



Kathy Hochul, Governor
Roberta Reardon, Commissioner

February 7, 2024

The Honorable Liz Krueger
State Senator & Chair Senate Finance Committee
New York State Senate
172 State Street, Capitol Building, Room 416
Albany, NY 12247

The Honorable Helene E. Weinstein
State Assembly Member & Chair Ways and Means Committee
New York State Assembly
Legislative Office Building, Room 923
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Chairs Krueger and Weinstein:

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Liz and Helene -". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned to the right of the typed name "Dear Chairs Krueger and Weinstein:".

It was a pleasure testifying before the Joint Budget Hearing last week. I appreciated the opportunity to speak about the Governor's budget, as well as talk about the work at the New York State Department of Labor.

I received several questions from your colleagues regarding my testimony. To ensure clarity and facilitate further discussion, I have prepared detailed responses to each point provided below.

Hiring Services for Veterans

The Department has various programs and specialized staff dedicated to helping Veterans receive priority services for all state employment and training opportunities for which they are eligible and qualified. This priority of service is guaranteed by federal law and the New York State Veterans Bill of Rights for Employment Services.

In addition, the Department employs Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialists, who are Veterans themselves. They provide individual career services exclusively to Veterans who have significant barriers to employment. They also offer a comprehensive suite of employment services, encompassing assessments, individual plans, job search support, training referrals, and interview preparation assistance.

The Department also employs Local Veterans' Employment Representatives staff, who are also Veterans. They specialize in advocating on behalf of Veterans and eligible persons with business, industry, and community organizations to promote employment and training opportunities.

In addition, the Department runs the "Experience Counts" program, which grants Veterans credit toward state licenses for military experience. For example, Commercial Driver's License fees can be waived for military members with recent experience driving trucks and heavy equipment during their service. The program also recognizes certain military training as credit towards licensure for Veterans to become armed and unarmed security guards.

Hiring Services for Differently Abled

The Department meets our customers where they are and have Disability Resource Coordinators (DRC) who help improve employment outcomes for individuals who are differently abled. The DRCs are specially trained to improve accessibility of services and supports to our customers. Their aim is to improve coordination and collaboration between educational resources, vocational rehabilitation, disability services, and other service systems.

The DRCs are a direct result of the New York Systems Change and Inclusive Opportunities Network (SCION). This network builds upon the work of the federal Disability Employment Initiative pilot funding which was preceded by the Disability Program Navigator. The primary goal of SCION is to improve education, training, and employment opportunities for youth and adults with disabilities. It also has a specific focus on people receiving Social Security disability benefits. The Department funds and oversees SCION.

LLC Disclosure Chapter Amendment

Thank you for mentioning the LLC disclosure chapter amendment (S.8059/A.8544). I will have the Department work with the New York State Secretary of State to request access to the confidential database as appropriate. This has the potential to be a real asset to us moving forward because it may provide a new avenue for our enforcement capabilities. As you may know, the legislation does not take effect until January 1, 2026.

Wage Theft

I appreciate your interest in our efforts to combat wage theft and enforce public work laws. Wage theft is not a victimless crime; it is a scam on working people. I hear about the devastating impact this has on families, communities, and our neighborhoods almost every day.

The Department's investigators and inspectors are the frontline defense against wage theft and violations of public work laws. I sincerely appreciate their tireless efforts to ensure workers receive their legally due wages and work in safe environments. The bad actors that perpetrate these crimes are small in number, but the accumulated harm across the state translates to millions of dollars stolen. In 2023, the Department returned approximately \$26 million to workers in stolen wages and interest. This is approximately \$20 million from Labor Standards investigations, and \$6 million from Public Work investigations.

As Commissioner, I believe safeguarding worker rights is a paramount responsibility. My team and I leverage every tool and resource at our disposal to combat wage theft and hold

unscrupulous employers accountable. But it is sometimes difficult to execute judgements after our labor standards investigators complete their investigation.

In the Executive Budget, the Governor included a proposal to expand our ability to execute judgements for labor standards investigations (ELFA Part L). This has the potential to be a game changer for us. For your information, this proposal simply mirrors a tool the Department already has and uses for unemployment insurance collections. I believe this extra authority will allow us to collect funds more expeditiously and put it back into the hands of hard-working New Yorkers.

Indian Point

The Department has been working on the Indian Point decommissioning for over 10 years. We have been focused on prioritizing the community and its workforce. Outside the work we do with the Task Force, we collaborate with labor leaders, community groups, businesses, and advisory bodies. This includes close work with the local and statewide building and construction trade councils.

The Department is providing targeted assistance to impacted employees through regular meetings, skills-aligned job fairs, and ongoing engagement with their union leadership, as well as also maintaining communication with the employer to explore redeployment opportunities. This multi-faceted approach seeks to minimize the economic impact of the decommissioning and ensure a smooth transition for all involved.

Office of Just Economic Transition

As the state transitions to a clean energy economy, the Office of Just Energy Transition (OJET) will connect workers to opportunities for quality jobs, upskilling, and training with a focus on serving those who are traditionally underrepresented, especially within disadvantaged communities. OJET will also assist businesses by upskilling their workers and connecting them to a trained workforce while helping navigate eligible hiring incentives and available funding.

The Department has already made headway to connect with industry, communities, and workers to lay the groundwork for a just clean energy transition in New York. We created a Green Topics Dashboard, which assists job seekers, educators, and training providers to identify skills and occupations within the clean energy economy. The dashboard includes 72 green topics and over 300 occupations. And the Department held a series of industry stakeholder meetings to understand industry hiring needs and desired skills. Industries represented include utility companies, offshore wind developers, geothermal companies, energy efficiency, emerging tech, and others.

Moreover, we work closely with partner agencies like New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, New York Power Authority, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and others, and formed relationships with frontline community organizations, academic institutions like State University of New York, City University of New York, and Cornell, and labor unions to understand what is needed for a just clean energy

transition. And we are committed to ensuring that all programming and services meet the New York Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act requirement that at least 35% of benefits, including jobs, reach the State's Disadvantaged Communities.

The Department is actively working with the New York Power Authority to finalize an agreement that will open up to \$25 million for a wide range of initiatives related to the transition to clean energy. This fund, which appeared in last year's budget, does not take effect until this upcoming fiscal year and the Department will be announcing various programs in the months ahead.

Conclusion

I want to again express my genuine enthusiasm to continue expanding the collaboration between the State Legislature and our Department. This includes closer cooperation between your district offices and our Intergovernmental Affairs team.

As I think you know, our various programs and services can be of benefit to your constituents. Whether it be direct assistance or information on our programs, we are dedicated to supporting you and your staff in effectively serving New Yorkers.

To initiate this collaboration, I propose a meeting with you or anyone on the Joint Committee: either myself or a member of my team would be happy to engage with you or any of your staff. This discussion would explore areas of shared interest, identify relevant programs and resources, and brainstorm joint initiatives to serve your constituents. Beyond these types of meetings, the Department remains readily available to answer questions and contribute our expertise wherever valuable.

I am confident that through continued collaboration, we can make a significant difference for the people of the State of New York. Please don't hesitate to reach out if there are any questions or areas you'd like to discuss further.

Again, thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Roberta Reardon
Commissioner



RR/lis

cc: The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins, President Pro Tempore and
Majority Leader, New York State Senate
The Honorable Carl E. Heastie, Speaker
New York State Assembly