



KATHY HOCHUL
Governor

DENISE M. MIRANDA
Executive Director

**Testimony before the Joint Legislative Fiscal Committees
2022-2023 Executive Budget Proposal
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Denise M. Miranda, Executive Director**

Good afternoon, Chairs Brouk, Kruger, Mannion, Abinanti, Gunther, and Weinstein, as well as other distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly.

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

The Justice Center opened its doors nearly nine years ago. In that time, we have investigated tens of thousands of abuse and neglect cases. Since 2013, more than 800 people have committed egregious acts of abuse and neglect and they are now barred from working with people with special needs.

Hundreds of thousands of criminal background checks have been completed, keeping violent offenders out of facilities. Abusers are no longer free to move from facility to facility unchallenged. There is no doubt that vulnerable New Yorkers are now safer than before.

But the Justice Center's work goes well beyond incident investigations. We also place great emphasis on preventing reportable incidents from happening. The agency's abuse prevention efforts are critical to advancing our mission to support and protect the health, safety, and dignity of people with special needs. We do this by creating materials to equip staff with the tools and skills they need to identify situations that pose a risk of harm to people receiving services. We currently have eight prevention toolkits published on our website. The latest one, published last year, focuses on body checks. This toolkit provides information about the importance of performing regular body checks as well as tools to support the practice in the provision of care. Body checks can identify injury or illness and ensure appropriate care is received. Critically, this preventative measure can also identify if someone is being mistreated.

The Justice Center also launched an innovative online training on one of our most popular prevention toolkits- professional boundaries. Trend analysis identified the failure to maintain professional boundaries as commonly reported. The online training tool presents users with real-life scenarios and helps them navigate them appropriately. The agency has now launched a committee dedicated to prevention work that will be producing more materials in the year ahead.

Another pillar of the Justice Center's work is assisting individuals receiving services and their families. Since 2013, agency advocates have helped more than 16 thousand people. Our highly trained staff members supported individuals and family members to understand the process of an investigation. They also accompany victims during interviews and guide people through the process of obtaining records.

This past year, the agency contributed to the COVID relief efforts across the state, lessening the burden on New Yorkers. Justice Center staff assisted in processing rent relief, ensured compliance with State Liquor Authority regulations, and helped coordinate operations at State vaccination sites, among other initiatives.

Looking ahead, the Justice Center will continue to improve accessibility and connection with the public. We have welcomed the opportunity to increase transparency regarding the agency's work and proudly share what we do. We have published a plan that outlines several steps aimed at providing stakeholders with more insight into agency operations.

This includes the publication of new data points that will enhance monthly and annual reports. The goal here is to shine more light on internal processes. We also plan to publish more in-depth reports on our forensic work. Meeting summaries from our Advisory Council have already been posted on our website for review. We value open government and will continue to find ways to enhance transparency going forward.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to report on our important work. We look forward to continued partnerships with the State Oversight Agencies and the Legislature in 2022. I now welcome your questions.