

**Testimony of
Greg Olsen, Acting Director
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the Aging**

**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
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Senate Finance Committee
Assembly Ways & Means Committee
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Good afternoon, Chairpersons Krueger and Weinstein, Chairpersons May and Kim and all the distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly standing committees. I am Greg Olsen, Acting Director of the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA), and I'm honored to testify on provisions of Governor Kathy Hochul's proposed budget that directly affect NYSOFA programs and services, along with additional budget proposals that will positively impact older New Yorkers and their families. I appreciate this opportunity to share the incredible ongoing work of the network of aging services providers as they respond to the pandemic.

Governor Hochul and her administration's commitment to older New Yorkers is unprecedented. The Governor's State of the State message and subsequent proposed Executive Budget contain many initiatives that are positive for older adults and their families. The approach is so much broader than one agency—it is about making New York the healthiest state in the nation through a multi-agency, coordinated effort focused on:

- Improving physical and behavioral health;
- Preventive health care strategies;
- Embedding healthy aging and livability principles into general government and local government operations;
- Expanding age-friendly communities and age-friendly health systems;
- Expanding access to services and training for older LGBTQ individuals;
- Supporting informal caregivers and working caregivers;
- Addressing disparities in access to care;
- And much more.

Utilizing the state's 2019-2024 Prevention Agenda as the umbrella, and instituting a Health Across all Policies approach, New York State agencies are incorporating health considerations into our planning, programs, and initiatives. As agencies, we are committed to working together and considering how all of our policies fulfill New York's pledge as the first age-friendly state in the nation. We are already meeting this pledge for New York's older population; and now we have the opportunity to further strengthen and coordinate this vital work through the Governor's proposed state Master Plan on Aging. This Master Plan is consistent with the goals and work that New York has been engaged in to improve communities for people of all ages and create healthy environments in which to grow up and grow old.

New York became the first state in the nation to receive the age-friendly designation by AARP and the World Health Organization in 2018 because of the foundation that was built and because we rank high in the eight domains of age-friendly, livable communities, and due to the comprehensive plan to systematically build age-friendly and smart growth principles into how government operates and functions. Through much-needed investments, the Governor's FY 2023 Executive Budget expands and strengthens this foundation with initiatives that will help individuals of all ages access needed services and lead healthy lives by:

- Maintaining base funding for all services and baselining agreements in last year's enacted budget for Community Services for the Elderly (CSE), elder abuse and Holocaust survivors funding;
- Creating a Master Plan for Aging;
- Continuing \$23 million in historic investments – for older New Yorkers across the state awaiting services;

- Investing \$2.9 million to expand efforts to combat isolation, bridge the digital divide, address elder abuse, and strengthen NYSOFA's stipend program for volunteer recruitment and retention;
- Expanding a bill-payer service program for up to 10 counties to prevent and mitigate financial exploitation of older adults;
- Continued improvements to New York Connects, further increasing access to long term care services and supports;
- Continuing the \$4 million increase to Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) and Neighborhood NORC (NNORC) programs that was contained in last year's enacted budget;
- Maintaining \$500,000 that is used to draw down more than \$2 million in federal funds to combat elder abuse and financial exploitation of older adults; and
- Strengthening the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program, which serves as an advocate for residents and their families in nursing homes and other facilities.

To meet the growing need for services in the pandemic, NYSOFA received more than \$149 million in federal stimulus funding that we immediately distributed to all counties. This funding has met a variety of needs, including the 20-plus core services that the network provides on a daily basis as well as several key areas of focus. Together, this includes:

- Home-delivered meals and grab-and-go meals
- Shopping and supply delivery
- Prescription drug delivery
- Critical transportation – for example, to dialysis and cancer treatments
- Combatting social isolation
- Shifting service delivery to virtual programming where appropriate
- Elder abuse mitigation and scam prevention via education and outreach
- Helping individuals get vaccinated at vaccine sites, in the home and helping access booster shots

State-level executive orders, coupled with the federal Major Disaster Declaration (MDD), have allowed NYSOFA to provide counties and their community-based partners with maximum flexibility in the delivery of services, eliminating barriers that would otherwise unduly impede responsive action to community needs in the pandemic. These flexibilities remain in place today while we work to safely reopen community outlets that were closed.

On a national level, NYSOFA's advocacy efforts assisted in securing policy and program changes and additional resources to help older New Yorkers. We are also leading a national effort under our Older Americans Act Modernization proposal to better resource the network and to continue to provide flexibilities that will allow counties to meet locally determined needs. The demands of COVID-19 have also strengthened NYSOFA's existing close partnerships with state agencies to help New Yorkers, such as our work with: Agriculture and Markets on access to food; the Department of Labor on supports for working caregivers; the Department of Health (DOH) on all COVID-related health and safety issues; the Office of Mental Health on addressing

social isolation and mental health issues magnified by COVID-19 (like anxiety and depression); the Office of Addiction Services and Supports on prevention and treatment for alcohol and substance abuse, prescription safety and abuse, and problem gambling and the Division of Veterans Services, where 63% of the state's veterans are age 60 or older.

Throughout the pandemic, NYSOFA developed and tested new programs and projects to assist older adults. The FY 2023 Executive Budget provides critical funding to sustain and significantly expand these efforts.

The Governor's budget provides the support necessary to continue our trailblazing initiatives like NYSOFA's award-winning animatronic pet project, which has proven to reduce loneliness and pain, as well as our partnerships with several tech platforms that are bringing virtual programming to homes. This includes access to the Virtual Senior Center, online courses and social programs through GetSetUp, leveraging the therapeutic power of pets via the Pets Together platform, and our partnership with the NYS Council on the Arts to bring professional artists into the homes of older adults.

NYSOFA has also begun partnering with GoGo Grandparent, a targeted ridesharing service, to increase transportation options and economic opportunities for older adults. We are launching a multi-county evidence-based intervention pilot that uses complex analytics to identify caregiver burnout – a leading cause of referral to higher levels of care for older adults. Our partnership with the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council is working to better equip and train the aging services network on how to support the unique needs of older adults caring for younger individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We've teamed up with the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services to bring FEMA resources to the state, further supporting the nutritional needs of older adults. Our comprehensive assessment tool now includes a screen for social isolation and technology capacity. We've partnered with DOH and HANYS to better integrate clinical and community-based care to improve outcomes for older adults under the Age Friendly Health System priority.

NYSOFA is also the nation's first state unit on aging to enter a contract with the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) to make Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS) training available to our case managers. This certification will better prepare our staff to assess, recommend, and incorporate home safety features into care plans, helping individuals age in place and prevent injuries and falls.

Finally, through our partnership with DOH, we will be expanding a very successful integrated care model that coordinates aging services with health services and strengthen NY Connects data and reporting systems as well as the state resource directory.

But this budget is about so much more than any one program or service. It must be examined holistically. Older adults, like you and me, touch many different systems in their day-to-day lives, which is why the Governor's systemic investments are so important, including:

- \$2 billion in property tax relief
- \$25 billion five-year housing and supportive housing plan
- \$2 billion to protect renters, and funds for eviction legal representation
- \$540 million for the homeowners' assistance fund
- \$1 billion DOT Capital Plan
- \$1 billion investment in health care transformation

- \$2.4 billion in health care improvements, including worker wages
- \$2 billion for bonuses for health care and front-line workers
- \$500 million for Human Services COLA
- \$1 billion for tech purchases, internet access, subsidizing a \$30 cap on broadband access for those at 200% of poverty or less
- Expansion of telehealth and capacity to treat behavioral health issues

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

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