home because -- you know, with their
17 abusers, I am concerned about a low per-diem
18 rate paid to DV shelters. Can you speak
19 about that? Are we remaining -- maintaining
20 that baseline nonresidential appropriation?

21 You know, we've seen what is happening
22 during this pandemic in terms of DV. You
23 know, what are you doing at the agency?

24 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Well, you

1 know, that is an area that we have not had
2 funding reductions, I think in recognition of
3 the vital services that our DV shelters have
4 provided, and especially so, as you point
5 out, Senator, in response to what we know and
6 what we've all been hearing about with
7 respect to, right, domestic violence and the
8 impact that it's had during the pandemic. So
9 there's been no reductions to the rate
10 structure for domestic violence services.

11 I think you're also aware in 2020, and
12 in light of the recognition that the pandemic
13 only worsened, right, the ability for
14 survivors to leave their homes and seek
15 services, the Governor and the Secretary to
16 the Governor stood up a domestic violence
17 task force. There were a number of
18 recommendations that came out of that.

19 Also, very happy to say that we have
20 issued two rounds of funding to further
21 assist domestic violence programs. So
22 there's a million and a half dollars that was
23 put out and just announced to award agencies
24 to provide technology, whether it's access to

1 WiFi or phones, so that survivors have better
2 access to ask for help or seek services.

3 And then we had received some
4 additional federal money which we turned out
5 into small grants to domestic violence
6 shelters and other programs, to do as they
7 wish to really provide support to their team,
8 to folks who are taking advantage to have
9 their services. So that was about \$2.5
10 million that we were able to provide.

11 And as you know, other state
12 agencies -- OPWDD and OVS, you know, have
13 done their part, as well as the Office of
14 Mental Health, in trying to stand up call
15 centers and hotlines to be available to
16 survivors.

17 But there's no question that the
18 pandemic has only exacerbated what we see to
19 be a huge problem with respect to domestic
20 violence.

21 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you,
22 Commissioner.

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
24 Assembly.

1 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes, we go to
2 Assemblywoman Byrnes, the ranker on Children
3 and Families, for five minutes.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: Thank you.

5 Thank you, Commissioner. I appreciate
6 the opportunity to speak with you here today.

7 I'd like to go back a little bit to
8 the potential closure or what will be the
9 closure of four underutilized OCFS youth
10 facilities. I'd like to go back to that,
11 ma'am, with your permission.

12 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Of course.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: My question is,
14 in the spring of 2019, I toured a location
15 that was under construction in Sonyea,
16 New York, which is in my district, which was
17 supposed to be -- they were spending a lot of
18 money, a ton of money, to revitalize this
19 facility, that it was on the grounds of the
20 Groveland Correctional Facility, to make it a
21 youth facility.

22 And my question is, you've listed the
23 four locations that are potentially going to
24 be closed as a result of the budget. Is

1 there any specific word as to whether or not
2 construction is going to continue in Sonyea,
3 or is that project terminated at this point?

4 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: So that
5 facility that you're referring to is a DOCCS,
6 that's under the Department of Corrections.
7 That is not an OCFS facility. So I'm not in
8 the position -- I'm not familiar with that
9 capital project. I think you'd have to
10 direct that to Commissioner Annucci.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: Because my
12 understanding, when the Groveland
13 superintendent took me on a tour of the
14 construction, which I had insisted on, is
15 that this was specifically going to be an
16 OCFS facility for youth, not part of the
17 prison system.

18 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: So I
19 think -- I think just a slight change in the
20 language. So the DOCCS facility -- we're
21 also at the time of Raise the Age being
22 passed, standing up a number of specialized
23 facilities for adolescent offenders. But
24 again I would, you know, recommend that you

1 speak to Commissioner Annucci. I'm not at
2 all familiar with what they're planning to do
3 with those facilities or capital projects
4 right now.

5 But they were never OCFS facilities,
6 and they're not today. They're not one of
7 the four that we're planning to close under
8 the proposed budget.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: All right. My
10 understanding is that it was different than
11 that, from a number of people. But thank
12 you.

13 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Of course.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We'll go to the
15 Senate.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

17 We've been joined by Senator Martucci.

18 And I believe our next questioner is
19 the ranker on Children and Families, Senator
20 Stec. I thought I saw his hand up, and now
21 I'm just double-checking. Are you here,
22 Senator Stec?

23 SENATOR STEC: I am here, but I don't
24 have a question anymore.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay, thank you.

2 SENATOR STEC: Thanks for asking,
3 Senator.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Absolutely.

5 Then we go to Senator Savino.

6 SENATOR SAVINO: Thank you, Senator
7 Krueger.

8 Good to see you, Commissioner. I only
9 have a few minutes, so I want to focus on New
10 York City particularly.

11 And as you know, over the past little
12 more than a decade, we have seen what appears
13 to be a -- almost a permanent reduction in
14 the state's share of commitment to child
15 welfare and child preventive service
16 spending. As you know, under the statute the
17 state is required to spend -- the share of
18 the state spending is supposed to be 65
19 percent. But it seems that we've actually
20 reset it to 62 percent. And under the
21 pandemic, it looks like an additional 5
22 percent is reducing it to 59 percent.

23 The cost to the City of New York, just
24 on the Foster Care Block Grant, over this

1 period is almost a \$62 million loss. And I
2 won't go into the loss of kin care and now
3 PINS. I'm particularly concerned about the
4 fact that the state has provided zero to a
5 program that you and I worked on from 2012.
6 The creation of Close to Home, as you know,
7 has been incredibly successful at making sure
8 that children don't wind up eventually in
9 prison. And the fact that the state, as a
10 matter of policy, has decided that the City
11 of New York is not entitled to a nickel for
12 Raise the Age -- not one cent -- in spite of
13 almost \$300 million of investment by the City
14 of New York into the Raise the Age program.

15 But now, under the current budget -- I
16 spoke to the ACS commissioner yesterday --
17 this additional cut of another 5 percent is
18 going to cost New York City almost another
19 \$20 million out of the Foster Care Block
20 Grant.

21 And I'm just concerned because as you
22 know, the vast majority of the children that
23 are served in the foster care system and
24 preventive services, and by the child welfare

1 system in the State of New York, continue to
2 be the children who reside in the City of New
3 York just by virtue of the population. And
4 we cannot invest in preventive services,
5 we're not going to be able to fully meet the
6 federal Family First Preventive Service Act,
7 if we don't have the funding. And how are we
8 going to do that, Sheila? How is this
9 possible, if we continue to reduce funding to
10 these very vital services?

11 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Thank you,
12 Senator.

13 And, you know, I would say two things
14 with respect to this year's budget and the
15 impact on New York City. So, number one,
16 just to be clear, in this year's budget there
17 is no difference in the application of any of
18 the proposed cuts to New York City as there
19 are to every other district across the state.
20 So I just want to be clear about that.

21 And, you know, again, not to repeat
22 myself, but again I -- right, we all wish we
23 weren't having any conversations about any
24 reductions to anything that we do. And I

1 consider myself, as I think you all know, an
2 advocate as well. So I continue to hope that
3 these are able to be restored and that we can
4 move on and continue to do the good work
5 we've done, you know, particularly with
6 respect to prevention and not having, right,
7 kids come into foster care.

8 And with respect to prevention, you
9 know, New York City is in a bit of a unique
10 position in that prior to the Family First
11 Preventive Services Act being passed, that
12 New York City, to its credit, stood up and
13 said they wanted to be a waiver program. So
14 they piloted a number of prevention programs
15 and, to their credit, really stood up some
16 innovative models.

17 Under Family First, those states and
18 those counties and states who had opted into
19 a waiver program were given continued
20 authority, outside of Family First, to
21 continue to draw down federal reimbursement
22 for those waiver services. And so that's why
23 -- I don't know if you saw in the budget, and
24 I mentioned it in my testimony, that there's

1 additional appropriation authority
2 specifically for New York City to be able to
3 continue to draw upon that Title IV-E money
4 waiver, that they are the only county in the
5 state who has the opportunity -- and again,
6 because they raised their hand and opted into
7 that program several years ago, that should
8 help them mitigate some -- if, right, if this
9 proposed reduction to preventive services
10 holds.

11 SENATOR SAVINO: I'm out of time, but
12 thank you. We'll continue this offline.

13 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Of course.

14 SENATOR SAVINO: Thank you.

15 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

16 We go to the ranker of Social
17 Services, Assemblyman Simpson, for three
18 minutes. Three minutes on the clock, please.
19 Set the clock to three minutes.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN SIMPSON: Good morning,
21 Commissioner.

22 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Hold on one
23 second.

24 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Good

1 morning.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN SIMPSON: How are you?

3 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Pretty well,
4 thank you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Can we set the
6 clock for three minutes, not five minutes,
7 please. Hold on one sec.

8 Thank you. Now you can go.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN SIMPSON: I want to start
10 off by thanking you for all that you're
11 doing, and your staff, through these trying
12 times. And I know it must be difficult,
13 especially with the financial aspect of your
14 organization.

15 But I have a question. You know, in
16 the December 2020 federal coronavirus relief
17 package, there was an inclusion of \$10
18 billion total for childcare services. And I
19 was wondering how much of this funding will
20 be coming to New York and how it will be
21 coming through. Will it be in the Childcare
22 Development Block Grant, like the funds from
23 the CARES Act did? What the requirements
24 will be, you know, on the spending of that.

1 And also how the childcare providers that
2 receive the funding from the CARES Act grants
3 will be prioritized for this new funding.

4 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Good
5 questions.

6 So it's good to talk about happier
7 times when we have new money coming to us,
8 and we do, both in child welfare and
9 childcare. And so, Assemblyman, our portion
10 of that \$10 billion that you referenced, we
11 just received our Notice of Funding Award
12 last week, so it's \$469 million. That's
13 one-time money. So we will need to submit
14 our state's plan to the Office of Child Care
15 by the end of this month. And so we're
16 working very busily on that. And they intend
17 states to spend this money. It has to be
18 encumbered by September of 2022, and it has
19 to be liquidated by September of 2023. So
20 that's a lot of money to be spending, and
21 it's one-time-only money.

22 So we are working. We have -- we
23 knew, right, that this would be coming back
24 in December when the Consolidated

1 Appropriations Act passed, so we were busy
2 putting together our concept. So we're
3 hopeful that we will be able to present that
4 to our federal partners and receive approval
5 and be able to start getting that money out
6 the door.

7 I will also refer to CARES dollars
8 that we received last year, and that again
9 came through our Childcare Development Fund.
10 So we received 163 million plus some
11 change -- again, specifically to support
12 childcare. We issued three separate rounds
13 of childcare funding. So we did scholarships
14 for essential workers, we did a variety of
15 different kinds of grant programs to try and
16 help keep the lights on in childcare programs
17 that were either shuttered and trying to
18 reopen or had remained open but whose
19 enrollment was reduced, right, because
20 parents have continued to work from home.

21 So there was a lot of lessons we
22 learned doing this the first time, and we
23 plan to carry out those lessons learned. One
24 of the things we've learned is to keep things

1 as simple as possible. And recognizing that
2 our childcare providers, who we're trying
3 very hard to reach downstream, right, are not
4 accustomed to dealing with a lot of
5 government bureaucracy. So again, trying to
6 really keep things simple, straightforward.

7 And then the other thing we've learned
8 from our administration of the CARES project
9 was to really try and shrink our business
10 cycle time. And so some of the things we're
11 talking about in contemplating the additional
12 \$470 million is trying to create a much more
13 robust and elegant IT solution, sort of like
14 a TurboTax model, that makes it really easy,
15 streamlined, for providers to go in, have a
16 drop-down box of things, right, that are
17 allowable under the federal dollars, click
18 them off, and we can match them behind the
19 scenes with our system so we'll know that
20 they are a legitimate provider.

21 And the idea is to really turn around
22 the funding to providers much more quickly.
23 That's the goal of these pandemic funds. And
24 we had some hiccups along the way,

1 particularly with our second round of CARES
2 funding. We did not have an IT solution;
3 things got complicated. Some of that we
4 owned. We were relying on our fabulous
5 network of our childcare resource and
6 referral agencies who, bless them, were
7 really patient in trying to get through some
8 of our rules and regulations.

9 So we are doing everything we can
10 today to push out the first three rounds of
11 our CARES dollars. I feel very good about
12 where we are, I want all of you -- because I
13 know a lot of you have heard concerns about
14 how quickly we're paying out CARES dollars --
15 to know that I am very involved in overseeing
16 the CARES project. Last week here at OCFS,
17 we pushed out \$6 million of payments, and
18 we're going to keep our eye on that. We have
19 a lot of claims that are still outstanding,
20 so we need the CCR&Rs to push those claims to
21 us.

22 But like I said, now that we'll have
23 \$470 million, right, we need to even be more
24 fast, more efficient, and have a much more

1 streamlined way of getting money out to the
2 providers and supporting them during this
3 pandemic.

4 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you,
5 Commissioner.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN SIMPSON: Thank you,
7 Commissioner.

8 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to the
9 Senate.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. Our
11 next questioner is Senator Weik.

12 THE MODERATOR: I have searched the
13 room for the Senator, but I do not see him
14 here -- or her, sorry.

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay, we'll come
16 back to him if he comes back.

17 And let's go to Senator Martucci.
18 Wait, did we find Senator Weik? Nope. Okay,
19 Senator Martucci. Did we lose him also?

20 SENATOR MARTUCCI: Yeah, I'm here.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Oh, I'm sorry.
22 How are you, Senator?

23 SENATOR MARTUCCI: Thank you,
24 Chairwoman, I appreciate it.

1 So, commissioner, thank you for taking
2 a few moments today for a couple of questions
3 that I have. The questions that I have are
4 with respect to the -- also with respect to
5 the OCFS facilities' closures. Specifically,
6 I've been working with Senator Serino, who I
7 see is here with us as well, because many of
8 these closures do affect our region, the
9 Hudson Valley.

10 I have a map here that I printed from
11 your -- which I'm certainly sure you're
12 familiar with -- that I printed from your
13 website. And really my big concern has to do
14 with the fact that New York State law
15 requires youths to be placed close to home.
16 And in our case, the facilities that are
17 located in the Hudson Valley, specifically
18 the Goshen Secure Center, is about an hour
19 from New York City. And when you look at the
20 map and the proposed closures, effectively
21 what this does is it's taking families and
22 placing these young people not one hour from
23 home, those families that live in New York
24 City, but rather somewhere closer to three

1 hours.

2 So what -- I guess my question really
3 is, what percentage of youths in Goshen are
4 from the greater New York City area? And
5 wouldn't it be true, then, that this would
6 force these youths to be placed, in this
7 case, three hours from home?

8 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Sure. No,
9 great question.

10 So today we have about 28 youth at
11 Goshen, and a good portion of those youth, as
12 I mentioned earlier, are actually from
13 upstate counties, as far away as Erie,
14 Monroe, Niagara, Genesee.

15 We do obviously have a number of young
16 people from the New York City area. So as I
17 mentioned earlier, the one program that they
18 would move to, for those kids who are still
19 with us at the time of the closedown, would
20 be going not three hours away, we would be
21 transitioning them to our Brookwood Secure
22 Facility, which is actually an hour away.
23 And Senator, as you may have heard me say,
24 that, you know, having youth connected with

1 their families and visitation and allowing
2 families to visit is something that we have
3 taken seriously, and we will continue to do
4 whatever we can to promote family visitation.

5 Our Brookwood facility, as I just
6 mentioned earlier, is a 10-minute ride from
7 the Amtrak station. So for families it might
8 actually be, even if they're from New York
9 City, easier to see their young person at
10 Brookwood than it is getting to our Goshen
11 facility right now.

12 But I assure you we do everything we
13 can. And to your question about close to
14 home, you know, for a majority of -- or for a
15 good number of the young people at Goshen,
16 when we make this transition they will
17 actually be moving closer to home, because
18 for young people who are placed from the
19 western part of the state, we have a secure
20 facility called McCormick Secure Facility
21 that we will also be able to move those young
22 people -- again, where it makes sense, and
23 we're always careful about specialized
24 services -- right, we'll be able to

1 accomplish that goal of getting them closer
2 to their families.

3 SENATOR MARTUCCI: Thank you,
4 Commissioner. I see that I'm out of time. I
5 did have another question about the
6 employees, but I'll network with my colleague
7 Senator Serino, who I think has the same
8 concern.

9 I thank you for your time today.

10 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yes, thank
11 you, Senator.

12 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So now we go to
13 Assemblyman Ra for five minutes, Ways and
14 Means ranker.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you, Chair.

16 Good morning, Commissioner.

17 I just wanted to go back a little bit
18 to something you spoke to the two chairs
19 about with regard to the voluntary
20 not-for-profits and, you know, placement of
21 youth with the closure of some of the state
22 facilities. Basically, you know, my question
23 is just in terms of kind of the timing and
24 the capacity in the system. You know, I know

1 that the change in the hold harmless is going
2 to be effective -- I guess April 1st, is that
3 correct?

4 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yes, if the
5 budget is passed as proposed.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. And, you know,
7 the closures are slated for later on in the
8 year. So really the question is, you know,
9 if -- is there a concern with the capacity,
10 if the not-for-profits stop receiving that
11 funding, to keep that capacity in place?
12 Obviously the transition of these youth out
13 of those youth facilities, are they starting
14 earlier or will they be starting after the
15 closures this fall? And what is the
16 department doing to ensure that that capacity
17 is preserved in the meantime?

18 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yeah. So
19 just to be really crystal-clear, so the folks
20 -- the young people that we're talking about
21 being good candidates to be placed in our
22 voluntary foster care programs, the total
23 number of them, between our Brentwood
24 facility in Long Island and our Red Hook

1 facility, the number is 12. So we have eight
2 young women in Brentwood, and we've got four
3 young men at Red Hook.

4 So between now and then, certainly a
5 number of our young people will naturally,
6 right, attrit out of the program, so they'll
7 be going back home to their families. So
8 that's -- I think I just wanted to make that
9 clear, the number is very small to begin
10 with.

11 Secondly, when we look across our
12 entire state, I think it's important for
13 everyone to understand that the vast majority
14 of folks who have the same adjudication
15 charges as these 12 young people are already
16 today being served, and served very well, by
17 foster care agencies who have specialized
18 youth programs. And because the numbers in
19 foster care have dropped substantially over
20 the course of the past decade, there is ample
21 capacity, right, in every region of this
22 state to be able to serve those young people,
23 however many we have left by the time we do
24 this transition.

1 So I feel very confident, Assemblyman,
2 that we will be able to appropriately
3 discharge those kids back to their
4 communities. And for young people who will
5 need a step-down closer to their home, that
6 we will work with their counties of origin.
7 And I am confident, given the number of beds
8 available, that we will be able to do that.

9 And just to reference the Raise the
10 Age programs that you mentioned, as I said,
11 even with the reductions, right, some of the
12 agencies may choose -- you know, may choose
13 to keep those beds open, in which case young
14 people may be able to go into those programs.
15 And we're still working on how we might
16 create a model outside of Raise the Age for
17 them to do so.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you. And one
19 other issue related to that. You know, I'm
20 very supportive of our 853 schools and, you
21 know, many of them have had enrollment
22 reductions as a result of the pandemic and
23 not getting placements from districts. How
24 does that plan impact the 853 schools?

1 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: So for the
2 four programs we have, we don't have 853
3 schools on our campuses or our state-run
4 school programs. Is that -- I'm sorry, am I
5 understanding your question?

6 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Well, with regard to
7 the voluntary agencies. And, you know, has
8 there been any analysis of how, you know, not
9 having perhaps a reduction in that capacity
10 from not -- you know, from that change
11 impacting those nonprofits that run 853
12 schools?

13 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Well,
14 that's, you know, an interesting point.

15 You know, I will say that the Raise
16 the Age beds that those voluntary agencies
17 have, have not been filled since the
18 beginning of Raise the Age. And so, you
19 know, I think they have been able to address
20 impacts. I know that the Department of
21 Education, through the 853 Special Ed
22 Coalition, have also been working separately
23 with the State Education Department.

24 And I also know that many of the

1 853 Special Act schools, as the number of
2 kids in foster care writ large has
3 dramatically dropped, you know, in the past
4 decade, that some of those schools have
5 chosen and been able to successfully fill
6 their seats in classrooms with day students
7 placed through the Committees on Special
8 Education.

9 I hope that helps, Assemblyman.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you,
11 Commissioner.

12 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to the
13 Senate now.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. And I
15 accidentally jumped over Senator Borrello
16 before, so it is his turn.

17 SENATOR BORRELLO: Thank you, Madam
18 Chair, no problem.

19 First of all, thank you, Commissioner
20 Poole, for being here. Appreciate it.

21 You know, I think we can all agree
22 that childcare is truly the foundation of our
23 economic recovery here. Our childcare
24 workers worked through this pandemic, and

1 they are truly frontline workers. But I can
2 tell you that although I'm glad to hear that
3 there's more CARES funding, my question -- my
4 first question is, we had \$163.4 million in
5 the Emergency CARES Act almost a year ago
6 now. And, you know, I know myself and
7 Assemblyman Hevesi and others fought hard to
8 try and get that money allocated. It took us
9 months of a bipartisan effort. And my
10 understanding is still -- that \$163.4 million
11 is still not fully allocated.

12 So we have 469 million coming again,
13 but we still haven't spent the money that we
14 had the first time. Meanwhile, we're seeing
15 childcare centers closing and not reopening.
16 What's the status of that original CARES Act
17 funding?

18 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Sure. Happy
19 to go back to my previous answer on that when
20 I talked about -- hopefully you heard some of
21 me, Senator.

22 So just to be clear, so as of -- you
23 know, we've allocated the money, it's a
24 matter of now having it claimed and paid out.

1 So we've got a ways to go. We have paid out,
2 as of last week, close to \$40 million of that
3 money. So --

4 SENATOR BORRELLO: Forty of the
5 163 million from almost a year ago.

6 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yes.

7 SENATOR BORRELLO: And I'm not trying
8 to cut you off, I apologize. But I think
9 it's --

10 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: That's fine.

11 SENATOR BORRELLO: What's the plan,
12 then, for the 469 million to ensure that this
13 money gets out quickly? Because, again, this
14 is emergency funding. I can tell you that in
15 my district, there are several centers that
16 have closed or are close to closing, and we
17 have all this money still unspent from going
18 on a year now.

19 So how do we improve this process for
20 this new allocation of funding from the
21 federal government?

22 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Sure. So
23 I'll repeat what I said earlier, which was
24 that we learned a lot of lessons in

1 administering the CARES 1 through 3. And to
2 repeat what I said earlier, we've learned
3 we've got to keep it simpler, we've got to
4 have a much more robust IT system.

5 You know, part of the challenge in
6 CARES 2, just to stop there for a moment, as
7 frustrating as it's been, you know, we
8 recognize many of these providers, right, are
9 home-based providers. Right? They are not
10 sophisticated not-for-profits. So we were
11 trying to be very accommodating in allowing
12 them to submit their budgets and documents
13 and their receipts, you know, in handwritten
14 format, trying to think that was a way of
15 being able to have it be easier. And it
16 wound up to be not quite the case. And so --

17 SENATOR BORRELLO: My time is almost
18 running out. But if we make this as easy as
19 we've made it for people to collect
20 unemployment, I think we could probably get a
21 lot of money into childcare centers right
22 away.

23 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Totally
24 agree. Yup, that is actually -- our plan is

1 to create and use a more robust technology
2 solution to do that very thing, Senator.

3 SENATOR BORRELLO: Thank you for your
4 time.

5 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: You're
6 welcome.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly?

8 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to
9 Assemblywoman Lunsford for three minutes.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Thank you
11 very much.

12 I would like to address childcare as
13 well. In the Executive proposals there's
14 Article 7 language to limit copayments for
15 families receiving childcare subsidies to no
16 more than 20 percent of their income above
17 the federal poverty level. Now, the way
18 that's funded is through prior-year federal
19 grants, it's a \$40 million price tag. But
20 that's going to be ongoing. So my question
21 is, using this prior-year federal money, how
22 long can we sustain that program? And what
23 are we going to do when those federal funds
24 run out?

1 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Great
2 question. So there's two parts to that
3 answer. So one is, Assemblywoman, we have
4 traditionally had what's called rollover, so
5 no district ever spends out -- most of them
6 never -- some of the small, small counties
7 might. But by and large, we always have what
8 we call rollover. And traditionally we've
9 allowed that to do just that, to roll over
10 into previous years.

11 But in recent years our rollover has
12 grown quite considerably. So with the
13 rollover that we have on hand now, we have
14 more than sufficient dollars to be able to
15 support the \$40 million, as you said, to
16 limit the copay to 20 percent as well as the
17 additional \$6 million to try and get after
18 the childcare desert.

19 I will also say the second part -- and
20 it's an important part -- is that our federal
21 base funding for childcare has been
22 increasing in prior years. So last year we
23 received an additional \$35 million in our
24 base funding. And again, we are expecting

1 additional federal dollars coming in when we
2 get our new allocation this year.

3 So, Assemblywoman, there's a high
4 degree of confidence that between taking, you
5 know, a small piece of rollover as well as
6 our new additional federal base funding, we
7 should be more than sufficient in being able
8 to continue that.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Thank you.

10 I also want to ask about the PPP
11 funding that some of our voluntary providers
12 have received. I wanted to make sure that
13 between the CARES Act funding and these other
14 federal programs, that they won't receive any
15 kind of negative impact on their rates, that
16 this won't be counted as an offset against
17 them. You know, they have had extraordinary
18 expenses, and I want to make sure that we're
19 taking into account that those funds were
20 used during these extraordinary circumstances
21 moving forward, and that we don't punish them
22 for accepting this help.

23 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yeah, we
24 certainly have received a number of inquiries

1 asking us to be careful about that and to
2 hold folks harmless.

3 You know, the one thing we have to be
4 very careful of is that by doing so, we don't
5 run afoul of any federal or IRS rules. So we
6 are analyzing all of that. But again, you
7 know, understanding, right, these dollars
8 were intended to be, right, pandemic, given
9 extraordinary circumstances. And, you know,
10 again, my position and hope would be that if
11 it is permissible and is not something that's
12 illegal or creates problems, that we would
13 certainly want to try and find a way to
14 accomplish that goal.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Thank you.

16 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you,
17 Commissioner.

18 We go now to the Senate.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. We've
20 been joined by Senator Sue Serino, ranker on
21 Aging.

22 I just want to double-check. Is
23 Senator Weik back with a question?

24 THE MODERATOR: Sorry, Madam Chair, I

1 am still not finding him.

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: No problem. But
3 you all know we're looking for him.

4 So then I'm going to turn it over to
5 Senator Sue Serino.

6 SENATOR SERINO: Thank you,
7 Chairwoman. And Commissioner Poole, it's
8 great to see you again.

9 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Good to see
10 you, Senator.

11 SENATOR SERINO: Hi. I want to say
12 that I echo Senator Martucci's comments and
13 concerns. And as you know, I represent the
14 Red Hook facility, which employs between 40
15 and 50 residents. And I was wondering if you
16 could tell me exactly how the State Police
17 closing only this facility, how much it's
18 estimated to save.

19 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Sure. So
20 there are actually 47, as of a couple of days
21 ago, 47 employees at the facility. And, you
22 know, for anyone who's got staff in a
23 district where we're proposing closures, I
24 think it's important to take a moment to make

1 sure people appreciate and understand all
2 that we are doing. There will be no layoffs
3 associated with these closures. The Governor
4 and Budget Director have made that clear.
5 And we have already done a session or a
6 number of sessions -- in each of the four
7 facilities. We've brought in the Career
8 Mobility office from Civil Service. We
9 have -- obviously these employees who are
10 impacted are prioritized for every open
11 position that we have in our other juvenile
12 facilities at OCFS, as well as any other OCFS
13 non-juvenile title for which they would be
14 qualified.

15 So we -- you know, we've been through
16 this before, Senator. We've closed
17 facilities. I see these folks, you know, not
18 just as PEF and CSEA employees, they're my
19 employees too. And I do understand the
20 impact on them and their families and what
21 this means. And we take that seriously, and
22 we've been actively engaged with every single
23 employee to try and create as desirable a
24 plan for those staff as possible.

1 As for savings for Red Hook, the
2 estimated savings from the closure of that
3 facility would be close to \$3 million
4 annually. And those are all state General
5 Fund dollars.

6 SENATOR SERINO: And then I was also
7 incredibly disturbed to learn that this week
8 many of the employees have already -- they've
9 been given the cards that they've been asked
10 to fill out to note where like they would
11 want to transfer to when the facility closes.
12 So it kind of sounds like to me that the
13 decision has already been made to close these
14 facilities.

15 So I'd like to know from you whether
16 you believe that this is even up for
17 negotiation.

18 And the other part of that is, can you
19 guarantee reemployment to the employees that
20 might not be able to travel a couple of hours
21 away to another facility?

22 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Mm-hmm,
23 yeah. So we want to be prepared. Right? I
24 mean, we don't -- right, the budget is a

1 proposal. It will go through, you know, its
2 natural deliberation process. Right? But if
3 the budget is passed as proposed, and if we
4 are going to be closing these facilities in
5 October, I don't want us to be waiting.
6 Right? We want to make sure we are planning
7 well in advance to give staff every
8 opportunity for reassignment or transfer or a
9 new position.

10 So I'd rather be us planning ahead and
11 having them fill out their cards and seeing
12 what options are available than at the last
13 minute, right, as the clock is ticking, you
14 know, to do that.

15 As for the closures themselves, I will
16 say this, candidly and honestly to all of
17 you, that we as a state -- and again, with,
18 you know, staffing aside, you know, we should
19 be celebrating the fact that we are able to
20 close juvenile confinement facilities. We've
21 done a lot in diversion, we've raised the age
22 of criminal responsibility. The number of
23 kids in care is down. And it is not a bad
24 thing when we are shrinking our physical

1 footprint of juvenile confinement facilities.

2 And so with all due respect -- and it
3 is no reflection, and I've said this to all
4 of my staff, and I've had conversations with
5 every facility director who's impacted --
6 these closure decisions are not a reflection
7 on the quality of the program or the quality
8 of the staff at all. They are a reflection
9 of us doing what we're asked to do, which is
10 to try and have young people remain with
11 their families in their communities and
12 taking advantage of services.

13 So I am in support of the closures
14 going forward --

15 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you,
16 Commissioner. We're going to go to the
17 Senate now.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. Thank you
19 very much, Assemblywoman.

20 Our next Senator is Senator Tom
21 O'Mara.

22 SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you,
23 Chairwoman. And thank you, Commissioner, for
24 being with us today.

1 I want to go back briefly to the cost
2 shift of reducing the state assistance to
3 counties for provision of these services, the
4 reduction of the 65/35 split down to 60/40.

5 What is being done for the counties?
6 Are they getting any flexibility on how they
7 provide these services or what they have to
8 provide so that they don't get stuck with
9 this full state reduction on their backs?
10 It's just a cost shift if they don't have any
11 greater flexibility to control their costs.

12 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Mm-hmm,
13 yeah. Yeah, no, I think that's a fair
14 question.

15 You know, if these reductions, right,
16 the 5 percent and the 3 percent in the case
17 of the Foster Care Block Grant -- you know,
18 right, county executives, social service
19 commissioners, right, you know, have to make
20 individual determinations whether to, you
21 know, reduce some of the services -- again,
22 there's mandated services that they're
23 required to provide. But many counties,
24 because of the rich state reimbursement, go

1 above and beyond, right, investing
2 particularly in preventive services.

3 So, you know, it's possible that some
4 counties -- and we all know counties are
5 feeling very stretched and stressed, right,
6 that that might result in the reduction of
7 some services. So that is absolutely a
8 possibility, and an unfortunate part if in
9 fact these reductions have to stay.

10 SENATOR O'MARA: Okay. So that -- I
11 mean, my concern there is that this -- what
12 may be perceived as a 5 percent reduction
13 from the state is going to result in a
14 10 percent reduction overall. Because
15 counties, local governments are in no better
16 fiscal condition than the State of New York
17 is, given this pandemic we've been through.
18 So that seems to me it's going to end up
19 being a much larger impact to the provision
20 of these services.

21 But moving on to the closure of
22 facilities, in particular the Columbia Girls
23 Secure Facility, it's my understanding that
24 is the only secure girls facility in the

1 state. So what is going to happen to the
2 girls that are within that secure facility?
3 Where are they going to be transferred to?
4 Are they going to be combined in a boys
5 facility? How is that going to work?

6 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Sure. So
7 today we have three young women in that
8 secure facility. That's a 16-bed program.
9 So our proposal is to create, within our
10 Brookwood Secure Facility, which is a very
11 large and -- I've invited all of you to tour
12 our facilities in the past, and I hope once
13 we get past COVID you will. So Brookwood is
14 a very large state-of-the-art facility that
15 has plenty of room and physical plant
16 capacity to stand up a unit for those young
17 women.

18 So just to be clear, right, they will
19 not be commingling or cohoused together.
20 There will be a very separate unit for the
21 young women, so they will be housed
22 separately, they will have meals and
23 programming separately from the young men
24 there.

1 The one place -- and, right, you know,
2 I think all of you may know that young people
3 who are in our secure facilities are those
4 young people with the more serious charges,
5 so they tend to stay longer. We made a lot
6 of investments in education and vocation, so
7 we've got a fantastic college program at
8 Brookwood. We have a collaboration with
9 Columbia-Greene Community College. And so
10 there we obviously want to make that
11 available for the young women, too. And so
12 there may be some classes virtually that the
13 young women are able to participate in as
14 well, which obviously only makes sense.

15 SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you for your
16 time, Commissioner.

17 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: You're
18 welcome.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
20 much.

21 Assembly, it's yours.

22 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes, we go to
23 Assemblywoman Clark.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Hi, Commissioner

1 Poole. Great to see you again on Zoom.

2 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yes, nice to
3 see you.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thanks for all
5 your help and guidance when I first took
6 office. We're back to childcare, because as
7 you might recall, it is my big passion.

8 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yes.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: It's great to
10 hear about the 163 million from the CARES Act
11 being completely allocated. And anything we
12 can do to continue to help facilitate getting
13 those payments out is wonderful.

14 I also know, you know, with the new
15 money coming from the Consolidated
16 Appropriations Act -- which is also good news
17 for the childcare industry -- it's still not
18 enough, based on some of the recommendations
19 that came out from the reauthorization in
20 2014. I know we've done a lot around the
21 health and safety for our facilities. But to
22 really create a system that's affordable and
23 accessible for both families and providers
24 and those who work in the industry, it still

1 sure (laughing).

2 So, you know, what I will say is sort
3 of big picture, right, sort of universal
4 childcare, right, really aspirational goals
5 for us as a state, and certainly our
6 childcare task force as well.

7 The pandemic, right, \$470 million in
8 pandemic funding is great. It is one time,
9 so it's clearly not, right, the solution to
10 the big issue, right, which is, you know, the
11 goals of that federal bill that was passed,
12 you know, several years ago. So that's still
13 an issue for us, right, the 12-month
14 guarantee and graduated phase-in and those
15 kinds of things. You know, half a billion
16 dollars was unaffordable to us when the bill
17 passed. We still don't have that kind of
18 federal support yet. There's hope, because,
19 right, the feds are really talking about the
20 deep investment.

21 With respect to the next round of
22 pandemic, the \$470 million, you know, we know
23 from CARES rounds, right, that scholarships
24 that we've offered to essential workers,

1 really helpful. I think there's room for us
2 to expand eligibility for who is eligible to
3 take advantage of those scholarships. You
4 know, clearly the kinds of things that you
5 mentioned -- you know, reducing clearance
6 fees, all those kinds of things. There are a
7 lot of things that are on the table.

8 And as -- I just want to repeat, you
9 know, what others have raised earlier. You
10 know, we do know that we have to make it
11 easier for folks to apply and for us to be
12 able to be responsive.

13 To your issue, Assemblywoman, of
14 enrollment and capacity, right, so we do a
15 weekly survey of childcare providers. And
16 while many have remained open, right, what
17 we're hearing from them, roughly two-thirds,
18 is that while they might have 75 percent of
19 their slots enrolled, they actually on a
20 weekly basis have far fewer kids actually
21 coming into the service.

22 So how do we keep those centers,
23 right, alive and keep their staff employed
24 while recognizing it's going to take some

1 time, right, for folks to sort of bring their
2 children back to childcare.

3 So it's those kinds of concepts that
4 we hope to be bringing forward in the new
5 federal money.

6 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

7 So now we'll go to the Senate.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
9 much. I actually think I may be the last one
10 with questions. And I don't want my 10
11 minutes, not to worry. But I want to talk to
12 you, Sheila, about what I think a lot of us
13 feel like we know is out there and about to
14 explode, which is the level of teenage sort
15 of angst and suicide, actual suicide because
16 of everything that's going on with COVID-19.
17 They are forced to stay at home with parents,
18 which teenage years maybe aren't perfect
19 times to do that. They are separated out
20 from their peers, which teenage years, you
21 know, you're so much more dependent, for the
22 good and the bad of it, with whatever's going
23 on in your peer group. People are
24 self-medicating, teenagers and adults. But

1 teenagers, you know, it's already a pattern.

2 Where are the new programs, where are
3 the new places where we think we're going to
4 have the resources to deal with this issue?
5 And I -- when I say I think we all know this,
6 I mean, I'm talking to educators,
7 psychiatrists, substance abuse providers, and
8 they're telling me this is like this secret
9 that's not so secret that's going to explode
10 on us.

11 So I worry that I don't see any new
12 initiatives in the State Budget about really
13 dealing specifically with these issues. And
14 they're different for teenagers than they are
15 for older people. They also culturally, you
16 know, play out differently --
17 disproportionate growth in suicide attempts
18 by young people of color. You know, already
19 an underserved area for us.

20 I know that for years people have told
21 me there aren't any child psychiatrists in
22 much of rural and upstate New York. So, you
23 know. Don't assume you're starting with
24 them, because they don't exist.

1 So I'm just very concerned about this.
2 And I'm just not sure the state's doing any
3 kind of planning for something that is real
4 and is out there.

5 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yeah. So I
6 feel like I'm a little bit out of my
7 wheelhouse in responding to this, Senator,
8 but I share -- you know, we have seen some
9 cases where there have been youth suicides,
10 and we all know, right, just the trauma that
11 young people and -- right? None of us are
12 the same, I don't think, in February of 2021
13 than we were, right, a year ago, for sure.

14 I do know that the State Office of
15 Mental Health, we have done some work with
16 Commissioner Sullivan and her team around
17 teen suicide in 2020. And as I think you all
18 know, right, telehealth and being -- you
19 know, being able to increase access to mental
20 health services using technology has been a
21 big push of the state.

22 But I'd like to, Senator, circle back
23 with Commissioner Sullivan to get you a
24 fuller answer about what OMH is doing as

1 well.

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: But you don't see
3 it as an issue for you unless you have to
4 take custody of those children? How do the
5 lines get drawn?

6 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Well, you
7 know, it's an issue for everybody, you know,
8 for sure.

9 But, you know, we've not seen a lot of
10 kids come into foster care or custody because
11 of concerns of suicide. So I don't know.
12 And I'm not saying that it's, you know,
13 certainly fully an Office of Mental Health
14 issue. But, you know, we are not seeing an
15 increase in the number of kids coming into
16 care because of suicide concerns. I think it
17 is -- it is a medical and a primary sort of
18 prevention concern. And as I said, that's
19 most typically within the Office of Mental
20 Health. And I just -- I'll need to get back
21 to you on what else we can be doing.

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: All right. Thank
23 you very much.

24 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Of course.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

2 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes. We go to
3 Assemblyman Anderson for three minutes.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: Okay. Can I be
5 heard?

6 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yes.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: Okay. Good
8 morning. Thank you, Chairwoman Weinstein.
9 And thank you, Commissioner Poole, for being
10 here this morning to answer very critical
11 questions around children and families.

12 I have a few quick questions. I know
13 time is limited, and I want to ask this one
14 first.

15 As it relates to foster care, Chafee
16 Foster Care Independence Program provides
17 funding for academic supports and for foster
18 kids tutoring and mentoring, exam prep,
19 college application stuff, in that
20 wheelhouse.

21 Did we receive another round of
22 funding, Commissioner, from the federal
23 government for 2021? Like will it be the
24 same formula to disburse these funds around

1 those areas, issue areas? And do you know
2 around about when they'll be released?

3 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: I'm so
4 sorry, Assemblyman, my heater fan just turned
5 on. I'm so sorry, I didn't hear the name of
6 the program that you referenced.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: Chafee. Chafee
8 Foster Care Independence Program?

9 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Oh, yes.
10 Yes. Actually, there's some really good
11 news on that program.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: I like good
13 news. Let's hear that.

14 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yes. Yes.
15 Thank you for allowing me to share some.

16 So as part of the Consolidated
17 Appropriations Act, there's an additional we
18 believe \$28 million coming to us in New York
19 State. So that will add on to -- I think our
20 base for Chafee has been around \$12 million.
21 So there's more money coming for young
22 people.

23 And, you know, it's going to raise the
24 grant awards for young people up to \$4,000,

1 so it's pretty exciting.

2 There's also some other new federal
3 provisions included in that act that will
4 allow young people who have left care during
5 the pandemic to reenter care up to the age of
6 22.

7 So it's been a long time -- and I've
8 been around a long time, but it's been a long
9 time since we've seen a real federal interest
10 and investment in aging out young people.
11 And I am very happy to say that during the
12 pandemic the sort of plight of young people
13 in care and aging out of care and needing
14 supports seemed to be listened to.

15 So we will be getting those dollars
16 out. We've not received our Notice of
17 Funding Availability yet, but we will have a
18 plan in place, Assemblyman, to get those
19 dollars out. And like the conversation about
20 federal money in CARES, we want to do it as
21 quickly, as efficiently, and get the dollars
22 into the hands of young people who need it
23 just as soon as we can.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: Absolutely.

1 And I'm sure you know that the childcare, the
2 foster care system has some hiccups and we --
3 you know, this infusion of dollars will
4 really work to help in that effort.

5 I have one more quick question. I
6 know, Helene, I'm running out of time. But
7 really quickly, the elimination of the
8 Committee on Special Education state share.
9 You know, I was a special education --

10 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblyman,
11 the clock is running up instead of down. So
12 why don't you email -- you can -- we'll be
13 able to email the commissioner the question
14 to ask later.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: But it's just
16 really quick, Helene, really quickly. Just
17 really quickly. Can you just explain --

18 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Khaleel -- I'm
19 sorry, Assemblyman, but we really have to --
20 we've been enforcing the rule.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: Thank you,
22 Chairwoman.

23 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: You can share
24 with me, and I'll ask the commissioner during

1 my time.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: Thank you,
3 Chairwoman.

4 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: To the Senate
5 now.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
7 much.

8 Sorry. We have one more questioner,
9 Senator -- excuse me -- Elijah
10 Reichlin-Melnick.

11 SENATOR REICHLIN-MELNICK: Thanks,
12 Liz, you got it. Commissioner, thank you. I
13 should say Chair Krueger, I apologize.

14 Commissioner, thank you so much for
15 taking some questions. I just wanted to ask
16 you, and I think others may have, childcare
17 resources are a huge concern for me. I've
18 spoken to some of the leading providers and
19 the umbrella organizations in my district.
20 Several have closed. You know, the last year
21 has been very hard for people providing
22 childcare, and so a number have exited the
23 business entirely. And then others are
24 really just still waiting for CARES Act

1 funding.

2 And so I know that you're working hard
3 to get that funding out the door to people,
4 but I just kind of wanted to touch base and
5 ask you what can we do to speed that up and
6 make sure that as quickly as possible folks
7 in the childcare sector are able to get their
8 funding and continue providing these
9 services?

10 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: I appreciate
11 that. So there's nothing you can do. I
12 appreciate the offer.

13 You know, I think we have -- I will
14 assure all of you, we have made the necessary
15 adjustments and preparations here at OCFS
16 that when claims come in from the CCR&Rs for
17 CARES dollars, that we are going to turn
18 those around very, very quickly. And we've
19 made a lot of progress. And we know, right,
20 as we heard earlier, there is still money
21 that's got to get paid out the door. So we
22 need those claims coming in.

23 And trust me, as my team here -- and I
24 meet with my CARES people once a week, we've

1 got dashboards and trackers. They understand
2 here at OCFS that people are waiting for
3 their money, and we are pushing those dollars
4 out the door just as quickly as we can, so --

5 SENATOR REICHLIN-MELNICK: I
6 appreciate that. And what do you think the
7 timeline may be for getting some of the funds
8 in the recent federal stimulus from December
9 and then -- I guess we don't know when
10 Washington is passing the next one, but
11 hopefully -- do you think we are able to
12 learn the lessons from the CARES Act to get
13 whatever money we do get in this next round
14 out the door even quicker?

15 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: That is
16 my -- that is my fervent hope and commitment,
17 yes, that we will absolutely have much better
18 agility and technology supports.

19 We did not have the luxury of standing
20 up any kind of system, so this was sort of a
21 long business process, right? And I think
22 all of us who are getting these big bodies of
23 pandemic dollars know it can't be sort of
24 government as usual. Right? It's got to be

1 a new, faster, more nimble system. And we've
2 been really working toward that since the act
3 passed in December.

4 SENATOR REICHLIN-MELNICK:
5 Commissioner, thank you very much.
6 Appreciate it.

7 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Thank you.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
9 Assembly.

10 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes, we go to
11 Assemblywoman Cruz, who is back from her
12 committee meeting.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CRUZ: Thank you. I'll
14 keep my questions fairly short.

15 Commissioner, thank you for being here
16 today.

17 The \$6 million grant that we've been
18 discussing, one of the things that I think is
19 -- and my apologies for the dinging. I still
20 don't know how to turn this stuff off on my
21 computer. I'm not very technologically
22 savvy.

23 How are you determining where these
24 childcare deserts are -- or actually, how do

1 you determine where these childcare deserts
2 are? And what parameters are you using to
3 determine it?

4 And then going back to a comment
5 actually that Senator Borrello mentioned,
6 which was making this process easier, perhaps
7 something like unemployment insurance -- I
8 beg you not to make it like unemployment
9 insurance. That's actually been a pretty hot
10 mess for many of my constituents.

11 I represent a community that has a
12 large number of childcare providers -- my
13 mother is actually a childcare provider --
14 and I understand the difficulties of actually
15 working with that system. Many of our
16 childcare providers in downstate have a
17 language that is dominant that is other than
18 English. So the easier we can make it and
19 the more accessible we can make it in another
20 language, the better.

21 So yeah, so language, childcare
22 deserts, and how those are being determined.

23 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Great. So
24 language we are absolutely sensitive to. We

1 have always made our applications, our
2 guidance documents -- if you go to our
3 website, Assemblywoman, I think you will see
4 that we are very, very much supportive and
5 responsive to language access needs.

6 So with respect to the \$6 million
7 that's proposed for childcare deserts -- so
8 believe it or not there's actually quite an
9 operational definition of what a childcare
10 desert is, and it's from the Center for
11 American Progress. So I'm going to cheat a
12 little bit and read it off. So it's a census
13 tract with more than 50 children under the
14 age of 5 that contains either no licensed
15 childcare providers or so few options that
16 there are more than three times as many
17 children as there are childcare slots.

18 So it's a mouthful. It's a lot. But
19 that's generally sort of the threshold about
20 what defines a desert. And when we use that
21 definition from the Center for American
22 Progress and map it over New York State, we
23 actually have around 64 percent of our state
24 having a childcare desert.

1 So our plan will be to work in
2 coordination with the Regional Economic
3 Development Councils. Right? It makes sense
4 to use a regional approach. And as you may
5 have heard me say earlier, the REDCs have
6 really become very important strategic and
7 financing partners and investors in
8 childcare. So that will be our plan, is to
9 work through them, get to these census tracts
10 and figure out where is the most strategic to
11 begin making those investments.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CRUZ: Thank you.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. Thank you.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Any more
15 Senators?

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: We do. We have
17 our chair, Senator Brisport, for his second
18 round. Would you like to wait till the
19 Assembly completes or have him go now? What
20 do you prefer?

21 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: He can go now,
22 right, and then we'll --

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. Senator
24 Brisport.

1 SENATOR BRISPORT: Hi, Sheila, it's me
2 again.

3 So -- and I hope everybody can hear me
4 better. I heard there were some complaints
5 for my audio last time, so I hope I sound a
6 little bit better now.

7 So -- and Sheila, I just apologize, I
8 had to step away for a bit, so sorry if you
9 answered this already. But I wanted to talk
10 more about the cuts to -- regarding the
11 Committee on Special Education. And just,
12 you know, if the state has consulted with any
13 educational stakeholders that may be impacted
14 by shouldering the shifting burden from the
15 state to localities, and these reductions in
16 funding. And, you know, I'm just curious
17 what the response has been, if they have been
18 consulted with.

19 And I'm just curious like, you know,
20 what has been looked into, into how this will
21 affect local school budgets, local property
22 taxes, and so on.

23 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: So I'll be
24 really candid with you, Senator. I have

1 never understood why this is in OCFS's
2 budget. These are not children in foster
3 care. They're not in the care or custody of
4 any local social service -- right --
5 commissioner. These are kids who, through
6 the local Committees on Special Education and
7 under IEP and special education law, are
8 determined by the school district to place
9 the child in residential care.

10 So, you know, the proposal is to make
11 that shift permanent. It is -- I don't know
12 that anyone has had any conversations with
13 either the State Education Department -- I'm
14 not aware of any. I have not had any. And I
15 think the estimated cost savings from that --
16 again, across the entire state -- is about
17 \$28 million.

18 SENATOR BRISPORT: Well, yeah, I
19 really appreciate that. I'll just, you know,
20 reiterate what I, you know, said earlier,
21 like way, way at the beginning, is that
22 someone needs to pay for this. The state has
23 the ability to raise progressive taxation on
24 the wealthiest New Yorkers, and should be

1 doing so, to shoulder the burden of some of
2 these.

3 But I'll cede the rest of my time, and
4 thank you again so much for taking your time
5 to answer our questions.

6 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: A pleasure.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

8 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So we will go
9 to Assemblywoman González-Rojas.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Hi.

11 Thank you, Commissioner, for being here.

12 My question is also in the same vein,
13 for students with special needs. The state
14 is proposing eliminating the 18.42 percent
15 state-share room and board for children with
16 severe disabilities. So I want to hear how
17 children will be hurt by this cut and how the
18 local school districts would have to pick
19 up -- or whether the local school districts
20 will have to pick up the funding, given that
21 they're struggling right now to meet the
22 needs of their own communities.

23 So if you could share more about how
24 we will be addressing those cuts.

1 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: So it really
2 is a -- it is a shift in funding, as I just
3 responded to Senator Brisport. So it would
4 require local school districts across the
5 state, right, depending on how many young
6 people they place through Committees on
7 Special Education, to absorb that portion of
8 the costs.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Do we
10 have a sense how they're going to do that?

11 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: I am not
12 aware of any analysis that has been done, you
13 know, by the hundreds and hundreds of school
14 districts that we have in the state. I'm not
15 aware of that.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: I also
17 support Senator Brisport's comments about
18 taxing the wealthy to get there. So we have
19 a lot of proposals on the table, and we hope
20 to get the funding to the communities that
21 need it most.

22 Thank you.

23 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Understood.
24 Thank you.

1 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay, we go now
2 to Assemblyman Walczyk, three minutes.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: Hi,
4 Commissioner. How are you today?

5 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: I'm well,
6 thank you.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: I wondered if
8 you could tell me, a couple of years ago the
9 Governor had a task force on childcare
10 affordability, and I think a report was done
11 by that. Has that report been made public
12 yet?

13 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: You're right
14 that the Governor convened a Child Care
15 Availability Task Force at the end of 2018.
16 I have had the privilege of cochairing that
17 task force. They have done absolutely
18 amazing work. There is a final report that
19 has been drafted, and we are hoping to have
20 that report released very, very soon.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: Thanks,
22 Commissioner. And appreciate your work on
23 the task force.

24 What does "very, very soon" look like

1 to you?

2 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: (Laughing.)
3 Soon. Just as soon as possible, Assemblyman.
4 We know everyone is very anxious, very
5 anxious to have the report released.

6 I will say, Assemblyman -- and this is
7 not a substitute for the release of the
8 report. But I will say that a number of the
9 things that you've heard me speak about
10 today, right, focusing on limiting family
11 copays, childcare deserts, reducing, right,
12 administrative burdens and duplicative
13 things, right, you know, are very reminiscent
14 of the kinds of things in the task force.

15 So although the task force has not
16 released its report, you know, we were very
17 strategic and intentional on bringing forward
18 some of the themes and recommendations in
19 this year's budget proposal.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: Okay, I just --
21 I just asked was -- I mean, I had the -- a
22 different commissioner, and not you, but
23 answer me in a letter in August saying "as
24 expeditiously as possible." And that was

1 last August, and I still don't have an answer
2 on "as expeditiously as possible."

3 So "very, very soon" sounds good. I
4 look forward to reviewing it very, very soon.
5 And hopefully it has some answers dealing
6 with the patchwork of subsidies and payments
7 that we have across New York State.

8 So I represent two counties, it's kind
9 of a tri-county area. Constituents work in
10 one county, live in the other, and the
11 patchwork can be very difficult to navigate
12 for providers and for families.

13 Are you doing something about that in
14 this budget, and will the task force report
15 on that?

16 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yeah. So,
17 you know, not to give too much of a trailer
18 of the task force report, but that sort of
19 idea of consistency across counties, right,
20 is a theme that is discussed, and there are a
21 specific set of recommendations about that,
22 you know, in the task force report.

23 I think the one thing that is in this
24 year's proposed budget that gets to that is

1 the, right, the \$40 million investment in,
2 right, sort of the 20 percent limit on
3 copays, right, across the state. So it is
4 one important step forward toward a sort of a
5 statewide standard that applies to all
6 families regardless of what county they live
7 in.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: Thank you,
9 Chairwoman. Thanks, Commissioner.

10 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Of course.

11 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to
12 Assemblyman Hevesi for his second round, five
13 minutes.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Commissioner, you
15 made it. We're almost done. So thank you so
16 much for hanging in there with us, and all of
17 the work that you're doing.

18 I got three questions, I'm going to
19 ask them quick in a short amount of time. If
20 I can ask you to keep your answers relatively
21 concise, I'd appreciate it.

22 To the first one, another of my
23 colleagues mentioned that our providers,
24 particularly -- well, it doesn't matter. All

1 of our providers have been taking federal
2 money from a variety of different sources and
3 are -- and I am deathly afraid that they're
4 going to be penalized for doing exactly what
5 the Governor asked them to do.

6 The Governor has been asking us to go
7 after federal money for the better part of a
8 year now. These providers followed that
9 instruction. I just -- if you could give us
10 some sort of assurance that their rates are
11 not going to be hurt because they took the
12 federal funds, that would be really important
13 for these providers.

14 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: So my quick
15 response is I think I answered that same
16 question earlier on, as asked by another
17 member. So again, you know, completely in
18 support of that, just want to make sure that
19 we're not running afoul of any federal rules
20 regarding, you know, double dipping in the
21 federal pot, so.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I appreciate it,
23 Commissioner, thank you. I do.

24 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: You're

1 welcome.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Second is MSAR
3 rates. Can you give us a sense of when
4 they're going to be published? Because, you
5 know, providers need to make their plans. So
6 I just wanted to get a sense from you when
7 you think those rates are going to be coming
8 out.

9 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yes. So my
10 hope is that the rates will be coming out
11 very soon. They were due out some time ago.
12 And I do understand that that creates some
13 challenges for providers.

14 I will say, however, absent the
15 official publication of the rates, we have
16 been able to message to the procedures
17 providers that in doing their budgets for
18 this year, that they should assume that the
19 rate structure and the improvements we made
20 in the last rate package will hold true for
21 this.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: That's great.

23 Okay. Fantastic, Commissioner.

24 And just one last question, and this

1 is the big topic I didn't touch on in my
2 first round. But this is childcare. And I'm
3 not going to -- I know. I know. I'm not
4 going to come back at you and ask you for the
5 release of the report. Although I've got to
6 be honest, I'm excited for a couple of
7 reasons. One, you know, the word-of-mouth
8 feedback about that report is it's stellar
9 and it calls for a wholesale change of the
10 childcare industry, which I think is
11 wonderful.

12 My concern is since we have a deadline
13 to spend -- by the way, you said
14 \$469 million? I thought it was 464. It's
15 469?

16 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: No,
17 469 million is our official number.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you to the
19 Consolidated Appropriations Act. That's
20 great.

21 So you have that money, and you have a
22 deadline to spend it in the next two weeks,
23 regardless of when -- whether we get that
24 task force report out. I would hope that the

1 Executive and the Legislature could come to
2 agreement on how to spend that one-time lump
3 sum in a way that sets us up to succeed for
4 what the task force report will eventually
5 say. Is that a fair assessment?

6 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yeah. The
7 goal, right -- I think we're all aligned on
8 the goals here, right? It's a matter of how
9 we get there.

10 I just want to clarify, thank God we
11 don't have to spend it in the next two weeks.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: No, no, no --

13 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Two years.
14 Yeah. Yeah.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Two years. Yeah,
16 agreed a hundred percent. But, you know,
17 Commissioner, I've been watching this just
18 for a couple of years; I know you've been
19 doing this for a lifetime. The fact that
20 there is actually a lump sum of federal cash
21 to be used for childcare is a very exciting
22 prospect, and I look forward to working with
23 you, the professionals at OCFS, Division of
24 Budget, and the Governor on doing the best we

1 can for the children of New York State. This
2 is a great opportunity for us. I think we
3 could do a lot of good for a lot of kids and
4 families.

5 So I look forward to working with you,
6 and thank you for all your time and testimony
7 today.

8 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Thank you.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

10 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you,
11 Assemblyman.

12 Thank you, Commissioner, I think we
13 have -- not I think, I know we have gone
14 through all of the members. Your information
15 has been very helpful. I know that we'll
16 continue to have some offline discussions, as
17 we have in the past.

18 And we look forward to some additional
19 funding in the next stimulus package that
20 we'll be discussing hopefully even more
21 expansion than we're talking about today.

22 So with that, want to thank you for
23 your participation --

24 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Thank you.

1 THE MODERATOR: I'm sorry, I believe
2 we have one more member. I apologize.

3 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Oh, okay.

4 THE MODERATOR: Assemblymember Phara
5 Forrest.

6 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Right. I saw
7 her hand up, and then it disappeared.

8 So you're with us for another three
9 minutes, Commissioner. So we're going to go
10 for three minutes for Assemblywoman Forrest.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: Thank you so
12 much.

13 Thank you again, Commissioner Poole,
14 for being with us today.

15 I do want to -- I know that
16 Chairman Persaud had raised her hand and
17 asked the question about the Summer Youth
18 Employment Program. I know she had requested
19 some information and you said you didn't have
20 it. But I would like to again request that
21 that information be forwarded to her, but
22 then also to us in general for Social
23 Services. Because I will have to say that
24 the loss of summer employment this summer had

1 quite an impact on the youth that are in my
2 district, but also on the employment of
3 vendors, right, vendors in the community.

4 I do think that we -- if given the
5 opportunity, that the vendors can transition
6 to online. And so online learning, online
7 employment, there's great room for college
8 preparation, career preparation. So please,
9 you know, this information would be very
10 important to our communities, and this
11 information could be shared amongst us all.

12 That's my only small request, and I
13 give back my time, Chairman Weinstein.

14 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Thank you.
15 We'll be sure to get that information,
16 Assemblywoman.

17 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: And,
18 Commissioner, to the extent that you provide
19 additional information to some of the
20 members, if you could please share it also
21 with myself and Chair Krueger, and we'll make
22 sure that all members on the call --
23 actually, all the members on the committee
24 receive that information also.

1 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Yes, of
2 course.

3 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Summer Youth is
4 something we all care about very much.

5 So now I get to say I'll say good
6 morning to the next commissioner, instead of
7 good afternoon. Thank you.

8 OCFS COMMISSIONER POOLE: Thank you
9 all.

10 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So now we're
11 going to call the Commissioner of the
12 New York State Office of Temporary and
13 Disability Assistance, Michael Hein, to join
14 us.

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Hello. How
16 are you doing?

17 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Good. Good.

18 So just a reminder, you know, you have
19 10 minutes to make your presentation. We're
20 happy for you not to take all the time. And
21 then we'll go to the chairs and then members
22 for questions. So proceed.

23 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Wonderful.

24 Good morning, Chairs Krueger,

1 Weinstein, Persaud and Rosenthal, and
2 distinguished members of the State Senate and
3 Assembly. I'm Mike Hein, Commissioner of the
4 Office of Temporary and Disability
5 Assistance, or OTDA. I'm pleased to have
6 this opportunity to discuss the 2022
7 Executive Budget and the critical work of our
8 agency.

9 As we collectively design solutions to
10 the far-reaching impacts of COVID-19, what is
11 clear is that New York's social safety net
12 has never been more important. OTDA's core
13 mission is to help vulnerable New Yorkers
14 meet their essential needs and advance
15 economically by providing opportunities for
16 stable employment, safe housing and quality
17 nutrition. This pivotal responsibility is
18 accomplished in conjunction with the state's
19 58 social services districts and with your
20 support.

21 While New York State has been at the
22 forefront of combating this terrible virus,
23 unfortunately we remain in the grasp of the
24 global pandemic, and our fight for economic

1 recovery has just begun.

2 At the outset of this pandemic, OTDA
3 took extraordinary steps to reimagine the way
4 we do business. Our agency quickly adapted
5 to support a remote workforce, where
6 possible, and adjust the office space for
7 those essential employees who needed to
8 continue to report in person. I'm proud to
9 say that even with these never-before-seen
10 obstacles, OTDA's workforce rose to the
11 challenge in carrying out our agency's core
12 mission, while consistently going above and
13 beyond to help our fellow New Yorkers.

14 As you know, unprecedented times have
15 called for unprecedented governmental
16 actions. To that end, we are grateful for
17 both the Governor's and the State
18 Legislature's timely actions to ensure an
19 effective eviction moratorium that clearly
20 avoided a catastrophic homeless crisis
21 across New York State.

22 And I'm happy to share with you that
23 our agency has been tasked with the critical
24 role of overseeing a new, federally funded

1 \$1.3 billion Emergency Rental Assistance
2 Program this year.

3 This initiative will provide
4 desperately needed support for households
5 behind on their rent that have experienced
6 financial hardship as a result of COVID-19
7 and are at risk of homelessness or housing
8 instability. Those with the lowest incomes
9 will receive priority, including those who
10 are currently unemployed, greatly reducing
11 economic hardships for these families.

12 It's also important to properly set
13 expectations. While this program will make a
14 huge difference for many families and
15 landlords, more federal funding will likely
16 be required to fully address this pending
17 national crisis.

18 Additionally, under the Governor's
19 leadership we continue to make meaningful
20 progress in our ongoing efforts to ensure
21 that all New Yorkers have access to
22 affordable, safe and secure housing over the
23 long term. This includes the Governor's
24 unprecedented \$20 billion, five-year housing

1 plan, which is creating or preserving 100,000
2 units of affordable housing and creating
3 6,000 new units of supportive housing.

4 I am pleased to report that the
5 supportive housing component of this
6 commitment has already been achieved and
7 exceeded, and we are on track to meet the
8 Governor's goal of creating 20,000 new
9 supportive housing units over 15 years. And
10 we will continue to press forward, because we
11 know the need is great.

12 The Executive budget also continues
13 historic investments in the Homeless Housing
14 and Assistance Program, or HHAP. This program
15 provides capital grants and loans to expand
16 and improve the supply of permanent
17 supportive, transitional and emergency
18 housing for individuals experiencing
19 homelessness.

20 HHAP is unique among capital programs,
21 in that its specific mission is to serve the
22 most economically disadvantaged among us.
23 Thanks to the Governor and the State
24 Legislature, funding for this program was

1 doubled last year to \$128 million, and
2 continues at its highest level ever. And I'm
3 pleased to report that yesterday the Governor
4 announced that HHAP has awarded over \$90
5 million for 20 projects that, when complete,
6 will serve thousands of individuals in need
7 for many years to come.

8 And in addition to addressing housing
9 needs, OTDA also assists vulnerable
10 individuals and families with the resources
11 they need to put food on the table.
12 Immediately after the onset of the pandemic,
13 New York saw a dramatic increase in
14 households seeking relief from the
15 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ,
16 or SNAP.

17 In a program as large as SNAP, a 2 to
18 3 percent increase is significant and
19 reflects a profound need. In 2020, we
20 experienced an increase of over 7 percent.
21 To help meet this need, OTDA aggressively
22 sought federal waivers to ensure New Yorkers
23 could continue to access SNAP while greatly
24 expanding nutrition assistance for families

1 and individuals suddenly experiencing greater
2 need, some for the first time ever.

3 OTDA also acted quickly to secure
4 hundreds of millions of dollars in
5 COVID-specific funding to provide additional
6 supports for New Yorkers facing food
7 insecurity. This was accomplished largely
8 through two new programs that provided
9 significant relief for those adversely
10 affected by the pandemic. The Pandemic
11 Electronic Benefit Transfer program, or PEBT,
12 brought in more than \$1 billion in food
13 assistance for more than 2.5 million children
14 who were unable to access free school meals
15 due to COVID-related school closures
16 throughout New York State. And since March,
17 the SNAP Emergency Allotment program has
18 brought in more than \$100 million per month
19 in additional federal aid.

20 The \$1.1 billion in supplemental
21 benefits issued through December has ensured
22 that all SNAP households receive their
23 maximum monthly benefit, based on household
24 size. In January, the federal government

1 also temporarily increased benefits for all
2 SNAP households by 15 percent, which will
3 continue through June of this year.

4 Now as we look forward, OTDA is
5 continuing to work with the U.S. Department
6 of Agriculture to finalize a plan that will
7 provide a second round of PEBT to New York's
8 schoolchildren for this current school year.

9 We're also thankful that during such
10 difficult financial times, the Executive
11 Budget continues steady funding for OTDA's
12 core programs that serve as a lifeline for so
13 many in need. These programs include
14 temporary assistance; the Home Energy
15 Assistance Program, or HEAP; as well as other
16 key areas like child support, shelter
17 inspections, Fair Hearings, Summer Youth
18 Employment, and refugee assistance.

19 OTDA also proudly administers
20 life-altering disability determinations that
21 result in roughly \$1 billion being
22 distributed annually to help disabled
23 New Yorkers make ends meet.

24 Like all of you, we take very

1 seriously our role in helping vulnerable New
2 Yorkers meet their essential needs as they
3 strive to achieve independent financial
4 stability. With the Governor's leadership
5 and the leadership of the State Senate and
6 Assembly, New York has achieved so much in
7 this cause.

8 Now, after a year-long battle with
9 COVID-19 that is far from over, and as we
10 face the long road to economic recovery
11 together, the role of human services and your
12 support has never been more important. At
13 OTDA we are confident that by offering
14 critical assistance, informed by many lessons
15 learned, and by embracing our collective
16 humanity, we will emerge from this moment a
17 better, stronger and more resilient New York
18 State.

19 I want to thank you for the
20 opportunity to appear before you today, and I
21 welcome any questions or comments you may
22 have.

23 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

24 Before we go to the chair of -- our

1 chair of Social Services, I see that we've
2 been joined at some point earlier today by
3 Assemblywoman Hyndman, Assemblywoman Dickens
4 and Assemblywoman Hunter.

5 And now we are going to go to Linda
6 Rosenthal, chair of our Social Services
7 Committee, for 10 minutes.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Thank you,
9 Chair Weinstein, Chair Krueger.

10 Hello, Commissioner. It's good to see
11 you in semi-person, since we've talked so
12 much on the phone.

13 First I'd like to say I'm delighted to
14 be the new chair of this committee and I'm
15 delighted to work with my friend Roxanne
16 Persaud, the chair in the Senate. And I
17 thank Andy Hevesi for his stewardship and
18 strong support here of this committee. I
19 have big shoes to fill, but I aim to fill
20 them, with all my colleagues' assistance.

21 So, Commissioner, I have many, many
22 questions for you. Let me first start with
23 the almost \$1.3 billion in rental assistance,
24 rent relief, that your agency is tasked with

1 distributing.

2 I believe, first off, the aid should
3 flow to the low-AMI-band renters,
4 hard-to-reach populations, including gig
5 workers, people who work in the cash economy,
6 and undocumented immigrants -- those are key
7 -- as well as mom-and-pop landlords I think
8 need to be prioritized before the big
9 landlords, you know, which -- who can get
10 along quite well for a longer time than small
11 landlords. And also require that landlords
12 give tenants longer-term protections against
13 rent hikes and evictions and refusal to renew
14 leases, which happen.

15 What is your view on whether landlords
16 will be the ones to apply, in this program,
17 with tenant consent; a low-AMI band; and how
18 to get the aid to simultaneously the tenants
19 who qualify, but also the smaller landlords?

20 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Again, I
21 think that this is a great question. It's a
22 perfect way for us to kick this off. We're
23 talking about a large amount of money
24 designed to be able to make an enormous

1 difference in the lives of so many
2 New Yorkers who are really up against it and
3 really facing significant rent arrears,
4 facing the possibility of becoming homeless,
5 and nowhere else to turn. So we recognize
6 how serious and important this is.

7 That said, we are awaiting some final
8 federal guidance from the Treasury that will
9 help us in the finalizing of this plan. But
10 to your point, we absolutely believe in a
11 centralized, statewide portal. We believe
12 that landlords should be able to participate
13 in it as well, and apply. Obviously the way
14 that the federal dollars are structured, they
15 will move through and be attached to the
16 resident, so the client would have to agree
17 and consent. But ultimately, providing an
18 opportunity for landlords to participate in
19 the process. We see as very much
20 streamlining it and opening it up and
21 speeding the dollars that would ultimately
22 flow and make a huge difference in addressing
23 rent arrears.

24 I would again share with everybody

1 that solving rent arrears is not something
2 new to OTDA. OTDA does this virtually every
3 day. Wherever they're in emergency
4 situations, we step in and are able to help.
5 This program, we believe, could be one of the
6 most influential parts of helping some of the
7 lowest-AMI population find financial
8 stability in a moment of extreme crisis. So
9 we agree that --

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Can you
11 provide a little more detail about how -- the
12 hardship fund for people who are
13 undocumented? And how many people do you
14 believe this money will help?

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Again, I
16 think it's a great question. How deep and
17 how profound the need is to be able to solve
18 the rent arrears problem I think is an
19 important part of calculating that number.
20 We know it's significant. We know it won't
21 be the entirety of the situation.

22 So when it comes to the volume --
23 excuse me, the volume that we're going to
24 see, it's unclear at this point. We've seen

1 what happened with previous iterations of
2 this, but we don't know the total volume.

3 When it comes to the other part of
4 your question, when you were talking about
5 kind of whether or not -- the federal
6 government did not put forth a citizenship
7 test in this legislation, and we do not see
8 that taking place in New York as well.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Okay, that's
10 great. I'm sure we'll be talking further
11 about this program as the days and weeks go
12 on. But when do you think the money will
13 start flowing?

14 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Well, again,
15 I noted that there's some -- we are awaiting,
16 and we expect it imminently, some guidance
17 from the Treasury. We are working also with
18 the local governments, because I think it's
19 important that everyone be aware of this.
20 While roughly \$800 million flowed to the
21 state, of the \$1.3 billion, \$247 million went
22 to New York City. And to 23 other local
23 governments, there's an additional \$234
24 million. Those are local governments who

1 opted in who happen to be in -- have in
2 excess of 200,000 residents. So we're
3 working with all of them as well to put all
4 of this under an umbrella.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Okay. So
6 during COVID, the state -- has the state used
7 FEMA funding to de-densify congregate
8 shelters?

9 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: The answer is
10 yes.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Okay. And
12 did the state direct social services
13 districts to use FEMA funds, did you direct
14 them to move people out of congregate
15 shelter?

16 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: No, we did
17 not. What happened early on --

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL:
19 {Inaudible.}

20 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: That's okay.
21 What happened early on in this process is we
22 put out clear guidance to all shelter
23 operators and to all districts to make it
24 clear exactly what our expectation was when

1 it comes to social distancing, when it came
2 to cleaning, when it came to the whole
3 laundry list of things that we've all heard a
4 million times over -- mask wearing and the
5 like.

6 And so we gave detailed protocols in
7 how the shelters must be operated. And as a
8 result, some of them made the decision to
9 make density reduction efforts and utilize
10 FEMA dollars in the process.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Okay. Let
12 me ask you a question about FHEPS. From what
13 I understand, before families can get the
14 FHEPS aid from HRA, they must be sued for
15 eviction. But you know we don't have
16 evictions allowed right now. And also
17 tenants can't owe more than \$9,000, according
18 to state regs. Why can you not grant a
19 waiver so that tenants in desperate need of
20 help from OTDA and HRA can get it?

21 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Again,
22 another great question. I know it's very
23 popular at this point --

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: I only ask

1 great questions, really.

2 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I appreciate
3 that. Again, they're thoughtful. And I
4 understand and respect that.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Okay.

6 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: While we're
7 looking at FHEPS, we are faced with a
8 different challenge. I had such a wonderful
9 answer that I would love to have been able to
10 have a conversation about this with. We are
11 very much analyzing it, we're working to be
12 able to address it. And we believe that we
13 will be able to address this issue.

14 That said, there is a recent lawsuit
15 that was filed as of yesterday. And because
16 of that, it really limits my ability to be
17 able to have a conversation about this.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Okay. Okay.
19 Well, I think it's important to get that
20 waiver out so people don't freak out that
21 they can't pay their rent, even though they'd
22 be eligible in other times.

23 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I would also
24 note -- I would also note -- I apologize. I

1 would also note that the moratorium that has
2 been put in place has done an extraordinary
3 job of ensuring that those individuals are
4 not negatively impacted in the process.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Yes. Yes.
6 Absolutely.

7 The Homeless Housing and Assistance
8 Program, it's meant to create 20,000 units
9 over 15 years. But I think that it really
10 needs to be quickened. There are so many
11 people in need of supportive housing. And
12 while that is a noble goal, I think the state
13 has the ability and capacity to speed it up.
14 What's your opinion?

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: The state has
16 made some extraordinary changes to HHAP, and
17 I couldn't be more proud to be involved in
18 them. If we were having this conversation
19 three years ago --

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: I know, but
21 we're having it now.

22 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: -- it would
23 be -- no, but if we were, the dollars
24 associated would be \$64 million. Okay? We

1 now find ourselves in a situation where it's
2 \$128 million. Not just last year, but in the
3 face of all the challenges fiscally that are
4 happening around the state, we still find
5 ourselves with level funding. So it's that
6 doubling of funding for HHAP.

7 And we continue to roll out
8 significant new projects -- again,
9 \$90 million in allocations announced just
10 yesterday. We're very active in the process.
11 We have reached -- we issued RFPs, the
12 results have come in, we've had some
13 extraordinary awards. So we're -- again,
14 we're excited about where we're at. Now, we
15 can always utilize more dollars. We
16 recognize that the need for affordable
17 housing is extreme.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Great. I
19 have 25 seconds and a quick question to a
20 larger problem. You've read in the New York
21 Times about Victor Rivera, chief executive of
22 Bronx Parent Housing Network, allegations of
23 sexual abuse, financial misconduct.

24 Was OTDA notified by anyone about

1 these allegations prior to the Times coming
2 out with it? And what is OTDA's oversight
3 responsibility on these shelters?

4 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure. I
5 think, first and foremost, we have to be very
6 clear with this situation. If the former CEO
7 of BPHN in any way -- if these allegations,
8 which are horrific, are proven -- are proven,
9 then he should be prosecuted to the fullest
10 extent of the law.

11 When we look at this situation, it's a
12 contractual agreement between New York City
13 and BPHN, though there are state dollars
14 attached to it. I know that DHS is very
15 active in this process. They're examining
16 the situation. They've told us that they are
17 in the process of looking to replace not just
18 the CEO with an interim person from the
19 agency, but ultimately to replace the CEO
20 with a CEO that reports directly to the city.
21 Those are all notable efforts by the city.

22 But the reality is this. We are
23 launching an investigation into DHS and how
24 they have handled the situation, to make sure

1 emergency rental assistance that Chair
2 Rosenthal touched on. If a tenant's locality
3 does not cover their 12 months of rental
4 arrears or provide prospective payments, will
5 they be able to apply to the state for
6 different payments? And also, will tenants
7 be provided a choice where they can apply for
8 funding?

9 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I'll answer
10 the second question first, how about that?

11 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay.

12 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: The goal here
13 is to have all applications flow through a
14 central portal. And so we've had these
15 conversations with New York City, we've had
16 these conversations with all of the
17 districts, as well, who have resources that
18 have been allocated to them.

19 And I think it is almost universally
20 embraced that that is an important step in
21 the process, to have a central portal,
22 central eligibility determination, and
23 ultimately the ability to move dollars out
24 extremely quickly. And so there's a goal to

1 being Able to do that, and we see the state
2 as playing the pivotal part in that process.

3 When it comes to people's ability to
4 address issues that -- rent arrears that
5 exceed the 12 months -- and so to make sure
6 that everyone is on the same page, the
7 federal dollars that have been allocated
8 toward this allow for 12 months of rent
9 arrears to be paid and three months of
10 prospective rent as well. So we very much
11 are looking forward to be able to address a
12 large number of issues.

13 If it exceeds that, again, I think
14 we'll have to have bigger conversations about
15 those, about those particular situations
16 where it exceeds both 12 months of arrears
17 and three months of prospective rent.

18 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

19 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: You're
20 welcome.

21 SENATOR PERSAUD: Can you tell me,
22 will this program be assisting the foster
23 care population, the ones who are just aging
24 out?

1 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: It will apply
2 to anyone who is a renter.

3 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. And will the
4 beneficiaries of this program be required to
5 pay back any money at any time?

6 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: No.

7 SENATOR PERSAUD: Is that guaranteed?

8 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I feel like I
9 should have a longer answer. The answer is
10 no.

11 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. So we're
12 going to go to Summer Youth. And you know
13 we've had this conversation --

14 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Absolutely.

15 SENATOR PERSAUD: -- and we'll
16 continue to have this conversation until we
17 have a full grasp of, you know, expanding the
18 number of youth that we can employ for the
19 summer.

20 As you know, last year New York
21 City -- there was a debacle with their Summer
22 Youth Program. Are we anticipating any
23 issues this year in the administration of our
24 Summer Youth Program?

1 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: We are not.
2 We are working very closely with New York
3 City to make sure that they don't make the
4 same challenges come forward that happened
5 last year. I'm not sure if everyone is aware
6 of this or not, but we should be clear: Last
7 year there was a decision by the city early
8 in the pandemic to cancel the Summer Youth
9 Employment Program. That was a unilateral
10 decision. Ultimately, they followed up with
11 a program that came forward that did not meet
12 what we consider the basic requirements,
13 which is employment and employment experience
14 for individuals.

15 We worked with them to be able to
16 identify where they could improve and get
17 something to us that we could ultimately
18 approve. Unfortunately, what happened then
19 was they released the exact same plan
20 forward, which was troublesome.

21 I would be remiss if I didn't mention
22 the fact that every single municipality in
23 the State of New York, including very large
24 ones that surround the Metro New York area,

1 were able to bring forward a plan that was
2 approvable.

3 So we are continuing to work with New
4 York City to ensure that doesn't happen,
5 because we understand the critical importance
6 of this program and how it makes a difference
7 in young people's lives.

8 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. Because we
9 didn't use the funding last year, what was
10 that money used for?

11 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I think it's
12 more of a conversation going forward on what
13 happens this year from a budgetary
14 perspective, and that should be considered in
15 the scope of the larger budget.

16 SENATOR PERSAUD: So can I ask what is
17 out there -- so since New York City didn't
18 use their full allocation, could that money
19 be added to this year's money so we can
20 expand the number of slots of summer youth
21 that we offer?

22 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: That sounds
23 an awful lot like a question for the Division
24 of Budget.

1 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you. Going to
2 SNAP, you know, recently the Governor
3 announced, you know, the auto-enrollment for
4 SUNY students, and I think that's going to
5 cover 10,000 students. But there is no
6 conversation about, you know, the City
7 University of New York. They have a large
8 population of students in need also. Is
9 there a conversation that's being had about
10 that population?

11 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Absolutely.
12 And we're very excited. I mean, what you
13 just saw announced from SUNY is likely to
14 positively impact 20,000 individuals. So
15 we're excited about what that can mean, and
16 we firmly believe that working with CUNY, we
17 have the opportunity to be able to make a
18 similar difference right there.

19 Again, SNAP is such an amazing program
20 to be able to stabilize households.

21 SENATOR PERSAUD: Well, thank you.
22 There is a great need.

23 Does the state have any plans to offer
24 a simplified application for the elderly or

1 disabled? You know, we tend to hear how
2 cumbersome -- we know -- you know, during
3 this pandemic we've made modifications, yes.
4 Will these be permanent modifications so that
5 the elderly and disabled are able to apply
6 for benefits easier?

7 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: That really
8 speaks to one of the core goals, which is to
9 be able to limit bureaucracy, make it easier
10 for people who are in need of services, and
11 be a government that is continually evolving.

12 What you speak of is something that
13 I'm glad to be able to say is actually in
14 place right now, a simplified application for
15 seniors to make sure that we can maximize the
16 number of individuals.

17 It also gives me an opportunity to say
18 something I think is really important for
19 people to know. New York State is a leader
20 when it comes to being able to identify
21 individuals who qualify for SNAP, and then
22 ultimately having them move through the
23 process and be able to receive the benefits.
24 My most recent data that I had put us at

1 number one or number two in the entire
2 nation, especially for seniors.

3 SENATOR PERSAUD: Well, thank you.

4 And I just want to make sure we remember it's
5 not only the senior population we're talking
6 about --

7 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Absolutely.

8 SENATOR PERSAUD: -- we're talking
9 about the challenged populations also.

10 Is there any plan to increase funding
11 to food banks? You know, during this -- the
12 pandemic has shown us, you know, the great
13 need that our communities have, and many of
14 our food banks are struggling. Is there any
15 conversation around increasing funding to
16 food banks?

17 I know there's a, you know, from the
18 tax returns, you know, there's only \$280,000
19 that was being asked to be transferred to
20 Department of Health to be given to food
21 banks. But is your agency looking at trying
22 to get more money to food banks?

23 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: The answer
24 is, as you mentioned earlier, the food banks

1 will be receiving additional dollars this
2 year just simply by nature of the fact that
3 that portion of the tax returns that relies
4 on New York individuals and their incredible
5 ability to be able to step forward and
6 provide additional dollars when people are in
7 crisis -- the money that came forward there
8 ultimately goes to the Department of Health,
9 like you said, and through to food banks.
10 And that's really where the funding stream is
11 for the food banks.

12 We very much are focused on the SNAP
13 portion of it when it comes to nutrition
14 assistance.

15 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you. So can
16 you explain to us the unclaimed child support
17 proposal? Just, you know, seven year to two
18 year, taking away the five year, because --
19 can you explain that entire process?

20 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I sure can.

21 When it comes to unclaimed funds, New
22 York State agencies have one specific model
23 that is utilized. And many of you have
24 experienced this, because you've set up and

1 worked with the State Comptroller on -- to
2 provide an easy access for your constituents
3 to be able to access unclaimed funds.

4 The problem is there is one outlier to
5 that, and that is unclaimed funds for child
6 support. Again, OTDA is tasked with
7 collection of child support dollars, and
8 distribution of them. So in this situation,
9 we have come across with a significant amount
10 of dollars, and it takes action of the courts
11 for us to be able to move those dollars. And
12 it's so cumbersome that that process takes
13 seven years. Okay?

14 It's inconceivable to me that a young
15 person could need these things, that the
16 parent could need these things so
17 desperately, the custodial parent, and the
18 money is there, and it's difficult for
19 someone to be able to identify and access
20 through the current process. Again, a
21 seven-year process.

22 Transitioning over to operating not
23 like an outlier, but operating just like
24 every other agency in the state, would allow

1 this process to turn into a two-year plan.
2 And we would virtually immediately move over
3 \$7 million to be distributed in unclaimed
4 child support that we could all collectively
5 work towards getting those dollars into the
6 hands of the custodial parent who is
7 desperately in need.

8 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you,
9 Commissioner. I'll come back. Thank you.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay, I think Ron
11 Kim from the Assembly is the next up.

12 Ron, are you there?

13 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Yeah, I'm here, hold
14 on. There you go. Thank you.

15 It's good to see you, Commissioner.
16 Thank you for your testimony today.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Give Ron five
18 minutes. Yes, thank you. Sorry, Ron.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Great, thank you.
20 Thank you, Chairwoman Krueger.

21 So a number of outside studies have
22 shown that there's approximately about
23 \$2.2 billion in rental shortfall. Is OTDA
24 keeping track of some of these studies, or

1 has it done an internal assessment of what
2 the demand is or what the market for rental
3 shortfall looks like versus what we're
4 providing in terms of relief?

5 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: We're very
6 much aware of those studies that are out
7 there. And there are competing studies that
8 talk about the magnitude of the problem
9 across the State of New York and in the City
10 of New York as well.

11 We know the \$1.3 billion is unlikely
12 to be sufficient. We are working with
13 everybody to maximize it and ultimately to be
14 able to work with the lowest-AMI population
15 in an attempt to be able to ensure that the
16 individuals who would be impacted the most
17 directly and the most immediately are
18 assisted first.

19 That said, we're also building a
20 program that allows for additional federal
21 dollars to flow through, and for a potential
22 expansion in the program as well so we can
23 help more and more New Yorkers in need.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Great. I mean,

1 those are all great things to hear,
2 Commissioner. I'm glad that we're
3 structuring these programs more efficiently
4 and in a better way to reach our most
5 vulnerable members.

6 And I know, as you know, DHCR had I
7 guess access to the first pot of money under
8 the Emergency Rent Relief Act, of
9 \$100 million. You know, we had a number of
10 hiccups, and over and over throughout the
11 hearings a number of our colleagues
12 criticized how the applications were handled,
13 there was a lack of transparency, we weren't
14 reaching the people that we want to reach.

15 And I'm just wondering, are we
16 actively sharing best practices notes? Are
17 we learning from, you know, the shortfalls of
18 DHCR, and are we making sure that OTDA is
19 executing in a much better way?

20 And also in terms of the applications,
21 I will assume they're overlapping people that
22 are applying for relief. Is there a seamless
23 sharing of notes and data between the
24 agencies?

1 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN:

2 Ms. Visnauskas and I have had exactly this
3 conversation, and our teams have worked very
4 closely together because we want to make sure
5 that there's lessons learned here, that we're
6 able to move forward and get these dollars
7 out quickly.

8 We are very focused, again, on having
9 landlord involvement in this process, because
10 we see that as an opportunity to be able to
11 make things move more quickly. So sharing
12 those information is critically important.

13 When it comes to someone who has
14 already applied, we're very much looking at a
15 way to do some data matches that will allow
16 us to be able to bring them under this
17 umbrella.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: That's great,
19 Commissioner, and thank you.

20 And I just want to reemphasize -- and
21 you already mentioned that the federal
22 government doesn't have any guidelines around
23 citizenship. And as you know, there's -- so
24 many of our constituents have been excluded

1 and are suffering through so much pain and
2 trauma. So it's good to hear that our
3 mission, our values are aligned in trying to
4 reach out to the immigrant and undocumented
5 communities as well.

6 Just for my remainder of time, I just
7 want to dive into a little bit of supportive
8 housing, if you will. You know, I think the
9 Governor in 2016, you know, said he was
10 committed that he would try to build
11 20,000 units of supportive housing. How many
12 units have been financed to date so far,
13 Commissioner?

14 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I don't have
15 the number right in front of me. Oh, wait,
16 there's -- here's the good news about Zoom,
17 guys. I have the ability to be able to look
18 to my right and to my left and have people
19 that are engaged in this tell me the numbers.
20 The answer is 7,000.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Seven thousand.
22 Okay, that's good to know. Okay, thank you.

23 And of the 20,000 units that were
24 committed -- or 7,000, I guess, how many

1 units are open and occupied by formerly
2 homeless households?

3 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: That I can't
4 speak to at this point. But I will find the
5 answer out, and we will get back to you.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Okay, Commissioner.
7 And I have a couple of follow-up questions in
8 regards to that as well, and I'll submit them
9 to you directly. Thank you so much for your
10 time, Commissioner.

11 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

13 Next, for the Senate, Senator May,
14 five minutes, the chair of Aging.

15 Senator May, are you there? Hmm.
16 Perhaps we will go on and come back to
17 Senator May when we find her again.

18 Senator Sue Serino, are you there?

19 SENATOR SERINO: Yes, Madam Chair.
20 Thank you very much.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: You're welcome.
22 Three minutes for Senator Serino. Thank you.

23 SENATOR SERINO: Thank you.

24 And it's so great to see you,

1 Commissioner Hein.

2 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: You as well.

3 SENATOR SERINO: Thank you very much
4 for being here.

5 You know, last year I was very happy
6 to see the additional \$5 million included in
7 the State Budget to address the issue of
8 homelessness among veterans. And I apologize
9 if somebody else has covered this; I was away
10 from the desk for a few minutes. Can you
11 give us an update on whether that funding was
12 ever released? And, if so, how it was used.

13 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: It was
14 released. And I'm proud to be able to say
15 that it has been fully utilized. I want to
16 be able to make sure that I get you a
17 specific breakdown of how it was utilized,
18 and I'll be more than happy to do that. But
19 I can tell you that it was fully utilized.

20 SENATOR SERINO: Okay, great. Thank
21 you, Commissioner. I'll follow up with you
22 later. I appreciate that.

23 And I also have my -- I'm always
24 talking about SSI, you know. As you know,

1 we've been trying for years to secure the
2 increase in the state supplement of the SSI
3 payments for individuals in adult care
4 facilities. And as you know, these payments
5 are their primary means for paying for
6 housing, care and services. And although a
7 bill has passed multiple times, it has been
8 consistently vetoed by the Governor. So the
9 SSI pass-through falls in your portion of the
10 budget here, and the current rate is only \$41
11 a day.

12 So last year I asked you if you
13 thought this was sufficient, but now,
14 especially in light of the COVID pandemic,
15 I'm wondering if you believe that there
16 should be a greater urgency behind the push
17 to increase this allowance.

18 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Again, I
19 don't think there's ever a question about the
20 need. I think the question is really more of
21 a budgetary discussion that needs to be
22 addressed in the confines of the budget in
23 its totality.

24 There's always need. And I think as

1 Commissioner Poole said beforehand, there's
2 always -- we always have need. We wish that
3 it was a limitless pool of resources, but we
4 recognize that that's not the case and we try
5 to do the best we possibly can to maximize
6 our impact with the dollars that are
7 available.

8 SENATOR SERINO: Thank you,
9 Commissioner. I'm going to keep pushing
10 every year, but I --

11 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I know.

12 SENATOR SERINO: And I know your heart
13 is in the same place. So thank you very
14 much.

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you.

16 SENATOR SERINO: Thank you,
17 Madam Chair.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

19 Assemblymember Andrews?

20 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Actually,
21 Assemblyman Anderson.

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Oh, I'm sorry.
23 Excuse me, I didn't realize you were back.

24 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

1 Thank you, Senator, yes. Thank you for
2 covering.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: Okay. Can I be
4 heard?

5 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: You can.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: Okay. Thank
7 you, Chairwoman Weinstein and Chairwoman
8 Krueger, and Commissioner, for being here
9 this afternoon.

10 I have a few questions related to
11 housing subsidy. I know that the former
12 Social Services chair and now the new
13 Social Services chair, both Rosenthal and
14 Hevesi, have been, you know, big on the HSS
15 program, the Home Stability Support program,
16 which would provide essentially market-rate
17 vouchers to families to be able to afford to
18 live in units.

19 Where is the agency on that in terms
20 of your position on it? I know -- I know
21 that HRA downstate has taken a position on
22 it. What's OTDA's position on it?

23 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: We don't have
24 a position on it. When we're looking at

1 this, we understand the distribution of
2 supplements, we understand what currently
3 exists in the system. We also understand
4 what supplements are available in New York
5 City as well. But the agency itself does not
6 take a position on this legislation.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: That's fine.

8 Next question, Commissioner, for
9 supportive housing. I want to make a -- this
10 is actually a comment, not a question. I
11 think that the state -- i.e., your agency,
12 but particularly the Executive -- is moving
13 incredibly slow on this supportive housing
14 initiative. Twenty thousand units over 15
15 years is incredibly slow, and I think the
16 state can do much better given the drastic
17 circumstances that we are in as it relates to
18 supportive housing and the needs of folks for
19 those very critically important wraparound
20 services, so that folks who are either
21 returning home from incarceration, folks who
22 need mental health supports, folks who are
23 leaving facilities that are increasingly
24 closing across the state need supportive

1 housing, among many other categories and
2 groups.

3 So I just want to make that comment
4 that the state is moving incredibly slow on
5 that, and we need to do better on that.

6 Question for you, Commissioner. In
7 terms of Fair Hearings and negative case
8 actions, are you aware of any Fair Hearings
9 that are taking place on any social service
10 cash assistance -- obviously, you guys only
11 cover cash assistance -- related cases? And
12 if so, what steps is your agency taking to
13 ensure that there are no negative case
14 actions and Fair Hearings?

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: From a Fair
16 Hearings perspective, we obviously operate
17 that portion of state government. And there
18 has been really a herculean effort by the
19 team at Fair Hearings to be able to ensure
20 that these critical cases get heard and heard
21 quickly.

22 That said, there was a absolute crush
23 of cases to be able to address --

24 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: Can you hold

1 on? My time is -- wait, can you just answer
2 on the back end? I just want to get this
3 last question in.

4 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Of course.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN ANDERSON: In terms of
6 HEAP, have you seen an increase or a decrease
7 in the administration of HEAP? What
8 resources does your agency need to
9 thoughtfully execute the HEAP program across
10 the state?

11 I know we've been receiving increases
12 in my district, but I want to hear what the
13 agency is doing overall just given the
14 context of the pandemic. Thank you.

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: You're more
16 than welcome. Thank you.

17 When it comes to HEAP, what we did
18 with the HEAP dollars is we were able to have
19 multiple emergency allocations through the
20 course of the year, and we extended the
21 application process -- I think we went from
22 the benefits from March 16th of 2020 through
23 August 31st of 2020, rather than closing in
24 the spring. So there's been an extension in

1 the process. Multiple emergency allocations
2 have been made available to people in need.

3 And in addition to that, we were able
4 to provide a cooling component, and we're
5 excited about what this can do for people.
6 Obviously facing the challenges of a hot
7 summer, COVID, quarantining, for some
8 individuals, especially seniors, especially
9 individuals with serious medical conditions,
10 the ability to have an air-conditioner can be
11 absolutely pivotal. And so we're pleased to
12 have been able to move forward.

13 I would say one other item when it
14 comes to HEAP that I think we should talk
15 about is we have moved to the point where we
16 believe there are dollars available to
17 provide assistance when it comes to
18 utilities, in addition to the \$1.3 billion
19 that we'll be looking to work with rent
20 arrears on.

21 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you,
22 Commissioner.

23 Now we go to the Senate.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

1 Senator Brian Kavanagh.

2 SENATOR KAVANAGH: Hi. Am I on?

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: You're on.

4 SENATOR KAVANAGH: All right, forgive
5 me. Too many -- too many switches.

6 Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you to
7 all of the chairs, you know, chairing this
8 very productive hearing.

9 Commissioner, I want to thank you for
10 your comments about the rent relief program.
11 And I was particularly heartened to hear you
12 say that the state does not intend to
13 restrict it with respect to undocumented
14 immigrants, I think that's -- in response to
15 a colleague's question. I think that's very
16 important and, you know, has been a gap in
17 our work in this area so far.

18 I want to talk to you a little --
19 follow up about some of the questions you've
20 had about homelessness. You testified as to
21 various -- the state's various approaches.
22 Can you talk about the scope of homelessness?
23 Do you have a -- does the state have an
24 overall sense of the numbers of people who

1 are currently homeless or who are, you know,
2 so underhoused that they might be at risk of
3 homelessness?

4 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Absolutely.
5 When we're talking about these kinds of
6 numbers, we're talking about -- you know,
7 again, they are very large: 92,000
8 individuals who are homeless statewide.

9 I think that when we have this
10 conversation about that number -- and it is a
11 very large number, and it speaks to the
12 importance of affordable housing and other
13 actions that we can take to be able to reduce
14 that number -- I think it's also important
15 that we highlight the fact that unlike many
16 states, because of New York's
17 right-to-housing laws, in excess of
18 95 percent of the people who find themselves
19 homeless are sheltered. You know, and I
20 think that's a really important point to be
21 able to make when compared to what happens in
22 many other states, where you see tent cities
23 and extraordinarily troubling sights.

24 SENATOR KAVANAGH: And in terms of

1 the -- obviously at any given moment, you
2 know -- so that's 90,000, that's a rough
3 census of people who are in shelter --

4 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure.

5 SENATOR KAVANAGH: -- facilities. And
6 that includes government facilities and also,
7 you know, churches and other sort of more
8 informal programs?

9 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Correct.

10 SENATOR KAVANAGH: Okay. And what is
11 the -- what is the scale of units that you
12 can make available to homeless people in a
13 given year at this point?

14 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I'm not sure
15 I'm -- are we talking about shelters or are
16 we talking about --

17 SENATOR KAVANAGH: No, I'm talking
18 permanent housing units. I'm the Housing
19 chair, so I do housing. I'm on the Social
20 Service Committee, but I'm -- I'm trying to
21 understand the -- you mentioned a couple of
22 your programs. We mentioned a few different
23 routes to putting homeless families into
24 permanent housing, including -- you know, or

1 keeping people in permanent housing.

2 Is there any sense of how all of these
3 things fit together and the overall numbers
4 that are available?

5 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure. I
6 think when we complete this most recent round
7 of HHAP, I think you're probably talking
8 somewhere in the area of around 1100 or 1200
9 brand-new units, in addition to the existing
10 units that are out there.

11 SENATOR KAVANAGH: Per year.

12 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Yes.

13 SENATOR KAVANAGH: Okay. And I see my
14 clock --

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I think that
16 speaks to the -- that's just in HHAP, and it
17 speaks to the importance of the 128 million,
18 the doubling of those dollars.

19 SENATOR KAVANAGH: Right. And that's
20 an important program, and I support that
21 program. And I see my time -- the clock has
22 run. Just I will -- I will want to follow up
23 just on whether the state has like a -- sort
24 of an overall sense of the resources

1 available for -- to place people who are
2 currently homeless into permanent housing.
3 Because, we mentioned -- one option that has
4 been on the table was mentioned before, but I
5 think a lot of us, you know, are really
6 committed to the notion that we need to do a
7 lot more in that area. But three minutes is
8 very quick, and I appreciate your testimony
9 so far. Thanks.

10 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you so
11 much.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
13 Assembly.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to
15 Assemblywoman Reyes.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYES: Thank you,
17 Chairwoman. And thank you, Commissioner
18 Hein, for answering our questions.

19 I have three very quick questions,
20 I'll ask them and see if you can answer for
21 me.

22 So I've been working with Senator
23 Persaud on enrolling New York State in the
24 federal Restaurant Meals Program. Just

1 wondering what your thoughts are on the
2 implementation, perhaps the cost of
3 implementing such a program that would allow
4 the disabled seniors and the homeless
5 population to use their SNAP benefits for
6 prepared meals.

7 Also I know that given the recent
8 lawsuit on the FHEPS program, you may not be
9 able to comment, but just wondering what
10 OTDA's reasoning was behind not waiving the
11 lawsuit requirements for families in New York
12 City, but not for those outside of New York
13 City.

14 And also given the rise of
15 single-adult homelessness across the state,
16 does the state currently fund any rental
17 assistance programs for single adults?

18 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Okay, I'll go
19 as quickly as I can.

20 First off, you've chosen a wonderful
21 Senator to partner with. Secondly, when it
22 comes to the hot meals portion of it, I can't
23 give you an exact dollar value of what the
24 cost would be associated with having hot

1 meals or restaurants associated -- involved
2 in the process.

3 What I can tell you is there's been an
4 aggressive effort -- in fact, New York State
5 was the first in the pilot program for USDA
6 to be able to do online SNAP benefits. We're
7 excited about what that can mean. It means a
8 lot, obviously, to people who are shut-ins,
9 seniors, people with disabilities. And we've
10 seen an absolute explosion, as you can
11 imagine, of this over the course of the last
12 year when it's been fully -- or when it's
13 been operational.

14 It's a pilot program. There are a
15 limited number of participants. We are
16 working with USDA because they are the ones
17 that determine whether a retailer can be part
18 of that process. And we're looking to grow
19 it aggressively, because we see real value in
20 it.

21 But I will say that that's the avenue
22 that we have at this point. USDA has not
23 approved a restaurant process going forward
24 at this point. So there will be -- it would

1 be an effort to be able to get USDA to engage
2 in the process.

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYES: And my other
4 questions?

5 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I'm sorry,
6 which other ones were we talking about? If I
7 missed one, I apologize.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYES: I had a question
9 on FHEPS -- on OTDA's position for not
10 waiving the lawsuit requirement for New York
11 City families, as opposed to out-of-New York
12 City families.

13 And then do you have any rental
14 assistance programs for single homeless
15 adults?

16 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Yes, there
17 are rental assistance programs for senior
18 homeless adults.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYES: Single homeless
20 adults.

21 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Yup. Yup,
22 single homeless adults.

23 They're -- I'm going to come to the
24 FHEPS program you were talking about. Again,

1 this is a conversation that I would love to
2 have at this point, but we are limited
3 because of the litigation.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYES: Understood.
5 Thank you.

6 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: You're
7 welcome.

8 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.
9 We'll go back to the Senate now.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
11 much. Our next questioner is Senator Rachel
12 May, who gets five minutes as the Aging
13 chair.

14 SENATOR MAY: Thank you, Senator
15 Krueger. And hello, Commissioner.

16 I just have one question. This is
17 based on -- one of my constituents brought
18 this question to me. She has been on SNAP
19 for a while. And when the supplemental SNAP
20 benefits started to come in last spring, she
21 discovered that she was able to do some
22 really smart purchasing for her family. Like
23 she was able to buy a whole side of beef and
24 keep it for months of good nutrition for her

1 family.

2 And she brought to me a question about
3 how we can make it possible for people on
4 SNAP to plan ahead or to have, you know,
5 cooperative buying options or something like
6 that, so that they can use these funds in a
7 long-term way that's more efficient than
8 just, you know, week-to-week budget planning.

9 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I don't have
10 a great answer for you at this point, because
11 to be quite frank with you, it's something
12 that we really should explore more, about the
13 opportunity to be able to utilize co-ops and
14 additional purchasing power. And that really
15 is driven by where SNAP dollars can be
16 allocated. But I'll explore it.

17 SENATOR MAY: Thank you. I hope you
18 will --

19 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Absolutely.

20 SENATOR MAY: -- because she said all
21 of a sudden her family had way better
22 nutrition and her peace of mind was better --
23 you know, all kinds of things were better
24 because she was able to plan ahead.

1 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I will tell
2 you, it also gives me an opportunity to talk
3 briefly about really how the PEBT program
4 launched as well. That was one of those
5 programs that hundreds of employees of OTDA
6 stepped forward, built a call center,
7 delivered this PEBT program, working with the
8 schools and making sure where that we got
9 where we needed to be, ultimately moving a
10 billion dollars in aid to 2.5 million kids in
11 a very short window of time.

12 It's one of those silent successes in
13 this whole process.

14 SENATOR MAY: Great. Thank you very
15 much.

16 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure.

17 SENATOR MAY: That was my only
18 question. I yield my time back.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
20 Assembly.

21 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes, we go now
22 to Assemblywoman Lunsford, three minutes.

23 Jen, are you there?

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: I am, hello.

1 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: We'll get the
3 unmute.

4 So thank you, Commissioner. I just
5 have a very quick question. Funding for
6 childcare subsidies has always come to
7 New York from TANF funding. And this year
8 the TANF funds going directly to childcare in
9 the budget has dropped by almost
10 \$200 million. Can you tell me, if you know,
11 what are those funds going to? Has there
12 been a surge in public assistance claims?
13 We're just trying to figure out where that
14 money is.

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: This is
16 really a budgetary action. I think it's
17 important to highlight this one. While you
18 will see a significant reduction in OTDA's
19 budget when it comes to this, you will see a
20 corresponding increase in OCFS's budget. So
21 it was simply a shift from OTDA to OCFS.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Okay. That's
23 all I have. I cede my time. Thank you.

24 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay.

1 We go to the Senate. You're muted,
2 Senator Krueger.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So sorry.

4 I was saying we're on a roll. Senator
5 Brisport, five minutes, since he's the chair
6 of Children and Families. Thank you.

7 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you,
8 Madam Chair.

9 And hello, Commissioner. We haven't
10 met yet, but hi. Good to meet you. Senator
11 Brisport.

12 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Good to meet
13 you too.

14 SENATOR BRISPORT: So I represent a
15 district in Central Brooklyn, but I would
16 like to use some time just to talk about
17 something that happened upstate, in
18 Rochester. And I want to come back to the
19 question of using FEMA funding to decrease
20 density in congregate shelters.

21 I read an article and I saw a story of
22 the House of Mercy, you know, homeless
23 shelter in Rochester, where Sister Grace,
24 who's the director has been in the news

1 previously asking for help to open up hotel
2 space to decrease density in her shelter.
3 That did not come, that did not happen.
4 There was a COVID outbreak inside of the
5 homeless shelter, they had to shut down the
6 entire shelter temporarily. And, you know,
7 they've reopened since at a limited capacity.

8 But my question is, you know, why
9 hasn't the state done more to direct
10 localities to use these FEMA funds to open up
11 hotels? And what could we be doing more?

12 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I think
13 your question is perfect, although I don't
14 know all the specifics of that particular
15 case.

16 What I will tell you is by sending out
17 very clear guidelines and working with
18 shelter operators and working with local
19 social service districts, we've been
20 crystal-clear about what our expectation is.
21 We also do inspections in that process, to
22 make sure that people are living up to what
23 they're supposed to be doing in this process.

24 So again, many districts have chosen

1 to use FEMA dollars specifically for this,
2 for density reduction, and for assistance to
3 be able to address exactly what you're
4 talking about.

5 And I will say this. While we have
6 all experienced these tragic losses as a
7 result of COVID-19 and we've seen infection
8 rates rise and fall and rise again, we would
9 say that because of the actions that we have
10 taken within the shelters and with local
11 social service districts, even though we may
12 have additional comorbidities or other issues
13 associated and risk factors associated with
14 shelter residents, we have not seen a
15 proportionate number of people who have
16 passed or levels of infection rate. Across
17 the entirety of the system.

18 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you so much,
19 Commissioner. And just a quick question, a
20 second one, is just I have a question about
21 F-H-E-P-S, or FHEPS, I believe. Do you have
22 a number of how many families are on FHEPS
23 each year, how many in New York City and
24 outside of New York City?

1 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I don't have
2 the exact number at this point. But we know
3 that there obviously is a significant amount.
4 Again, what I spoke of earlier is the ability
5 to be able to have wonderful folks in the
6 room with me, and they are telling me that
7 the answer is 10,500 in New York City.

8 Individuals on FHEPS.

9 SENATOR BRISPORT: Well, thank you so
10 much. Those are my questions, Commissioner.
11 I really appreciate you taking the time.

12 I will yield the rest of my time.

13 Thank you.

14 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Pleasure to
15 meet you.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

17 Assembly. Assembly? Anybody there?

18 Okay, perhaps not. Let's see if I can

19 --

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Hi,
21 this is Jessica González-Rojas. I think I
22 was up next, but I'm waiting for the
23 chairwoman.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: There are lists

1 up, so I'm just quickly trying to get to it.

2 Yes, I think you are next. Thank you.

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Thank
4 you so much. Thank you, Commissioner, very
5 nice to meet you. I'm --

6 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: You as well.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: -- also
8 a new Assemblywoman from Queens.

9 My question is related to the
10 administration's position on the Section
11 8-like program, the Housing Access Voucher
12 Program, which is Bill S2804 and A3701. It's
13 a proposal by Senator Kavanagh and
14 Assemblymember Cymbrowitz that would create a
15 statewide voucher program that covers a
16 hundred percent of fair market rent and help
17 people receiving public assistance, Social
18 Security income, and people who are
19 undocumented.

20 So can you share your position on the
21 bill and your rationale for that position.

22 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: This is
23 obviously a comprehensive question. The
24 challenge that we have is because the fact

1 that it is pending legislation, it's not
2 something that an agency would typically
3 comment on. We understand the importance of
4 the discussion, we understand the issues at
5 hand. But because it's pending legislation,
6 an agency doesn't traditionally take a
7 position.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Okay.
9 Well, thank you.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay, are you
11 ceding the rest of your time?

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Yes, I
13 will cede the rest of my time.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We'll go back
15 to the Senate then.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay, thank you.
17 I think I'm next up. Good afternoon.

18 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Senator.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Nice to see you
20 again.

21 Following up on two different paths
22 that were started down, one about supportive
23 housing -- so I think probably this entire
24 Hollywood Squares group could agree that we

1 like supportive housing, we see it as a win,
2 we hope that we're moving more quickly on it.

3 With that in mind, the Governor has
4 referenced in his budget, in the language
5 bills, the concept of supporting transferring
6 perhaps commercial buildings into supportive
7 housing buildings, at least in the City of
8 New York.

9 So here's my question. Would you
10 agree that's only a good idea if there are
11 service dollars following those new units?
12 Because if we suddenly add on additional
13 supportive housing, which I very much want us
14 to do, but from a different source with a
15 different time frame and conceivably with a
16 completely different application process --
17 if we don't have the services in place when
18 we take those buildings over, what we hope to
19 do falls apart.

20 So are you prepared to commit that if
21 the state goes down that road you're going to
22 have the service dollars to do what we need
23 to do?

24 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Obviously

1 ESSHI funding is pivotal to being able to
2 make a difference in so many of the
3 supportive housing situations. What you're
4 speaking of, though, again, I don't know of
5 any that are scheduled to be online
6 immediately. And again, it's more of an EDC
7 conversation, because I know that they are
8 very actively involved in that process, in
9 that initiative.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: They won't come
11 up with supportive -- they're not going to
12 come up with service dollars year after year,
13 Mike, right? We know that.

14 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I -- I fully
15 understand the importance of service dollars
16 following the need for supportive housing.
17 So again, we'll continue to move forward as
18 that initiative evolves.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. Thank you.

20 And then there was another -- there
21 was a follow-up question, and now I'm
22 completely blanking. I will have to follow
23 up with you separately, because I don't
24 remember --

1 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I was going
2 to say, reach out anytime and we'll touch
3 base.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Very good. Thank
5 you. I'll cede my time to the Assembly.

6 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We'll go to
7 Assemblywoman Forrest, three minutes.

8 Is Phara there?

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: Hello. Okay?

10 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Hello,
11 Assemblymember.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: Yes, thank
13 you. Commissioner Hein, hello.

14 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Hello.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: Hi. Okay. So
16 my question for you is that Biden issued an
17 EO asking the Department of Ag to consider
18 expanding and increasing SNAP benefits. The
19 expansion would increase benefits for
20 low-income students and those receiving the
21 max SNAP benefit.

22 Has the state received any guidance
23 regarding this expansion? And will the state
24 continue to apply for waivers allowing people

1 not to recertify their SNAP benefits?

2 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: The answer to
3 your question about the waivers is yes, we
4 will continue to apply for these waivers. We
5 think it's pivotal in the process.

6 And I don't have an answer for you on
7 the other piece, but I will get you an
8 answer.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: Okay. And
10 then my second question is regarding the
11 distribution under the rental -- the money
12 for the rental assistance. So one article
13 had stated -- I was reading an article that
14 landlords and tenants do concur that a
15 landlord-based application system would be
16 better as far as making sure that the
17 \$1.3 billion, that was the number, actually
18 gets to who it needs to get to, which is the
19 landlords, right? Because the tenant is a
20 middleman. If we can just minimize the fact
21 that, you know, -- we minimize and help
22 increase the chances that rent arrears can be
23 addressed and that to increase eligibility
24 for people who are nontraditional workers or

1 immigrant families, I think that the landlord
2 application, the landlord being able to apply
3 on behalf of their tenants would be a good
4 idea.

5 What is your take on this? Is this
6 something that OTDA is considering?

7 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Very much so.
8 We agree, in setting up a program like this,
9 that there will be dual entry points. So
10 while there's a single application, we
11 believe that it makes perfect sense to be
12 able to have an opportunity for a tenant --
13 because that will be appropriate in certain
14 conditions, for a tenant to be able to apply
15 and then work with the landlord. There will
16 also be scenarios where it makes a lot of
17 sense for the landlord to apply and then work
18 with the tenant and work from that
19 perspective in the application.

20 So we see both. So I think we share
21 the desire to have both tenants and landlords
22 involved in the application process.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: For my last 10
24 seconds, do you have any strategies,

1 straight-out strategies to increase this
2 application being available to landlords?
3 How will the -- what's your ideas on
4 accessibility?

5 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: One of the
6 goals, I think, is to be able to work with
7 the community-based organizations, working
8 with, obviously, the local social service
9 districts as well, and the local
10 governments -- all with an eye towards
11 outreach. This is going to be a herculean
12 effort to make sure that we get outreach
13 where it needs to be, that we get quality
14 applications in, and that we're able to move
15 dollars out quickly.

16 So we absolutely believe that from the
17 administrative dollars that are available to
18 local governments in this process, they
19 should be utilizing them absolutely towards
20 quality outreach and extensive outreach,
21 especially in underserved areas who have been
22 disproportionately negatively impacted by
23 COVID-19.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN FORREST: I have one

1 last thing. Sorry, Chairwoman Weinstein.

2 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: No,
3 Assemblywoman, we have to move on. But you
4 can send the question in writing.

5 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Please reach
6 out directly.

7 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. We gave
8 you a little extra time there.

9 Senate, do you have a --

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: We do. We have a
11 second round for our chair, Roxanne Persaud.

12 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you, thank
13 you, thank you. Commissioner, I just have to
14 follow up. I have four questions, actually,
15 and I want to follow up on the child support
16 discussion that you had just now.

17 As part of the proposal, it's
18 \$7 million for a one-time windfall. And of
19 that, \$7 million, \$5 million is going to the
20 federal government and 2.5 to -- about 2.5 to
21 the state? And then after that, it's like
22 about a million each year goes to the
23 Comptroller, and we're -- the state is
24 keeping a little over \$300,000 and, you know,

1 we're sending money to the feds.

2 Could you explain all of that?

3 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: The dollars
4 that we're talking about are significantly
5 more than those dollars that you were
6 discussing. The \$7 million would flow
7 directly to the Comptroller's office,
8 ultimately to be distributed. From that
9 point -- at any one time, there's a large
10 amount of uncollected. We're talking about
11 numbers that are in the area of \$70 million
12 or \$80 million. And they're at different
13 parts of this process.

14 So we would see a regular flow of
15 dollars to the Comptroller's office for
16 undistributed that would then have the
17 ability to be able to be in the hands of
18 individuals who it should be.

19 SENATOR PERSAUD: And could you
20 explain, how much of the money that we're
21 sending to the Comptroller is actually going
22 to the federal government? And why is it
23 that we're holding money that goes to the
24 feds?

1 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: We don't
2 think there's any dollars that flow to the
3 federal government in this process.

4 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay, can you just
5 check that and get back to us? Because
6 that's what I'm being told.

7 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Of course.
8 Of course. Absolutely.

9 SENATOR PERSAUD: So thanks for that.

10 Another thing, on SNAP benefits, you
11 know, you've done a great job applying for
12 waivers and all of that.

13 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you.

14 SENATOR PERSAUD: Are you still going
15 to apply for any more waivers just to make it
16 easier for New Yorkers to receive SNAP
17 benefits?

18 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: We anticipate
19 that we will continue to provide waivers for
20 individuals as much as we possibly can.

21 Obviously, one of the goals in this
22 entire process was making sure that we could
23 limit the number of times an individual would
24 have to go into a social service office. We

1 wanted to make it as easy as possible for the
2 individual facing all the crises that were
3 happening all around us. We also wanted to
4 protect the workforce in local social service
5 districts as well in that process.

6 So we anticipate being able to fully
7 examine that, continue to look at these
8 waivers and think about this from a public
9 health perspective, first and foremost, and
10 then obviously ease of use and streamlining
11 of the process.

12 I would also share with you that some
13 of the waivers -- again, the waivers have
14 forced us to rethink how we do business in
15 certain areas. And so I would expect that
16 some of them will continue for a long period
17 to come, if not permanently.

18 SENATOR PERSAUD: I'm happy to hear
19 you're thinking of some that are permanent,
20 because, you know, I'm thinking of some that
21 should be permanent. So I'm happy to hear
22 we'll continue that conversation.

23 So, quickly, on Code Blue, the funds
24 are being reduced again. Is there a decrease

1 in the need for shelter beds? You know, and
2 is the current demand being met? Because
3 we're seeing this trend of decrease, decrease
4 in housing and homelessness funding.

5 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Obviously
6 during the Code -- Code Blue is, again,
7 subject to the same challenges that we have
8 seen across the board where you see a
9 5 percent reduction within the budget,
10 obviously addressing the huge challenges that
11 are happening with a \$15 billion budget gap
12 and the like.

13 What I will say is the allocation that
14 has been made to Code Blue is still
15 sufficient to be able to meets the demands
16 with which districts have come forward over
17 the course of the past year.

18 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay, so you're
19 saying -- but there are districts with
20 homeless people sleeping on the streets that
21 are not really coming forward?

22 (Overtalk.)

23 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: No, I think
24 that every district is coming forward,

1 absolutely.

2 SENATOR PERSAUD: And as you know, you
3 know, we've been pushing for that diaper bill
4 legislation that we're looking to offer
5 supplements, subsidies for diapers to needy
6 families. And the Governor has this
7 initiative of distributing the 20 million
8 diapers. What is your agency's role in that?

9 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: We don't
10 really have a role in that process. Though
11 we understand the desire to be able to make a
12 difference in the lives of young parents who
13 are facing this demand, this added demand
14 that comes with providing for a baby.

15 SENATOR PERSAUD: Again, I hope you
16 know that we can come together to get the
17 diaper legislation that I have moving forward
18 so that we can assist more families who are
19 desperately in need.

20 So again, Commissioner, it's great
21 seeing you. Thank you for answering my
22 questions, and we will follow up. Thank you.

23 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: You as well.
24 Thank you.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

2 Assembly?

3 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes, we have
4 Assemblywoman Mitaynes before we go to
5 Assemblywoman Rosenthal. So three minutes.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Hi. Thank
7 you very much. Thank you for being here.

8 I just wanted to -- just hearing some
9 of what was said earlier, I just want to
10 mention that there is, to my understanding,
11 10 percent set aside in the budget for
12 outreach to be used to communicate with
13 folks.

14 But my question, my question is around
15 conversions of hotels and commercial property
16 to permanent housing in New York. The
17 Governor had proposed a plan to convert
18 distressed hotels and commercial space into
19 permanent housing. How much money will be
20 allocated for this proposal? How many units
21 do you estimate could be created? And is the
22 administration planning to use nonprofit
23 developers to convert units into housing?

24 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Again, I

1 think you're asking very valuable questions
2 when it comes to the conversion, but it's not
3 something that's directly tied to OTDA. So I
4 can't really answer these questions.

5 What I can do is say the 10 percent
6 set-aside is actually not just for outreach,
7 it's for all the administration of the
8 program. This program is designed to be very
9 lean, the \$1.3 billion one, so the 10 percent
10 set-aside is for all administration. That
11 means the central portal, any IT associated
12 with that. It means any of the call centers
13 that would be there, to be able to set up to
14 make sure that someone who had technology
15 challenges and couldn't apply online could
16 still apply by phone or by mail. It's a
17 whole host of those kinds of -- as well as
18 the distribution of funds as well, in
19 addition to all of the outreach that we know
20 is critically important.

21 So there is a lot that falls under
22 that category.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: And getting
24 back to the -- to just follow up on the

1 question of Assemblymember Forrest Souffrant,
2 there's many more -- there's less landlords
3 than there are tenants. They have management
4 offices, so it's easier for them to actually
5 apply.

6 Wouldn't it be easier and faster to
7 make sure that we're getting the money that's
8 needed to our small mom-and-pop landlords by
9 just targeting them? And this way they would
10 be applying themselves, and they would be
11 getting the funds directly themselves.
12 Wouldn't it be a better allocation to just
13 focus on them to be able to apply than have
14 tenants do it, who may or may not know or may
15 not be able to get the access? And it would
16 just take longer, I believe.

17 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: We really
18 don't view this as an either/or. We want to
19 make sure that is a quilt in the process.
20 And so we fully anticipate that there will be
21 tenants that will want to apply in the
22 process, they'll want to kind of run that
23 whole entire process from start to finish and
24 work with the landlord. We also understand

1 that there are landlords who will want to be
2 able to do this for their tenants. We'll
3 work with organizations.

4 I also think that the outreach that we
5 talk about is absolutely focused on being
6 able to help individuals and lower AMI and be
7 able to assist them. But it's also to be
8 able to help those small mom-and-pop
9 landlords who may struggle to be able to
10 figure out how to participate in the program.
11 So it's not an either/or. We think we can be
12 able to do both.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. We
15 now go to our chair of Social Services, Linda
16 Rosenthal, for her second five minutes on the
17 clock. Thank you.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Thank you.

19 Hi, Commissioner.

20 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Hello.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Good to talk
22 to you again.

23 I just want to quickly follow up on
24 the Rochester situation, because -- well, I

1 went to school in Rochester, so I have a
2 personal caring in my heart for them.

3 But really it seems like they were
4 closed for a month because of the FEMA --
5 they didn't have the FEMA dollars. Now
6 they're back open, but at a reduced capacity.

7 There's a document by the National Low
8 Income Housing Coalition about how to work
9 with FEMA for localities to work with FEMA.
10 Can you look into that particular situation?
11 Rochester is very poor, has a lot of homeless
12 folks. And here's a place that would be open
13 to them, but it seems like there are
14 bureaucratic hurdles. Do you think your
15 department can look into that?

16 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Absolutely.
17 Not only would I look into that from the
18 specific case, I'll also take a look at how
19 the interface is taking place with Monroe
20 County.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Okay. Thank
22 you so much.

23 So in New York State we have 92,000
24 people who are homeless. It doesn't seem

1 that there's enough rental assistance to help
2 people escape homelessness.

3 So in particular, single adults. Can
4 you expand on what is available for them to
5 transition out of shelter or off the street
6 to affordable units or supportive units?

7 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure. The
8 dollars that are available, again, provide --
9 present significant challenges, no question
10 about it. But they're through public
11 assistance and through a shelter portion of
12 that as well. Those --

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: I think you
14 said to Senator Kavanagh there would be 1200
15 more units coming online. Who would those be
16 for?

17 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Well, if the
18 units are funded through HHAP, you're talking
19 about folks who are homeless, currently
20 homeless or facing homelessness imminently.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Right. But
22 --

23 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: And it runs
24 the entire gamut, I apologize. It runs the

1 gamut. There are some dedicated to folks who
2 are homeless veterans, some for individuals,
3 some for seniors, some for families. So
4 there is a broad cross-section available in
5 HHAP housing.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: You know, in
7 my district there are three hotels with
8 homeless single people in them, mostly men.
9 What is the priority level when you talk
10 about all the eligible populations.

11 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: We work with
12 the local social service districts in
13 identifying individuals to be able to be
14 placed in upcoming housing. Because a lot of
15 times it's also focused on making sure that
16 we've identified the appropriate supports in
17 place as well.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Right. It's
19 really a horrific situation for the people
20 who are homeless, so I hope we can work
21 together to speed up the construction of --
22 as I've said, and some of my colleagues as
23 well, for supportive housing.

24 While others were asking questions, I

1 looked up the Coalition for the Homeless
2 report that showed that the cumulative
3 New York City mortality rate due to COVID was
4 231 deaths per 100,000. But for sheltered
5 homeless New Yorkers, it was 406 deaths per
6 100,000 people.

7 So, you know, really, how do we move
8 forward? How do we move forward to turn the
9 tide on homelessness if there are not enough
10 tools in government? Does the administration
11 have a target goal? And I know it's no one
12 should be homeless, that's what we all agree
13 on. But because there's such an overwhelming
14 number, does the administration, you know,
15 have like set benchmarks through the years to
16 reduce the number?

17 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I think what
18 we're finding here is the net effect of
19 significant challenges, from an economic
20 perspective, for so many individuals, as well
21 as substance use disorder and other
22 challenges -- mental health challenges -- all
23 coming together in a situation where the cost
24 of housing is expensive, especially in the

1 New York City area.

2 To your point, we are very focused on
3 building affordable housing as quickly as
4 possible with the resources that are
5 available. We understand the importance of
6 this. That's really a fundamental solution
7 in this process, is making sure in the supply
8 and demand issue, that there are actually
9 enough units available to be able to assist
10 people.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Well, there
12 aren't. So what a lot of my colleagues and I
13 think is we need to raise revenue, and a lot
14 of revenue, and we can do that if we tax
15 those that have the means so that we can stop
16 this -- it's humiliating that one of the
17 richest states in the country has so many
18 people without a home. And I think we in the
19 Legislature will look to raise revenue so
20 that we can realize that goal of eliminating
21 homelessness.

22 Thank you for your testimony today.

23 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you.

24 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: I think the

1 Senate -- I believe you have -- we have a few
2 more members now who wish to speak. I
3 believe you have Senators.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: We have Senator
5 Diane Savino.

6 SENATOR SAVINO: Thank you, Senator
7 Krueger.

8 Commissioner, I was away at another
9 meeting and I got back in time. And I want
10 to ask you specifically about COVID
11 protection within -- especially within HRA
12 and then in the income maintenance centers or
13 whatever we call them -- in the job centers.

14 Many of the workers, particularly the
15 members of the Social Service Employees Union
16 Local 371 -- as you know, I have a fondness
17 in my heart for them -- they've had some
18 difficulties with HRA because there's been no
19 requirement for clients who are showing up to
20 comply with mask requirements and/or
21 screening. When they've had discussions with
22 HRA, the city says that they cannot require
23 clients to do that because your agency
24 particularly, OTDA, will not enforce that

1 mask requirement or screening requirement.

2 So I'm asking you, what are you -- you
3 can't go into a restaurant in New York City
4 without a mask. You can't ride the subway
5 without facing mask requirements. There's a
6 whole host of reasons. The president
7 himself, on Day One, signed a mask executive
8 order.

9 So what can we do to require clients
10 who are seeking services in the job centers
11 to be compliant with mask and/or screening
12 requirements so that we can reduce, you know,
13 opportunistic infections among people who are
14 seeking services, and protect the workforce?

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Your point is
16 well-taken. But I want to make sure we're
17 clear about something. There is no question
18 that they have the ability to be able to
19 enforce a mask mandate in that situation.

20 SENATOR SAVINO: They said they can't.
21 They say you won't allow them to.

22 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Well, I think
23 that we can clarify that very quickly.

24 So there is no question that they have

1 the ability to enforce a mask mandate. What
2 they do not have the ability to do is deny
3 services. So to be able to identify new
4 pathways to serve individuals, and use
5 alternative means, that's fine. But there's
6 no question that they can enforce a mask
7 mandate.

8 SENATOR SAVINO: So in the interests
9 of time, perhaps offline we can have this
10 discussion --

11 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Absolutely.

12 SENATOR SAVINO: -- and we can help
13 HRA develop that offline way to provide the
14 services.

15 But what their response has been is if
16 someone comes into the center, refuses to
17 comply, they require their staff to provide
18 the services, whether they have a mask or
19 not, whether they will be -- submit
20 themselves to a temperature test. They don't
21 care. They say they can't do anything, that
22 OTDA will not allow them to refuse services
23 under any circumstance.

24 So I think this is a further

1 conversation, because this has been going on
2 for months now. And quite honestly, it's not
3 acceptable.

4 So I look forward to that discussion
5 with you offline. Thank you.

6 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: -- Senator.

7 SENATOR SAVINO: Good seeing you
8 again.

9 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: You as well.

10 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to our
11 chair of Veterans Affairs, Didi Barrett, for
12 five minutes if needed.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: I'll try to
14 talk fast.

15 Thank you, Commissioner. Nice to see
16 you.

17 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: You as well.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: The Hudson
19 Valley rocks, right?

20 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: No question
21 about it.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: I just wanted
23 to -- and I also have been in and out a
24 little bit, so I don't -- I apologize if I'm

1 asking something you've already talked about.
2 But I chair the committee, as you heard, of
3 Veterans Affairs, and want to talk about the
4 Homeless Veterans money and how that has been
5 working out. Has it been spent? Is there
6 progress? Is there a program?

7 I know many of those are single moms,
8 the homeless veterans. Do we have outreach
9 that we've been able to do to them? So I've
10 got a few questions, but if you could just
11 sort of start with that, you know, and then
12 we can kind of go from there, please.

13 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure. Five
14 million of the dollars that were allocated
15 specifically to veterans, that \$5 million was
16 allocated through HHAP, it was awarded to be
17 able to build housing for veterans
18 specifically within the process. The answer
19 is there's \$5 million that has been awarded
20 specifically --

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: And are there
22 programs to spend it? Is there a plan to use
23 that, and if so, what is it?

24 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Since it has

1 been allocated to different programs --
2 excuse me, to specific projects, those
3 projects are now entering one of the phases
4 on its way to completion.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: So are they
6 going to existing veterans service
7 organizations or existing housing, or are
8 they going to municipalities? How is that
9 money being allocated?

10 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I'll find out
11 exactly who the allocations went to and I'll
12 give you the list.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Okay, that
14 would be helpful.

15 I know in Columbia County we have an
16 extraordinary head of the Veterans Program
17 here who is committed to not a single veteran
18 ever spending a night homeless. And he's
19 done a great job. I mean, we are a small
20 county, but he's done an amazing job.

21 And one of the programs that he had
22 said he is a big fan of is right over the
23 border in Pittsfield. And I'm wondering if
24 that's something that you have looked at or

1 have you worked -- do you work with the
2 Division of Veterans Affairs? There are so
3 many silos here, you know, I'm never quite
4 sure how, you know, we get to where we want
5 to be with this kind of money.

6 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure. We
7 definitely do work with others. I'm not
8 familiar with the Pittsfield model. As you
9 know, this is an area that's near and dear to
10 my heart. When I was a former county
11 executive, we built transitional housing for
12 homeless veterans and ended homelessness
13 among the veterans population in my county.
14 So again, it's something that's near and dear
15 to my heart.

16 I will look into the Pittsfield model
17 to see if there's something there. Again, we
18 don't care where the lessons are learned. We
19 want to make sure that people are served.
20 And if it means we can help more homeless
21 veterans, we want to be able to do that.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Okay. Well,
23 thank you. I would look forward to working
24 with you on that and would love if you could

1 loop back offline --

2 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Sure.

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: -- and share
4 what you're learning with us.

5 I will cede the rest of my time.
6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. And
8 I believe our last Assemblymember on --
9 actually, the last questioner, Assemblyman
10 Mamdani, for three minutes.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN MAMDANI: Thank you so
12 much, Chairwoman Helene.

13 Hello, Commissioner. It's nice to
14 meet you.

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: How are you
16 doing? Nice to meet you as well.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN MAMDANI: My name is
18 Zohran Kwame Mamdani. I'm an Assemblymember
19 from Astoria, in Northwest Queens.

20 So I'm going to follow up a little bit
21 on the line of questioning from my colleagues
22 Phara Souffrant Forrest and Marcela Mitaynes.
23 And so what I wanted to speak about is rent,
24 tenants and small landlords, and ask you a

1 question along those lines.

2 So according to national census data,
3 tenants across our state owe about \$2.2
4 billion in back rent. And this is also a
5 racial justice issue, as 48 percent of Latinx
6 renters and 40 percent of Black renters owe
7 rent, versus a smaller portion of just 20
8 percent of white renters.

9 The state does not have enough money
10 in the budget to meet this need.
11 Furthermore, tenants and landlords who are
12 not eligible for federal rent aid could be
13 helped with state investment, however. And
14 so I wanted to ask you a yes-or-no
15 question -- given that I have just three
16 minutes, I'll try and frame it very
17 quickly -- which is, will you advocate that
18 additional money from the state, at least
19 \$2.2 billion, is included in the state budget
20 for a small landlord hardship fund in order
21 to clear New Yorkers' back rent?

22 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: I want to be
23 really clear about this. The \$1.3 billion,
24 as you said, we do not see that it's likely

1 to be complete in its being able to address
2 the entirety of this issue.

3 That said, there is looming federal
4 legislation that we hope will pass as soon as
5 possible that will provide additional money
6 into this pool of \$1.3 billion that can be
7 very meaningful in being able to address the
8 totality of the problem in the State of
9 New York. So that's something that, again,
10 we are optimistic on.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN MAMDANI: So would you --
12 would you advocate -- I understand that there
13 is the possibility of federal assistance.
14 But given that the state can also take action
15 -- and my colleague Linda Rosenthal spoke
16 about the potential for raising revenue here
17 in New York State, something I fundamentally
18 support -- would you support the increase of
19 that amount to 2.2 billion from state-fueled
20 financial support?

21 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you,
22 Assemblymember. And I appreciate the
23 question. But it really is fundamentally a
24 question about supporting or not supporting

1 pending legislation or potential legislation.
2 And so it's really not a position that as a
3 commissioner of an agency that I would take.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN MAMDANI: Okay. Well,
5 thank you very much. I appreciate the
6 answer.

7 I will cede my 41 seconds --
8 {inaudible}.

9 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thirty-eight
10 seconds. Thank you, Zohran.

11 Thank you, Commissioner. I believe
12 that we have no more questions for you. So
13 we thank you for participating and look
14 forward to --

15 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you so
16 much.

17 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: -- having
18 continued discussions about the rental
19 assistance program, which is very near and
20 dear to so many of us.

21 OTDA COMMISSIONER HEIN: Thank you so
22 much. You're welcome.

23 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So now we move
24 to New York State Office for the Aging, Greg

1 Olsen, acting director.

2 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank
3 you, Chairman Weinstein. Can you hear me
4 okay?

5 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes, we're all
6 set.

7 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Okay,
8 outstanding. Well, it's great to be with all
9 of you. I always look forward to spending
10 this time, and I hope all of your families
11 are healthy and well.

12 So again, good afternoon. My name is
13 Greg Olsen. I'm the acting director of the
14 New York State Office for the Aging.

15 Chairpersons Krueger, Weinstein, May
16 and Kim, and all the distinguished members of
17 the Senate and Assembly standing committees,
18 again, happy to be here. Congratulations to
19 Assemblyman Kim for being the new chair of
20 the Assembly Standing Committee on Aging.

21 I'm honored, really, to testify on the
22 portions of Governor Cuomo's proposed budget
23 that affect older New Yorkers, as well as to
24 share the incredible work that the network of

1 aging services providers do as they respond
2 to the pandemic.

3 Governor Cuomo and his
4 administration's commitment to older
5 New Yorkers is unprecedented, and New York is
6 viewed as the trailblazer nationally for the
7 work that we're doing to support older adults
8 and their families generally, and through the
9 pandemic. Our approach is so much broader
10 than one agency -- it is about making New
11 York the healthiest state in the nation
12 through a multi-agency coordinated effort
13 focused on improving physical and behavioral
14 health, implementing preventive health
15 strategies, embedding healthy aging and
16 livability principles into general government
17 operations, implementing age-friendly
18 communities and age-friendly health systems,
19 expanding access to services and training for
20 older LGBTQ individuals, supporting informal
21 caregivers and working caregivers, and much,
22 much more.

23 Utilizing the state's 2019-'24 Prevention
24 Agenda as the umbrella, and instituting a

1 "Health Across All Policies" approach, all
2 New York State agencies are incorporating
3 health considerations into our planning,
4 programs, and initiatives. We have been
5 charged and are expected to work together to
6 consider how all our policies further our
7 efforts as the first age-friendly state.
8 This approach is having a significant
9 positive impact on New York's older
10 population.

11 Under the Governor's leadership,
12 New York State became the first age-friendly
13 state in the nation in 2018 to receive that
14 award by AARP and the World Health
15 Organization because we rank high in the
16 eight domains of age-friendly, livable
17 communities, and because we are implementing
18 a comprehensive plan to systematically build
19 age-friendly and smart-growth principles into
20 how government operates and functions. We
21 are truly leading the nation in our
22 collaborative and thoughtful approach.

23 The FY '22 Executive Budget continues
24 its ongoing commitment to older New Yorkers.

1 It includes continuing the historic \$15
2 million investment contained in the past two
3 years' enacted budget for older New Yorkers
4 across the state who are awaiting services.
5 It continues the \$2.3 million increase to
6 Community Services for the Elderly that was
7 contained in last year's enacted budget. It
8 continues support for the NY Connects systems
9 reforms by providing \$27.2 million for
10 statewide operation of these reforms to more
11 easily access long-term-care services and
12 supports. It continues the \$4 million
13 increase to NORCs and NNORC programs that was
14 contained in last year's enacted budget. It
15 maintains the \$500,000 match that's used to
16 draw down \$2 million in federal funds to
17 combat elder abuse and financial
18 exploitation. And it maintains all core
19 funding at last year's level.

20 On the pandemic front, NYSOFA received
21 more than \$73 million directly in stimulus
22 funding that we distributed to all counties
23 to support the delivery of services that
24 would meet a variety of needs during the

1 pandemic. In addition to the more than
2 20 core services that the network provides on
3 a daily basis throughout New York State, the
4 key areas of focus for the network during
5 this pandemic included home-delivered meals;
6 shopping and supply delivery; prescription
7 drug delivery; critical transportation to
8 dialysis and cancer treatments, for example;
9 combating social isolation; and elder abuse
10 mitigation and scam prevention.

11 Under the Governor's direction,
12 executive orders that were issued provided
13 NYSOFA with the flexibility to offer maximum
14 flexibility to the counties and
15 community-based providers to make available
16 services in the most flexible way possible,
17 so that bureaucracy and rules that don't make
18 sense when you're responding to a pandemic
19 were not barriers to service.

20 The Governor included our direct-care
21 staff as essential workers to be able to
22 deliver basic needs services. We secured and
23 distributed more than 1.8 million masks,
24 delivered them to older adults 75 and older,

1 and their families, those at risk of getting
2 COVID and spreading it. We delivered more
3 than 3,200 cases of hand sanitizer to older
4 adults in their homes and their caregivers,
5 and to direct service providers.

6 On a national level, our advocacy
7 efforts assisted in securing almost
8 \$1 billion in stimulus funds to support older
9 adults; ensuring a \$50 million carve-out in
10 HUD stimulus funding to support services in
11 HUD buildings for older adults; and getting
12 counties emergency meals by utilizing our
13 procurement process.

14 Other highlights include working with
15 businesses such as Sysco to deliver millions
16 of meals to older adults, working with
17 Enterprise Rent-A-Car to offer low-cost or
18 no-cost rentals for transportation and food
19 delivery, and PureHappiness Farms out of
20 Cayuga County to deliver more than 2,000
21 cases of their nutritious Cowfee drink to
22 older adults across the state.

23 COVID-19 also strengthened existing
24 partnerships with state agencies, working

1 even more closely to meet needs, such as
2 Agriculture & Markets to access food, the
3 Department of Labor to connect working
4 caregivers to local supports, the Department
5 of Health on all things COVID-related, and
6 the Office of Mental Health in combating
7 social isolation and addressing COVID-related
8 issues such as anxiety and depression.

9 NYSOFA also developed and implemented
10 many pilots and projects to assist older
11 adults during this pandemic. These
12 initiatives led the nation in combating
13 social isolation, which includes our
14 award-winning Animatronic Pets project.
15 Partnership with several tech platforms are
16 bringing virtual programming to homes,
17 including the virtual senior center and other
18 platforms to maintain health and wellness and
19 connectivity.

20 NYSOFA has been working with Go Go
21 Grandparent out of California to increase
22 transportation options and economic
23 opportunities for older adults.

24 NYSOFA is launching a multicounty

1 pilot that includes an evidence-based
2 intervention that uses complex analytics to
3 identify caregiver burnout, which is a
4 leading cause of placing an older adult in a
5 higher level of care.

6 NYSOFA has partnered with the New York
7 State Council on the Arts to bring arts
8 programming into the homes of older adults.

9 A project has also been launched in
10 partnership with the Developmental
11 Disabilities Planning Council to better equip
12 and train the aging network to work with
13 older adults caring for younger individuals
14 with intellectual and developmental
15 disabilities.

16 NYSOFA is working with the Division of
17 Homeland Security and Emergency Services to
18 bring FEMA resources to the state to continue
19 to meet the nutritional needs of older
20 adults.

21 We have added to our comprehensive
22 assessment tool a screen for social isolation
23 and a screen for technology capacity and
24 ability.

1 We have partnered with the Department
2 of Health and HANYS to better integrate
3 clinical and community-based care to improve
4 outcomes for older adults under the
5 Age-Friendly Health System priority.

6 Changes to our business model have
7 been made that allow the aging network to
8 provide services differently in order to slow
9 the spread of the virus while meeting the
10 needs of older adults, and will continue to
11 be nimble as a network and advance
12 enhancements to improve services to meet
13 expanding demand.

14 The '22 Executive Budget proposal will
15 continue to help hundreds of thousands of
16 older New Yorkers maintain their
17 independence, support the loved ones who care
18 for them, reduce future Medicaid costs, and
19 further demonstrate why New York is the
20 first-age friendly state in the nation.

21 We will continue to engage state
22 agencies as we always do, private partners,
23 not-for-profits, and other community-based
24 organizations to serve New York's older

1 population as effectively as possible.

2 And before I conclude, I just want to
3 publicly thank all of the staff at the State
4 Office for the Aging for the amazing work
5 they have done, are doing, and will continue
6 to do, and the network of 59 area agencies on
7 aging, their 1200 community-based
8 organizations, and the Association on Aging
9 in New York that represents them, because I
10 couldn't be more proud to be a part of this
11 network and the response to try to meet the
12 unique and diverse needs of older adults in
13 this state.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you,
15 Greg.

16 We're going to go to Assemblyman Ron
17 Kim, our new chair of the Aging Committee,
18 10 minutes on the clock. You're on.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you,
20 Chairwoman Weinstein, Chairwoman Krueger, and
21 our Dr. Rachel May, on the Senate side, for
22 your partnership and all your expertise in
23 this space. And let me begin by also
24 thanking the former chair, Harry Bronson, for

1 his tremendous work.

2 Greg, Director Olsen, it's good to see
3 you again, and thank you for your testimony
4 today.

5 So let's start off with the hot-button
6 stuff that everyone is talking and thinking
7 about, the nursing homes.

8 (Off camera) I'm sorry, can you stop?
9 Sorry, can you stop? Ana, stop, please.
10 Okay, you can go. Thank you. Sorry. I'm
11 co-teaching first grade, sorry.

12 Yes, nursing homes. You know,
13 Director Olsen, as you know better than most,
14 the best way to keep our older adults healthy
15 is to provide them care and support at their
16 homes and in their communities. The
17 economic, physical and mental health outcomes
18 from investing in programs that you oversee
19 at the Office for the Aging, like home food
20 delivery programs, social day cares, are far
21 better in terms of leading to positive
22 outcomes than sending our elderly into
23 long-term facilities. And obviously there
24 are clear overlapping services between the

1 State Office for Aging and other state
2 agencies like OTDA and the Department of
3 Health.

4 So my first set of questions are like
5 how integrated are the systems between the
6 agencies that serve the same older adults,
7 who might be just in that space contemplating
8 where they should -- do they need more home
9 care or they should be going to nursing home
10 care -- like in other words, Director Olsen,
11 do you share the same data set across
12 agencies to make better -- to help make
13 better and informed decisions by serving,
14 advising, and directing older adults?

15 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I think
16 that's a great question, and there's a lot to
17 unpack there. So, you know, in New York
18 State -- and other states, but I'll obviously
19 only speak to New York -- we have a continuum
20 where, you know, you can get a variety of
21 very light types of supports -- that could be
22 information and assistance at the front
23 end -- all the way to skilled care at the
24 back end.

1 And I think one of the great things
2 about, you know, New York and the network
3 that we oversee in our partnerships with
4 folks like the Health Department and others,
5 is to try to provide that information and the
6 supports that you can provide earlier in the
7 community, so that you are maintaining
8 independence or even improving, so that you
9 don't decline to a point where you might need
10 to go to assisted living or to an adult home
11 or a nursing home.

12 You know, those decisions are
13 difficult, they're family decisions, and
14 there's a variety of factors that would lead
15 one, for example, to be frail and cared for
16 in the community, of which we care for, you
17 know, over 75,000 people that have multiple
18 functional limitations, four or more chronic
19 conditions, are low-income, with our support
20 services, versus somebody who may not be able
21 to maintain themselves.

22 So one of the things I think that our
23 network does extremely well is we are
24 organized to be community-based, to leverage

1 other, you know, organizations, including
2 local governments across the spectrum. We
3 really believe in person-centered care,
4 asking people what matters, assessing
5 strengths -- not just weaknesses, but what
6 can you do, what might you need, how early
7 can we provide it, so that we can delay not
8 only nursing home placement and Medicaid
9 spend-down, but you want to, you know, try to
10 assist in people reducing their ER visits and
11 hospitalizations, making sure they're going
12 to their doctors regularly and the dentist
13 regularly. And we assess for all of those
14 types of things so that we can intervene
15 earlier and help people maintain their
16 independence.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you, Director.
18 I want to transition over to talking about
19 ageism. And this is something that you had
20 brought up and have been focusing on as
21 director, to counter the rise of ageism in
22 our state and our country.

23 You know, as you know, the term was
24 coined back in the 1960s. But unlike sexism

1 or racism, you know, there haven't been any
2 institutional efforts to confront it in our
3 schools, media, or pop culture, you know.
4 And in fact, we actually went the other way
5 and commercialize ageism by profiting off
6 youth, youth-centric commercials and brands,
7 while our society de-glorifies and even puts
8 down people getting old.

9 And I feel like during this pandemic
10 we've all been kind of blindsided by ageism,
11 and I believe our, you know, cut-throat,
12 winner-take-all economy treats midlife, aging
13 communities the worst. You're either a
14 glorified wealthy or powerful older figure
15 or, if you're poor -- and if you're a poor
16 older adult, you know, you're a burden to
17 society and often referred to as demented or
18 unproductive and all the other nasty words
19 that are attached to the older population.

20 We know that during recessions, ageism
21 takes center place in causing the most number
22 of suicides among midlife men, who have to
23 deal with these sentiments and they have to
24 wake up one day -- and they wake up one day

1 feeling like they're better off to their
2 families and communities if they're no longer
3 around.

4 But honestly, Mr. Olsen, I feel like
5 we slept-walked into a post-ageist society
6 without recognizing how terrible we view and
7 treat the aging communities and older adults.

8 So I believe one immediate way to
9 reverse this cultural apathy toward the aging
10 is to give voice to older adults who have
11 been mistreated and ignored. And what better
12 way to honor their lives than to set up some
13 sort of a compensation memorial fund for all
14 those who passed from COVID at long-term
15 facilities and other sites. Would you be
16 willing, Mr. Olsen, to work with us in
17 exploring these ideas to combat ageism and
18 just -- if you don't mind, just sharing a
19 couple of things that you've been doing as an
20 agency to combat ageism as well.

21 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I
22 really appreciate the question, because I
23 think you are absolutely on to something.
24 And this is a -- this is one of the things

1 we've lived with hundreds of years. We're a
2 young-focused, anti-ageist society. People
3 don't want to grow old. We don't talk about
4 death and dying, which is as normal as being
5 born, and people don't plan for it. And part
6 of that is because of the, you know, painting
7 with a broad brush of an older population
8 that they're takers, they don't have anything
9 to contribute -- and that just simply isn't
10 the case.

11 So, you know, to your question, what
12 have we been doing, we've been spending the
13 last decade aggregating data to show that
14 that is far from the case. So, you know, I
15 don't want to be over-statistically heavy
16 here, but I think it's really important. And
17 what you are talking about is extremely
18 important.

19 You know, we know that 83 percent of
20 all the wealth in the nation is held by
21 people over the age of 50. They support
22 90 million jobs, 42 percent of federal, state
23 and local tax revenue. They are the
24 number-one givers to philanthropy. They're

1 the number-one volunteer bloc. They're the
2 number-one entrepreneur group. And, you
3 know, if you're going around in the Catskills
4 or the Adirondacks or you're shopping
5 somewhere, those are the folks who you'll see
6 every day.

7 We have a million volunteers over the
8 age of 55 in New York State that contribute
9 half a billion hours a year at an economic
10 value of \$13.8 billion, and they represent
11 across the board pretty much 65 percent of
12 all the household-generated.

13 So the point just being is to the
14 point that you're making, you know, for
15 organizations that I work with, but across
16 the spectrum, whether you're working at the
17 Boys & Girls Club or you're mentoring young
18 kids or you're delivering home-delivered
19 meals or you're helping with reading, older
20 adults are the ones who are the primary
21 volunteers. And so creating the value of
22 what they really are is important.

23 Now, that doesn't mean that there
24 isn't a bloc of folks that need a variety of

1 assistance, and that's what we do. And
2 that's what we do collectively. That's what
3 we should do, and that's what we should focus
4 our attention on.

5 But to your point, to say that, you
6 know, they are not valued I just think is
7 wrong, and the data doesn't bear that out at
8 all.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Just a couple of
10 quick questions before we wrap up.
11 Mr. Olsen, do you know the approximate full
12 cost of a full-time resident in a nursing
13 home?

14 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I think
15 the state average is about \$137,000.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Wow.

17 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: So it's
18 different by region.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: I thought the
20 national average was around 80,000 to 90,000.
21 But the state average is around 130,000,
22 okay.

23 Do you know the approximate cost of an
24 elderly person receiving care and support at

1 home -- you know, Meals on Wheels and other
2 programs that you oversee?

3 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes, so
4 our typical client is, you know, an
5 83-year-old female, low-income, four or more
6 chronic conditions, fairly high, you know,
7 daily needs -- bathing, dressing, shopping,
8 things of that nature.

9 We do not require four to start our
10 services, hence the continuum I talked about.
11 We're able to intervene a little bit earlier
12 and don't require residents -- or a
13 physician's note to turn on services. But we
14 can typically keep somebody at home for about
15 \$7,000 a year.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Right. Thank you so
17 much. I'll come back for a second round
18 later. Thank you, Mr. Olsen.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. Thank
20 you very much.

21 Our next is Chair Rachel May.

22 SENATOR MAY: Yes, thank you, Chair
23 Krueger. And hi, Greg, it's great to see
24 you.

1 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Hi,
2 Senator, how are you?

3 SENATOR MAY: I'm great, thanks.

4 I wanted to follow up on a couple of
5 things that you talked about. I want you to
6 know that I really appreciate the work that
7 you do to try to cost out what it costs to do
8 this up-front work that Chairman Kim was
9 talking about, as opposed to paying the big
10 expenses after the fact of people having to
11 go into nursing homes because the care isn't
12 available for them to stay in their homes.

13 So two years ago the budget included
14 \$15 million for getting people off of the
15 EISEP waiting list, and estimated I think, if
16 I recall right, that that saved about
17 \$40 million in the budget, by keeping some
18 portion of those people out of nursing homes.

19 Have you done that same comparison
20 this year? I know the 15 million is there
21 again. Is there a paired savings for that?

22 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: So it's
23 a great question. And again, there's a
24 differentiation between a nursing home client

1 and ours. I think people, if they're absent
2 the services that we're providing, wind up
3 getting to a -- you know, they get worse
4 because they're not receiving services. And
5 so, you know, what you get in a nursing home
6 is skilled care, required by a doctor, and
7 we're able to provide non-clinical supports
8 just prior to, you know, having unfortunately
9 to make those tough decisions.

10 But to your point, you know, we're
11 just about at the end of our second year
12 where, you know, what my goal was to do an
13 analysis on where we landed after the two
14 years, for a couple of reasons. First, to
15 see, you know, if there is any unmet need to
16 the counties that were receiving dollars --
17 we had a couple that didn't report them, as
18 you'll remember, back when those dollars were
19 first in our Executive Budget -- to see if
20 the folks who received the services are still
21 on the caseloads. That would help get to
22 some of that outcomes data.

23 But as you know, you know, it's a
24 point in time and it's very -- it's a moving

1 target, because some of the folks that I just
2 mentioned -- I mean, when you're 83 and you
3 have these very high needs, you know, it's
4 not uncommon for people to die receiving
5 services. And, you know, I've got to be
6 honest, to me that is a successful outcome.
7 That's how I want to die -- at my home,
8 surrounded by my family, hopefully managing
9 my pain, with these types of services that we
10 provide.

11 But we are going to do an analysis
12 after the two years of full implementation so
13 that we can see, you know, if you turned on a
14 particular service for Mr. Smith in August of
15 2019, is he still on the program? We are
16 able to determine how long people stay on our
17 programs, and outside of short-term -- you
18 know, about 25 percent of them stay on a
19 program just because they have an immediate
20 need for maybe, you know, a home-delivered
21 meal or what have you.

22 But many are able to remain on the
23 program between three and six years,
24 depending on, you know, what their conditions

1 are. So that's an analysis we absolutely
2 will do, because those outcomes are critical
3 to understand.

4 SENATOR MAY: Okay, great. Yeah,
5 thanks.

6 So the advocates are saying that
7 15 million isn't going to come close to
8 getting people off the waiting list this
9 year. Has the waiting list gotten longer?
10 And what do you think is an appropriate
11 amount to get them off?

12 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes, I
13 don't know the exact amount. I've seen
14 what's been reported by the counties to the
15 association. It's complicated, in that there
16 of course has been additional need.

17 I think, you know, the previous two
18 commissioners, you know, had talked about the
19 same type of thing. I mean, we're in the
20 middle of a pandemic, it has very heavily
21 impacted our population, we have the
22 strongest stay-at-home guidance that Governor
23 Cuomo put forth in Matilda's Law. So we did
24 see a really large increase, particularly in

1 meals, and in the beginning with supply
2 delivery, transportation, things of that
3 nature.

4 But we've also received a direct
5 infusion of cash into the agency from the
6 stimulus that went out to the counties to
7 address those. We're expecting another
8 \$9.3 million in the coming weeks. We were
9 notified of that from the stimulus that just
10 passed. And then of course, you know, the
11 President's new stimulus plan will bring
12 hundreds of millions of more dollars in.

13 So, you know, that's something that we
14 are looking to -- the lists that I saw were
15 as of October 2020, and that was like three
16 months ago. So those are always a moving
17 target. There's absolutely some need out
18 there.

19 And again, Senator, you know how this
20 network works. Not having access to a
21 particular service does not mean that there
22 aren't other things that we can do, like
23 connecting to veterans, because we assess for
24 veteran status. You know, trying to get

1 additional SNAP benefits or HEAP benefits or
2 putting other types of community programs
3 around folks if you're not able to access an
4 aide, for example. So it's never the end of
5 the story. We just, you know, try to do the
6 best we can with what we have.

7 And one of the things -- again, not to
8 take all your time, but one of the things
9 that's really important at this time is the
10 Older Americans Act Modernization program
11 that I'm putting forth and has had some
12 interest with our U.S. Senators.

13 And the reason being is no different
14 than what the Governor has talked about,
15 about giving -- New York State being the
16 biggest giver to the federal government and
17 the least amount coming back. That's how we
18 are. We get -- of our total budgets,
19 federal, state and local, 15 percent of what
20 we do as a job comes from the federal
21 government. And what that means is the
22 Governor, all of you in this body, and the
23 counties, every single year increase
24 resources to try to meet these needs.

1 It is long past time that we not only,
2 you know, fix the antiquated nature of the
3 Older Americans Act, but get the investments
4 that we are due with the population growing
5 and all the new things that have been added
6 to our portfolio in the last 20 years.

7 SENATOR MAY: Okay, great.

8 All right, I'm going to try to be
9 quick with my remaining questions. One of
10 them is also about the workforce.

11 So I've been hearing that there just
12 aren't enough people to provide the care in
13 the home that people want. And I know
14 you're -- I'm sure you saw the CUNY report
15 that came out yesterday that said if we
16 invest, up front, \$4 billion in paying people
17 more to do home care, the return on that
18 investment would be almost twice that amount.

19 But it's not clear to me how much of
20 that would be internalized to the
21 State Budget and how much of that is more
22 just general benefit to society. So is that
23 something you're looking into, to see if we
24 can actually make a good case in the

1 State Budget for paying home care workers
2 more?

3 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, I
4 would be interested in reading that report.
5 I didn't see it this morning.

6 But, you know, there has been an
7 impact on the home care and personal care
8 industry through COVID. You know, we had a
9 lot of clients who, you know, had other
10 sources to help them -- they were worried
11 about people bringing COVID into their homes.
12 But we've also saw a reduction in the number
13 of personal care aides and home care workers
14 through this pandemic as well, not to mention
15 through our network.

16 You know, as you know, many of the
17 folks that provide services or help deliver
18 and make meals and do a lot of other things,
19 were older themselves. So that is -- the
20 workforce is definitely a challenge, not only
21 within the personal care environment, but
22 also within the overall infrastructure. And
23 again, that is part of the Older Americans
24 Act Modernization Plan that I'm pushing to

1 really professionalize -- I mean, it's
2 already a very professional network. But I
3 don't know how we -- you know, we're in 2020
4 {sic}, and we're living in a 1965 structure
5 that expects us to rely exclusively on
6 volunteers -- who do amazing jobs, but have
7 changed over the last 20 years. That just
8 seems really backwards to me.

9 But I'll take a look --

10 SENATOR MAY: I'm going to interrupt
11 you because I have a couple other questions.

12 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: So
13 sorry.

14 SENATOR MAY: You mentioned in your
15 statement about caregiver burnout as a real
16 problem, and something that drives people
17 into nursing homes because their family can't
18 keep taking care of them. And yet the budget
19 includes a reduction in respite care funding,
20 which would help people who are giving care
21 to get, you know, time off or hire, you know,
22 other people to do the work.

23 Why would there be that reduction in
24 respite care funding in the budget?

1 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: There's
2 no reduction in respite care in our budget.
3 I'm not sure which -- what that you're
4 necessarily referring to.

5 You know, we have over 76,000
6 caregiving and respite providers in New York
7 State that you can access, anybody in the
8 state can access in our NY Connects database.

9 One of the most important projects we
10 are launching is our partnership with the
11 Department of Labor, because what caregivers
12 don't usually do is self-identify. We have
13 many people who are working caregivers, and
14 working with businesses and our HR
15 departments to help self-identify and to link
16 folks with those resources is absolutely
17 critical.

18 We're also piloting a project out of
19 Washington called TCARE, which does exactly
20 that, as I referenced earlier in my
21 testimony, using expanded analytics to really
22 prevent the type of burnout, which then leads
23 to, you know, people just saying I just can't
24 do this anymore.

1 So, you know, we are not reducing any
2 of our respite and caregiver programs. We
3 have unlimited flexibility under the federal
4 Disaster Declaration and our state executive
5 order to allow our dollars to be used to
6 provide services that are needed locally
7 based on local decisions.

8 SENATOR MAY: Okay, great. Thanks.
9 I'll have another question for follow-up. I
10 appreciate it.

11 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Sure,
12 Senator. Always a pleasure.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
14 Assembly.

15 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to
16 Assemblyman Jones, three minutes.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Hello.

18 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Hey,
19 Assemblyman, how are you?

20 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Hey, how you
21 doing, Mr. Olsen? How you been? Good to see
22 you again.

23 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Great,
24 yourself?

1 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Good, good.

2 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
3 me as well.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: First of all, I
5 have to, you know, thank you for everything
6 you do, and can't wait to see you back in the
7 North Country soon, when things get
8 normalized here.

9 But there are a couple of questions
10 that I have, but I will put a plug in first.
11 We're talking about our most vulnerable
12 populations in our seniors and, you know,
13 isolation, the social isolation that they're
14 incurring now, especially during this
15 pandemic. We know that these times have been
16 tough on everyone, but more so on our senior
17 populations and our people that have been in
18 their homes for many, many months now.

19 So I will say technology, getting
20 technology to our seniors, having them able
21 to use that technology -- I'm going to put in
22 a plug for a program that's worked very well
23 in my district, Older Adult Technologies,
24 OATS. It's been great. I'd like to see the

1 Governor just put that in the budget, and I'd
2 like to see that go statewide as well,
3 because it has been used so appropriately.
4 There's no better program that I've been able
5 to be a part of in my district; that has
6 worked well. So when we're talking about
7 social isolation, let's look into that.

8 You talked about new money -- and I
9 want you to answer at the end, because I have
10 only a minute and a half left. You said
11 9.3 million or 9.3 billion coming back to --

12 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, I
13 wish it was billion, but it's million.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: It's million.
15 Okay. Okay. Could you tell me -- because
16 I'm a county person, you know me from my
17 county days, I think we utilize our Office of
18 the Aging, our local Offices of the Aging so
19 well. It's just that the county puts up so
20 much money into that. Could you give me a
21 breakdown of federal, state and the local
22 funds that go to our counties?

23 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah.
24 So thank you, Assemblyman, and I look forward

1 to coming back up in your neck of the woods
2 as well.

3 So first on the isolation, and then
4 I'll answer your question. I absolutely
5 agree with you. We have to be very careful
6 that, you know, for those individuals that
7 have technological capacity, that have access
8 to broadband, that we can teach how to use
9 it, technology is going to be a really
10 important solution to help stay connected.
11 But we have to remember there's a lot of
12 people -- and I know you know this in your
13 area -- and a lot of areas around the state
14 that don't have access to that. Or won't be
15 able to use it.

16 And so old-school ways to combat
17 social isolation still need to be, you know,
18 embedded. You probably saw yesterday OATS
19 announced a partnership with AARP, so I am
20 hoping that that's expanded. And we have a
21 variety of other platforms that we're rolling
22 out.

23 But on your question, this goes right
24 into what I was saying before. So, you know,

1 we receive 15 percent of our funding from the
2 feds. The way that it works, as you know, is
3 the federal funds, our state funds and our
4 local funds all kind of work together to
5 provide consistent services. It's not one or
6 the other, they make up the whole.

7 So we get about, you know, \$77 million
8 from the federal government, the Governor and
9 the Legislature, year in and year out, invest
10 about \$160 million in the agency, and then
11 the counties put in \$275 million through
12 local match and overmatch. And the overmatch
13 is I think where we're struggling right now,
14 because of the state and local budget
15 problems that hopefully the next stimulus
16 bill will address, so that those services
17 that are needed are not reduced.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Okay. Thank you.

19 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank
20 you.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

22 Sue Serino, ranker on Aging.

23 Are you there, Sue?

24 SENATOR SERINO: Yup. Hi, Chairwoman,

1 sorry. I'm here. Thank you very much.

2 And thank you, Greg, for being here.

3 Greatly appreciate it.

4 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Sure,

5 Senator. Good to see you.

6 SENATOR SERINO: So as I said, we are
7 really thrilled about the 15 million for the
8 CSE that was included in the Executive's
9 proposal. But given the additional
10 challenges brought out by the pandemic, do
11 you still think that the 15 million
12 commitment will be enough going forward to
13 meet the demand for these critically
14 important services, or do we need to see an
15 increase?

16 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
17 so the 15 million was based on, again, the
18 folks that we brought onto the caseload a
19 couple of years ago. Again, those ebb and
20 flow. So as folks come off, for whatever
21 reason -- there's a variety of reasons --
22 there will be dollars there.

23 We have, as I mentioned, a fairly
24 substantial amount of stimulus money that

1 comes with great flexibility. So, you know,
2 a lot of that has helped to address the
3 increased demand. We have another
4 9.3 million coming. And then, depending on
5 what happens with the federal -- the next
6 round, the 1.9 trillion proposal that
7 President Biden put out, that will be helpful
8 as well.

9 I think what we're trying to assess
10 now is exactly where we are. Because as you
11 know from, you know, your time working with
12 us, they are always point-in-time. But, you
13 know, we have had a demand. It's been sharp.
14 We've had to, you know, utilize other state
15 agencies and county departments. And our
16 AAAs have just been amazing in terms of
17 leveraging those.

18 So I think what will wind up happening
19 is this is the start of the process. You
20 guys will all be involved in your normal
21 budget-making process. I think what we're
22 trying to do is get a handle on where we are
23 as of February 2021, as opposed to the
24 numbers that we received in the fall.

1 But yeah, demand is increasing, and
2 we're doing the best that we can both as a
3 state, county agencies, and our
4 subcontractors, to assist.

5 I'm also, as I mentioned, working with
6 DHSES and DOB to bring FEMA support to the
7 upstate counties, you know, to bridge the
8 gap; if stimulus funding runs out, that we'll
9 be able to provide nutrition services to the
10 65-plus.

11 So I think there's a lot of
12 opportunities that are still unknown yet.

13 SENATOR SERINO: I kind of figured
14 with the increase in the cases too. And last
15 year I thought that -- I asked you if you
16 thought that we had enough ombudsmans
17 operating in the state and whether you
18 thought we needed to do more to incentivize
19 volunteers in this program. But I also asked
20 if your agency would need additional funding
21 to do so.

22 So in light of the pandemic, what
23 would be your assessment of this program
24 today, and should we be making greater

1 investments to bolster the program?

2 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
3 so I think that, you know, there's been some
4 additional stimulus dollars that have come in
5 to support the ombudsman. Again, as I
6 mentioned earlier, some of the volunteers --
7 we've had a decrease in volunteers. That's
8 not unique to LTCOP, that's across the board.
9 Because as you know, Senator, in your work
10 with aging, many of our programs and services
11 rely on volunteers, and many of them are in
12 the at-risk category.

13 Again, I don't mean to keep beating
14 the Older Americans Act Modernization
15 proposal to death, but these are the types of
16 things that really need to be addressed at
17 the federal level. We can't be relying on
18 volunteers to be a core part of our
19 workforce; we need a workforce investment.
20 And the volunteers -- Claudette, her team --
21 have done an amazing job.

22 So we are working with the Health
23 Department and others on a five-point plan.
24 Number one, there was a million dollars that

1 went out to increase technology so that there
2 could be more virtual visits for nursing home
3 residents. You know, publicizing the
4 Long Term Care Ombudsman Program that was
5 still operational even though the model had
6 changed. You know, utilizing additional
7 resources for involuntary discharges to help
8 with the appeals process.

9 And then the two final things I think
10 are directly to your question. We need to
11 expand significantly the volunteer
12 recruitment, and I think we are working
13 towards that and, you know, hopefully
14 bringing in a younger cadre. This isn't
15 something that, you know, college kids
16 couldn't do, that we couldn't think about
17 doing with social work students and others.
18 And developing a Reimagine Workgroup with
19 Health Department and AARP and other
20 stakeholders on the changes that we really
21 need to make to make this program successful,
22 because we only get a million dollars in
23 general support from the federal government,
24 with the expectation we have to run a

1 statewide program that covers 160,000 nursing
2 home beds.

3 SENATOR SERINO: Well, thank you so
4 much for that information, Greg. And I just
5 have one last thing.

6 Do you think that NY Connects could
7 play a role with the vaccine rollout, since
8 it's been, you know, so difficult for the
9 seniors?

10 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah.
11 So it already is. And this is, you know --
12 again, so proud of the network. I mean, we
13 have -- I learned a couple of days ago
14 Schenectady County has 10,000 people on their
15 list.

16 And, you know, the counties are part
17 of the local county government structure, so
18 the Offices for the Aging are involved.
19 They're part of their EOCs, they're taking
20 calls, they're setting up lines, they are
21 helping older adults who, you know, need help
22 because of technology or phone, make
23 appointments, provide transportation. They
24 reached out, they have lists ready so when

1 the vaccines come in, which are in very, very
2 short supply, they can get those in the arms.

3 So NY Connects on the state level, you
4 know, is routing those questions to the local
5 county Offices for the Aging. They're
6 handling them within their organizational
7 infrastructure -- it's a little bit
8 different -- and then folks can call in
9 directly.

10 But many of the counties are
11 developing their own 800 numbers, their own
12 websites; we are capitalizing on the state
13 800 number and website. So there is a
14 comprehensive effort for the population that
15 we oversee to make sure we identify who needs
16 help, how to get them the help, and then when
17 the vaccines come in, get them in the arms.

18 SENATOR SERINO: What can we do to
19 improve that too, Greg? Do you have any
20 ideas for that?

21 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN:
22 Increase the vaccination supply.

23 SENATOR SERINO: Yeah, for sure
24 (laughing). For sure. Well, thank you very

1 much. I appreciate you being here today, and
2 I know my time is running out.

3 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Sure,
4 Senator, thank you.

5 SENATOR SERINO: Thank you.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly?

7 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So -- yes,
8 Director. We have a couple of other
9 Assemblymembers, but I just want to -- I have
10 questions that really just follow up with
11 Senator Serino's comments.

12 Has the -- your office been involved
13 with the Governor's office in looking at how
14 to provide vaccines to people -- seniors who
15 are basically homebound?

16 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah,
17 so the -- certainly this issue has come up.
18 So there's a variety, not only within our
19 agency, of individuals who are not going to
20 be able to go to a bricks-and-mortar. And
21 so, you know, having a mobile strategy
22 certainly needs to be on the table.

23 I do know some counties that have
24 already begun to do things like that. Albany

1 County is one. They posted it the other day
2 that they have a partnership with their EMS,
3 emergency, they're volunteers, to do those
4 types of things.

5 So I think it's getting through -- you
6 know, having the number of vaccines and
7 getting through the priority list. There's
8 seven-plus or -- who was it yesterday said
9 10 million people in this 1a, 1b category.
10 So yeah, definitely, those are things that
11 are being discussed because they -- we have a
12 variety of folks that aren't going to be able
13 to get to their pharmacy or their doctor or
14 some other bricks-and-mortar place to get
15 their vaccine.

16 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: I guess my
17 question is more directed at you, not what
18 particular counties are doing. Are you
19 advocating with the Governor's office to set
20 up such a program, particularly for New York
21 City, where there are so many homebound
22 seniors? So I would -- if you're not, I
23 would urge you to raise this issue with the
24 Governor's office. They have not -- a number

1 of members have raised it, and we have not
2 gotten a plan in place. So I think you're
3 certainly a very strong advocate for that.

4 And at the same time I would urge you,
5 if you're not also urging the Governor's
6 office, to deal with -- you talked about
7 caregivers. So there are many family
8 caregivers, they're taking care of a
9 homebound -- basically a homebound senior.
10 Again, relating to vaccines, many of them do
11 not -- of these family caregivers, are not
12 now eligible under any of the categories to
13 receive a vaccine themselves. However,
14 obviously we would want them to be protected,
15 both for their own health, so they can
16 continue to provide caregiving services, but
17 also to make sure that the person they are
18 caring for doesn't come down with COVID.

19 So I would also ask you to advocate on
20 behalf of all of the volunteer caregivers
21 that save our state millions and millions of
22 dollars of providing services, to find a way
23 for them to become eligible for vaccines so
24 that not only do we protect the homebound

1 senior, but we protect the family member, who
2 may not otherwise be eligible, from receiving
3 COVID.

4 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank
5 you.

6 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

7 Senate, do you have any --

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Hi. You know,
9 Greg, I don't have a question, I have a
10 statement, I guess.

11 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Okay.
12 Great, Senator.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Nice to see you
14 again. And you've been with the state a
15 while now, haven't you? How many years?

16 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: I have.
17 It's kind of crazy, yes.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes. Because I
19 feel like you're one of the ones who is
20 consistent.

21 And Rachel May had paid you a
22 compliment before we got to the hearing
23 today, that you're someone who does his
24 homework and has data and information

1 available. And I think that is crucial,
2 because, you know, we talk about the aging.
3 It's 30 years in people's lives. People are
4 living a lot longer, and so it's a huge
5 percentage of New Yorkers' lives. And we
6 don't put a lot of money, by any measure,
7 into the programs they need. And I think we
8 all need more data to continue to come out
9 from you and the government to remind us of
10 the many, many issues where government can
11 make a difference if we don't forget what a
12 crucial role we can play in people's lives.

13 And it's a hard assignment, Greg,
14 because it's very broad. You know, it's
15 harassment and discrimination in the
16 workforce for people who are remaining in the
17 workforce or hope to -- but in today's world,
18 you know, if they lose their job by the time
19 they're 55, the chances of them getting back
20 in are damn hard. And the workforce does
21 discriminate. And it's people, as you
22 described, you know, in their later years
23 being too frail to be able to take care of
24 themselves.

1 I know for me, the worst thing that
2 ever happens in my office is when it's a
3 Friday and some very elderly frail person
4 shows up -- or, nowadays, calls -- to say,
5 you know, they've maxed out their savings on
6 rent, they went as far as they could, happily
7 there's a moratorium at the moment, but the
8 landlord is evicting them because they don't
9 have the money to stay where they're living.
10 And where do elderly people who are
11 desperately poor go? They end up going into
12 our nursing homes, whether they should be
13 there or not, because of, frankly, a fear
14 that if they went into our homeless shelters,
15 they would just die really quickly.

16 And I just think we don't know enough
17 or we don't understand enough as legislators
18 about what an incredibly broad universe of
19 issues we should be thinking about and coming
20 up with ideas for. And of course I would
21 like the ideas also, thank you. But I just
22 think it's crucial that we all sort of get
23 pushed to remember how big a percentage of
24 New York State falls into the category that

1 you're supposed to be responsible for.

2 And you're just too small and too
3 underfunded an organization to imagine you're
4 doing it all, but you can help educate us
5 about what more we need to do.

6 So that was my little lecture at the
7 moment. Thank you.

8 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes,
9 Senator, and I think, you know, what you're
10 saying is that aging is not one agency. I
11 mean, older people touch every facet of life,
12 and that's kind of the point that you're
13 making, and I agree with you.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

15 I think that is it for the Senate.

16 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay, so then
17 we go to Assemblywoman Rosenthal, chair of
18 our Social Services Committee, five minutes.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Okay, thank
20 you very much.

21 Hello, good to meet you.

22 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: You as
23 well, Assemblywoman. How are you?

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Good, thank

1 you.

2 You know, a lot of my district has
3 seniors, and my grandmother was a big
4 influence in my life, and all of her friends
5 too. So I care particularly about the plight
6 of seniors. And I see that there is such a
7 need for more funding in terms of home care,
8 home delivery of services.

9 Until the Older Americans Act is
10 updated and fortified, what other revenue
11 options are there to raise funds to help this
12 population?

13 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yup, so
14 there's a couple of different things that
15 we're working on. So, again, you're counting
16 Offices for the Aging for -- I don't know if
17 you're one, necessarily, county; I'd have to
18 look at your district. Are you
19 cross-borders?

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: It's the
21 Upper West Side and parts of Hell's Kitchen
22 in Manhattan.

23 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Okay,
24 so you're under DFTA. So, you know, we have

1 a couple of different things that aren't
2 going to reach necessarily the lower income,
3 but may.

4 So, you know, we authorized the
5 ability to create a private-pay model for
6 individuals that can afford these types of
7 services that are in very, very high demand
8 but are low-cost, high-yield. I only raise
9 that because any additional revenue that
10 comes from those goes directly to target
11 individuals who are low-income.

12 I think one of the most promising
13 things that we've been working on in the last
14 couple of years is our business acumen
15 projects. We talk about health-friendly --
16 age-friendly health systems. We're working
17 to address social determinants of health and
18 value-based payments.

19 I think the value of what the counties
20 and the community-based organizations in our
21 office did during this pandemic was a real
22 eye-opener for health systems. And so we've
23 had a lot of conversations with several
24 regarding what it is we do, how we go about

1 doing it, the costs for what we do, and how
2 that's beneficial to them.

3 So I believe that's going to lead to
4 some very positive contractual relationships
5 that will expand significantly the service
6 provision and be able to, you know, serve a
7 lot more people.

8 The Health Department doesn't get
9 enough credit for the amount of things that
10 they fund. So back to Senator Krueger's
11 point, this isn't just about aging. But, you
12 know, on caregiving and respite services and
13 supports alone, they put \$25 million in a
14 year. So I think that there's things like
15 that.

16 But, you know, the bottom line is that
17 we are very, very heavily underfunded on the
18 federal side, and I'm making that my priority
19 this year, in addition to everything else we
20 do, to get that type of attention, because
21 the timing is right.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: You know,
23 much like Senator Krueger, when we were in
24 the office every Friday, that was the time

1 when seniors came feeling most desperate.
2 And I have seniors who don't even have a
3 phone, so they have to use my phone in the
4 office. And I think so many are not
5 connected with programs that could possibly
6 assist them. So that's one thing.

7 But I also know there's great
8 loneliness for seniors.

9 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: And
11 particularly now during COVID, when you can't
12 go to the senior center and you can't get
13 lunch with your friends at the senior center.

14 You know, are there new programs that
15 maybe you, in conjunction with other
16 departments, are creating so that they could
17 be -- or are you leaving it to the local
18 community organizations? You know, like Zoom
19 talks or phone calls, like that.

20 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes.

21 So all of those things, Assemblywoman, are
22 happening. I can tell you, DFTA has made
23 over 3 million wellness calls since the
24 pandemic started alone. And that's happening

1 all across the state. So yeah, the Zoom
2 calls, the Lunch and Learns, I've done a
3 bunch of those in various counties.

4 We implemented our Animatronic Pet
5 Project, which showed significant reduction
6 in social isolation after a year.

7 We are bringing virtual platforms
8 like, out of New York City, Selfhelp's
9 Virtual Senior Center. GetSetUp is a
10 California company we're working with where
11 we're launching to bring those tech solutions
12 into the home.

13 But as I mentioned earlier and you
14 said so eloquently, there are people that
15 don't have -- they can't afford the
16 equipment, don't know how to use it, possibly
17 can't be trained, don't have access to
18 broadband. So those personal, you know,
19 calls or emails or things of that nature,
20 those have ramped up significantly. And I
21 think what our network does so well is to
22 prioritize who really needs those and who
23 doesn't.

24 You know, if you had a caregiver who

1 was able to work from home during this
2 pandemic, they were maybe able to spend a
3 little bit more time with their loved one.
4 But there are people who live alone that
5 don't have anybody and can't go to the
6 center, as you're talking about. Or not
7 going to social adult day anymore.

8 So yeah, all of those types of things
9 have been ramped up exponentially. And then
10 of course -- and I don't mean to take all
11 your time -- Office of Mental Health put out
12 that 800 number, they had over 7,500
13 volunteers to take those calls. Those things
14 are still happening.

15 So there's a multi-agency,
16 multi-network approach to really try to
17 combat isolation, because we're going to be
18 in this, unfortunately, probably for another
19 nine to 10 months.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: One last
21 thing. You know, please feel free to call on
22 any of us to help you in D.C. to push for
23 that. I know the Aging chair is anxious to
24 get that done as well. Thank you.

1 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, I
2 will definitely take you all up on that,
3 because you all have those connections.

4 And this is the time. I've been doing
5 this 29 years, and we've never had an
6 opportunity like we do right now. And it's
7 time to get out of 1965 and get into the
8 21st century. So thank you so much.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Thank you.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

11 Senator Rachel May for her second
12 round for five minutes, as chair.

13 SENATOR MAY: Thank you very much.

14 Yeah, so first of all I want to say I
15 hope you're going to enlist us in helping
16 with doing the advocacy with the federal
17 government to make those changes that you're
18 talking about, because I think -- I agree
19 with you, they're really important.

20 I didn't get a chance to ask about the
21 ombudsman program. I know Senator Serino
22 asked, but -- and we just passed through the
23 Aging Committee this morning my bill to beef
24 up the ombudsman program. But I know it's a

1 federally mandated program. Do we get
2 federal funds for it? And were there any
3 additional funds in the pandemic context for
4 that?

5 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: So we
6 do get federal funds, a little over a million
7 dollars. We get some state funds, we get
8 some funds from the Health Department. And
9 then we use some of our internal funds to
10 supplement. We got a million dollars through
11 the CARES Act to add to that, and some of
12 those dollars are being targeted for
13 recruitment and retention.

14 I think I mentioned to you last year,
15 Senator, we were pilot-testing a stipend for
16 LTCOP workers and volunteers to see if that
17 had a behavior change in terms of, you know,
18 being able to recruit and retain. And we
19 have really positive outcomes in terms of
20 folks spending more time doing more work,
21 being more invested.

22 So, you know, I think that there's
23 some things that we can learn not only from
24 LTCOP, but the HICAP program and other things

1 of that nature.

2 There was some dollars that came out
3 of the civil monetary fund, a million dollars
4 I mentioned earlier, that we didn't
5 administer but went out to the nursing homes
6 to be able to upgrade and buy technology
7 equipment to better connect folks.

8 So we're around 5.2 million right now;
9 there are CARES Act dollars. The 9.3 million
10 that I mentioned that we're expecting any
11 time was just for nutrition support. There
12 were some additions in the stimulus that just
13 passed a couple of weeks ago that will
14 probably bring some additional resources.
15 And then of course elder justice issues, of
16 which LTCOP is a part of at the national
17 level, I believe we're included in the
18 1.9 trillion stimulus that President Biden
19 has put forth.

20 So I am hopeful that there will be,
21 you know, some stopgap dollars to help us
22 while, you know, everybody's trying to figure
23 out how to address the significant budget
24 deficit, which again I am hopeful will be

1 helped out through the Biden plan.

2 SENATOR MAY: Okay, great.

3 And then just to come back, I asked
4 about respite care before, and you said there
5 were no cuts. But the way the budget works,
6 as you know, the Executive Budget cuts out
7 things that were added by the Legislature the
8 year before, and then it's up to us to have
9 to add them back. And respite care is one of
10 those.

11 Elder abuse, the elder abuse work that
12 Lifespan does, you know, it's up to the
13 Legislature to add that back in, and we may
14 have to, you know, cull something else out in
15 order to do that.

16 This dance that we do year after year
17 I think is so disingenuous and so
18 hypocritical. And when, you know, the
19 leaders of executive agencies come up and
20 brag about how much work we're doing on elder
21 abuse and then, you know, cut things out of
22 the budget that we have to add back in,
23 it's -- it's very frustrating. And it's hard
24 to do the right kind of messaging about this

1 really things that they would, you know,
2 traditionally, if folks knew about this
3 happening in the home, that would be reported
4 to the long-term-care ombudsman, either paid
5 staff or volunteers, and that would rise to a
6 level where we would immediately refer that
7 to the Health Department, because they would
8 want to know that. I mean, that's to me just
9 outrageous.

10 So, you know, that is the role. I
11 mean, our folks work with the residents, the
12 families, the residents' councils, and the
13 administration and staff of the facilities to
14 try to solve problems. When they rise to a
15 level of a systems issue or a real, real, you
16 know, quality of care issue, they get
17 reported immediately. Because then, you
18 know, that's not what our role is, that --
19 then it goes to that next level.

20 SENATOR MAY: Okay, great. Thank you
21 very much.

22 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Sure.
23 Thanks, Senator.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

1 Thank you, Assembly.

2 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go -- yes,
3 thank you. We go to our Aging chair, Ron
4 Kim, for five minutes, his second round, to
5 finish.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Great. Thank you.

7 I just want to also underscore the
8 importance of what Chairwoman Weinstein has
9 said about the homebound older adults and
10 getting a vaccination plan for them.

11 I represent a district and a region
12 that do not have any vaccination sites, and
13 we have a ton of seniors that are just
14 calling, worried about how do we get the
15 vaccines.

16 We have a group of primary physicians
17 and nonprofits and community groups that have
18 ideas and suggestions on how to get this
19 done, Greg. If we can set up a call with
20 them and follow up, that would be great.

21 I also want to take a moment to
22 address and continue my talk about ageism
23 earlier, and address the ageist language that
24 has recently been coming out of the Executive

1 Office. On January 29, 2020 {sic}, in
2 response to Attorney General Tish
3 James' bombshell report that the state has
4 undercounted nursing home deaths by almost
5 50 percent, Governor Cuomo responded by
6 saying the following: "Look, whether a
7 person died in a hospital or died in a
8 nursing home, it's -- the people died.
9 People died. 'I was in a hospital, I got
10 transferred to a nursing home, and my father
11 died.' 'My father was in a nursing home, got
12 transferred to a hospital, my father died.'
13 People died. But who cares? 33 {percent}.
14 28 {percent}. Died in a hospital. Died in a
15 nursing home. They died."

16 Those are the words of our Executive
17 on that day. By now I think we all
18 understand how language matters when it comes
19 to not just racism and sexism, but also
20 ageism. So moving forward, Director, I
21 believe every commissioner and public officer
22 in the State of New York, including the
23 Governor, should receive mandatory training
24 on ageism and ageist language.

1 So, Director, would you be open to
2 collaborating and working with me in putting
3 together the nation's first public-sector
4 guidelines around anti-ageist culture and
5 language?

6 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: You
7 know, I think that that is important,
8 language does matter. When I first came to
9 this agency, we scrubbed "elderly," "senior
10 citizen" and "senior" from every publication
11 and told folks that they couldn't use those
12 terms -- not because I made them bad, but it
13 elicits a negative response. And we talk
14 about older adults, older individuals.

15 I did not interpret the Governor's
16 statement to be ageist. I interpreted it as
17 somebody who is very frustrated with the
18 pandemic and the toll that it's taken on
19 New Yorkers.

20 And, you know, the fact that people's
21 behaviors in wearing masks and not doing the
22 things that they were supposed to do -- we
23 saw it, you know, again, pictures from
24 Super Bowl yesterday of people partying it up

1 with no masks on and drinking, and how we
2 continue to try to perpetuate this -- the
3 right protocols for people to take, and
4 having spikes that are killing people. So
5 that's how I interpreted that personally.

6 But I would absolutely be willing to
7 work with you on some training guidelines
8 that could be available to all individuals to
9 not only understand the contributions but
10 ageist language and how detrimental that is.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Sure. Thank you,
12 Greg. I mean, I would -- I mean, I think,
13 you know, you have -- you have to, to an
14 extent, defend the Executive. But I think
15 many of us walked away listening to that --
16 the tone and how he delivered it maybe wasn't
17 intentional, but the outcome obviously was
18 very detrimental, because he has a national
19 platform. And for him to be on the national
20 stage and be caught saying words like "Who
21 cares where they died," it almost helps
22 normalize the dehumanization of our elderly
23 population.

24 And I'm not trying to pick a fight

1 here with the Governor. I'm just saying --
2 I'm just trying to recognize how important it
3 is that we get this right and we change the
4 way we address and talk about older adults,
5 especially when you have the spotlight on
6 you.

7 And I hope you and I can work together
8 to work on that manual in the near future.
9 Thank you. And thank you, Director Olsen.

10 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Be
11 happy to. Thank you, Assemblyman.

12 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: And so I think,
13 Director Olsen, that is it for questions from
14 our colleagues. We thank you for being here
15 and look forward to your continued advocacy
16 on behalf of our older citizens --

17 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well,
18 thank you. And you know --

19 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: -- both our
20 active adults and both our homebound adults.

21 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: You
22 know I love coming here to talk to you guys,
23 because I think what this network does is
24 amazing. So thanks for your time and your

1 great questions today, and I look forward to
2 working with you all.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
4 much, Greg.

5 NYSOFA ACTING DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank
6 you.

7 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Great. So
8 we've -- before we go on to the executive
9 deputy director of Veterans' Services, we've
10 been joined by Assemblyman Ashby, who is the
11 ranker on the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

12 And now I'd like to introduce
13 Joel Evans, New York State Division of
14 Veterans' Services.

15 There is 10 minutes for you to have
16 your -- make your presentation, and hopefully
17 not read, and then there will be some
18 questions from our colleagues. Thank you.

19 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Thank you.

20 Do you hear me well?

21 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes.

22 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Chair
23 Weinstein, Chair Krueger, and distinguished
24 members of the Senate and Assembly, thank you

1 for the opportunity to address you today.

2 I am Joel Evans, a veteran who served
3 for 23 years in the United States Navy,
4 retiring as a chief petty officer. I joined
5 the New York State Division of Veterans'
6 Services on November 1, 2007. Since 2013, I
7 have served as our agency's executive deputy
8 director.

9 The core mission of our agency is the
10 same as it was at our agency's inception
11 76 years ago -- to advocate for all of
12 New York's veterans, service members, and
13 their families, connecting them with the
14 benefits and resources earned by virtue of
15 their military service.

16 Our agency's Veterans Benefits
17 Advisors represent veterans, service members,
18 and their families in the preparation,
19 presentation, and prosecution of claims and
20 appeals for financial, medical, educational,
21 and vocational benefits before the
22 United States Department of Veterans Affairs,
23 commonly called the VA. This representation
24 brought in a total of \$780 million in new and

1 recurring tax-free VA financial benefits for
2 New York's veterans, service members, and
3 their families during the past year.

4 Additionally, our Veterans Education
5 Bureau has approved 2,001 facilities in
6 New York to receive G.I. Bill funds. These
7 programs brought \$590 million in federal
8 funding into New York in 2020, paving a path
9 for veterans and their dependents to receive
10 a high-quality education from our state's
11 colleges, universities, and vocational
12 programs.

13 Yet while our core mission remains the
14 same as it was when the agency was
15 established, we also know that crucial
16 aspects of our mission have evolved with the
17 changing times. Today, New York is home to a
18 diverse population of more than 737,000
19 veterans. The largest cohort of this
20 population are veterans who served during the
21 Vietnam War era.

22 We take pride in developing strategies
23 tailored to meet their needs and to serve
24 these veterans where they are, from our field

1 offices across the state to the places where
2 they reside.

3 Over the past year, the division has
4 also strengthened partnerships with
5 organizations serving traditionally
6 underrepresented veterans, improving our
7 cultural competency to better serve and
8 advocate on behalf of historically
9 marginalized veterans. This includes our
10 representation of veterans who received "bad
11 paper" discharges rooted in anti-LGBTQ+
12 policies, racism, mental health-based
13 discrimination, retaliation for reporting
14 sexual assault, and other unjust
15 circumstances.

16 New York's recently enacted
17 Restoration of Honor Act is a key pillar of
18 this work, as is our representation of
19 veterans in discharge-related cases before
20 the VA and the Department of Defense.

21 The COVID-19 pandemic has also forced
22 the agency to reinvent and improve itself.
23 We met this challenge in several ways: By
24 purchasing the technology necessary to

1 represent veterans and submit their cases to
2 the VA completely virtually; conducting
3 virtual hearings before the Board of
4 Veteran's Appeals; providing trainings online
5 rather than in person; establishing protocols
6 to conduct entirely virtual appointments with
7 clients; and reaching out to tens of
8 thousands of veterans through e-mail "buddy
9 checks."

10 These measures ensured the
11 uninterrupted delivery of the division's
12 services to veterans, service members, and
13 their families throughout these difficult
14 times.

15 Knowing that providing support to our
16 veterans takes a village, the division shared
17 these resources with our partners in county
18 and municipal governments, as well as
19 not-for-profit veterans service
20 organizations. Free of charge, we accredited
21 69 local and not-for-profit Veterans Service
22 Officers under the state's power of attorney
23 during 2020.

24 We shared with them free access to our

1 case management software so they could file
2 claims electronically once remote work became
3 the norm. We provided free access to county
4 and city veterans service agencies for every
5 training that we delivered. We signed a new
6 memorandum of agreement with the American
7 Legion, Department of New York, so that
8 completing our annual training will now
9 satisfy the continuing education requirements
10 for Veterans Service Officers to keep their
11 Legion accreditation as well.

12 Veterans confront food insecurity at
13 above-average rates, a problem that COVID-19
14 only made worse. Thanks to Governor Cuomo's
15 COVID-19 Philanthropic Fund and the Nourish
16 New York Program, we partnered with the
17 HelloFresh corporation and several
18 community-based organizations to provide more
19 than 300,000 healthy meals to veterans and
20 military families in New York facing food
21 insecurity during this pandemic -- an effort
22 that remains ongoing and successful.

23 For some veterans, COVID-19 has also
24 exacerbated mental health conditions,

1 increasing their risk of suicide. Our agency
2 has focused on this issue through our
3 participation in the Governor's Challenge to
4 Prevent Suicide Among Veterans, Service
5 Members, and their Families, and over the
6 past year New York has become the first state
7 in the nation to commit to training every
8 Veterans Service Officer on the use of the
9 Columbia Protocol, a highly effective
10 suicide-prevention risk-assessment tool that
11 will help Veterans Service Officers identify
12 individuals experiencing mental health
13 emergencies and connect them to support
14 services.

15 We are also proud to be the first
16 state in the nation to form a partnership
17 between our state's Bar Association and the
18 PsychArmor online training organization to
19 enhance military cultural competency for our
20 state's attorneys, including gatekeeper
21 suicide prevention training and training on
22 the mental health impacts of in-service
23 traumas that military members may experience.

24 As part of his State of the State

1 agenda for 2021, Governor Cuomo also
2 announced that he will direct state agencies
3 to ask their clients whether they or their
4 immediate family members have served in the
5 military. This initiative will facilitate
6 new connections between veterans, service
7 members and their families and vital
8 resources. This new campaign will help the
9 state reach veterans and service members who
10 may not self-identify as such because of
11 stigma or trauma, linking them with the state
12 and federal benefits, programs, and services
13 that they have earned.

14 The Governor's budget also seeks to
15 increase access to Veterans Treatment Courts
16 by permitting the transfer of a case from a
17 traditional criminal court in one county to a
18 Veterans Treatment Court in an adjoining
19 county. This will connect more at-risk
20 veterans in our justice system with the
21 life-changing services that these courts
22 provide.

23 The division appreciates the continued
24 support of Governor Cuomo and his

1 administration in addressing the needs faced
2 by our Veterans, service members, and their
3 families. Our work helps provide better
4 lives for the brave New Yorkers who have
5 served our state and nation, and our
6 dedicated staff will continue to represent
7 New York's veterans, service members, and
8 their families zealously, inclusively, and
9 effectively, and will help them adapt to and
10 overcome the challenges of this ever-changing
11 world.

12 I thank you for your support of this
13 agency's work, and I look forward to any
14 questions you may have.

15 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

16 Assemblywoman Barrett, do you have
17 questions?

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Yes, I
19 certainly do.

20 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Go ahead.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Thank you,
22 Executive Deputy Director, and thank you for
23 your service. Thank you for being here
24 today.

1 You know, I continue to have great
2 respect for all the work that your agency is
3 doing, that your team is doing, but I
4 continue to have concerns about the priority
5 that this administration puts on veterans'
6 services, veterans -- again, you have been
7 without a director of your division since
8 June. There has been -- you know, I'm sure
9 you're doing a wonderful job. But I'm
10 guessing that you need the help and support,
11 and we certainly need the gravitas of a
12 director, especially as you've talked about
13 all the challenges in this COVID time.

14 Dwyer funding, nowhere in the budget.
15 You know, it's supposedly in OMH, but that --
16 she didn't really know anything about it, the
17 commissioner there. It's an extraordinary
18 program that we all know works very well.
19 It's still only available to about half of
20 our counties, but nowhere in the budget.

21 And, you know, I'm just wondering how
22 you're feeling about that. Would you support
23 the Dwyer funding going directly to the
24 division, being under its responsibility

1 rather than OMH, to get some -- more of a
2 commitment to it from there? Thank you.

3 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Thank you
4 for your question.

5 I understand that there might be a
6 concern with a director not being in the seat
7 at this moment. I've been with the agency,
8 like I said, for 13 years, and I've been the
9 acting executive deputy director now -- I
10 mean, the executive deputy director since
11 2013. And there has been continuity of
12 service. And I am proud to say that we have
13 a strong leadership team in our organization,
14 and we are able to adapt and overcome
15 situations just as missing a director for a
16 moment.

17 And as you can see with what I have
18 read in the testimony, we have accomplished a
19 lot of things in 2020, amid a COVID crisis.
20 The funds that we brought into the state with
21 the work of our staff was \$40 million more
22 than what was brought in in 2019.

23 So we have a good chemistry in the
24 agency to continue doing the work until the

1 Governor finds a suitable director for the
2 agency. And so I don't think there should be
3 so much concern about a director not being
4 there, as long as we're still maintaining the
5 ship afloat, as I would say.

6 As far as the Dwyer Program -- and of
7 course you know, you already said it falls
8 under OMH and OMH is the agency responsible
9 for giving you the answers that you are
10 looking for.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Would you
12 support a switch from that funding stream in
13 OMH to directly be part of the division's
14 responsibility?

15 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Well, if
16 that were to happen, of course we would roll
17 with it and work it. But at the current time
18 I don't see any switch happening.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: I see.

20 Let me ask you about the Article VII
21 language. I know you commented about the
22 Veterans Treatment Courts, which we all know
23 are a good thing. Could you just explain a
24 little bit more to me how this Article VII

1 changes what's going on now -- you know,
2 what's entailed in that? It was a little
3 unclear in the Governor's language in his
4 budget.

5 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: So the
6 Veterans Treatment Courts, we have
7 approximately 36 Veterans Treatment Courts
8 right now that are in those counties. And we
9 have veterans in counties that do not have a
10 Veterans Treatment Court. So what this
11 proposed expansion is it allows a veteran in
12 a non-treatment-court-county to have their
13 case transferred over to a Veterans Treatment
14 Court.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: I see. So it
16 just expands what certain counties that have
17 the courts can -- who they can hear in their
18 courts, or makes adjacent counties' veterans
19 eligible to go to a neighboring county's
20 Veterans Treatment Court? And it doesn't
21 change the kinds of cases that they would
22 take or any other things, it just really
23 expands access?

24 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: It expands

1 the access. It's only fair that a veteran in
2 a location that doesn't have a treatment
3 court could go into this life-changing
4 situation of being under the Veterans
5 Treatment Court process.

6 You know, it's a very intense process
7 and it takes a lot for the veteran to
8 complete the program. And it meets the
9 actual goal of rehabilitation. So given the
10 opportunity for veterans, where there is not
11 a Veterans Treatment Court, to go ahead and
12 transfer to a location where there is one, is
13 a win-win situation for those veterans.

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: And is there
15 money in your budget to do this so that the
16 costs are covered, or are the counties going
17 to be responsible?

18 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: As far as
19 the funds, there's nothing that comes out of
20 us, as far as I'm aware of. It's just a
21 matter of the counties communicating with the
22 cases.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: I see. So
24 there is no direct funding for any of these

1 Veterans Treatment Courts in your division
2 budget?

3 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: No, ma'am.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Okay.

5 And another one of the Governor's
6 recommendations was saving \$79,000 by
7 transitioning the hotline, the helpline, from
8 the Human Services Center to -- directly to
9 the Veterans' Benefit Advisors. How is that
10 going to be implemented, and how are you
11 going to do outreach to ensure that veterans
12 get to where they need to be? And is that
13 funded in the budget?

14 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Yeah, so
15 what we're actually doing is we are going
16 away from the -- what we call the call
17 center, and it's actually going to be managed
18 by our staff.

19 We used to run this years ago where if
20 somebody calls our 800 number, one of our
21 staff members would actually answer the phone
22 in that region. And it will provide direct
23 access to the veteran or the family member,
24 instead of being transferred from one

1 operator to another staff member and so
2 forth.

3 So -- and in actuality, the shifting
4 of the model is actually going to be less
5 expensive to operate. So we actually will be
6 able to support this.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: And you'll
8 save money. And will it be as available? Is
9 it the same -- is it a 24/7 availability, you
10 know, before and after?

11 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Well, the
12 24/7 is not really a 24/7 because after hours
13 it goes to a voicemail, but the next day
14 we'll answer the phone calls. And right now
15 our call center also goes to a voicemail
16 after hours.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: So it's the
18 same services will be provided --

19 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Correct,
20 the same services will be provided. And it
21 will be just streamlined straight to the
22 regional location.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: I see.

24 And then you mentioned -- and I, you

1 know, was very proud to be the sponsor of the
2 Restoration of Honor and very proud of
3 New York leading on this.

4 Do you -- have you identified certain
5 resources in this year's budget that would
6 help implement this measure? Is there -- you
7 know, have there been costs that you've
8 recognized and that have gone into this
9 year's budget to make sure that those -- that
10 we're doing the best for these veterans that
11 we can?

12 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: The
13 Restoration of Honor Act is going perfect.
14 Implementation has gone smoothly. As of this
15 moment we've had 25 applications submitted.
16 And of those 25, 12 awards, Restoration of
17 Honor awards have been provided.

18 The others are still pending
19 documentation from the federal government,
20 there's delays from the federal government in
21 getting personnel records. And so that's the
22 only delay. There has not been any denials.

23 And with our current budget, we've
24 been able to manage the program and we're

1 doing great work with outreach for the
2 program and getting other people to submit
3 for their applications.

4 And another great thing that has
5 happened with the Restoration of Honor is
6 that these applicants, we've been able to
7 also help them with getting further federal
8 benefits and even VA healthcare benefits as
9 well.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: That's
11 wonderful. That's very encouraging to hear.
12 I mean, I think that -- talk about an
13 opportunity to really change lives. And
14 thank you for your work on that, and really
15 glad to hear that people are reaching out and
16 that your outreach has been effective.

17 I think that covers what I have to ask
18 at the moment, so thank you again for your
19 work and for your service, and I'll cede the
20 remaining few seconds here. Thank you.

21 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Thank you.

22 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

23 So we go to the Senate now.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

1 And 10 minutes on the clock for
2 Veterans Chair John Brooks.

3 SENATOR BROOKS: Thank you,
4 Madam Chair. And thank you, Executive Deputy
5 Director, for joining us today.

6 As my partner in the Assembly has
7 said, I too am concerned that the director's
8 position remains open. I heard your
9 response, but I think -- we have almost
10 three-quarters of a million veterans in this
11 state, and I think we can do a better job in
12 addressing their concerns.

13 It's great to see that you are
14 expanding the court program; I think that's
15 been exceptionally successful and very much
16 welcomed. I think the fact that the courts
17 can take into consideration what our veterans
18 have been through, in some cases, and help
19 turn their lives around I think is a very
20 important consideration.

21 I am very, very concerned with the
22 practice year after year after year of
23 cutting the guts out of the Veterans Program
24 each year, and we have to scramble to put the

1 money back. Clearly the Dwyer Program in
2 particular has been an outstanding program,
3 exceptionally successful, a peer-to-peer
4 program where veterans are talking to other
5 individuals who have been through the same
6 circumstances, and they are comfortable.

7 We need to continue to make that
8 program grow. We should not now at this
9 point in time, with the budget, be putting
10 together appeals to put money into the
11 budget, we should be talking about increasing
12 those funds. I think it is really shameful,
13 the budget process that we go through, with
14 so many of these good programs that are
15 helping our veterans are being stripped out
16 and we have to go backwards to put the money
17 back in.

18 We should be, in this budget process,
19 talking about expanding the services to our
20 veterans. We know that the veterans from the
21 Vietnam War are showing more and more need.
22 We should be expanding and developing and
23 discussing programs to help them out.

24 We still need to look at housing. One

1 of the issues I'd like to see us look more
2 at, in my area of the state, at least,
3 there's a large number of zombie houses that
4 can be recovered and made available to
5 veterans. We should be looking at those
6 kinds of programs.

7 One of the things we have to spend
8 more time looking at is veterans who are
9 coming to the end of their time in active
10 duty, and helping and assisting them in
11 advance to know what benefits are available
12 to them, what educational benefits, what
13 housing, et cetera. We've got to do a better
14 job of preparing our veterans as they enter
15 back into civilian life.

16 The military has changed. The
17 military has changed greatly. We're in a
18 situation where citizen-soldiers, the
19 Reservists, the Guardsmen, they are in a
20 situation where they're in civilian life and
21 then suddenly they're in a hostile situation,
22 and they come back to civilian life. And
23 that is something we need to recognize, how
24 dramatic that change is. And I think we need

1 to do some work to assist those things.

2 It's been suggested to me by someone
3 in the teaching profession that one of the
4 things we should be doing is making sure that
5 the schools are aware of those situations
6 where one of the parents are in the Reserves,
7 where they may be activated. The schools
8 should know about that. Because if something
9 happens in the area where your parent is and
10 you hear some bulletin on the news, and when
11 you come to school that day, your mind is
12 elsewhere. You're worried about your parent
13 in that other location.

14 Teachers should be aware of those
15 students that are in that situation so they
16 can look for signs that they need some
17 assistance -- they need some assistance or
18 maybe some counseling as to what might be
19 going on.

20 So, you know, I think -- I think our
21 Veterans Committees in both houses are
22 committed to helping the people who have
23 served this country. I think we're concerned
24 that we've got to do more for those veterans,

1 and I think we've got to recognize the mental
2 aspects that people are going through, the
3 deterioration in health that we've seen in
4 terms of our Vietnam veterans, and the
5 emotional strains that some people do
6 experience from transitioning in and out of
7 civilian life to veterans.

8 So like we both said, we think that
9 the chair position should be filled, that's
10 critical. But I'd like you to explain where
11 you think the veterans programs should be
12 going in dealing with not only the problems
13 that we're seeing now, but the challenges we
14 have in retaining people in the National
15 Guard, the challenges we have in making sure
16 people are getting the right housing, and
17 recognizing that we -- I believe that all of
18 the funding associated with the veterans
19 should be under the Veterans budget. It is
20 difficult for us to chase all the money
21 that's been put in different departments.

22 You were asked about the Dwyer money,
23 and the response was, Well, you've got to
24 check with another department. That's an

1 unacceptable response. The mission of this
2 department, the Veterans agency, is to serve
3 the needs of the veteran. We should be on
4 top of every aspect of the services and the
5 fundings we're providing for the Veterans.

6 So I'd like you to talk about what
7 changes you think need to take place to
8 deliver more and better services to our
9 veterans.

10 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: So thank
11 you for the question.

12 We are doing great service for our
13 veterans. As a matter of fact, we mentioned
14 the service members that are getting out of
15 the service at this current time, we're
16 running -- there's a pilot program that's
17 going on right now where they're in
18 contact -- this is happening in Suffolk
19 County -- they're in contact with the
20 veterans service organizations in Suffolk
21 County, and they're helping them transition
22 into the civilian world, they say.

23 So that's a pilot program that is
24 going on right now. It's a promising

1 program. It's something that probably should
2 have happened a long time ago. I myself
3 remember when I was just retired in 2007, and
4 so many questions and so many things that I
5 didn't know. And if all those questions are
6 answered before I retire, whether six months
7 or a year before I retire, where placement
8 for a job and home and where I'm going to
9 live and so forth, how is my family going to
10 be taken care of -- if all those situations
11 are addressed prior to separation or
12 retirement, it will be very beneficial for
13 the veterans. So that's one program that I
14 think is very productive.

15 The Dwyer Program, our agency has
16 Veterans Benefit Advisors in those regions
17 that have Dwyer programs, supporting the
18 program. They help provide veterans benefits
19 counseling. So we are involved with many of
20 the Dwyer chapters, even though the Dwyer
21 Program is not under the Division of
22 Veterans' Services.

23 SENATOR BROOKS: So my question to you
24 is, does it belong under the Division of

1 Veterans' Services?

2 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Well, it's
3 something that other people will have to
4 decide if it belongs or not. That's not for
5 me to decide.

6 SENATOR BROOKS: Well, you know, I
7 think that says a lot. You know, this is a
8 successful program, one of the most
9 successful going. And, you know, for us to
10 sit and discuss veterans' benefits, we should
11 be discussing those benefits with your
12 department, your agency, not other agencies.

13 I'm aware of the program in Suffolk,
14 and Tom does a great job in so many things
15 that he provides. But we have to -- we have
16 to expand those programs, not say, Well,
17 that's a good experiment. I mean, in
18 Long Island, in Suffolk, there's a lot more
19 job opportunities than other regions in the
20 state. And we have to recognize that we have
21 a better or greater obligation, perhaps, to
22 those who live in remote areas where the
23 opportunities are less. We've got to help
24 those people more.

1 And it frightens me that we accept
2 this pass-off of three-quarters of a million
3 people who have served this country, some of
4 them injured, some of them with problems when
5 they're discharged from service, some of them
6 in search of something to do. And instead of
7 having, if you will, one-stop shopping, we're
8 handing things off. You know, the Dwyer
9 Program should be embraced and expanded all
10 over the state. We should --

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Brooks, I
12 have to actually cut you off now -- you've
13 gone over a minute -- I apologize.

14 SENATOR BROOKS: I'm sorry, Liz.
15 Well, thank you, Mr. Director. But --
16 (Overtalk.)

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And you can
18 certainly -- you actually can have another
19 five minutes at the end, if you like, as the
20 chair. Or you can follow up with the
21 executive deputy director separately.

22 SENATOR BROOKS: Thank you.

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

24 Sorry, Assembly.

1 them. As evidenced by not having a director,
2 you know, for an extended period of time.

3 I mean, do you get the sense that, you
4 know, your division is being overlooked or
5 neglected in some ways?

6 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Not
7 necessarily, no. Not at all. We -- we are
8 part of a -- we are not neglected or
9 overlooked at all. We -- we are well taken
10 care of. We have good people in our agency,
11 and we get the job done.

12 So some of the programs that don't
13 belong to the agency, the ideas of shifting
14 them over to us, well, we would need people
15 that would have that expertise to also manage
16 those programs. So it's not a matter of --
17 that we can't do it, it's just a matter of
18 where the -- like you said, what would the
19 resources be.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN ASHBY: I think you should
21 be credited as being a good NCO, too, and
22 having a can-do attitude with that and not
23 really seeing maybe some of the potential
24 that we -- that we have here.

1 A lot of constituents, veterans that I
2 have, and really throughout the state, have
3 come to me in the last several months, in
4 particular about the Vet Centers being closed
5 throughout the state -- and I know that
6 New York is not alone in this -- and not
7 having the ability to really connect with the
8 veterans and their families who are utilizing
9 the resources. And even, you know, like
10 we're doing right now, through Zoom --
11 virtually, those resources are not available.

12 Have you heard similar things in your
13 organization, in your position? And are
14 there measures or steps that can be taken
15 within the division to help stem this?

16 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: So the Vet
17 Centers, of course, they're not managed by
18 us. But we do have Veterans' Benefits
19 Advisors that cover some of these Vet
20 Centers. And our agency, for example, we
21 have had some of our advisors meet at the
22 Vet Centers in -- right now it can't be
23 outside because of the cold -- but during the
24 heat of the pandemic and so forth, where our

1 advisors were meeting with veterans and
2 providing veterans benefits at the
3 Vet Center, but not inside because of course
4 the restrictions that were in place.

5 So we still stay in contact with the
6 veterans that need support from the Vet
7 centers. So I know it's a little -- it's
8 tough when they can't go and have this
9 support there. But our agency, one thing
10 that we were able to do with the forced work
11 remote, work from home, we were ready almost
12 at the gun of the work from home. So all our
13 Veterans Benefits Advisors could actually
14 assist any veteran anywhere in the state
15 virtually. And we could file a claim for
16 them without them even having to see a sheet
17 of paper, and it gets submitted straight to
18 the VA.

19 So we still are able to provide a
20 valuable service for the veterans amid the
21 closures and the pandemic.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN ASHBY: I think that's --
23 I think that's great to hear in terms of
24 being able to register for benefits. But

1 really my primary concern was the delivering
2 of services at those Vet Centers, primarily
3 for behavioral health, for both the veterans
4 and their families.

5 And I know that my time is about to
6 expire. I think that by elevating the
7 division to a fully fledged state agency and
8 giving the director a seat at the table
9 during budget negotiations, we would resolve
10 a lot of these issues that we're discussing
11 right now, and I hope that we could come to a
12 consensus on {inaudible}. Thank you.

13 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Thank you.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

15 We go to the Senate.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
17 much. And our chair of Aging, Senator May,
18 has some questions. I thought she was here
19 with some questions. Senator May, are you
20 still here?

21 THE MODERATOR: I don't believe she's
22 with us at the moment.

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay, so she may
24 have had to get off, so I apologize. I don't

1 believe I see any other Senators' hands, but
2 I do have one question, if I might.

3 Can you tell me how your office works
4 with the City's Office of Veterans' Affairs,
5 and how do things get coordinated -- or not,
6 if they don't?

7 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: So with
8 the New York City, this past year we
9 strengthened our partnerships with many
10 county and not-for-profits. Sixty-nine
11 individuals got accredited to be able to file
12 claims through the VA using our power of
13 attorney, and that includes staff from
14 New York City.

15 And we provide training for the
16 New York City staff, and we have a great
17 working relationship with the New York City
18 DVS.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Great. Great.

20 And is it true that -- I know that
21 my -- I'm sorry, I represent Manhattan, so I
22 have the 23rd Street VA. And I know that
23 that hospital has been providing vaccines to
24 veterans. Is that true statewide?

1 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: The VAs
2 are -- if they're not providing yet, the
3 VA Medical Centers are getting prepared to.
4 I know that, like you said, the one in
5 Manhattan already is. I'm not sure if every
6 single one in the state is. But I know that
7 they are getting ready to be converted as
8 such.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I wanted to say
10 it out loud, just in case my colleagues might
11 not all know that. They should remember the
12 VA hospitals when in search of vaccines for
13 older constituents who may be veterans.
14 Because I was surprised to discover it when
15 frankly a friend who's a 92-year-old veteran
16 said, "Don't worry, Liz, you don't have to
17 find me the vaccine, I found it myself at the
18 VA." I was like, "Oh, that's great."

19 So I want everybody to know that that
20 might be out there as an option.

21 So thank you very much for your work.

22 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Thank you.

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

24 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes, so we have

1 a number of Assemblymembers, so unless
2 Senator May returns with a question, we'll go
3 through them.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Great.

5 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Assemblyman Kim
6 for five minutes.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you,
8 Chairwoman.

9 Thank you, Director Evans, for your
10 testimony today and for your service.

11 You know, I come from a family full of
12 veterans -- my dad was a Vietnam vet, and my
13 uncle -- my older uncle, who passed away last
14 year, was a U.S. Army captain. And my
15 younger uncle was a Navy Seal. So I was the
16 only -- first male not to go to the military,
17 so I caught a lot of slack {sic} from those
18 men when I was growing up.

19 But I share that story because when I
20 hear of our veteran communities suffering in
21 any kind of way, it hurts me very deeply.
22 And when I read this article, and this was
23 brought up to the panel, of a nursing home in
24 Queens that has been giving out --

1 administering experimental drugs,
2 hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin, I think,
3 to a dozen or more veterans at a veteran
4 nursing home.

5 Were you informed or aware our
6 veterans were being treated with these drugs
7 in our state-run nursing homes?

8 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: No, I was
9 not.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Are you -- and I
11 hope that you will be a part of the
12 discussion, Mr. Evans, with the Department of
13 Health moving forward, because -- and I know
14 the previous speakers have talked about doing
15 a full investigation and holding some of
16 these sites accountable. But in light of
17 some of the blanket immunity that was given
18 out last year to the sites, I do not know
19 whether these families will be able to
20 properly have any recourse. Which is why I
21 think we need to reexamine our legal immunity
22 that was handed to these sites to make sure
23 that they have some retroactive justice.

24 When you hear about these stories of

1 the veterans -- they only found out weeks
2 later, you know, when they got the receipts
3 and their medical reports of their loved ones
4 who passed away were being administered these
5 drugs. That's the only way they found out.
6 And without the family's permission.

7 So I think there's a lot of digging we
8 have to do collectively because these
9 veterans and older adults did not deserve to
10 die alone in pain in these type of settings,
11 and the least we can do is go back and find
12 the truth and give them justice.

13 And I hope you can be a partner in
14 achieving those goals, Mr. Evans.

15 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Thank you.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you.

17 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So we're going
18 to go to Assemblywoman Hunter, who I know has
19 to run to conference in a few moments.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN HUNTER: Hi, good
21 afternoon, Deputy Director. Thank you so
22 much for being here today.

23 Just quickly, I know I have just a few
24 moments and I don't necessarily have some

1 questions for you, but just to convey some
2 concerns. I, along with my fellow veterans,
3 have significant concerns, along with the
4 chair of the Veterans' Services Committee.
5 It remains very difficult, you know, being a
6 veteran. We've heard mention that there's
7 almost three-quarters of a million veterans
8 in New York State. And it becomes very
9 difficult when, you know, around every corner
10 we hear, you know, people say thank you for
11 your service, and then we turn around and
12 have to squabble over little pockets of money
13 for programs that help so many people
14 desperately in need.

15 And it just concerns me that every
16 year, you know, instead of standing on, you
17 know, our thanks for all of those who, you
18 know, contributed to this country, we have
19 to, you know, squabble over money for the
20 Dwyer Foundation. We are squabbling over
21 money for the veterans services, the Vet
22 Centers. And squabbling over money
23 relatively to the money that goes to Boys
24 State and now Girls State. And I just feel

1 like we need to do so much better for our
2 veterans.

3 So, you know, as a state when we stand
4 and say thank you, you know, for your
5 service, that needs to equal coming forward
6 immediately, you know, instead of us asking
7 to contribute the money back, to making sure
8 that that money is already there and we're
9 asking for more money.

10 There's a desperate need right now for
11 mental health services like never before.
12 And of course it's not just with veterans,
13 it's across, you know, our country because of
14 what's going on with the pandemic and remote
15 learning. So I am just imploring you that as
16 we go through this budgetary process, you
17 know, that we put every strong foot forward
18 to make sure that we're putting the necessary
19 funding in place for veterans so when folks
20 come forward and say thank you, it is backed
21 by money and our commitment to do what we
22 said we would do and honor the people who
23 served our country.

24 So I just wanted to be on the record

1 saying that today, Deputy Director. Thank
2 you.

3 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Thank you.

4 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

5 Now we go to Assemblyman Lawler.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN LAWLER: Thank you,

7 Chairwoman.

8 Thank you, Director, and I do want to
9 echo the comments and sentiments of my
10 esteemed colleague from Syracuse. She's
11 absolutely correct. I think, frankly, we
12 fall very short as a state, despite your
13 efforts, and I appreciate your efforts and
14 your work. It's not you, it's our state. We
15 do not put enough in terms of resources
16 behind helping our veterans. This pandemic
17 has been especially enlightening to that
18 point.

19 I can tell you in my district I have
20 numerous American Legions and VFW halls, and
21 they have done a phenomenal job throughout
22 this pandemic trying to help their fellow
23 veterans, trying to make sure they have food
24 on their table, trying to make sure that they

1 are getting the attention and resources they
2 need, many of whom are elderly and stuck in
3 their homes during this pandemic, and they
4 have really done a phenomenal job stepping up
5 to the plate.

6 But I think we need to do more. The
7 fact that the Governor has sat on the funding
8 for the Joseph Dwyer Program is an absolute
9 embarrassment and totally unacceptable. In
10 my district, BRIDGES is responsible for
11 administering the peer-to-peer program. They
12 have had to rely on the county to, you know,
13 basically advance the money, with nothing
14 from the state in well over a year.

15 And I don't know in what universe the
16 Governor thinks that's acceptable to our
17 veterans, but it's not. And I certainly hope
18 you will convey that message to him. I know
19 many of my colleagues have expressed that in
20 letters, in their own comments today. But
21 it's really -- it's really unacceptable, and
22 I do hope that funding is released
23 immediately.

24 I would also ask that if there are any

1 grants or programs by which you can help our
2 American Legions and our VFW halls -- many of
3 them are in desperate need of repair or, you
4 know, need additional funding to help run
5 their operations. If there's ways that your
6 agency can help with that, that's something
7 that would be greatly appreciated as well.

8 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Thank you.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN LAWLER: Thanks.

10 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

11 Now we go to Assemblywoman Rajkumar.

12 Jenifer, are you here? There she is,
13 okay.

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN RAJKUMAR: Hello. Thank
15 you, Chairman Weinstein.

16 And thank you, Mr. Evans, for your
17 service to our country and for your service
18 to all veterans as a state government leader.

19 My borough of Queens has the most
20 veterans of any borough in the City -- about
21 28 percent of the City's veterans. So I'm
22 especially appreciative of your work. And I
23 have two questions for you this afternoon.

24 My first question is on Veterans

1 Treatment Courts, which you spoke about. I
2 know they focus on rehabilitation and
3 treatment over punishment -- which is exactly
4 what all our courageous veterans deserve, a
5 second chance. So I want to ask you if you
6 can give me more details for how we can
7 create statewide access to Veterans Treatment
8 Courts. What are the financial pathways and
9 budgetary requirements needed to expand
10 access to these courts across the state?

11 And my second question is on the
12 Restoration of Honor Act, which as you
13 mentioned allows veterans with bad-paper
14 discharges due to PTSD, traumatic brain
15 injury, or sexual trauma to apply for
16 veterans benefits. Can you talk more about
17 the specific resources you plan to commit to
18 further this legislation's goals? And have
19 you coordinated with other state agencies,
20 such as the DOB or Parks, that control state
21 veterans benefits?

22 Thank you for your time today and your
23 testimony, and you can always count on me as
24 a true partner on services to help our

1 veterans.

2 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Thank you.

3 On your first question, I will have to
4 get back to you with a more detailed answer.

5 But on your second question, with the
6 Restoration of Honor, we are engaged with
7 multiple state agencies, because the benefits
8 that the veteran gets are benefits that other
9 agencies provide. So once the award is
10 given, the veteran actually has a list of
11 about 50 or so benefits that they'll have
12 access to. And we already are in partnership
13 with the other agencies, we've had training
14 and discussions, and they know what to expect
15 when they see a veteran come in and maybe
16 want, at the DMV, the "V" on their license
17 plate. Or if they go to their tax assessor
18 and they want to do their property tax
19 exemption, they know what paperwork to look
20 for and so forth.

21 And if there's any problems, the
22 veterans that have been awarded know to
23 contact us, and then we do a follow-up to
24 make sure that everybody follows the

1 guidelines that are set.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN RAJKUMAR: Thank you.

3 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Thank you
4 very much.

5 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

6 So we go now to Assemblywoman
7 Buttenschon.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: Thank you,
9 Chair. And thank you for the opportunity to
10 speak.

11 Deputy Director, thank you for your
12 work with our veterans. As the daughter of a
13 veteran, I understand the importance.

14 Chair Barrett provided an overview
15 that I concur with as she talked about so
16 many issues that we see. And I do appreciate
17 your experience working with our veterans.
18 However, I feel it is important that we do
19 have a director in that position and --
20 whether it's you or whoever it may be.

21 As you reviewed the executive branch's
22 elimination of 1.9 million of funding -- that
23 I find unacceptable -- for the community
24 initiatives, can you tell me what you think

1 this will do to our state veterans if that
2 elimination remains? And my second question
3 is regarding the status of the development of
4 the state's Veterans Cemetery.

5 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Okay. So
6 would you -- what -- the 1.9 million you're
7 referring to, can you tell me which ones are
8 you referring to there?

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: The
10 community initiatives that was in the
11 Executive Budget that talks about the
12 New York State Defenders Association Defense
13 Program, Paths for Veterans, looking at the
14 SAGE Veterans Project that had a loss, and
15 the Vietnam Veterans of America's New York
16 Council.

17 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Okay. Let
18 me state, on the question of the state
19 cemetery, we are of course moving forward
20 with trying to get a state cemetery going.
21 We're right now waiting for the chapter
22 amendment to be approved and signed. And
23 once that gets done, everything starts
24 moving. So that's the only thing we're

1 waiting on right now to get started.

2 As far as the line items that you
3 mentioned on the funds, I will have to see --
4 get back and see what actually is going on in
5 that area.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: Okay. I
7 just -- again, as many of my colleagues have
8 stated, the importance of ensuring that you
9 have the revenue to move forward to meet the
10 needs of our veterans that clearly have those
11 needs. And I just wanted to confirm. So I
12 look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

13 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Thank you.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We now go to
15 Assemblyman Walczyk.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: Thanks very
17 much. Appreciate the opportunity.

18 I represent Northern New York and
19 Fort Drum. We have, obviously, a very high
20 veteran population. One of the sad stories I
21 think of our region is the veterans that
22 choose to leave New York State.

23 So if you don't know Fort Drum and the
24 Army, it sort of has this reputation, sir,

1 as -- well, the young soldiers, it's not the
2 place that they want to be stationed. They'd
3 rather be somewhere warm, you know, a lot of
4 times with a college very close by, maybe a
5 beach. But the Army sends them up to
6 Fort Drum.

7 But what people will find, and what
8 families find, is that it is a great place to
9 raise a family. We have a great school
10 system here in New York. Many veterans think
11 about retiring in our area until they see
12 that the options for employment, the options
13 for a business climate or for taxation are
14 unpalatable compared to all of the other
15 places for veterans to retire.

16 So I just wondered if you could -- if
17 you could speak to that for a moment.

18 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: As far as
19 retention of people in the Fort Drum area?

20 ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: Yes, sir.

21 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: I can tell
22 you personally it is a wonderful area. And I
23 know individuals that have decided to make
24 that area, that region home. As a matter of

1 fact, we have good advisors there in our
2 agency, and they -- of what they tell me of
3 the region, they tell me it's great. And I
4 know some people that have moved from
5 elsewhere just to return back to Fort Drum.

6 So in Fort Drum we do have a Veterans
7 Benefits Advisor inside Fort Drum. That
8 helps the veterans with benefits, whether
9 they're staying in Fort Drum or whether
10 they're going somewhere else.

11 So our Veterans Benefits Advisors are
12 able to tell them, to probably help out in
13 retention to the Watertown area, of the
14 benefits that New York has to offer for them,
15 other than --

16 ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: I hate to cut
17 you off, sir, I only have 50 seconds left and
18 I do want to make a couple of points and ask
19 you another question.

20 Do you think you should be a
21 cabinet-level position? It sounds like
22 there's so many members that have supported
23 the cause of veterans today. I think your
24 position should be elevated to a cabinet

1 level. What do you think? Yes or no.

2 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Well, if
3 I'm not mistaken, the Veterans right now is a
4 cabinet position.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN WALCZYK: Okay. I would
6 just -- I would just use my last 30
7 seconds -- and I appreciate your testimony
8 here today and all that you do for veterans
9 in New York State -- to advocate for Clear
10 Path for Vets. They're an amazing
11 organization: Project Healing Waters and the
12 service dog, you know, opportunities that are
13 out of that organization are phenomenal.
14 Vets Peer-to-Peer is saving lives every
15 single day through Joseph Dwyer funding. And
16 Helmets to Hard Hats really helps us retain
17 some of that veteran talent here in New York.

18 So the \$1.9 million cut that the
19 Governor had in this budget for veterans is
20 beyond the pale to me.

21 Appreciate the time. And thank you,
22 Chairwoman, and sir.

23 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Thank you.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. We

1 have one final round from John Brooks, chair
2 of the Veterans Committee.

3 You need to unmute. There you go.

4 Nope, try again, John, to unmute.

5 SENATOR BROOKS: Okay, that should do
6 it, I hope.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes, it does.

8 SENATOR BROOKS: Okay. Thank you,
9 Madam Chair. And Mr. Evans, thank you for
10 being here today.

11 You know, I think for a lot of us,
12 this is important. And our hearts are into
13 this. And we're concerned that we do the
14 right things for our veterans.

15 Assemblyman Lawler got into an area I
16 just wanted to bring up very briefly. And so
17 many of the veterans organizations that we
18 belong to are struggling to maintain their
19 buildings, and many of them are closing down.
20 Many of these buildings -- I know the Legion
21 Hall next to mine was used for early voting
22 in this last election. What can we do to
23 help the various veterans organizations get
24 funds needed to maintain these buildings?

1 They provide such an asset to the community
2 for meetings and other things, but it's very
3 difficult for them to raise funds. We've
4 tried to pass a bill to allow a form of
5 gambling to help them out but, you know, it's
6 critical that we maintain these locations.
7 And it's -- you know, all of us who are
8 veterans, we kind of form a group, and that's
9 a place that's home, that's a place to meet.

10 So is there anything that you can see
11 or a way you can see that we can get some of
12 the needed funding to these organizations to
13 help them maintain those buildings?

14 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: I know the
15 value of the VFW and American Legion halls,
16 and they provide more services than people
17 can imagine, right, in the communities.

18 So probably getting together with the
19 leaders of the halls and seeing creative ways
20 that we could probably help them out. So if
21 a hall was able to be used for early voting,
22 how about doing something different where you
23 could probably get veterans to do different
24 activities, or family members, so that would

1 also bring some traffic in it and so forth.

2 But it would be a good opportunity to
3 sit down and talk to some of the leaders of
4 the halls, with our agency, and see what we
5 could come up with as far as pathways, and
6 show support to those important halls.

7 SENATOR BROOKS: If you can give them
8 that kind of assistance, I think it would be
9 very helpful. Because they're trying, there
10 are so many restrictions when they start to
11 charge fees for -- from a tax standpoint and
12 the rest. But I think it's a shame if we're
13 going to lose those facilities. And, you
14 know, anything we'd do there I think is a
15 great help.

16 And I thank you for what you do. I
17 mean, I came on a little hard. But, you
18 know, we owe these guys a lot. And we can do
19 better than we're doing. So I appreciate
20 what you do and I think all of us that are
21 involved, in both houses of the Legislature,
22 appreciate what our veterans have done to us
23 and what our Reservists are doing for us. So
24 thank you very much for your service.

1 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: I want to
2 thank you for the support that you always
3 provide us. Thank you.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
5 much. We appreciate you being with us here
6 today.

7 And we are now, for people following
8 on the scorecard, going to start our first
9 panel of non-governmental invitees.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Madam Chair --

11 THE MODERATOR: I believe we have the
12 ways and Means ranker, Mr. Ra, with a
13 question.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Oh, I apologize,
15 Mr. Ra, I did not see a hand up. Please.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: I put it up late
17 because Mr. Ashby just had an additional
18 follow-up question. And since he already
19 went, I am going to ask it on his behalf.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Certainly.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Good afternoon,
22 Mr. Deputy Director. I just have a follow-up
23 to what Mr. Ashby had mentioned earlier, as
24 well as Mr. Walczyk, with regard to the level

1 of the department.

2 And I certainly -- I understand -- I
3 think we all think it's obviously an
4 important department, but there seems to be
5 an idea that if it was elevated to a full,
6 you know, separate department, that there
7 might be, you know, funding available
8 federally that -- you know, enhanced federal
9 funding that the department could apply for.
10 My understanding from our ranker is that this
11 is something they did in Connecticut, and it
12 was able to improve the services that the
13 department was able to provide to their
14 state's veterans.

15 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: I will
16 look into that and see what we could do about
17 that.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Yeah, I think it's
19 definitely something worth looking into. You
20 know, I think it helps enhance the ability
21 for grants and things like that.

22 So thank you. And thank you for your
23 service to our country and all of the
24 veterans in New York State, you know,

1 especially during these very trying times.

2 So thank you for being here this afternoon.

3 Thank you.

4 DVS EXEC. DEP. DIR. EVANS: Thank you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So now I will
6 politely thank you very much and excuse you
7 for the afternoon, and start to call, as a
8 panel, the next five witnesses.

9 And so the rules change a little bit,
10 everybody, for the rest of the hearing. For
11 the panel we're going to go through, each
12 individual testifying gets three minutes to
13 testify. Which means don't even try to read
14 your testimony. You've given it to all of
15 us. We are all qualified readers. And you
16 are supposed to highlight -- I saw that hand,
17 Assemblymember. You are supposed to
18 prioritize your bullet points in your three
19 minutes.

20 Then we, the legislators, only get
21 three minutes each to ask the panel and get
22 our answers.

23 So it's a little bit like
24 speed-dating, that's how I describe it every

1 day of our budget hearings, as we try to now
2 move a large number of people through.

3 But please know your testimony is
4 available for every legislator to see and for
5 the public to read online. Even if you
6 didn't get into the slots to testify today,
7 you can still submit your written testimony,
8 which will go up online for everybody to
9 review in moving forward with our efforts
10 during the budget process. Because I know
11 from certain hearings, like tomorrow's, we
12 had to turn away as many people as we could
13 accept because there were so many people
14 asking to testify.

15 So I'm going to just start now. I'll
16 list you in order, and then you'll start
17 rolling in. The New York State Kinship
18 Navigator, Ryan Johnson; the Prevent Child
19 Abuse New York organization, Jenn O'Connor;
20 the Families Together in New York, Paige
21 Pierce; the Northern Rivers Family of
22 Services, William Gettman; the New York State
23 Network for Youth Success, Trudy Morgan.

24 And do we have Ryan with us?

1 MR. JOHNSON: I am here.

2 THE MODERATOR: Number two, Jennifer
3 O'Connor, will not be here.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And no Jennifer
5 O'Connor. Thank you, Moderator.

6 Please start, Ryan.

7 MR. JOHNSON: Thank you very much,
8 Chairperson.

9 Good afternoon. Thank you for the
10 opportunity to speak on behalf of the kinship
11 community today.

12 The term "kinship care" refers to
13 family members, often grandparents and other
14 close relatives or family friends who take on
15 the full-time care of children when they are
16 not able to be cared for by their parents.

17 In New York State there are an
18 estimated 195,000 children being raised by
19 kinship caregivers. Most of these children,
20 about 188,000 of them, are being raised
21 outside of foster care and therefore have
22 limited access to resources.

23 I am here today on behalf of those
24 caregivers who have been asked to step up in

1 times of crisis to raise children that they
2 were not expecting to raise and who need
3 support. I'm here for the 72-year-old
4 grandfather who is caring for his disabled
5 wife and who in 2016 was asked by Child
6 Protective Services to take on three of his
7 grandchildren, all under the age of six at
8 the time, when his daughter got caught up in
9 the opioid epidemic. Five years later, he
10 still has all three children in his home, and
11 he was only connected to kinship services
12 three weeks ago.

13 I'm here for the 56-year-old widow who
14 back in April was called by her niece, who is
15 incarcerated and facing removal by CPS, and
16 asked if she would drive across the state to
17 pick up a newborn from a hospital -- and who,
18 with only five days notice, prepared to take
19 on the responsibility that most parents get
20 nine months to prepare for. As a result, the
21 aunt has had to rack up thousands of dollars
22 in credit card debt to pay for the expenses
23 of an unexpected child.

24 These are not abnormal cases. This is

1 what we work with every day.

2 Over the last decade, much of the
3 policy focus around kinship care has been
4 around children living with relatives who are
5 made foster parents, and little attention has
6 been paid to kinship caregivers who are
7 caring for children outside of foster care.
8 As a result, fewer resources have been
9 allocated to this population to help sustain
10 families in need.

11 In New York, funding for kinship
12 services has fluctuated over the past decade,
13 but since 2016 the Legislature has funded
14 kinship services at a total of \$2.5 million.
15 This funds 14 localized case management
16 programs and a statewide Kinship Navigator.
17 Last year the kinship budget line was cut by
18 \$950,000, leaving OCFS with the option to cut
19 the services or to find other funding.
20 Thankfully they found funding to continue the
21 programs for one year.

22 I'm here to ask the Legislature to
23 choose to prioritize these families by
24 restoring the funds lost last year. These

1 programs are here to help kinship families
2 navigate the complex system of benefits and
3 services that they are eligible for, and they
4 help stabilize families for a fraction of the
5 cost of foster care. During the pandemic,
6 these programs provided valuable resources
7 like giving away hundreds of tablets,
8 increasing access to food, and assistance
9 with benefits.

10 In the Consolidated Appropriations
11 Act, the federal government incentivized
12 states to invest in kinship services by
13 offering a 100 percent match of any dollars
14 spent on kinship care during the COVID-19
15 pandemic. This would double the resources
16 available to these programs, but the state
17 needs to commit to funding these programs
18 first. We're asking for \$1.9 million for the
19 local kinship programs and \$100,000 for the
20 Kinship Navigator.

21 Thank you.

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
23 much.

24 Next up, Paige Pierce.

1 MS. PIERCE: Thank you, Senator.

2 Hi, my name is Paige Pierce. I'm the
3 CEO of Families Together in New York State.
4 We represent families and youth with lived
5 experience in the mental health, addiction,
6 child welfare, juvenile justice,
7 developmental disabilities, special education
8 systems. Our board and staff are made up
9 primarily of family members and youth, myself
10 included, who have lived experience in these
11 systems.

12 Like most advocates you'll hear from
13 today and throughout your hearings these
14 weeks, I want to talk to you about the
15 effects of the pandemic on our children and
16 families and the need to invest in the
17 emotional wellness of children and families
18 overall. But my role is different, in that
19 I'm speaking not as a provider or even as an
20 advocate, but as the collective voice of the
21 families and youth who are directly affected
22 by the decisions you make in these committees
23 here in Albany.

24 Before the pandemic, we used to say

1 our families are multi-stressed, and that's
2 now compounded by the amount of stress that
3 are families are facing, but also the number
4 of stressed families and youth, causing more
5 trauma and more adverse childhood experiences
6 than ever before. This speaks to the social
7 determinants of health that you heard Greg
8 Olsen talk about earlier.

9 I feel compelled also to just talk
10 about the racial inequities, because it's
11 directly related to all of these issues that
12 we talk about, and can't be ignored. Each
13 year at these hearings, and especially this
14 year, I'm heartened to hear legislators and
15 commissioners that are repeating some of the
16 messages that we as family members have been
17 saying for years. We're so glad to know that
18 we have allies in you.

19 I heard Assemblyman Hevesi talk about
20 that we might have a different read on how
21 much money we have, but either way, it's
22 about the priorities. Thank you for saying
23 that.

24 Senator Krueger talking about teen

1 depression and suicide, and the recognition
2 that the Human Services Committees and the
3 Office of Children and Family Services play a
4 role, not just the Office of Mental Health,
5 in everyone's emotional wellness.

6 Senator Brisport talking about the
7 resources that are available by raising
8 revenue to make the necessary investments.
9 Thank you.

10 And Commissioner Poole, when talking
11 about that it's a good thing to be downsizing
12 our facilities, and that it's not a
13 reflection of poor services but rather it's a
14 good thing that we're closing facilities.

15 We want to thank you for acknowledging
16 the absolutely critical importance of making
17 these investments. It's taken a worldwide
18 pandemic to draw attention to what oppression
19 looks like and the importance of everyone's
20 wellness. And if ever there was a year to
21 finally make these investments, this is our
22 year.

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. I was
24 surprised there were a few seconds left.

1 Northern Rivers Family of Services,
2 William Gettman. I think you're muted,
3 though.

4 MR. GETTMAN: Let's try this again.

5 Thank you, Senator, thank you, Chair
6 Weinstein and members of the Legislature.
7 First off, I want to thank you for your
8 public service today, because like everyone
9 in New York, you're making a real difference.

10 Northern Rivers is a human service
11 agency across New York State. We serve
12 18,000 children and adults and families every
13 year. Our 1400-person workforce provides
14 mental health services, child welfare
15 services, and education services. We provide
16 residential care, clinic care, and outpatient
17 services.

18 I'm here today on behalf of the
19 4.1 million children across New York State.
20 You've heard through your hearings the awful
21 impacts of COVID-19 upon mental health,
22 poverty, income, suicide, stress, depression
23 and substance abuse. The conditions are
24 awful, and together we must fight them. Yet

1 the Governor's budget proposes a 5 percent
2 reduction in child protective services, child
3 preventive services, foster care services,
4 adoption subsidies, and kinship programs.

5 How can we, in this time of increased
6 need, additional stress and trauma, cut
7 services that protect children and keep
8 families together? As Assemblyman Hevesi
9 pointed out earlier today, the rolls of
10 foster care will go up if we cut preventive
11 services, and families will end up going into
12 emergency rooms. I call on you today to
13 reject the Governor's 5 percent reductions.

14 During the pandemic, thousands and
15 thousands of direct care workers came to work
16 every day. They left their homes, they left
17 their families, they came to care about our
18 kids, kids in foster care who couldn't go
19 home on a home visit on Christmas, kids who
20 have been quarantined. These are staff
21 making \$14 an hour, and yet we call on them
22 as essential workers. We made them come to
23 work, we asked them to take on the risks and
24 the assignment.

1 Yet there's no COLA in the budget.
2 Why can't we provide people caring for our
3 kids more than \$14 an hour when we pay people
4 who can deliver us coffee the same amount?

5 Turning to juvenile justice, we
6 support the closure of the four OCFS
7 facilities, yet we encourage you to create a
8 reinvestment fund to allow for the transition
9 of young people back to their communities,
10 the provision of safe services in the
11 community, and early intervention services.

12 Lastly, we want to comment on the
13 marijuana proposal as revenue. We encourage
14 you to look at policies that in fact care for
15 our communities that have been impacted,
16 think about the impact of marijuana on young
17 people's brains up to the age of 26, and
18 provide prevention services.

19 And finally I will add that the Raise
20 the Age provisions in the Governor's budget
21 create undue stress upon private agencies,
22 and we ask for a short-term fix to that.

23 In closing, thank you for your
24 service, thank you for what you do for the

1 care of kids and families. And when this
2 COVID epidemic is over, I invite you to come
3 and meet the first responders on our campus
4 in Albany.

5 Thank you very much, be safe, and make
6 New York strong.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
8 much.

9 And last on this panel, Trudy Morgan.

10 MS. MORGAN: Good afternoon, and thank
11 you for allowing me to testify today. I am
12 Trudy Morgan, and I'm the policy director at
13 the New York State Network for Youth Success.

14 During COVID-19, after-school, summer
15 and expanded learning programs are crucial in
16 helping young people and their families.
17 These programs provide services and support
18 and promote resilience, provide protective
19 factors, and elevate assets that can help
20 overcome the effects of trauma and adversity.
21 Even despite program disruptions caused by
22 COVID-19, the vulnerability of the
23 after-school and childcare structure, and the
24 limited resources to work with, after-school

1 programs, many driven by passion and
2 commitment, continue to meet critical needs
3 to adapt high-quality after-school programs
4 to support youth and their families.

5 But these programs have been hit hard
6 by the pandemic too. Following school
7 closures, many programs have had to
8 transition into new spaces to operate, have
9 had to cover additional costs of lower staff
10 ratios, longer hours and enhanced protocols
11 for cleaning and equipment. Many have had to
12 close or bear the brunt of running their
13 programs at unsustainable levels due to
14 unexecuted contracts, delayed payments and
15 guidance. The need to rebuild the current
16 after-school infrastructure -- which was
17 fragile before the pandemic -- towards a more
18 robust system is paramount at this time.

19 I'd like to focus on three main asks
20 today, as our full budget priorities are
21 detailed in the written testimony. Firstly,
22 we ask the state to make no cuts to
23 after-school funds this budget season, and
24 that includes restoring the \$5 million in the

1 Advantage After School Program and the
2 \$2.2 million in the Youth Development
3 Program.

4 Secondly, we ask that the state direct
5 \$250,000 in quality funds to sustain the
6 mobilization and coordination of school-age
7 childcare programs, many of which are
8 after-school programs. Without these funds,
9 New York truly will have no statewide support
10 specified for SACC providers at a time when
11 it is most needed, for its recovery.

12 And then thirdly, we urge you to
13 dedicate a quarter of revenue from adult-use
14 cannabis, if it is legalized, to increase
15 access to affordable, high-quality expanded
16 learning programs. In Alaska, which recently
17 allocated 12.5 percent of revenue from the
18 legalization of adult-use cannabis to
19 after-school, data shows that youth who
20 participated in programs just twice a week
21 were 40 percent less likely to use marijuana.

22 Leveraging cannabis tax revenue is an
23 intentional investment in a portfolio of work
24 around prevention for young people. And New

1 York State, which is a leader in the
2 after-school field, cannot miss the
3 opportunity to do the same.

4 In conclusion, I want to note that the
5 Network also supports the Winning Beginning
6 New York agenda. Thank you.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
8 Assembly.

9 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So, yes, we
10 have Assemblyman Ra, I believe, to -- oh, it
11 was the other panel, I'm sorry.

12 Okay, so then I don't -- oh, we do
13 have our chair, Andrew Hevesi, to ask a
14 question.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I'm a lot more
16 fun than Ed Ra anyway, so --

17 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: I'm sure.

18 (Laughter.)

19 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay, so thank
20 you to all of those who testified. There was
21 one omitted from your panel, Jenn O'Connor,
22 who couldn't be here for personal reasons.
23 But I would encourage all of my colleagues to
24 read their -- Prevent Child Abuse's

1 testimony. It's very informative about ACEs
2 and trauma.

3 And I do have questions for each of
4 you, but I've got to go quick, so I'm just
5 going to ask them and maybe Helene will give
6 the panels a second to answer.

7 So for Ryan, my friend, first, I'm not
8 done with uncapped reimbursement. We'll come
9 back to that. But the question for you is
10 wouldn't it make sense, since the
11 Consolidated Appropriations Act does a
12 100-percent federal match, that now is the
13 time to really invest in kinship programming?
14 That's a leading question.

15 But before you answer, let me get my
16 other questions, Helene, if I can. Yeah, I
17 think this is the quickest and best way to do
18 it, so I apologize.

19 Ms. Pierce, for you, thank you for
20 your testimony. You have some
21 recommendations, particularly about
22 preventative services here, that are really
23 interesting. Targeting them towards specific
24 populations and then also -- well, you know

1 what, if you could use some time to talk more
2 about what we should do in preventative
3 services -- I am against those cuts, but if
4 there's a way we can -- you know, more
5 robust, particularly now during COVID, that
6 would be very helpful.

7 Let's see. Mr. Gettman, I'm sorry to
8 have to do this this way. So Mr. Gettman, I
9 am with you about -- first of all, thank you
10 for all the work you do at Northern Rivers.
11 And, you know, I agree in rejecting the
12 5 percent reduction. I didn't have time to
13 ask the commissioner about your proposal to
14 reinvest the closures money into a funding
15 stream, so if you could elaborate on that,
16 that would be great.

17 Look at this, Helene, I've got some
18 time left.

19 And one more, if I can. Trudy Morgan,
20 I will tell you, last --

21 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: They need to
22 answer also.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: In that time?

24 No.

1 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes. Yes.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. So

3 Ms. Morgan, just want to tell you that we
4 will be fighting to restore all the cuts
5 to -- particularly to the Advantage Program.
6 It was wrong of the Governor to cut that and
7 leave the other money {inaudible}.

8 I'm done. You've got a minute. Good
9 luck.

10 MR. JOHNSON: Briefly, thank you so
11 much. It would be amazing if the state
12 wanted to invest more money. Because yes,
13 there is a 100-percent match. The State of
14 Ohio invested \$8 million in its kinship
15 navigation programs. So that would be a
16 great bar to try to hit.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

18 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Mr. Gettman, do
19 you want to answer the --

20 MR. GETTMAN: Twenty-two million
21 dollars are the savings if reinvested into
22 communities. Quite the mental health
23 reinvestment. We'll make sure our
24 communities are safe. Potentially we could

1 use that to drop some federal Families First
2 money. And it is a good transition so we
3 don't have to reopen facilities.

4 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: I think -- look
5 at that.

6 MS. PIERCE: I'll just say that, you
7 know, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound
8 of cure. And we know that there's a lot of
9 work that can be done to help prevent some of
10 the more costly things on the other end of
11 the stream, if we can address them early.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

14 I believe I just have one question, if
15 I might.

16 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Go for it.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

18 And for Ryan. And don't take it
19 wrong, but I'm getting older, so I was
20 working with families in kinship foster cares
21 back in the early '90s. And we were all
22 saying if we could only explain to them why
23 it's such a better option for them and their
24 children -- their grandchildren, very often

1 it was grandchildren, or nieces and nephews,
2 rather than trying to go it alone. And there
3 have been all these reasons that the
4 government agency really wouldn't want to let
5 them on kinship foster care, because it costs
6 us more money, for example.

7 I feel like we've gone backwards. We
8 should make people have to take kinship
9 foster care. Now, I know you're going to
10 tell me there's risks with that. But it's
11 infuriating that there are generations of
12 children who were raised with no money in the
13 house, with their grandparents trying to hold
14 onto a {unintelligible} that they could
15 barely afford before they were suddenly
16 grandparents who were being parent/guardians.

17 And we're letting ourselves off the
18 hook by just making it sound too complicated
19 to try to get kinship foster care, and hence
20 they don't. What do you think about my idea
21 of making it a requirement?

22 MR. JOHNSON: I think there's benefit
23 to having family choice in the direction of
24 custody that they go.

1 OCFS has incentivized counties to use
2 more kin as foster parents; they've offered
3 waivers of some non-safety standards, so
4 making it easier for a kinship caregiver to
5 become a foster parent. They've encouraged
6 counties who aren't using that waiver to go
7 ahead and start doing it. They've given
8 guidance recently on the emergency
9 certification process, meaning when a kinship
10 caregiver is identified that potentially
11 could become a foster parent, they make it so
12 that they become a foster parent right away
13 and go through training after.

14 So OCFS has done a lot to try to make
15 the pathway to foster care easier. And
16 frankly, 40 percent of our foster care in
17 New York State is kinship foster care. So
18 about 7,400 children are in kinship foster
19 care.

20 I'm here today on behalf of the kids
21 that don't make it into kinship foster care.
22 In the written testimony there is a
23 cost-study analysis that the Kinship
24 Navigator did. You know, it costs a lot of

1 money to have a kid be in foster care. You
2 can offer supports, because there are
3 financial incentives that are available for
4 kinship caregivers who don't make it into
5 kinship foster care, of about \$430 per month
6 per one child in your home you can get
7 through public assistance.

8 If you robustly fund the support
9 services that we have already started, these
10 little seeds around the state -- there's 14
11 of them in the Kinship Navigator -- everybody
12 could have access to the supports that matter
13 to them and ensure that they get that
14 financial assistance. Currently only 15
15 percent of eligible children get the
16 financial assistance that they --

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And that's what
18 frustrates me. I'm not trying to say don't
19 let grandparents raise their grandkids. I'm
20 saying make it that the government has to
21 help them get kinship services. Because
22 grandparents are going to be the better
23 caregivers. They love these kids. Right?
24 Families most of the time are going to be

1 better option, and government knows that.

2 So we're just trying to make it too
3 complicated for people to actually get the
4 resources that they need and they deserve to
5 raise these kids correctly.

6 And I'm taking up too much time, I'm
7 done. Thank you, Helene.

8 MR. GETTMAN: If we cut 5 percent from
9 local government we can't do that, Senator,
10 as they're going to have less people to do
11 the work and less preventive services.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Fair enough.

13 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We go to
14 Assemblywoman Byrnes for three minutes.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: Some of my
16 questions were answered. Thank you very
17 much, though. I appreciate it.

18 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay, so thank
19 you. We are -- no more questions for this
20 panel, so we're going to move on to Panel B,
21 which is Schuyler Center for Analysis and
22 Advocacy, Dede Hill, policy director; Council
23 of Family and Child Caring Agencies, Kathleen
24 Brady-Stepien, president and CEO; Early Care

1 & Learning Council, Meredith Chimento,
2 executive director; and Day Care Council of
3 New York, Gregory Brender, director of public
4 policy.

5 So if -- I see they're all here, so
6 why don't we start in that order, with Dede
7 Hill first.

8 MS. HILL: Good afternoon. Thank you
9 to the chairs and the members of the
10 respective committees for this opportunity.
11 Thank you for all that you do for New York,
12 and for your stamina today.

13 For almost 150 years, Schuyler Center
14 has been advocating to strengthen public
15 systems that serve low-income and
16 disenfranchised New Yorkers, particularly
17 children and families.

18 I just want to start with a general
19 observation about this Executive Budget.
20 Much of this budget and particularly the
21 5 percent across-the-board cuts are really
22 deaf to the reality that this pandemic has
23 not impacted all New Yorkers equally, it's
24 hit low-income communities, communities of

1 color, immigrant communities, and our
2 families with children disproportionately
3 hard.

4 But, you know, we think that there is
5 time and real opportunity to craft a final
6 enacted budget that centers our children and
7 all the communities hardest hit by the
8 pandemic.

9 So first I want to touch on an issue
10 largely unmentioned in the Executive Budget,
11 and that's the issue of child poverty, which
12 has surged since the pandemic hit New York.
13 We urge New York to make a public, binding
14 commitment to cut child poverty in half by
15 2030, and dedicate significant funds this
16 year to set New York on a path to meeting
17 that target.

18 We urge the Legislature and the
19 Governor to include the Child Poverty
20 Reduction Act, which is Senate Bill 2755,
21 Assembly Bill 1160, in the final enacted
22 budget. And this is so we can ensure that
23 child poverty is the first issue the state
24 tackles in our recovery efforts.

1 In the area of child welfare, there
2 are also real opportunities, particularly in
3 the area of family strengthening and
4 prevention, as New York begins to implement
5 the federal Family First Preservation
6 Services Act. Unfortunately, as Bill Gettman
7 already mentioned, the Executive Budget
8 proposes a 5 percent reduction in preventive,
9 protective, independent living, adoption and
10 after-care services at exactly the time
11 New York should be bolstering these services.
12 We urge the Legislature to reject this
13 proposal.

14 Also of concern is the proposed cut to
15 foster care. The Executive Budget proposes
16 \$11.2 million in cuts, and this is on top of
17 a \$62 million cut that was imposed in 2017.
18 This is not the time to be cutting foster
19 care.

20 We do want to -- there are a few good
21 points. We welcome and support the Executive
22 Budget's proposal to expand the Family
23 Assessment Response Program statewide. This
24 is good for families. We also applaud and

1 support the level funding for the Family
2 First Transition Fund. Shifting -- am I
3 done? Okay. Thanks.

4 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yeah. I just
5 warn everybody to keep an eye on the clock.
6 The numbers go down to zero, but then we
7 start to go up if you're going over. So
8 we're not giving you extra time, it just
9 shows how much time you're going over.

10 So next, Council of Family and Child
11 Caring Agencies.

12 MS. BRADY-STEPHEN: Thank you.

13 Hello. My name is Kathleen
14 Brady-Stepien. I am the president and CEO of
15 the Council on Family and Child Caring
16 Agencies, or COFCCA. We are a statewide
17 membership association, and we have as our
18 members the more than 100 child welfare
19 nonprofit organizations in the state.

20 New York State's commitment to state
21 funding of preventive services that provide
22 support to families has been far and away the
23 best in the country. And for that reason, it
24 is deeply disappointing that there is a

1 5 percent proposed cut in this Executive
2 Budget to reduce that state commitment to
3 counties down to 59 percent reimbursement.

4 There is also a proposed elimination
5 in the Executive Budget of the Community
6 Optional Preventive Services, or
7 COPS program, which provides primary
8 prevention. If we are truly committed as a
9 state to racial justice and equity, we would
10 be investing more in prevention and primary
11 prevention, not less, because families of
12 color are disproportionately represented in
13 our child welfare system. Especially given
14 the increased family and community needs we
15 have seen due to COVID, and the fact that we
16 will be transitioning into the federal Family
17 First Act implementation this fall, we need
18 to do everything possible together to
19 strengthen the front end of our system in
20 prevention.

21 So we're asking for your support in
22 rejecting the Executive's proposed 5 percent
23 cuts to prevention and rejecting the
24 elimination of the primary prevention

1 program, COPS.

2 In our foster care programs, we need
3 your support in asking for the state to
4 release the MSAR rates. We're now more than
5 halfway through the fiscal year, and
6 providers still do not have their rates. And
7 additionally, I can't state strongly enough
8 that we need for our providers to be held
9 harmless from having any of the federal
10 COVID-19 relief aid they were able to access,
11 such as the Paycheck Protection Program, from
12 having a negative future impact on their
13 state-set rates.

14 And finally, we were very concerned to
15 see language included in the Executive Budget
16 Briefing Book this year that stated New York
17 State would not adhere to its original
18 agreed-upon terms with the foster care
19 agencies that partnered with the state to
20 become Raise the Age providers over the past
21 few years. Providers were not given any
22 prior notice that the state would change the
23 financing structure of this program, and
24 they're now at a less than 60-day notice on

1 it. If there is no change made to this
2 decision, providers will be forced to make
3 difficult decisions to close down capacity.

4 We're asking for your help in
5 including language in your one-house budgets
6 to support these programs and making sure the
7 state fully executes its original agreement
8 with them to pay based on capacity through
9 September of this year. We truly believe
10 that if we can go ahead based on the original
11 terms agreed to with the state, we have an
12 opportunity to partner with the state to
13 preserve and to transform essential
14 residential capacity for our children and
15 youth with higher acuity, which are the needs
16 we'll see for our system under the Family
17 First Act implementation changes ahead.

18 Thank you.

19 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

20 Early Care & Learning Council?

21 MS. CHIMENTO: Hello. I'm Meredith
22 Chimento, executive director of the Early
23 Care & Learning Council, the membership
24 agency for the 35 childcare resource and

1 referral agencies in New York.

2 CCR&Rs and childcare businesses have
3 been a critical component of reopening the
4 economy and moving New York forward during
5 the pandemic. Named essential businesses,
6 childcare remained open, with decreased
7 enrollment, increased risks, and additional
8 expenses to operate. CARES funding was set
9 up to assist childcare providers during the
10 pandemic, yet the staggering loss of revenue,
11 increased costs for cleaning, and rising
12 fixed costs have forced programs to
13 permanently close. Today, in a meeting with
14 Senator Hinchey, I listened to a 26-year
15 group family provider reference that she
16 saved for rainy days, not rainy months.

17 Childcare was at a tipping point prior
18 to the pandemic. It has now fallen over.
19 Small businesses, predominantly owned by
20 women of color, have exhausted their life
21 savings to continue to care for our children.

22 ECLC supports the increased investment
23 of \$15 million to support infant/toddler
24 resource centers. CCR&Rs employ

1 infant/toddler specialists, mental health
2 consultants, which work to eliminate the
3 suspension and expulsion of Black and Brown
4 children in childcare. Across the nation,
5 over 250 preschoolers are suspended each day,
6 and Black students are expelled and expelled
7 at three times a greater rate than white
8 students. We must do better to equip our
9 providers with the appropriate techniques to
10 help our children thrive.

11 Currently there are only 58
12 infant/toddler specialists and 28 mental
13 health consultants tasked with serving the
14 18,000 regulated programs in New York State.

15 Additionally, we request \$4 million to
16 implement a Technical Assistance and Business
17 Support initiative, TABS, which would focus
18 primarily on family and group family
19 providers, to provide ongoing support and
20 technical assistance. Each CCR&R would
21 employ an individual whose sole role would be
22 to ensure that businesses operate in the
23 green, they are equipped to ensure that their
24 life savings are not destroyed, that they do

1 not incur considerable credit card debt --
2 rather, that they operate as a business that
3 is profitable.

4 As evidenced by the quality of many
5 CARES applications, we became aware that this
6 is a critical need. Childcare providers work
7 12-hour days, and throughout the pandemic
8 were then asked to add additional hours
9 submitting complex applications and tracking
10 receipts. The TABS initiative would assist
11 the programs, not only with the next round of
12 CARES funding; it will help ensure that the
13 childcare system does not entirely collapse.

14 CCR&Rs cannot continue to support the
15 providers in the way that is necessary, as
16 they have been flat-funded, like others, for
17 over 10 years. During the pandemic, CCR&Rs
18 worked seven days a week for months straight
19 to support the CARES process, while the
20 financial support received through the
21 administration of the CARES funding did not
22 begin to cover the costs associated with
23 increased staffing.

24 We must do better in supporting not

1 only our providers, but the early childhood
2 community that is responsible for ensuring --

3 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Meredith --

4 MS. CHIMENTO: -- that all children
5 have a safe, quality and affordable early
6 childhood experience. Thank you.

7 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

8 And now, Day Care Council?

9 MR. BRENDER: Thank you so much for
10 the opportunity to testify. My name is
11 Gregory Brender, and I'm here on behalf of
12 Day Care Council. We represent childcare
13 programs in New York City, and we are part of
14 the Empire State Campaign for Child Care and
15 Winning Beginning NY and support their ask.

16 As Meredith and others have pointed
17 out, the challenges that childcare providers
18 have faced during the pandemic are
19 unprecedented. At the same time, I think the
20 pandemic has really laid bare just how
21 essential childcare is. Childcare programs
22 have opened emergency childcare centers, and
23 family childcare homes have stayed open
24 through the pandemic to make sure that

1 essential workers were able to go to work.

2 We know that the economy cannot come
3 back and that businesses cannot reopen if we
4 do not build back childcare better.

5 Therefore, we support the asks that we've
6 laid out, with the Empire State Campaign for
7 Child Care, which includes making no cuts to
8 2020 funding in childcare, providing counties
9 with \$370 million to make the childcare
10 subsidy system more equitable by eliminating
11 unfair eligibility variations across counties
12 and communities and prioritizing those
13 families with the greatest need; committing
14 to eliminate expulsions and suspensions in
15 childcare and pre-K -- these are things that
16 disproportionately impact children of color,
17 and we want to set a statewide prohibition on
18 these suspensions and expulsions and invest
19 in the services that will support the most
20 vulnerable children -- and investing
21 \$100 million to increase workforce
22 compensation to a fair wage and improve
23 childcare quality.

24 Childcare workers are often not

1 recognized as educators. They do not receive
2 the same pay, benefits or pensions as staff
3 in public schools. And with the increased
4 recognition of how important childcare is to
5 reopening the economy, we want to see
6 meaningful progress made statewide on
7 ensuring that the compensation and support
8 for childcare staff is equitable.

9 Thank you so much for considering
10 this, and for all of your work on behalf of
11 childcare and families. We are happy to
12 answer any questions.

13 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So we go to
14 Assemblyman Hevesi for a speed round.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: A speed round.
16 I'm going to do it differently this time.

17 So first, thank you all for your
18 testimony. By the way, Meredith, hi {raising
19 fists}. There you go. Sorry, I had to do
20 that one.

21 So instead of asking you questions
22 about things that I agree with you
23 completely, I'm just going to take a second
24 to explain, if I can, why I agree with you.

1 I believe that for all policymakers,
2 the number-one enemy should be childhood
3 trauma, adverse childhood experiences. If
4 you attack childhood trauma, you can take a
5 bite out of the worst societal problems from
6 homelessness, recidivism in criminal justice,
7 kids failing out of school, alcohol and
8 substance abuse, generational poverty -- I
9 can keep going. That's where the smart
10 policy is.

11 And I am disappointed in the
12 Governor's budget because we have just come
13 through one of the worst crises in the
14 history of New York State for kids. And if
15 you ask any member, Senate or Assembly, tell
16 me about how the kids in your districts are
17 doing right now post-COVID, the answer's
18 going to be "Pretty rough."

19 So then we come to the budget. And we
20 know that 325,000 kids are now newly near the
21 poverty level, we know that 4,000 kids had
22 their parents or caregivers die and that a
23 good portion of them -- I think it's
24 23 percent -- are going to head into foster

1 care. We know about the racial inequality in
2 all of our systems. And so what's the
3 government response? How are we going to
4 help these kids? How do we come to the
5 rescue? Where's the cavalry?

6 And then we see the Executive Budget.
7 We're cutting preventative services. We're
8 cutting foster care. We're cutting -- we're
9 consolidating programs. We're doing
10 everything you should not be doing to respond
11 to this.

12 And I don't want to make this
13 adversarial with the Governor, but the public
14 policy that has been proposed in the
15 Executive Budget does two things that are
16 absolutely non-starters for me. Number one,
17 more kids are going to get hurt because of
18 this. There's no way to explain your way out
19 of it. I know that more kids are going to
20 get abused, and I'll debate anybody -- I
21 won't do it in the minute I have left -- but
22 I'll debate anybody who wants to argue that
23 cuts to preventative services aren't going to
24 lead to more kids getting abused.

1 That's number one. So I'd ask all my
2 colleagues, stand shoulder to shoulder with
3 me, we're going to be against child abuse.

4 And then the second thing, for some of
5 my other colleagues -- I'm trying to get my
6 more conservative colleagues on board here as
7 well. From a fiscal perspective, this is
8 remarkably bad government. Because every kid
9 who gets traumatized -- and there's going to
10 be tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of
11 thousands of them -- they're going to require
12 more expensive services, period.

13 So from a full-on budget perspective,
14 we are hurting ourselves, killing ourselves
15 in the outyears. And I know we're myopic as
16 politicians that we only look to the problems
17 right in front of us. And unfortunately,
18 that's the signal we're getting from the
19 Executive.

20 But it's the responsibility of the
21 Legislature to be long-term thinkers. We
22 don't want to hurt our kids, and we don't
23 want to cost ourselves more money in the
24 future, which is why all of the things in the

1 first two panels that they are advocating for
2 are right.

3 And I'm right on time. How 'bout
4 that, Helene. Thank you, everybody.

5 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes. So I
6 didn't get your question, but --

7 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: There was none.

8 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: We have a
9 question, I believe, from Assemblyman Ra.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you, Chair.

11 Kathleen, I have just a question. I
12 was reading your written remarks, and I just
13 was wondering if you can elaborate regarding
14 the hold-harmless and, you know, the impact
15 taking that away will have on capacity in
16 general.

17 And also I had mentioned to
18 Commissioner Poole this morning, you know,
19 whether the department was looking at the
20 impact it could also have with the
21 853 schools, who obviously you mention in
22 your remarks that they got the funding for
23 the capacity, but that was an additional
24 cost. So what the impact is, is from both of

1 those perspectives.

2 MS. BRADY-STEPHEN: Thank you,
3 Assemblyman Ra. And as always, thank you for
4 your support of our 853 schools.

5 So the 853 schools and the Special Act
6 school districts were a critical component of
7 the Raise the Age program. The original
8 request for applications out from OCFS made
9 it clear that the hold harmless for the three
10 years would be only for the residential
11 capacity and not for the tuition for
12 853 schools and Special Act school districts.
13 It also -- the state would not provide the
14 hold harmless on the Medicaid and health cost
15 side.

16 So these providers went into this
17 with, you know, eyes wide open saying, okay,
18 we acknowledge, you know, there will be
19 potential impacts on the 853 school side, and
20 a special education tuition, and on the
21 health side; however, we're going to have
22 this three-year hold-harmless period from the
23 state which is not due to expire until
24 September of this year.

1 And indeed, you know, we read the
2 Executive Budget Briefing Book to say the
3 state is going to go back on that commitment
4 to providers and instead is going to make
5 this change effective April 1.

6 I am concerned, to your question,
7 Assemblyman Ra, about the impact on capacity.
8 Because, you know, absent any further
9 guidance or discussion with the state, if
10 these providers were simply to wait until
11 April 1 and there's no change made to this
12 decision, I mean, they don't really have a
13 choice but to make the hard decision to
14 perhaps close down that capacity.

15 So what we'd really like to do is hold
16 to the original timeline, to September of
17 this year, and use the next six months that
18 that affords us to have that discussion with
19 the state about what we need to do to
20 transform the system for the Family First Act
21 capacity.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you. Even
23 better than Hevesi -- I left 30 seconds.

24 (Laughter.)

1 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. Okay.

2 {Inaudible.}

3 So I believe that's it for this panel.

4 Thank you all for being here with us.

5 So we're going to move on now to Panel

6 C: UJA-Federation of New York, Ariel

7 Savransky, NEW Pride Agenda, Cynthia Dames;

8 Catholic Charities Community Services,

9 Beatriz Diaz Taveras; and Human Services

10 Council, Gabriela Andrade.

11 And if we could start with Ariel.

12 MS. SAVRANSKY: Great. Good

13 afternoon. My name is Ariel Savransky, and I

14 am the policy and advocacy advisor at

15 UJA-Federation. UJA is one of the nation's

16 largest local philanthropies. Our mission is

17 to fight poverty, connect people to their

18 communities, and respond to crises both

19 locally and around the world.

20 Thank you for the opportunity to

21 testify and for all the work you do on behalf

22 of our human services agencies.

23 I'm just going to highlight three

24 specific areas from my much longer testimony.

1 First, supporting New York's nonprofit
2 human services providers. Over the past 11
3 months, the pandemic has impacted the lives
4 of all New Yorkers, particularly those living
5 in poverty, and our network of human services
6 providers has been on the front lines
7 supporting these New Yorkers.

8 However, the pandemic has exacerbated
9 the fiscal challenges these partners face.
10 We urge the state to honor state contracts
11 and pay for services already delivered to
12 residents and communities, and to recognize
13 human services workers as essential and
14 utilize a portion of any federal aid received
15 to fund emergency pay for the services they
16 provide to their communities.

17 Next, Holocaust survivors. New York
18 is home to nearly 40,000 Holocaust survivors,
19 40 percent of whom are living in poverty.
20 Thank you for providing \$450,000 to support
21 services for Holocaust survivors in last
22 year's budget, but more must be done.

23 The pandemic has been particularly
24 painful for survivors, many of whom already

1 suffer from posttraumatic stress, anxiety,
2 and other mental health complications.
3 Additionally, as survivors age, their needs
4 become more complex.

5 We ask that the state invest
6 \$2.5 million in FY '22 to fund care, services
7 and resources for Holocaust survivors living
8 in poverty.

9 And last, food insecurity. As I know
10 you are all aware, rates of food insecurity
11 have almost doubled in New York State over
12 the last year, with more people relying on
13 emergency food programs, food pantries, and
14 other emergency food services. Our food
15 pantries report having to turn people away,
16 reduce the amount of food distributed per
17 person, or limit their hours of operation
18 because they lack resources.

19 In order to meet this increased need,
20 UJA urges the state to increase funding for
21 the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition
22 Assistance program by \$16 million. As is,
23 the current funding does not allow pantries
24 to meet the standards established by the

1 state, which require that pantries
2 distribute a total of nine meals per guest.
3 Increased funding will result in compliance
4 and the ability to meet increased demand.

5 Next, maintain the Executive Budget
6 proposal to increase funding for the
7 Nourish NY program by \$25 million. So far
8 this program has been hugely successful,
9 funding the purchase of 17 million pounds of
10 food and benefiting over 1 million households
11 and 4,000 farms.

12 And last, maintain funding for the
13 Nutrition Education and Outreach Program.
14 With many New Yorkers now eligible for SNAP,
15 this program will ensure that New Yorkers
16 actually access the benefits they need.

17 Thank you for the opportunity to
18 testify.

19 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

20 Now, NEW Pride Agenda, Cynthia Dames.

21 Cynthia, you have to unmute yourself,
22 I believe. I don't know if we can do it for
23 you.

24 MS. DAMES: There we go. Hi. Cynthia

1 Dames. Nice to see you all. Nice to see you
2 particularly, Assemblymember Weinstein --
3 nice to see you're well -- Senator Liz
4 Krueger, and all members of the panel, a
5 pleasure, really.

6 My name is Cynthia Dames. I'm one of
7 the founders of the NEW Pride Agenda. The
8 NEW Pride Agenda is totally focused on trans,
9 gender-nonconforming, nonbinary communities,
10 people of color, people of poverty, people
11 that meet at the intersection of Black and
12 Brown identities. I am just an acting
13 project director as a volunteer to help
14 launch us. We hope to hire an executive
15 director representative of the community
16 soon.

17 Item number one -- just three items.
18 Item number one. We are part of your
19 community. We are your brothers, your
20 sisters, your kids, your friends, families of
21 friends, friends of families. We are you in
22 the queer community. So we ask that as you
23 pay attention to the safety net, for everyone
24 experiences difficulties regarding affordable

1 housing, and homeless, and food insecurity,
2 income inequity -- we too, our community, is
3 part of that community. And we ask you to
4 recognize and support us within that
5 community.

6 We go on record as also being
7 supportive of additional tax increases as
8 needed because it is important that poverty
9 is addressed in New York State, statewide.

10 Now, who's NEW Pride Agenda? We began
11 only a year and a half ago. We are advocacy,
12 education and support, just those functions.

13 We worked very hard, as soon as GENDA
14 came out, to encourage mandated training.
15 The Governor put that in the budget last year
16 for 340,000 state employees. We worked very
17 hard to get "Walking While Trans" in the
18 Executive Budget. It was in this year. And
19 God bless the Legislature -- we cried and we
20 cheered with our trans leaders when you
21 passed "Walking While Trans" last week.

22 We began 20 virtual town halls
23 statewide. And while the first two months
24 focused on COVID, the other 10 months are

1 entirely focused on human service needs. And
2 that is all the items all of my fellow
3 panelists have addressed.

4 What do we ask, in a very narrow
5 perspective. You kindly gave us \$50,000 last
6 year through OCFS for a downstate community
7 organizer, Ahmed Mohamed. He's done
8 tremendous work. We ask support for that and
9 an additional \$50,000 for an upstate
10 organizer, out of upstate or Western
11 New York. We need to hear and amplify needs
12 of upstate. So if we did so much with one,
13 imagine what we could do with two full-time
14 employees.

15 Thank you. Thank you all for your
16 kindness, friendship and support. Thank you
17 very much.

18 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you,
19 Cynthia.

20 Catholic Charities Community Services.

21 MS. TAVERAS: Thank you for the
22 opportunity to testify on behalf of
23 The Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of
24 New York, a federation of 90 contracting

1 agencies and providers of social services. I
2 am Beatriz Diaz Taveras, executive director
3 for Catholic Charities Community Services,
4 one of these 90 human service agencies.

5 I want to take my time and really
6 focus in on some of the items that we want to
7 bring to your attention.

8 The first one is the contract
9 withholding and rate adjustments. As you
10 know, the initial threat of 20 percent
11 contract withholding presented significant
12 operational challenges for our Catholic
13 charities agencies. While the reduction of
14 these withholdings is now 5 percent, this is
15 in one sense a relief, but it remains
16 contingent on federal assistance, and our
17 agencies are hurting.

18 We're advocating for an annual
19 3 percent increase to contracts amounts and
20 rates for the next five years, which would
21 help ensure that New Yorkers are able to
22 access the services they need as we defeat
23 and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The
24 human service agencies were the front workers

1 in this pandemic, and I think that needs to
2 be recognized.

3 We do support the Governor's inclusion
4 of the \$250 million in the Executive Budget
5 for the Affordable and Homeless Housing
6 Capital Plan. And in addition, we also
7 support the \$128 million for the Homeless
8 Housing and Assistance Program -- much needed
9 housing for all our communities.

10 Catholic Charities also urges New York
11 State to preserve the Liberty Defense Project
12 and the Pro Bono Program with a continued
13 \$10.8 million in funding to ensure all
14 immigrant New Yorkers' access to free,
15 quality legal counsel.

16 We also support the federal stimulus
17 legislation which has yielded significant
18 investments in and expanded access to
19 emergency food assistance programs, which my
20 colleague just mentioned, but we really do
21 recognize that these expansions are
22 necessary, although they come from federal
23 funding.

24 And we do want to continue advocacy

1 for this expansion of these programs; the
2 food insecurity in our communities is very
3 large.

4 We also want to talk about mental
5 health for children. The COVID-19 pandemic
6 continues to have an effect on child mental
7 health, and state action to allow for
8 expanded availability on telehealth has been
9 welcome. But maybe it should be made
10 permanent. Right now we receive
11 month-to-month notification that it is
12 continued. Let's expand it and make it
13 permanent.

14 And I see I have 16 seconds, so
15 disaster case management, if FEMA authorizes
16 submissions, we do think that New York State
17 should apply for disaster case management.
18 It will help all those families who are
19 suffering from COVID right now.

20 Thank you, that's my testimony. And
21 thank you for serving our New York State.

22 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.
23 Thank you. Now, the Human Services Council.

24 MS. ANDRADE: Good afternoon, and

1 thank you, Assemblymember Weinstein and
2 Senator Krueger for this opportunity to speak
3 today about the human services sector. I
4 also want to thank the committee chairs and
5 the New York State Legislature committee
6 members on Human Services.

7 My name is Gabriela Andrade, and I'm
8 the policy and organizing strategist at the
9 Human Services Council, HSC, a membership
10 organization representing over 170 human
11 services providers in New York City.

12 HSC serves our membership as a
13 coordinating body, advocate, and intermediary
14 between the human services sector and
15 government. We take on this work so that our
16 members can focus on running their
17 organizations and providing critical direct
18 service and support to New Yorkers.

19 Unfortunately, state budget cuts have
20 impacted the human services sector. Since
21 June of last year, the state has withheld
22 20 percent of contract payments while
23 demanding providers to do 100 percent of the
24 work, putting vital organizations in

1 financial peril.

2 Now, for fiscal year '22, the
3 5 percent withholding of payments on human
4 services contracts comes at an immense cost
5 and deep harm to the state's most
6 marginalized communities and neighborhoods.

7 The nonprofit human services sector
8 employs over 200,000 workers only in New York
9 City, and has seen a net loss of 44,000 jobs
10 since February 2020, with no job rebound in
11 sight. This is especially devastating
12 because New York City's human services
13 workforce is comprised of 82 percent women
14 and 80 percent people of color, making
15 providers a vital employer in communities of
16 color, who continue to be the hardest hit by
17 COVID-19.

18 The state must pay all nonprofit
19 contracts immediately, register late
20 contracts, and put a halt to the 5 percent
21 withholding on state contracts so New York
22 residents who need critical health, mental
23 health, domestic violence, housing,
24 nutrition, and early childhood education

1 services, to name a few, do not lose access
2 to critical lifelines of support nor suffer
3 any more profound economic and social harm.

4 The state must allocate funds in the
5 fiscal year '22 budget for emergency pay for
6 human services workers. The need for human
7 services increased exponentially during the
8 pandemic as residents from across the state
9 struggled with economic uncertainty. Human
10 services workers must be recognized as
11 essential workers so they can receive
12 emergency pay for their crucial work to
13 combat COVID-19 in their communities.

14 Finally, the state must invest in our
15 communities by enacting sensible
16 revenue-raising policies, such as the
17 ultra-millionaire tax and the pied-a-terre
18 tax, so that we overcome, as a state, the
19 budget deficit. By raising revenue, the
20 state will be able to invest in the human
21 services sector to help stabilize communities
22 ravaged by COVID-19 and structural racism.

23 Thank you for providing me this
24 opportunity to testify. We value our

1 partnership with the State Legislature and
2 know that you stand with us. Thanks.

3 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

4 Assemblywoman Linda Rosenthal, for
5 three minutes.

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Hi. I
7 wanted to introduce myself to some of you.
8 I'm Linda Rosenthal, I represent the Upper
9 West Side, parts of Hell's Kitchen, and I'm
10 the new chair of Social Services. So all
11 your testimony was very interesting to me in
12 that role.

13 I see Cynthia Dames, who I last saw
14 maybe a year ago out on the street in my
15 neighborhood and her neighborhood. So hi
16 again.

17 I wonder if all of you could give some
18 examples about how the 5 percent cut is
19 affecting the work of not-for-profits, human
20 services agencies. I know it's -- it would
21 be really a dramatic cut, so maybe some of
22 you -- each of you could present like one
23 example of how people would not have access
24 to certain programs that are life-saving or

1 life-enhancing. And Ariel, if you could
2 start.

3 MS. SAVRANSKY: In general, just UJA
4 as an umbrella agency, what we've been
5 hearing from our contracted partners -- and
6 this isn't a secret, but we know that, you
7 know, in general our human services contracts
8 are often late, they often don't cover the
9 full cost of a program. So to cut them even
10 further just means that our partners have to
11 find other ways to fund these critical
12 programs that are up and still running as a
13 result of the pandemic.

14 So we have childcare programs, we have
15 mental health programs that are really
16 struggling, food pantries that, you know, UJA
17 has stepped in, in numerous cases, to make
18 sure that our food pantries have access to
19 the resources they need to be able to serve
20 the increase.

21 So, you know, in general it's really a
22 systemwide problem that those -- those
23 programs are some of the examples that we've
24 been hearing.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Okay, thank
2 you. Gabriela?

3 MS. ANDRADE: Yes, so one of the
4 examples I can think of right now is we were
5 talking with our state partners from the
6 mental health sector, and they were telling
7 us how now with all this withholding there
8 are already people on waiting lists to get
9 some services, to get mental health services,
10 and now with the withholdings, the lines --
11 like the waiting list is even longer.

12 And it happens with all services,
13 right? There were already people waiting to
14 get many of these services, either like
15 childcare, to get housing services, but now
16 with the withholding, the numbers and the
17 waiting, it's even longer. And we're in a
18 crisis, we're in the middle of a pandemic, so
19 like what are people supposed to do, right?
20 So yeah, we just -- that's one example I can
21 think of right now.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Okay, thank
23 you. And Beatriz, you have a few seconds,
24 I'm sorry.

1 MS. TAVERAS: Five percent might not
2 seem like much, but when our budgets are so
3 tight, 5 percent is a lot. So you're talking
4 about we have to scale down our workforce.
5 That's why the waiting lists are longer,
6 because we just can't hire.

7 Also, we still have to pay our rent,
8 and that is going up. We still have to pay
9 our heating costs, and this winter has been a
10 little bit more -- harder than last winter.
11 So all our oil bills, all our gas bills, all
12 of that is going up.

13 And we -- the 5 percent cut is just
14 not feasible for us to absorb. But still, we
15 have to provide 100 percent of the service.
16 We can't forget that.

17 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank -- thank
18 you.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Thank you.

20 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Feel free,
21 members of the panel, to share some
22 additional examples if you'd like with myself
23 and Senator Krueger, and we'll make sure to
24 distribute to all of the members.

1 So I want to -- I don't see any other
2 questions from the Assembly or Senate, so I
3 think we're going to move on to the next
4 panel, Panel D, which is New York State
5 Veterans Defense Program, Roy Diehl,
6 Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army, retired;
7 Justice for Vets, Clyde Tate II, Major
8 General, U.S. Army, retired, New York State
9 Council of Veterans Organizations, Kirby
10 Hannan.

11 So you can go in that order, with Roy
12 Diehl first.

13 LT. COLONEL (RET.) DIEHL: Well, thank
14 you very much. I appreciate being able to
15 speak before you all today, courtesy of all
16 this technology.

17 The Veterans Defense Program
18 appreciates the 2020 legislative adds that
19 provided a total of \$720,000 of funding for
20 our program statewide. Of course, with COVID
21 affecting state funds, we were only able to
22 get by through the year thanks to lending, so
23 we had to borrow a lot to make up for pay.

24 I understand we're starting to have

1 some funds trickle in, but also we were able
2 to make use of technology to continue to
3 serve our clients.

4 So over the year we had about 200 new
5 cases. Again, we're dealing with the full
6 gamut from child support all the way to
7 second-degree murder, and then we're not
8 restricted just to Veterans Treatment Court
9 cases and misdemeanors. We had 50 cases that
10 were still continuing from prior years.

11 Most of our clients, according to the
12 information that we're able to put together,
13 some 80 to 90 percent of our clients are
14 suffering from some kind of physical, mental
15 or emotional disability that they incurred in
16 the line of duty while serving the country in
17 one of the armed forces. In most of these
18 cases, the conditions that they suffer from
19 contributed a great deal to the reasons
20 they're now involved in the justice system.

21 What we're doing is we're helping
22 their defense counsel understand who their
23 client is in terms of their military service
24 and what got them there, which then helps

1 inform the prosecution, which otherwise
2 wouldn't know and probably wouldn't care.
3 Again, there are exceptions, but by and large
4 we're letting the light flow in these things.

5 So without our help, more vets would
6 end up in jail, fewer would be in treatment
7 court, and we've calculated that the state
8 would have had about \$83 million more
9 expenses just in jail for these poor guys who
10 need help, not punishment.

11 We're asking for 2021 for renewal of
12 the \$500,000 that the Legislature, the
13 Assembly and the Senate together, have
14 contributed to our statewide operations, and
15 renewal of the \$220,000 state-sponsorship of
16 our Long Island office. What we're doing is
17 valuable also in helping defense counsel in
18 general learn about the -- their clients who
19 are military veterans, so that -- again, not
20 just if they have a client, but so they can
21 deal with their clients overall, the whole
22 population, better.

23 So I'll leave it at that and yield the
24 extra 9 seconds of my time.

1 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. Clyde
2 Tate, Major General, U.S. Army, Retired.

3 MAJOR GENERAL (RET.) TATE: Thank you
4 very much. I'm Clyde J. Tate II, 31-year
5 veteran of the United States Army, last
6 serving as the Deputy Judge Advocate General.
7 I thank all of you for your time, and I'm
8 impressed by your resilience, having been
9 watching you all day long. Well done.

10 As proud as I am of my own service, I
11 have even greater pride in my father's
12 service. I'm an Army brat. He served
13 36 years as a combat infantryman, two tours
14 in Vietnam. And the country, by and large,
15 made a choice when he returned, he and his
16 fellow soldiers, and that was to turn their
17 backs on those veterans and to turn their
18 backs on those veterans' needs -- in the
19 hope, I suppose, that we could just forget
20 about the war. That's not a very good choice
21 to make.

22 And I think now we have another choice
23 presented to us, as I outlined in my written
24 statement, that I would urge New York to

1 pursue, a choice that takes into
2 consideration the unique needs of our
3 veterans, their unique experiences, and when
4 they do intersect with the criminal justice
5 system and law enforcement, that they're
6 placed in the system in Veterans Treatment
7 Courts that respond to and are well-attuned
8 to their unique experiences.

9 I was still on active duty when I
10 visited Judge Russell's court in Buffalo, and
11 I walked away from that experience believing
12 that Veterans Treatment Courts represented
13 the government, the courts, and the community
14 at their absolute finest. Veterans Treatment
15 Courts restore lives -- they don't just
16 restore them, they at times save lives. They
17 restore hope. They save money for the state.
18 They -- at the same time, in doing all of
19 that, they still provide for accountability
20 and safety in the community.

21 Now, the 400-plus Veterans Treatment
22 Courts in the country, as well as many
23 thousands of vets and their family members
24 served by those courts, owe their success to

1 what really started in Buffalo, New York, in
2 2008, with Judge Russell and the Veterans
3 Treatment Courts. New York now has the
4 opportunity to take the next step and do what
5 I have not seen done in any other
6 jurisdiction in any other state, and that is
7 place a Veterans Treatment Court within reach
8 of every single veteran in your state.

9 You have that opportunity with this
10 initiative that's on your plate now. And I
11 urge you to give favorable consideration to
12 and support for that. This is yet another
13 opportunity for New York to not just say
14 thanks to a veteran for his or her service,
15 but in fact to take action that shows that
16 you recognize the value of their service,
17 their sacrifice and their contribution, and
18 the impact of that service on some of them.

19 So again, thank you for your time
20 today, and I ask for your support for and
21 favorable consideration of that transfer
22 initiative that allows courts to transfer
23 from a county that doesn't have a Veterans
24 Treatment Court to a county that does.

1 Thank you very much for your time.

2 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Kirby, please,
3 now.

4 MR. HANNAN: Thank you very much.
5 Thank you, Assemblywoman Weinstein.

6 So I'm here to talk about the Dwyer
7 Program, and I've been doing that for about
8 the last eight years. And you've all
9 listened, and all I can do is thank you for
10 being here today, and thank you for being
11 there all those eight years. Because it's
12 got an understanding now, and it's got
13 funding -- it could always use more, but
14 nonetheless, here's where we are.

15 Well, what I want to do is try to
16 discuss today, very quickly, how does it work
17 with VTC, Veterans Treatment Court, and VDP,
18 Veterans Defense Program.

19 The mentors are from the ground up.
20 It starts at the post level, it works in a
21 peer-to-peer way, it's much like AA. And all
22 you have to do is go to the Why6Vet website,
23 Why6Vet website, and you can see all the
24 programs that are offered to vets. It's

1 brilliant -- it's a Hudson Valley program.
2 It's brilliant and it's also daunting, and I
3 don't mean that in a critical way. It's
4 daunting in that the mentor then needs to
5 come into play, needs to work with the
6 veteran and work their way through that type
7 of a website, find the right service for the
8 right -- and the right program for the right
9 veteran.

10 So that's how it works at that level.
11 The mentor then, if they're good at what they
12 do, they get chosen or they make themselves
13 available to the Veterans Treatment Court,
14 they become a mentor and they go into the
15 court with the veteran and get the court to
16 understand maybe some of the extenuating
17 circumstances that the veteran is
18 experiencing. And in a way, the mentor, the
19 judge, the public defender in some cases,
20 they become one. And the Veterans Treatment
21 Court does a great job of connecting with the
22 veteran mentors at the local level, and that
23 needs to be emphasized as we move along.

24 Finally, the mentor at the VDP level,

1 it's a more serious offense, usually
2 felonies, and -- by the way, this program
3 offers hope to all veterans. So this is
4 important. Because when the veteran gets to
5 the point where he or she thinks -- and it's
6 mostly he's in this case -- that there's no
7 other recourse, then VDP is there.

8 And they're in hundreds of courts, you
9 know, representing probably a couple of
10 hundred vets a year, maybe more. But it's
11 the number of courts that becomes important,
12 because they educate the court system on some
13 of these stressors. And really, in
14 conclusion, what I really want to do is say
15 that we want to make sure that the veterans
16 defense always includes people who know what
17 a tunnel rat was in the Vietnam era, my era,
18 or, you know, where Kandahar is on the map
19 and what stresses may have occurred there.

20 So there you go, you got my five
21 seconds, get crazy.

22 (Laughter.)

23 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. Thank
24 you. Thank you all for being here,

1 testifying.

2 We have a couple of questioners, so
3 Veterans Chair Didi Barrett.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Thank you,
5 Chair. And thank you, gentlemen, so much for
6 being here. Thank you for your service,
7 thank you for what you do every day. And
8 thank you for explaining what this Article
9 VII really will do. And Kirby, thanks for
10 wrapping it all up.

11 To the other two gentlemen, I've had a
12 hard time kind of getting a real
13 understanding of this, and I really
14 appreciate your endorsement and your clarity
15 in really sharing what the impact will be.
16 And I -- you know, sounds like it's all a
17 good thing.

18 I just want to get -- you know, sort
19 of open up the possibility of is this
20 something that -- is there something more
21 that we should be doing at this point? Are
22 we reaching, you know, all -- just by opening
23 it up to a neighboring county, are we
24 reaching everybody, or are we still -- are

1 there still gaps here that we're not
2 addressing? And then obviously in the Dwyer
3 funds, it's kind of the same question.
4 There's only I think 25 counties plus
5 New York City that are covered by Dwyer funds
6 even when we get it, and obviously we know
7 that this year was not -- we didn't even see
8 it fully distributed.

9 So I'd just love your thoughts, since
10 the three of you are here, on how we might be
11 doing this even more effectively and
12 expansively to cover all of our veterans in
13 New York State.

14 MR. HANNAN: Madam Chair?

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Yes.

16 MR. HANNAN: Assemblywoman Barrett,
17 yeah, there is something, I think that -- I
18 think we looked at today, and that was the
19 testimony of Joel Evans from DVS.

20 And one of the things I think that DVS
21 would embrace, which may get the Dwyer
22 Program closer to the Veteran Service Officer
23 within DVS, is to maybe request, require,
24 however it may happen, get the Veteran

1 Service Officer through -- in DVS, and also
2 the VFW's Veteran Service Officers and
3 others, to take the accreditation course that
4 OMH has, so that the peer-to-peer counseling
5 that goes on would be more informed, and even
6 if it happens at a two-step level or whatever
7 it might be.

8 That way, I think the questions that
9 came up regarding OMH and DVS and whether the
10 program should be in one place or the other
11 and that sort of thing, maybe that could be
12 addressed in a step-by-step fashion. And I
13 think the first step could easily be that the
14 VSOs, Veteran Service Officers, who are very,
15 very knowledgeable anyway, would become more
16 inculcated in the OMH accreditation
17 peer-to-peer program, take it online,
18 et cetera. I don't think there's any cost
19 involved.

20 There you go, that's my thought.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Okay, thank
22 you.

23 LT. COLONEL (RET.) DIEHL: I just
24 wanted to kick in that the success of a VTC

1 depends a great deal on whether or not it's
2 supported by the district attorney. A lot of
3 district attorneys just do not appreciate
4 treatment courts in general and appear to
5 have zero regard for veterans, I'm sorry to
6 say. So without that support, well, there's
7 just only so much you can do. Places where
8 it's successful, it's got the support.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Could they
10 sabotage this in a county if that were their
11 attitude?

12 LT. COLONEL (RET.) DIEHL: I believe
13 very much so. Sabotage is a deliberate, you
14 know, negative word. But nonetheless, the
15 bill as is requires the consent of the
16 receiving attorney. If the district
17 attorney, if the attorney general in the
18 receiving county doesn't like their VTC
19 anyway, then the likelihood they're going to
20 accept someone from outside of the county,
21 it's kind of nugatory.

22 MAJOR GENERAL (RET.) TATE: Ten
23 seconds. This initiative fills one of the
24 biggest gaps you have, which is a group of

1 veterans in your state not otherwise having
2 access to a Veterans Treatment Court. And
3 this fills that enormous gap in a very
4 manageable way. Thank you very much.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRETT: Thank you.

6 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

7 So I don't see any other questioners,
8 so thank you all for the work you do.

9 And I'll call on the next panel, which
10 is --

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Brooks
12 raised his hand.

13 Yes, Senator Brooks.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senator Brooks.

15 SENATOR BROOKS: Thank you, Madam
16 Chairs.

17 I just want to thank the three of you
18 for this work that you're doing and the
19 service to our veterans. Major General, we
20 don't ever want to have a vet come back home
21 and experience what your dad did so many
22 years ago.

23 I think it's terrific what we're doing
24 in the court area, the ability to cut this

1 program back if someone doesn't want to
2 accept something with something, we have to
3 take a look and make sure we don't allow that
4 to happen.

5 Kirby, you've been there forever and a
6 day on the Dwyer Program, which is greatly
7 successful, and working with these folks to
8 do that. I think you guys are part of the
9 bright lights in how we're trying to help the
10 veterans. And hopefully these programs are
11 going to be accepted across the state, our
12 veterans will get an opportunity for a better
13 swing at the bat when they get into the court
14 system, and I just want to thank the three of
15 you for what you're doing both now, after
16 your time in the service, and while you were
17 on active duty. And just to say thank you so
18 very much. Thanks.

19 LT. COLONEL (RET.) DIEHL: Thank you,
20 sir.

21 MAJOR GENERAL (RET.) TATE: Thank you,
22 sir.

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Helene, now we
24 have one more Assemblymember and one more

1 Senator.

2 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Right. So we
3 go to Assemblyman Jake Ashby, our ranker on
4 Veterans' Affairs, three minutes.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN ASHBY: Thank you. Thank
6 you, Madam Chair. And thank you, gentlemen,
7 for being here today. Thank you for your
8 testimony.

9 In terms of being able to build on
10 this program and really make it sustainable,
11 have you seen examples in other states that
12 you feel like we could be doing here in
13 New York that would help? And it's a
14 question for all of you.

15 MAJOR GENERAL (RET.) TATE: Part of
16 what we do at Justice for Vets is training
17 and technical assistance across the country.
18 What you are undertaking, and at least what
19 you are considering is honestly one of a kind
20 in making this a statewide program through
21 which all of your veterans benefit, and a way
22 for you to fulfill the obligation to all of
23 the veterans in your state, not just the
24 select few whose judges have seen fit to

1 implement a court.

2 Are there other programs to emulate?

3 I'm certain that there are. But your 36
4 Veterans Treatment Courts, especially those
5 that incorporate mentors, that incorporate
6 all the right community players, all of the
7 right VSOs, you're doing it absolutely right.

8 We can always -- everyone can always
9 get better, but you are absolutely on a solid
10 foundation. I think this initiative will
11 help sort of take you to the next level, help
12 you go statewide, and then you just continue
13 to get better. With each little bit of
14 success, you'll build on that to have
15 statewide success.

16 But again, if they visit
17 Judge Russell, if they visit the court in
18 Rochester that I visited, they'll see how
19 it's done and how it's done well. Thank you
20 for your question.

21 LT. COLONEL (RET.) DIEHL: I have to
22 add that our Veterans Defense Program still
23 is relatively unique in the nation. So where
24 there are VTCs elsewhere in the country, it

1 seems that each defense office stands pretty
2 much on its own devices.

3 So here in New York we're able to
4 provide a consistent available state service,
5 statewide service to all of the courts, all
6 the county defenders, including the counsel
7 that veterans might hire privately because
8 they don't qualify for a public defender.

9 So we're helping everyone connect with
10 that service experience regardless. Again,
11 New York is in the lead on that, and I hope
12 we stay that way.

13 MR. HANNAN: The Dwyer Program, same
14 way. It's unique and, you know, you're to be
15 recognized for it. The feds are just
16 catching up with it, and they haven't. And
17 thank you very much.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN ASHBY: Thank you all.

19 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: And thank you.

20 Now to the Senate.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes, Senator Sue
22 Serino.

23 SENATOR SERINO: Thank you, Madam
24 Chairwoman. And thank you all so much for

1 your service.

2 And the Dwyer Program, I know how
3 valuable it's been in our district; I share
4 the district with Assemblywoman Didi Barrett,
5 and we've had tremendous results. I always
6 say you get the most bang for your buck with
7 those dollars. And I would really love to
8 see it go statewide.

9 Very encouraging about the Veterans
10 Treatment Courts. I know my guys in my area
11 would really love to see it come to us.

12 And then I just have a question about
13 like the VFWs and the American Legions.
14 They've always struggled, and now through the
15 pandemic they're really hit hard. Do you
16 guys have any idea like what kind of a role
17 that the state could play? Would it be
18 through grants, you know, getting younger
19 people involved? That's always been an issue
20 that we've been working on. Because we
21 really need to make sure that they survive
22 this pandemic.

23 MR. HANNAN: I think -- I'd like to
24 answer that, because I'm also the legislative

1 advocate for the VFW as a volunteer. And
2 honestly, you know, veterans have been
3 self-funding their programs for 50 years.
4 And we do need some attention to charity. We
5 get charity gaming.

6 I think that grants and a program to
7 direct posts grants is an important
8 initiative, and I know that Senator Brooks
9 has brought that up from time to time, and
10 that's something that perhaps we could do.

11 Also, too, though, let the posts do
12 their own self-funding, because as I said,
13 it's something that they've been doing and
14 doing well for a long time.

15 SENATOR SERINO: Thank you, Kirby.

16 And I just want to say thank you to
17 Senator Brooks too, he's always been such a
18 champion for our veterans. I appreciate all
19 of his hard work. So thank you, everyone.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

21 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: So I believe
22 that there are no more -- yes, there are no
23 more questions, so I just want to join in
24 thanking you for your service and for being

1 here today and helping provide us with some
2 information.

3 We're going to now move on to Panel E,
4 New York StateWide Senior Action Council,
5 Gail Myers; The Association on Aging in
6 New York, Rebecca Preve; Services & Advocacy
7 for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender
8 Elders, SAGE, Melissa Sklarz; LiveOn NY,
9 Katelyn Andrews; and National Federation of
10 the Blind of New York State, Raymond Wayne.

11 So Gail, if we could start with you,
12 that would be great.

13 MS. MYERS: Thank you. Thank you on
14 behalf of New York StateWide Senior Action
15 Council, and also to the staff behind the
16 scenes who make virtual testifying very easy
17 for us today.

18 I want to start out by saying that if
19 the pandemic taught us anything, it's the
20 need to make sure that the infrastructure of
21 our public health and community-based
22 services must be strong. And we urge you to
23 move away from austerity budgeting. That has
24 been what we have seen for the past decade.

1 You really need to invest in services. They
2 have been withering due to flat or cut budget
3 funding for years. Raise the revenue to do
4 that, we're all behind you.

5 Like your own constituent services,
6 Statewide's Patients' Rights Helpline has
7 been responding to an extraordinary amount of
8 concerns during the past year, and we have
9 worked hard to address those. Thank you for
10 increasing our budget last year. We are
11 distressed, however, that NYSOFA still has
12 not contracted with us for any of the 2021
13 appropriation for these services. So we
14 would like to ask you to reappropriate that
15 money from last year moving forward and ask
16 you once again to add legislative funds to
17 the budget of \$200,000 to support our
18 Patients' Rights Helpline program.

19 Regarding services that are offered
20 through the State Office for the Aging, we
21 urge you to increase funding to meet need.
22 And what I want you to particularly stress is
23 that over the years the cost of living
24 adjustment has been deferred. Now, that

1 happens in other agencies too, but in the
2 mental hygiene agencies and the health
3 agencies they are getting hard cash for the
4 minimum wage increase, and NYSOFA's services
5 have not gotten that. So there's a disparity
6 there.

7 We want you to stress that there's a
8 home care worker shortage. There are several
9 proposals to address that that we hope you
10 include: The Home Care Jobs Innovation Fund,
11 the Invest in Care Act, and the Fair Pay for
12 Home Care Act. And we want to make sure that
13 those apply to EISEP as well.

14 We have extensive testimony on the
15 ombudsman program and on the improvements
16 needed to long-term care. I will just remind
17 you that the Comptroller found that there was
18 only half the number of local staff needed
19 for the ombudsman program to meet the minimum
20 standards, and that about a third of
21 facilities had not been visited by an
22 ombudsman -- and that has only gotten worse
23 since the pandemic.

24 In terms of improvements to long-term

1 care, thank you for allowing us to testify
2 last summer. We particularly want you to
3 look at the Governor's budget narrative on
4 enhancing nursing home quality of care and
5 get some specifics that are related to the
6 language he will be posing in regulations.

7 Lastly -- two lastlys -- we recommend
8 that you increase the Medicare Savings
9 Program to 200 percent of the federal poverty
10 level, and that you expand the EPIC program
11 by supporting Senator May's bill Senate 4603.

12 Thank you.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: You're on mute,
14 Helene.

15 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: I realize that.

16 Rebecca, it's time for you to go,
17 speak.

18 MS. PREVE: Hi, thank you so much.
19 And I want to say thank you to all Senate and
20 Assembly members, especially to Senator May,
21 who chairs the Aging Committee, as well as
22 our new chair in the Assembly, Assemblyman
23 Kim. Thank you all so much.

24 My name is Becky Preve. I'm the

1 executive director of the Association on
2 Aging in New York State, and we represent the
3 59 Offices for the Aging throughout New York
4 State who work with a variety of about 1200
5 subcontractors to provide services.

6 I want to say, first and foremost, I
7 could not be more proud of what this network
8 has done through this pandemic. I think all
9 of you have seen it in your districts. And I
10 think our relationship with all of you, as
11 well as the New York State Office for the
12 Aging, could not be a more positive one. So
13 thank all of you.

14 I have submitted extensive written
15 testimony which I'm not going to go through,
16 but I wanted to highlight a couple of things.
17 First and foremost, we serve about
18 1.3 million older New Yorkers each year, and
19 their families and caregivers. And we do
20 that in a variety of ways, from our most
21 intense programs for home care services to
22 wellness programs and volunteer
23 opportunities.

24 New York State is unique; we're fourth

1 in the nation as far as the 60-plus
2 population, and we really have an extensive
3 public/private partnership across New York
4 State to provide services.

5 We've also seen a huge impact in this
6 population of service providers, as well as
7 older New Yorkers themselves, through the
8 COVID-19 pandemic.

9 I wanted to start by touching base on
10 the unmet need, or the waitlist information
11 that was referenced earlier today. We do
12 have extensive waitlists throughout New York
13 State, and those continue to grow. And it's
14 something that we really take a look at from
15 a Medicaid standpoint.

16 So currently we have thousands of
17 older New Yorkers waiting for a variety of
18 services, whether it be home-delivered meals,
19 home care services, just to kind of name a
20 few. And what we know from our own data is
21 that these are non-Medicaid-eligible
22 individuals.

23 So we looked at what happened to
24 someone that's on a waitlist in New York

1 State, and we found that about 10 percent of
2 anybody on a waitlist goes directly to a
3 skilled nursing facility, and another
4 6 percent spend down to MLTC or
5 community-based Medicaid coverage. What that
6 means, as all of you are very well aware, is
7 that the predominant care source at a skilled
8 nursing facility is on the Medicaid dollar.

9 To clean up our current waitlist, we
10 would be looking at an investment of about
11 \$27 million for the state, which would book
12 against about \$60 million just in skilled
13 nursing facilities' state-share Medicaid
14 coverage. So I really wanted to highlight
15 that.

16 I also wanted to talk about COVID-19
17 and the massive impact we've seen across the
18 state. We've seen a 70 to 90 percent
19 increase in our core services and the demand
20 for those services that are absolutely
21 life-sustaining, and we still aren't able to
22 get our direct workforce vaccinated as a
23 priority.

24 So one of the things I wanted to raise

1 to you, for legislative priorities, we are
2 looking for the investment in our unmet need.
3 We're also looking to restore the funding for
4 Lifespan of Greater Rochester and their elder
5 abuse prevention program. We're also asking
6 for a \$5 million increase in our ombudsman
7 program -- we've talked at length today about
8 the need for investments into the ombudsman
9 program -- as well as a \$5 million investment
10 into technology services, as we really try to
11 bridge the digital divide in the older
12 population.

13 Thank you.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Melissa, now?

15 MS. SKLARZ: Hooray. So my name is
16 Melissa Sklarz. Thank you for having this
17 hearing today. I'm the SAGE senior
18 government relations strategist.

19 SAGE is the first and largest
20 organization in the country dedicated to
21 improving the lives of LGBT elders. We
22 provide services and programs to LGBT older
23 people in New York City and throughout the
24 state with our affiliates in Long Island,

1 Hudson Valley, Syracuse and Rochester.

2 As the state continues to age, LGBT
3 elders are a significant part of that growing
4 population, but more often it seems
5 invisible, disconnected from services and
6 severely isolated. LGBT elders are twice as
7 likely to live alone, half as likely to be
8 partnered, and more than four times less
9 likely to have kids.

10 LGBT older people need to rely more
11 heavily on community services as they age.
12 And now we have the pandemic, so LGBT elders
13 are really living in the epicenter of it, not
14 only because of their age, but because of
15 high levels of underlying health issues like
16 HIV and diabetes, high levels of poverty,
17 food and housing insecurity, low access to
18 healthcare and supportive services,
19 isolation, and thin support networks. All of
20 these are made even worse for transgender
21 elders and LGBT older people of color.

22 SAGE provides comprehensive services
23 with our housing; we currently have housing
24 in Brooklyn and in the Bronx. There are

1 145 units at our Stonewall House in Brooklyn,
2 and 83 units are now opening up in East
3 Crotona in the Bronx. Both have set-asides
4 for the formerly homeless. Both buildings
5 are anchored by large SAGE Centers. The one
6 in the Bronx will be the largest SAGE Center
7 in New York City, with over 10,000 square
8 feet.

9 And since the pandemic, we have
10 transferred all of our services to virtual
11 and telephonic formats. We've been able to
12 offer more than 100 virtual SAGE Center
13 programs every week, attracting hundreds of
14 LGBT allies and elders, that range from yoga
15 to Spanish to discussion groups. I almost
16 want to quit my job so I can learn Spanish at
17 SAGE.

18 Of course we also have our SAGEVet
19 program. Thanks to the Restoration of Honor,
20 it's made our ability to reach out and access
21 our LGBT veterans throughout the state more
22 robust. A lot of our elder veterans are not
23 getting their federal benefits, they rely on
24 the state, shifting what should be a federal

1 expense to a state expense. SAGEVets
2 provides crucial support and saves money and
3 funding from the benefits that are entitled.

4 We've developed new programming.

5 Well, I wanted to ask for a restoration of
6 support. There's \$100,000 for our
7 comprehensive care, \$200,000 for support for
8 general services and expenses, and for our
9 SAGEVet program, \$150,000 to continue the
10 crucial outreach and benefits of connection
11 to LGBT older veterans.

12 Thanks for the chance to testify
13 today.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Next we go to
15 LiveOn NY, Katelyn Andrews.

16 MS. ANDREWS: Hi. Thank you for
17 having me here today. My name is Katelyn
18 Andrews, and I'm the director of public
19 policy at LiveOn NY.

20 LiveOn NY's members include more than
21 100 community-based organizations, including
22 SAGE, who you just heard from, that provide
23 core services to older adults throughout the
24 state, including senior centers,

1 home-delivered meals, affordable senior
2 housing, NORCs, home care, and more.

3 We believe that aging creates momentum
4 that drives our state forward, that older
5 adults power local economies, political
6 systems and our communities. Unfortunately,
7 despite older New Yorkers being an asset to
8 our state, they have not been invested in as
9 such. Our Executive Budget allocates NYSOFA
10 a small fraction of our overall budget, only
11 \$271 million. That's 3.12 million less than
12 last fiscal year, all amidst a global
13 pandemic in which seniors have been the
14 hardest hit.

15 It's true the pandemic highlighted
16 disparities and inequities in our
17 communities, and it's particularly true among
18 Black and Brown older adults, who are five
19 times more likely to be hospitalized due to
20 COVID in comparison to white peers, and twice
21 as likely to die from the virus.

22 There's a lot of work that needs to be
23 done, and part of this can be done by
24 investing in supports that we know work.

1 There are currently 11,000 older
2 adults that are languishing on waiting lists
3 for services -- services that deter the need
4 for higher levels of care in settings that
5 prove particularly vulnerable to the virus.
6 It's time to address this and fund NYSOFA's
7 community-based services to reduce waiting
8 lists. This will take an investment to the
9 tune of \$27 million to fully address the
10 waiting lists.

11 They're real. They're not going away.
12 While federal stimulus might play a role,
13 it's a Band-Aid. The trajectory of waiting
14 lists is not new. These services have been
15 seeing an increase in demand year after year,
16 partially due to demographic growth, and this
17 demand will exist long after the pandemic.
18 We need state funding in place for the
19 long-term demand for these programs as well
20 as not to exacerbate the stress of COVID by
21 forcing an older adult to choose between an
22 institutional setting that proved vulnerable,
23 or to go without the care that they need.

24 The good news: By making these

1 investments, we will reduce Medicaid
2 spending. We're all looking for that answer,
3 to reduce Medicaid spending, and here it is.
4 By just a 1 percent increase in meal service,
5 the state would find a savings of about
6 \$11 million to Medicaid, by an independent
7 research firm that found that. That proves
8 that waiting for services costs more than the
9 service itself.

10 This is our main funding request, but
11 I'd love to highlight three other restorative
12 asks that we would love to see happen this
13 year. One, restore \$200,000 in historically
14 legislative funding for LiveOn NY's RISE
15 program. Two, restore \$340,000 in funding
16 for Lifespan's New York State Coalition on
17 Elder Abuse. And three, restore \$325,000 in
18 historically legislative funding for NORCs.

19 Thank you.

20 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

21 And now, National Federation of the
22 Blind of New York State, Raymond Wayne.

23 MR. WAYNE: Can you hear me? Can you
24 see me?

1 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Yes. Yes, we
2 can hear and see you. Thank you.

3 MR. WAYNE: Thank you for the
4 opportunity to testify, and thank you for the
5 technical assistance. Tell me if I'm too
6 loud.

7 I'm Ray Wayne, National Federation of
8 the Blind of New York State. We are a
9 nationwide organization of blind people. I'm
10 here today on behalf of a particular subgroup
11 of seniors, and that is seniors who are
12 beginning to lose their sight. And as the
13 Baby Boomer generation ages, we're going to
14 have more of those.

15 Now, there's not a lot of training
16 opportunities available for seniors losing
17 sight. They need to learn how to do things
18 nonvisually that they spent most of their
19 lives doing visually, like cooking, shopping,
20 using public transportation, using
21 technology. The Commission for the Blind
22 gets some funding from the feds and the
23 state, but it's not nearly enough. And I
24 can't tell you how many seniors are just not

1 getting any training.

2 And the worst-case scenario is that
3 some of these seniors end up in nursing homes
4 when the only real significant disability
5 they have is vision loss, and it costs more
6 than \$70,000 a year for the state to maintain
7 one person in a nursing home. And we've
8 heard today and we all know how dangerous and
9 unpleasant nursing homes can be, so we want
10 to avoid that.

11 So we're asking for additional annual
12 funding of \$5 million to the Commission for
13 the Blind to provide more -- {Interruption.}
14 I'm sorry about that, that's my computer --
15 to provide more training opportunities to
16 this population.

17 This is going to pay for itself
18 because you won't have seniors going into
19 nursing homes just because their eyesight
20 isn't so good. You'll have them staying in
21 their communities, participating in their
22 communities, and having a much better quality
23 of life.

24 Thank you.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

2 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: A number of
3 members would like to ask questions.

4 So first we go to the chair of our
5 Aging Committee, Assemblyman Kim.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you,
7 Chairwoman Weinstein.

8 And thank you all for your advocacy
9 and your hard work, and it's good to see you,
10 some of you again, and I look forward to
11 working with you closely and collaborating
12 and having a good partnership with you moving
13 forward.

14 Today, in real time, Governor Cuomo
15 came out and said that he is reallocating the
16 federally earmarked vaccinations that were
17 supposed to go to nursing homes, tens of
18 thousands of vaccines. I've heard in recent
19 days, through our local administrators and
20 pharmacists who have witnessed throwing away
21 doses because it became administratively very
22 difficult to administer the shots at these
23 long-term facilities.

24 I don't think that's a reason why we

1 should be diverting these vaccines. Have you
2 heard anything from your ombudspeople or your
3 networks about difficulties administering
4 vaccines at nursing homes and long-term
5 facilities? And if so, what do we need to do
6 better to get this done? For anyone.

7 MS. MYERS: I can jump in. We've
8 heard a few things. Part of it is that for
9 the residents in the facilities, they didn't
10 feel that they had enough education and
11 information. A lot of populations are very
12 concerned about being the test case on the
13 vaccine, and more education would have been
14 helpful for the residents.

15 On the other hand, we're also noting
16 that there's a significant population -- a
17 percentage, excuse me, of the workers in
18 those facilities that are not opting to have
19 the vaccine. I think education would work
20 there as well, but we are not paying enough
21 attention to the reasons that people are
22 saying no.

23 There has been a problem, once this
24 vaccines are in cold storage, are taken out,

1 that they need to be using them quickly. And
2 it would seem that perhaps there's the
3 opportunity to say if there's leftover
4 vaccine that is about to, you know, not be
5 shelf-stable any longer, that there needs to
6 be a way to get those vaccines to the state
7 sites or to other pharmacists to distribute,
8 because nobody wants them thrown out.

9 Thank you.

10 MS. PREVE: And I would echo what Gail
11 just shared, and just add that we actually
12 still have providers within the senior
13 service network that still are not eligible
14 for the vaccine. We need really clear
15 guidance to make sure that home-delivered
16 meal providers -- the deliverers, the cooks,
17 the volunteers -- can get vaccinated, and we
18 don't currently have that.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Yeah, I appreciate
20 that. And I look forward to working with my
21 chair in the Senate to push for all those
22 workers, and the homebound seniors as well,
23 older adults as well, to make sure they get
24 their shots as quickly as possible.

1 Thank you, Chairwoman Weinstein.

2 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

3 We go to the Senate now. I believe
4 Senator May, Aging chair, has a question. Go
5 ahead.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Sorry, I was on
7 mute. Yes, Rachel May. Thank you.

8 SENATOR MAY: Hi, thank you.

9 First I just want to thank Mr. Wayne
10 for bringing up the vision loss issue and how
11 that's a driver of putting people in nursing
12 homes who don't need to be there. We need to
13 be paying attention to this and a number of
14 other factors that are easily -- or maybe not
15 that easily, but are addressable in other
16 ways than having people go into congregate
17 care like that.

18 I have a question for several of you
19 who talked about the need for getting more
20 people off the waiting lists, and that the
21 waiting lists are longer than the \$15 million
22 would cover that NYSOFA has budgeted. And
23 I'm wondering -- the 27 million is in
24 addition to the 15, I just want to clarify,

1 right, it's not --

2 MS. PREVE: Correct.

3 SENATOR MAY: And are there enough
4 providers, enough workers, home care workers
5 and meal deliverers and that sort of thing to
6 actually provide the care if we came up with
7 the money?

8 MS. PREVE: So thank you, Senator May.
9 It's Becky. And just to kind of tie into
10 that, you know, the 15 million that we
11 received for three budget cycles in a row,
12 those are services that have been turned on
13 to the people that were previously on the
14 waitlist. This is new individuals coming on
15 our waitlist. Which makes sense, considering
16 the nature of our population is aging, right?

17 So that's answer number one.

18 Number two is so the way our network
19 is structured is we have the flexibility to
20 target these dollars to people that were
21 waitlisted for services. And you raise a
22 really good issue. You know, we've
23 championed the home care workforce crisis for
24 years. We're really hoping to gain some

1 traction, especially with some of the reports
2 that have been published this year, because
3 it absolutely is a barrier for our network to
4 be able to provide services.

5 But again, if we have flexibility with
6 these funding streams, we can increase
7 services that someone may be waiting for
8 while -- if we can't find a home health aide
9 to fill it, could we, you know, provide
10 social adult day respite in an in-person
11 setting, or could we look to provide enhanced
12 services in other areas.

13 So, you know, we have just been kind
14 of stigmatized by our funding, historically,
15 and, you know, this really just speaks to the
16 fact that the sooner we can intervene on an
17 individual -- and Katelyn referenced this
18 with, you know, the millions of dollars in
19 cost savings just for a home-delivered meal.
20 If we can wrap those services around an
21 individual prior to that crisis point, we
22 absolutely can save healthcare dollars.

23 So even though the two issues are
24 absolutely intertwined and we want to address

1 them, that shouldn't be a hindrance for us to
2 get the investment necessary to support older
3 New Yorkers.

4 SENATOR MAY: Okay. I have a number
5 of other things, but I know where you all
6 are. I know how to reach you all. I just
7 wanted to mention to Melissa that we did pass
8 Senator Hoylman's bill today that expanded
9 the concept of the greatest social need for
10 funding to include LGBTQ individuals and
11 people with HIV. So that's good news today.

12 MS. SKLARZ: That's wonderful. Thank
13 you so much for the great news.

14 SENATOR MAY: Thank you.

15 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. We
16 go to Assemblyman Billy Jones for a question.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Hi. I was in
18 between this and conference and I believe
19 most of my questions have already been
20 answered.

21 The waiting list, definitely we have
22 to provide funding for that, and the unmet
23 needs. My question was going to be where the
24 actual needs of our older people, of our

1 senior population, our communities -- you
2 have all answered that so well.

3 I do have one other point that was
4 brought up, the chair brought it up before,
5 and it's the vaccine rollout for our seniors.
6 And I wanted to touch on, for our senior
7 volunteers. I think that is huge. We have
8 enough trouble recruiting volunteers now for
9 our senior programs. We need to get them
10 vaccinated. And I know there's an issue in a
11 couple of my counties that they're not
12 eligible for the vaccination. Are we seeing
13 that on a statewide basis? I didn't catch
14 that before.

15 MS. PREVE: Absolutely, Assemblyman.
16 And you raised a really good point. And so
17 collectively all of the advocates and those
18 on the call today, we have all reached out
19 numerous times to try and make sure that our
20 staff, who are delivering home-delivered
21 meals on a daily basis to the most vulnerable
22 individuals, to our case managers, who have
23 to respond to crisis situations and are in
24 people's homes -- and many counties do not

1 have the flexibility within their local
2 Public Health Department to deem that
3 individual an essential worker.

4 And so we've been asked by most of the
5 counties to actually get a written directive
6 stating that these individuals are eligible
7 for the vaccination, and to date we have not
8 been able to do so. Which has led, in some
9 parts of the state, for volunteers to
10 actually cease providing services for the
11 network. So it's been a major barrier.

12 The second point that I would like to
13 raise that we have seen across New York State
14 is really huge difficulties with vaccinating
15 homebound older people that don't have access
16 to the internet, they don't have broadband,
17 they may not have technology services
18 available. Some of the pharmacies are
19 requiring that you actually create a profile
20 and then log back in to sign up for the
21 vaccine.

22 And so collectively the AAAs across
23 the state have tens of thousands of people
24 they have on lists that they're ready to

1 enroll in pharmacy vaccinations, but there's
2 not been a clear-cut concise way to do it.
3 And so our network has really just tried to
4 get the word out that we're here to assist,
5 we're trying to make sure we alleviate any
6 public fear with vaccines. And really just
7 want to look to partner with pharmacies and
8 other institutions to make sure that we're
9 going to reach the most vulnerable of the
10 population.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Yeah, because
12 that's what I'm getting in my offices, where
13 a lot of our senior population, they're
14 intimidated with the sign-up process as well,
15 you know, going online.

16 And I have to put another plug -- I
17 know Chair Kim's going to get sick of me
18 putting in these plugs for senior
19 technologies, but I will again because it is
20 so vitally important.

21 But thank you all for your advocacy on
22 behalf of our seniors in New York State.
23 This is extremely important work that you're
24 doing, so thank you. And we will do whatever

1 we can to restore that funding and add to the
2 funding that is so necessary for our senior
3 populations. So thank you.

4 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

5 So now we go back to the Senate. I
6 believe you have another Senator?

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Oh, I'm so sorry.

8 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Senator Serino?

9 SENATOR SERINO: Thank you,
10 Madam Chair. And thank you to everyone
11 that's here today, and for all of your
12 advocacy for our seniors. And Katelyn, thank
13 you for really shining the light on the scope
14 of the problem today. I really appreciate
15 that.

16 Becky, how are you doing?

17 MS. PREVE: Good.

18 SENATOR SERINO: Good. Earlier today
19 I asked Commissioner Olsen about the increase
20 in the calls that they're seeing in NY
21 Connects and their experience with helping
22 seniors access the vaccine, right, that's
23 been a huge issue. You talked about the
24 various roles that the AAAs are playing, and

1 I wonder if you could speak to that just
2 anecdotally. Like are all the Offices for
3 the Aging handling it differently? And
4 what's working, what isn't, and what do you
5 think the state can do in this budget that
6 would be helpful?

7 MS. PREVE: So you raise a wonderful
8 question, Senator, and it's something -- so
9 the rollout of the vaccination distribution
10 plan has been different based on where you
11 are in the state. I can tell you that our
12 lives have been completely encompassed with
13 vaccine questions and issues for the past
14 three-plus weeks. And, you know, we have a
15 tight-knit network, we have 59 area agencies
16 on aging throughout the state, we have 59 of
17 them that have stood up to this charge.

18 The difficulties that we're seeing are
19 obviously there's not enough vaccines. I
20 think everybody is very well versed in that.
21 But the secondary issue is we have -- you
22 know, we have the young, 60-plus population
23 that may be very able to get online, but
24 we're serving, you know, 80, 85, 90-year-olds

1 who, number one, are very hesitant to do
2 anything online; number two, don't have
3 access to the internet; and number three,
4 don't have transportation. They physically
5 can't get out of their homes to get to
6 vaccination sites.

7 On top of that, we have seen a
8 disparity based on what pharmacies are
9 enrolled in what districts. And I can tell
10 you -- you know, I've mentioned this before,
11 just while we've been on this Zoom today
12 I've had about 15 emails from directors
13 reaching out regarding vaccination
14 distribution issues. And what I would like
15 to see from the state is a coordinated,
16 statewide educational campaign as well as a
17 mandate that these vaccination distribution
18 plans must go in partnership with the local
19 Offices for the Aging.

20 We're the experts in care of this
21 population, we know who they are, we have
22 registered clients, we have all of their
23 data, their health insurance information,
24 their physician, names, phone numbers,

1 emergency contacts. There is no reason that
2 there is not a mandate that every single
3 pharmacy or vaccine distribution site is not
4 working with their local AAA to make sure
5 that we're not leaving behind exactly who
6 we're tasked with managing, which are the
7 most vulnerable individuals that don't have
8 access to many of the items that we've
9 raised.

10 So, you know, the takeaway here is
11 that we stand ready to assist, and most
12 counties have compiled their own internal
13 listing of individuals that need to get
14 vaccinated but are unable to do so.

15 SENATOR SERINO: And that's great, and
16 that's really important that they're able to
17 do that and work with all of you guys too.

18 I just have one last question, for
19 Ray. Ray, I was wondering if you're hearing
20 from any of the folks that you serve, are
21 they having any issues like with getting the
22 vaccine, with having maybe to leave the house
23 to get the vaccine? Is that an issue that
24 they stay at home? Or anything there, to

1 you?

2 MR. WAYNE: Yeah, that's an issue.
3 And as she said, it's hard -- it's hard for
4 people to get information about how to get
5 the vaccine. And, you know, we work -- I
6 mean, if they're in nursing homes, they're
7 getting the vaccine, I believe, I hope.

8 But, I mean, I run into the same
9 problem every time I -- I'm 61, so I'm
10 probably not eligible yet, but I run into the
11 same problem every time I think about
12 figuring out how to get the vaccine. It's
13 like, oh, you have to go online. I mean, I'm
14 moderately computer-literate, but today was
15 an adventure.

16 SENATOR SERINO: Thank you, Ray.
17 Thank you, everyone.

18 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you all
19 for being here with us today. And I believe
20 we have no more questions for the panel.
21 Thank you for the work you do for all
22 New Yorkers.

23 Now we're going to go to Panel F:
24 Neighbors Together, Velvet Johnson Ross; Urban

1 Democracy Lab at New York University, Gianpaolo
2 Baiocchi -- sorry if I mispronounced your name --
3 YWCA of Rochester and Monroe County, Myra Henry,
4 president and CEO.

5 So if we can start with Neighbors
6 Together. Velvet, you need to unmute yourself,
7 please.

8 MS. JOHNSON ROSS: Sorry. Good
9 afternoon. My name is Velvet A. Johnson
10 Ross, and I'm a leader at Neighbors Together
11 in Brooklyn. Thank you for this opportunity
12 to testify.

13 I'm here today to discuss the need for
14 the Housing Access Voucher Program to be
15 passed and fully funded in this year's
16 budget.

17 I understand all too well what
18 New Yorkers are currently facing, because I
19 too faced that situation in 2019 when I was
20 illegally evicted by my landlord, who refused
21 to remediate toxic black mold, several mice
22 infestations, and three bedbug infestations.
23 The constant exposure to toxins and rodents
24 made me severely ill, and after fighting and

1 beating cancer, my health is still severely
2 impacted to this day.

3 Studies show that black women are
4 primary householders in communities hosting
5 environmental hazards, and they bear a
6 disproportionate environmental burden.
7 Before experiencing housing insecurity, I
8 never thought someone like me would be
9 impacted by homelessness. I was educated,
10 with an advanced degree from a prestigious
11 college. I had a full-time job on Madison
12 Avenue and served on my community board,
13 appointed by the Bronx borough president.

14 We have a narrative of what someone
15 who is homeless looks like, but I'm here to
16 tell you that any one of us could be in this
17 position. Housing should be a human right --
18 good, clean, safe and affordable housing
19 should the standard and not an option,
20 regardless of your accolades.

21 I have been looking for stable housing
22 with my voucher for over a year and a half.
23 It is hard for me because I'm severely
24 allergic to mold and vermin. Now where can I

1 find a brand-new apartment building or a
2 building less than 10 years of age with a
3 voucher for \$1,265, and with a compromised
4 immune system in the age of COVID?

5 Because it pays fair market rent, HAVP
6 would allow me to move into newer
7 developments and finally give me the
8 stability I need to heal and pursue my Ph.D.
9 HAVP will help the homeless and people at
10 risk of homelessness, especially right now as
11 thousands of New Yorkers stand on the cliff
12 of being evicted.

13 As I come to a close, the importance
14 of my speaking today, during Black History
15 Month, as the great-great-granddaughter of
16 enslaved persons in America is not lost on
17 me. Both sides of my family fled the South
18 to the North to escape Jim Crow, only to find
19 redlining, redistricting, and gentrification.

20 Data shows African-Americans often
21 face barriers when attempting to move to more
22 favorable neighborhoods. Passing HAVP will
23 allow me to move into a neighborhood that
24 generations of people who look like me have

1 been locked out of. The dream of equity and
2 equality that my grandparents had is still
3 that, a dream -- a dream that's been deferred
4 too long.

5 History will look back and look at
6 what we did in these times of trials and
7 hardships. I hope to look back and know that
8 our leaders took action to pass and fund HAVP
9 as soon as possible because the lives of tens
10 of thousands of homeless New Yorkers depend
11 on it, and so do generations to come.

12 Thank you.

13 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

14 Urban Democracy Lab at New York
15 University?

16 DR. BAIOCCHI: Thank you. My name is
17 Gianpaolo Baiocchi. I appreciate the
18 opportunity to be with you today. It's been
19 a very long day. Thank you, Velvet, that was
20 very powerful what you were saying.

21 MS. JOHNSON ROSS: Thank you.

22 DR. BAIOCCHI: I want to pick up on
23 those themes. Before this housing
24 emergency -- you all know that I'm not going

1 to go through the facts and figures, but it's
2 staggering. And I just want to remind you
3 that the research is showing that even the
4 numbers we have are understating the problem.
5 You know, the average renter is behind \$5600,
6 but we know many renters have been putting
7 rent on credit cards and pawning things to
8 pay rent. And we know the burden of this
9 rental situation has been falling very
10 heavily on communities of color.

11 So I wanted to bring a couple of
12 points for you today as we consider the very
13 important action that we have to take as a
14 state. I just want to remind us that things
15 were terrible in terms of housing before the
16 pandemic and that we should keep our eyes on
17 the bigger picture, in how do we address the
18 kinds of questions that Velvet was talking
19 about as we do this emergency bailout.

20 So I have four suggestions for you
21 today, I was thinking, just to be succinct.

22 One, this rent forgiveness needs to be
23 immediate and there should not be
24 means-testing for tenants. I believe that

1 landlords should be the ones applying for
2 aid, not tenants. And we need to follow the
3 examples of the PPP, the research, on the
4 ground experiences. It's very, very clear
5 that the more vulnerable a person is, the more
6 difficult it is for them to come up with the
7 paperwork and the evidence. Landlords have
8 the capacity to do that.

9 Second, relief to landlords need to
10 operate in order of priority. So nonprofits,
11 smaller buildings, buildings in more
12 vulnerable areas need to come first.
13 Large-scale and corporate landlords,
14 landlords in the luxury market, should absorb
15 some of the costs, in my view.

16 Third, any relief that we provide
17 needs to be conditioned on maintaining
18 habitability in the full protection of
19 tenants. The research we've been doing, the
20 conversations we've been having these last
21 few weeks shows very clearly that the
22 potential for mistreatment of tenants right
23 now is very, very high. Landlords are saying
24 they're not able to pay the bills and all

1 this stuff. Tenants are being mistreated
2 right and left.

3 So if we're going to offer relief, it
4 needs to be conditioned on maintaining those
5 standards.

6 Finally, the last thing I wanted to
7 bring up is that we need to think about how
8 to bring -- think about this moment as a way
9 to bring forward longer-term solutions. We
10 have developed a proposal for a Social
11 Housing Development Authority. We're going
12 to be rolling out a white paper for a state
13 version of it. There is some discussion of
14 it for the federal level.

15 But essentially, we feel the public
16 sector needs to act, purchase the distressed
17 assets that are going to come out, not let
18 private equity get its hands on it, and
19 transfer it to the social housing sector, which
20 we know has a very strong history of successes
21 here in New York State.

22 Thank you.

23 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

24 We now go to YWCA of Rochester and

1 Monroe.

2 DR. HENRY: Good afternoon, and thank
3 you to the chairs and members of the
4 committees -- and a hello to Assemblyman
5 Meeks -- for the opportunity to submit
6 testimony.

7 My name is Dr. Myra Henry, and I am
8 the president and CEO of YWCA of Rochester
9 and Monroe County. Our mission is to
10 eliminate racism and empower women through
11 housing and young adult services. Just as
12 you cannot build a house without a strong
13 foundation, we believe we cannot help to
14 build a stronger Rochester community without
15 a foundation of empowered families.

16 I am here today to share with you two
17 main points. First, the critical impact the
18 YWCA Parents as Teachers program has on the
19 families we serve. And then, second, how
20 reinstating the public/private partnership
21 will help build the stronger Rochester we all
22 deserve.

23 Our community has the third-highest
24 rate of childhood poverty in the country.

1 The YWCA Parents as Teachers program is one
2 program in our community's toolkit that
3 demonstrates proven success in diminishing
4 the devastating effects of poverty on those
5 we serve. We find it unconscionable that
6 programs specifically designed to combat the
7 effects of poverty for children have been
8 lost to other funding priorities.

9 As I look at the committee today, I
10 know that many of you are parents and, like
11 you, the families in our program want to be
12 the best parents they can be. All parents
13 face a mountain of challenges that can make
14 pregnancy and early parenting a very
15 stressful time. This stress is only
16 compounded for our young families who are
17 also trying to navigate poverty, their own
18 education and employment, as well as, for
19 many, systemic barriers built on years of
20 institutional racism.

21 Thanks in part to a public/private
22 partnership grant administered by the state's
23 Office of Children and Families, YWCA's
24 Parents as Teachers home visitors program

1 builds trusting relationships with mothers
2 and fathers to help ensure that parents and
3 babies are safe and healthy. We are there in
4 times of crisis, for the long-term, to assist
5 with mental health concerns, domestic
6 violence, and housing instability.

7 I imagine that as policymakers and
8 budget writers, you feel more confident in
9 knowing with a high degree of certainty that
10 grant-funded programs ultimately lead to
11 better statewide outcomes. With Parents as
12 Teachers, you can be certain that your
13 investment has proven success metrics.

14 Data from just about two months ago,
15 in a novel study in one of the largest
16 longitudinal intervention studies on home
17 visiting, with a randomized control study,
18 demonstrated that Parents as Teachers has
19 lasting biological DNA benefits that prevent
20 mental health concerns in children. It's
21 this sort of data that proves the importance
22 of the program to the long-term health of our
23 community in the prevention of abuse.

24 In closing, the elimination of the

1 public/private partnership grant at OCFS
2 places a significant financial strain on our
3 agency and our families, and we're asking you
4 to reconsider funding it again. Thank you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

6 We go to Linda Rosenthal for three
7 minutes.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Thank you so
9 much. Good to meet all of you.

10 I'm Linda Rosenthal. I represent the
11 Upper West Side and parts of Hell's Kitchen.
12 I was recently named the chair of the Social
13 Services Committee. And I just want to say
14 all of you were just so powerful, and I thank
15 you so much for bringing home the real crises
16 that are out there and how they affect you
17 personally.

18 The gentleman -- I'm not certain how
19 to pronounce your name, the director of the
20 Urban Democracy Lab, some of -- I agree with
21 everything you said in terms of the rent
22 relief program. And I'd be interested in
23 reading the white paper and discussing more
24 with you about how to create more housing for

1 people who need it.

2 And, you know, the wealthy can buy any
3 number of units that are going up in my
4 neighborhood that are unnecessary, because
5 there's plenty of luxury out there. There's
6 not enough affordable and certainly not
7 enough supportive. And the system is broken,
8 and we really have to fix it, you know.

9 Any comments on that?

10 DR. BAIOCCHI: I should answer you
11 directly?

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Yes.

13 DR. BAIOCCHI: Yes, so we have a
14 proposal currently we have developed for a
15 federal program called a Social Housing
16 Development Authority. But the idea is the
17 following. There's a lot of distressed real
18 estate, a lot of smaller landlords are in
19 trouble at the moment, and the idea is for a
20 public entity to step in, purchase those --
21 because they're going to be sold at discount
22 prices -- and finance the transfer to the
23 social housing sector.

24 You know, we have a tremendous

1 shortage of affordable housing in New York
2 City, but also throughout the state. And,
3 you know, we think this is a good moment for
4 the public sector to step in, because if we
5 don't, it's going to be private equity and
6 investors who are going to buy those things
7 at discounts, flip them. You know, they're
8 not often the best landlords. So we think
9 it's a good time for us to step in in that
10 way.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Yeah, we've
12 read that story before, haven't we.

13 Do you have an opinion or have you
14 researched at all the fact that there are so
15 many hotels and other commercial properties
16 that, you know, could be useful in providing
17 affordable housing and supportive housing,
18 but there doesn't seem to be a plan right
19 now. Would you advocate for public buying of
20 those similar properties?

21 DR. BAIOCCHI: Absolutely. You know,
22 as part of our research I've attended private
23 equity seminars where they're discussing
24 they're going to be investing in failing

1 retail, failing hospitality, and failing
2 residential.

3 We think the hospitality and retail
4 provide very good possibilities. I think,
5 incidentally, abandoned shopping malls could
6 also be very nice community housing. Our
7 paper discusses those possibilities. We
8 think it's a very good thing to do.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Great. I'd
10 love to read it. I see my time is up. But
11 thank you. Thank you to all of the --

12 DR. BAIOCCHI: We're happy to be in
13 touch.

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROSENTHAL: Thank you so
15 much.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Hello. I think
17 we have a Senator. Hi, Jabari.

18 SENATOR BRISPORT: Hi.

19 (Overtalk.)

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I wanted to make
21 sure the Assemblywoman didn't think I was
22 jumping ahead of them.

23 Senator Brisport, welcome back.

24 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thanks so much,

1 Madam Chair.

2 And thank you to the panel for being
3 here tonight. I have a few questions; I
4 would just like to start with Velvet. Hi.
5 It's me, Senator Brisport, from Brooklyn. I
6 think I heard some of these in your opening
7 statements, but I just want to double-check.
8 Which voucher do you currently have?

9 MS. JOHNSON ROSS: Thank you, Senator
10 Brisport. I currently have a CityPHEPS
11 voucher.

12 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you. And I
13 just wanted to hear, does it pay fair market
14 rent? And if not, how much less than a fair
15 market rent does it pay?

16 MS. JOHNSON ROSS: No, it doesn't pay
17 fair market rent. So it's significantly --
18 it's about -- maybe about \$500 less. I'm --
19 my -- for one person, it's 1265. For two
20 people, it's 1303. For three to four people,
21 it's 1580. So it's severely under.

22 I'm a part of different various groups
23 on Facebook for people looking for
24 apartments, and you see the desperation,

1 especially for women who are in a shelter
2 with their young children who cannot find an
3 apartment with three children. And they're
4 getting turned down because how can you have
5 three children in a one-bedroom?

6 And you're not getting the best of the
7 stock, let's be honest. I mean, when I
8 talked about redlining and redistricting and
9 gentrification, we all know what that's
10 about.

11 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you. And I
12 actually wanted to follow up two more on like
13 when you're doing the housing search itself.
14 So when you doing a housing search -- like a
15 two-part question -- how many units do you
16 find at your voucher's pay rate? And is
17 there any choice or variety of neighborhoods?

18 MS. JOHNSON ROSS: Okay. Pre-COVID,
19 none. Now, I'll be honest with you, because
20 of the flight of COVID, I am finding that I
21 am finding some availability with some
22 places. But even with that availability,
23 the -- I didn't even really get a chance to
24 speak on the discriminatory process of how

1 when you tell them you have a voucher, if
2 it's not Section 8, automatically they
3 will -- you won't hear from them, they will
4 tell you, What's your income or what's your
5 credit score -- things they're not supposed
6 to say even with you having the full amount
7 that would pay for the apartment.

8 So there are other things that kind of
9 put you out of the game already. Which is
10 illegal, but because of the way the system is
11 built, there are a lot of different ways of
12 them overlooking you with your voucher.

13 Yeah. So in the areas in which you
14 look that are available, they're places where
15 the transit systems are not as accessible,
16 the school systems are not as great. You
17 know, I mean, again, there are a lot of
18 systematic issues within the neighborhoods.
19 The quality of living is severely impacted.

20 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you, Velvet.

21 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

22 So I -- actually, I see two additional
23 Assemblymembers.

24 Assemblymember Meeks.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN MEEKS: Thank you, Madam
2 Chair. And thank you to the panelists that
3 have joined us today.

4 I just want to say that, you know,
5 these are definitely things that myself,
6 along with many of my colleagues, feel are of
7 high importance. So much so, we realize that
8 the struggles that have come about by way of
9 COVID-19, well, many of these struggles
10 existed before the onset of this pandemic.
11 And one of the things that we realize is the
12 way we get these things done is by looking at
13 different ways to generate additional
14 resources for the State of New York in order
15 to do these type of things that are
16 definitely needed.

17 So with that being said, one of the
18 things that we move forward with is a number
19 of progressive revenue-raising bills. One
20 that I'm supporting and I introduced is 4604,
21 that's Assembly 4604. I would love to talk
22 with you all more in more detail as it
23 relates to joining other advocates across the
24 state in pushing forward with these type of

1 bills to assure that we have resources for
2 these programs to continue to exist.

3 So I just wanted to present that to
4 you all and say thank you for your time.

5 MS. JOHNSON ROSS: Thank you.

6 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you,
7 Assemblyman.

8 And Assemblywoman Mitaynes.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Hi. Thank
10 you.

11 This question in particular is for
12 Mr. Gianpaolo. I wanted to know, can you
13 tell us a little bit about your experiencing
14 researching disaster relief and how it is
15 usually distributed and what are the best
16 practices and what are the common
17 restrictions put on relief?

18 DR. BAIOCCHI: Thank you. So when
19 this crisis came about, we've done -- we
20 started to do research on how disaster relief
21 is distributed around the world. And we've
22 been paying attention to some of the
23 experiences around the country around rent in
24 particular.

1 The best practice is to have it be as
2 universal and unrestricted as possible.
3 Means-testing for vulnerable people is a
4 terrible idea. Means-testing is saying, you
5 know, you have to prove that you didn't pay
6 rent because of a COVID-related economic
7 downturn. That is very difficult to prove if
8 a person is in the gig economy, in the
9 informal economy, in the cash economy.

10 And the research shows the more
11 vulnerable a person is, the more difficult it
12 is for that person to provide that kind of
13 evidence. So the best practice today is
14 universal speedy non-means-tested relief.

15 You know, and the -- you know,
16 California, Oregon and Washington, D.C. are
17 actually going to go with a landlord-based
18 process with the next round of rent relief.
19 So, you know, we think in this case for us in
20 New York, it really needs to be
21 landlord-based, and we do not need to be
22 placing additional burden on tenants.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

24 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. And

1 I believe that is the end of members with
2 questions for the panel.

3 I want to thank you all for being here
4 and helping and sharing the information you
5 have with us. And when you share the report
6 with Assemblywoman Rosenthal, if you can also
7 share it with Senator Krueger and myself so
8 we can distribute it to the other members.

9 Velvet, you mentioned you live in
10 Brooklyn? Just curious, as a fellow
11 Brooklynite, what neighborhood?

12 MS. JOHNSON ROSS: Red Hook.

13 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay.

14 Marcela's neighborhood.

15 Okay. Thank you for being here, and
16 we're going to move on to our next panel.

17 DR. BAIOCCHI: Thanks for your time.

18 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you, yes.

19 So we have 1050-1064 Carroll Place
20 Tenant Association, Florencio Gil, tenant
21 leader, and Syracuse Tenant Union, Palmer
22 Harvey, founder.

23 So if the -- we can go in that order.

24 First, Carroll Place Tenant Association.

1 MR. GIL: Hello, buenos tardes.

2 {Speaking in Spanish.}

3 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Muchas gracias.

4 I'm going to ask our colleague
5 Assemblywoman Mitaynes to just assist us for
6 a moment, to even just to say thank you
7 appropriately.

8 Can we -- so can Marcela be unmuted?

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: I'm here.

10 So I missed the beginning part, but
11 {in Spanish}.

12 Thank you. So they have it
13 translated. I thanked them.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay. Thank
15 you. No one told me. I was hoping.

16 THE MODERATOR: Sorry about that.

17 UNIDENTIFIED TRANSLATOR: I can
18 translate for him.

19 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Okay, thank
20 you. Thank you, Marcela, you pitched in.

21 Okay, yes. Thank you.

22 UNIDENTIFIED TRANSLATOR: {Exchange
23 with Mr. Gil in Spanish.}

24 Okay. So good evening, my name is

1 Florencio Gil, and I live at 1050 Carroll
2 Place in the Bronx. I have lived in my
3 building for 33 years, and I'm a member of
4 CASA and also part of the tenant association
5 in my building.

6 I've testified because the pandemic
7 has affected us all. Many of my neighbors
8 and I have lost our jobs, and we can barely
9 buy our food, and also worry about paying for
10 electricity, telephones, rent and other
11 expenses. We just don't have the money.

12 We are on rent strike in our tenant
13 association, and the landlord has started
14 cases against many of my neighbors, and now
15 we are in fear of being evicted.

16 I know my neighbors, and I feel stress
17 and panic when they receive these court
18 documents. Now they not only have to worry
19 about finding a job, but also about being
20 evicted.

21 We do not have the resources to pay
22 the rent, and the eviction moratorium is not
23 enough. What good is it if we are still
24 going to owe the rent, and where are we going

1 to get the money if we're already up to our
2 necks in debt?

3 A housing crisis is looming, and you
4 have the power to prevent it. 1.2 million
5 households are behind on rent, and the
6 majority of which are Black and Brown
7 communities. More than 40,000 cases have
8 been filed in New York City Housing Courts,
9 with the largest number of cases being in the
10 Bronx. We are suffering while the
11 billionaires grow their pockets.

12 Today I demand that you all pass the
13 Rent and Mortgage Cancellation Act to protect
14 New Yorkers from rent debt and ultimately
15 eviction. Don't put the burden on tenants to
16 apply for rent relief. Support the Invest in
17 Our New York platform to obtain the necessary
18 funds to not only cover the cancellation of
19 rent, but also to provide homes to the
20 homeless and other social services necessary
21 for the communities of New York.

22 Thank you for giving me the
23 opportunity to testify and share our story.
24 I hope that you support us.

1 MR. GIL: Gracias.

2 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

3 So now our final witness, Palmer
4 Harvey.

5 MS. HARVEY: Hello, my name is Palmer
6 Harvey. I'm the Syracuse Tenant Union
7 founder.

8 Before the pandemic in Syracuse,
9 according to a benchmark study by the Maxwell
10 School at Syracuse University in 2019, an
11 average of 11,000 residents were evicted each
12 year in Syracuse. Syracuse's population is
13 over 142,000, and 66 percent of residents
14 rent where they live. Nearly 55 percent of
15 renters spend 30 percent or more of their
16 income on housing costs, including rent and
17 utilities. This rate of the housing cost
18 burden is well over 60 percent in some of our
19 census tracts.

20 Poor housing conditions are rampant
21 among poor and disabled. Disabled tenants
22 suffer some of the most egregious experiences
23 from bad landlording.

24 I remember taking a call from a

1 disabled tenant -- for the sake of the story,
2 we will call her Miss M. Miss M. had always
3 paid her rent on time, but this time she had
4 fallen short due to the depressions of the
5 COVID-19 pandemic. She did what a good
6 tenant was supposed to do. She contacted her
7 landlord and told him that she was going
8 through a financial hardship and could not
9 come up with all the rent.

10 In the same breath, she also told him
11 that a leak from the ceiling that she had
12 told the landlord about seven months ago has
13 worsened to the point that the ceiling has
14 collapsed in her dining room and has created
15 a smell, a moldy odor in her home, causing
16 her to have breathing problems. To which the
17 landlord replied, "No rent, no fix," and then
18 hung up the phone.

19 There is a shortage of affordable
20 decent housing in Syracuse. Many tenants in
21 Syracuse live in deplorable conditions. One
22 out of every four children has childhood lead
23 poisoning caused by lead paint in their home.
24 Yet rents paid for unacceptable housing

1 continue to rise, and most tenants are left
2 completely without any protections from rent
3 increases or evictions.

4 There is great concern for increased
5 homelessness when Housing Court reopens and
6 evictions start up again. Where will
7 homeless families go? There is not anywhere
8 near enough shelter spaces for those newly
9 homeless people. Doubling up with family or
10 friends may not be safe because of COVID-19.
11 Many of our families have suffered multiple
12 traumas, including loss of jobs, family
13 members or health insurance.

14 You can prevent more unnecessary
15 trauma by clearing back rent owed and
16 creating a landlord hardship fund. At the
17 same time, tenants in Syracuse are behind on
18 rent, utilities and bills.

19 In Syracuse we feel safe in saying
20 more than the national average of one in
21 seven families do not have enough food.
22 Children have fallen behind in school because
23 online schooling is difficult. The need for
24 childcare has increased with remote learning.

1 Women are more likely to leave the job market
2 to supervise their children. The need for
3 mental health services now and after the
4 pandemic will increase dramatically.

5 With all of these issues, families
6 should not have to worry about staying housed
7 in a pandemic. The Syracuse Tenants Union
8 has been a shining light on tenants in
9 Syracuse. Syracuse Tenants Union has been
10 fighting for years to get the good-cause bill
11 and ETPA expansion. Now New York State needs
12 to understand that Syracuse is here and we
13 are hurting too.

14 One of the best things that government
15 should do is take care of the most vulnerable
16 without taking decades to act. The New York
17 State Legislature needs to take action right
18 now in the Housing Relief and Recovery for
19 All bill, for the fastest way to solve the
20 rental crisis.

21 Thank you.

22 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Thank you. I
23 believe we have -- Senate, do we have a
24 question there?

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I do. I see a
2 fellow Syracusean. Are you a Syracusean, is
3 that correct?

4 SENATOR MAY: Syracusan, we say.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Syracusan.

6 SENATOR MAY: I don't really have a
7 question for you, Palmer, but I just have to
8 thank you for sticking it out with us till
9 the bitter end and for your testimony and for
10 your advocacy.

11 And please know that we do know -- we
12 hear you, and we'll be doing what we can,
13 especially for my part, to raise revenue so
14 that we can cover some of these costs that
15 are so critical.

16 So thanks for being here. Good to see
17 you.

18 MS. HARVEY: Good to see you too.

19 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: With that,
20 thank you for all the witnesses who testified
21 today, all of the members who participated,
22 both in questions and also just participated
23 by being here. Thank you to Marcela for
24 almost -- for picking up and helping out with

1 our last witness.

2 This is going to end our hearing. I
3 just want to tell people tomorrow is the
4 Public Protection hearing. Last year it went
5 14 hours. We are not looking to break
6 another record, but Senator Krueger and I do
7 have some concern that we are going to
8 approach that record. So again --

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: But I've actually
10 been sitting here today explaining to people
11 why I couldn't make it a 18-hour hearing, and
12 saying no to them. So perhaps it won't be
13 that long, Helene. Be optimistic.

14 CHAIRWOMAN WEINSTEIN: Well, I'm going
15 to be optimistic and I'm going to ask all of
16 the witnesses and members -- maybe really
17 almost more so our members' cooperation
18 tomorrow so we can get to hear all of our
19 witnesses.

20 Again, thank you all for being here,
21 and this formally closes the Human Services
22 hearing. Tomorrow morning at 9:30, Public
23 Protection.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you,

1 everyone.

2 (Whereupon, the budget hearing
3 concluded at 5:44 p.m.)

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