

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
2024-2025 EXECUTIVE BUDGET ON
5 HUMAN SERVICES

6 -----

7 Hearing Room B
Legislative Office Building
8 Albany, NY

9 January 31, 2024
10 9:42 a.m.

11 PRESIDING:

12 Senator Liz Krueger
Chair, Senate Finance Committee

13 Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi
14 Chair, Assembly Committee on Children
and Families

15 PRESENT:

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

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

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

21 Assemblywoman Maritza Davila
22 Chair, Assembly Committee on Social Services

23 Senator Roxanne Persaud
Chair, Senate Committee on Social Services

24 Assemblyman Ron Kim
Chair, Assembly Committee on Aging

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3 PRESENT: (Continued)

4 Senator Cordell Cleare
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging

5
6 Assemblywoman Kimberly Jean-Pierre
Chair, Assembly Committee on
Veterans' Affairs

7
8 Senator Jessica Scarcella-Spanton
Chair, Senate Committee on Veterans,
Homeland Security and Military Affairs

9
10 Senator John C. Liu

11 Assemblyman Khaleel M. Anderson

12 Assemblywoman Jennifer Lunsford

13 Senator Samra G. Brouk

14 Assemblywoman Yudelka Tapia

15 Assemblywoman Grace Lee

16 Assemblywoman Jo Anne Simon

17 Senator Jake Ashby

18 Assemblyman Jeff Gallahan

19 Assemblywoman Taylor Darling

20 Assemblyman Brian Maher

21 Senator Dean Murray

22 Assemblyman Chris Eachus

23 Assemblyman Billy Jones

24 Assemblywoman Monique Chandler-Waterman

Assemblyman Brian Manktelow

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3 PRESENT: (Continued)

4 Assemblywoman Sarah Clark

5 Senator Rob Rolison

6 Assemblywoman Marcela Mitaynes

7 Assemblyman Chris Burdick

8 Assemblywoman Jessica González-Rojas

9 Senator Alexis Weik

10 Assemblyman Tony Simone

11 Assemblywoman Marjorie Byrnes

12 Senator Peter Oberacker

13 Assemblyman George Alvarez

14 Senator Rachel May

15 Assemblywoman Marianne Buttenschon

16 Senator Daniel G. Stec

17 Assemblywoman Chantel Jackson

18 Assemblyman Manny De Los Santos

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5	Suzanne Miles-Gustave, Esq. Acting Commissioner		
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17	Gail Myers		
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7	Jessica Hsieh		
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8	Chinese-American Planning Council		
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16	Senior Research & Policy Associate		
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17	-and-		
	Therese Daly		
18	Interim Executive Director		
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10 Executive Director
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Lauren Melodia
12 Deputy Director of Economic
and Fiscal Policies
13 Center for NYC Affairs,
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Joan Gerhardt
15 Director of Public Policy
and Advocacy
16 New York State Coalition Against
Domestic Violence
17 -and-
Dr. Daniele Lyman-Torres
18 President and CEO
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19 -and-
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20 Director of Public Affairs
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22 NYS Dwyer Coalition Facilitator
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23 for Veteran Reintegrating 483 496

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1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Good morning,
2 everyone.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Good morning.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Good morning.

5 My name is Andrew Hevesi. I'm the
6 chair of the New York State Assembly Children
7 and Families Committee. I am filling in for
8 Ways and Means Chair Helene Weinstein as
9 cochair of today's hearing. Chair Weinstein
10 is recovering from knee surgery and is hoping
11 to join us for next week's hearings.

12 Today we begin the sixth in a series
13 of hearings conducted by the joint fiscal
14 committees of the Legislature regarding the
15 Governor's proposed budget for the fiscal
16 2024-2025 year. The hearings are conducted
17 pursuant to the New York State Constitution
18 and the Legislative Law.

19 Today the Assembly Ways and Means
20 Committee and the Senate Finance Committee
21 will hear testimony concerning the Governor's
22 budget proposal for human services.

23 I want to tell you it's an honor to be
24 here with my cochair, Senator Krueger. And I

1 will now start by introducing participating
2 members from the Assembly, and after that
3 Senator Krueger will introduce members from
4 the Senate.

5 In addition, Ranking Ways and Means
6 Member Ra will introduce members from his
7 conference.

8 From the majority conference, we have
9 with us Chair Davila and Chair Kim. And we
10 also have Assemblymembers Tapia, Darling,
11 Burdick, Jones and Mitaynes.

12 Senate, please.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

14 Good morning, everyone.

15 And I'm delighted to be joined by
16 Senators Persaud, Liu, Brisport and, since
17 Senator O'Mara will be a little late, we are
18 also joined by his members Senator Murray,
19 Senator Rolison, and Senator Ashby.

20 And Senator Cleare. Okay, thank you.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great.

22 Assemblyman Ra?

23 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

24 Good morning. We're currently joined

1 by Assemblyman Maher, our ranker on Social
2 Services; Assemblywoman Byrnes, our ranker on
3 Children and Families; Assemblyman Manktelow,
4 our ranker on Veterans' Affairs, and
5 Assemblymember Gallahan.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great. I would
7 also like to introduce Assemblymember
8 González-Rojas as well. And we will be
9 introducing other members as they arrive.

10 Time limits for witnesses. The
11 governmental witnesses will have 10 minutes.
12 Nongovernmental witnesses will have three
13 minutes. Time limits for questions and
14 answers, legislators. The chairs of the
15 committees relevant to each governmental
16 witness will get 10 minutes, and a second
17 round of three minutes if desired.

18 The ranking members of these
19 committees will get five minutes each. All
20 other members of the relevant committees will
21 get three minutes each.

22 To all of our witnesses, all written
23 testimony has been submitted to the
24 legislators in advance, so we ask that all

1 witnesses please do not read your written
2 testimony to us. Instead, please summarize.

3 And to all my friends in the
4 Legislature, please let myself or
5 Senator Krueger know if you wish to ask a
6 question of each witness or panel of
7 witnesses. After the opening remarks of each
8 witness or panel of witnesses have been
9 concluded, the list will be closed.

10 Everyone, witnesses and legislators,
11 should locate the time clock and keep an eye
12 on it. Please note that when the clock is
13 down to zero, you'll be alerted that your
14 time is up.

15 Please be considerate and respect the
16 clock so that everyone has a chance to be
17 heard. And please note that these time
18 frames for questioning include both questions
19 and answers, so members are respectfully
20 requested not to commence a new question with
21 insufficient time on the clock to permit a
22 witness to answer. I will remember that
23 myself.

24 Due to the length of our hearings, we

1 have no alternatives but to strictly enforce
2 these time limits.

3 I should add that if any witnesses for
4 later in the day are here and have not yet
5 checked in, please do so at the top of the
6 stairs.

7 And I will now call on the first two
8 witnesses, to call on you -- you've been
9 sitting here for an hour. So thank you to
10 the first witness, Suzanne Miles-Gustave, the
11 acting commissioner of the State Office of
12 Children and Family Services, and also
13 Barbara Guinn, the acting commissioner of the
14 Office of Temporary and Disability
15 Assistance. Thank you both for being with us
16 here today.

17 Great, please.

18 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
19 Good morning, Chair Krueger, Children and
20 Family Committee Chairs Hevesi and Brisport,
21 and distinguished members of the Senate and
22 Assembly. And well wishes to Chair
23 Weinstein. We do wish her a speedy recovery.

24 I'm Suzanne Miles-Gustave, acting

1 commissioner of the New York State Office of
2 Children and Family Services. I appreciate
3 this opportunity to present Governor Hochul's
4 State Fiscal Year 2025 Executive Budget that
5 enhances our mission to protect and
6 strengthen all of New York's children, youth,
7 families and communities, a commitment I know
8 each of you share as well.

9 OCFCS is committed to accomplishing
10 this goal by following our guiding North Star
11 principle of equity. Our pledge is that
12 every program, policy, initiative funded by
13 the Executive Budget will further transform
14 our human services system into one that is
15 far more responsive, not reactive, to the
16 needs of underresourced and vulnerable
17 New Yorkers.

18 We are doing this with a renewed
19 commitment to center each of our initiatives
20 in equity. It's only by transforming our
21 human services system into one that values
22 all voices, and brings the changes they are
23 calling for, that we can make our state safer
24 and more supportive for everyone.

1 This year's Executive Budget offers
2 another critical opportunity to make truly
3 meaningful investments in OCFS's core
4 childcare, child welfare and adult services,
5 and juvenile justice programs that deliver
6 the services New Yorkers need now more than
7 ever.

8 It's a true honor to serve a Governor
9 with such an unwavering dedication to
10 increasing access to quality affordable
11 childcare for New York's families. Before
12 Governor Hochul took office, New York's
13 Childcare Assistance Program, as you know,
14 struggled to give families the help they
15 needed. Under the Governor's steadfast
16 leadership, investments in childcare have
17 grown to record levels and New York is now a
18 national leader in increasing affordability
19 and access to childcare.

20 I want to make clear that the more
21 than \$7 billion over four years dedicated to
22 childcare also would not have been possible
23 without your partnership. Today, New York is
24 one of just a handful of states where

1 eligibility for childcare assistance is at
2 the federal maximum of 85 percent of state
3 median income, which is more than \$99,000 for
4 a family of four, and copays are capped at 1
5 percent of family income above the poverty
6 level for all families, statewide.

7 This year's Executive Budget continues
8 the state's commitment to affordability, with
9 nearly \$1.8 billion this year for the
10 Childcare Assistance Program. To illustrate
11 just how far we've come, in fiscal year's
12 2022 budget, a mere three years ago, the
13 total funding provided for childcare
14 assistance, from state and federal sources,
15 was \$832 million. That is an increase of
16 114.5 percent in just three years.

17 Governor Hochul also understands that
18 without a strong workforce, we won't be able
19 to meet the high demand for these services.
20 Over the last several years, we have invested
21 more than \$1.4 billion in childcare
22 stabilization and workforce supports. This
23 year's budget allocates \$280 million in
24 underutilized pandemic funds to continue the

1 Workforce Retention Grant program and provide
2 another round of bonus payments to staff in
3 caregiving roles, so they will stay on the
4 job, and funding to support child care
5 programs' efforts to recruit even more staff.

6 Hardworking families don't just
7 deserve access to childcare, we need to make
8 sure that they have the peace of mind to know
9 that when they drop their children off, it's
10 at a high-quality program, no matter where
11 they live or work. The proposed budget
12 provides \$5 million to pilot Family Childcare
13 Networks in regions around the state.

14 Home-based providers, which include family
15 and group family providers, are the largest
16 component of our provider pool in New York
17 State and are run by mostly women of color.

18 The budget will also boost quality by
19 creating an enhanced payment rate for
20 providers that are accredited by a nationally
21 recognized childcare organization,
22 participate in QUALITYstarsNY, or have
23 completed training and actively participate
24 in the state's Non-Patient Epinephrine

1 Auto-Injector Initiative.

2 Protecting our precious children is
3 also a major part of Governor Hochul's
4 broader focus on the mental health crisis.
5 The budget invests \$1.7 million in the seven
6 regional infant and toddler resource centers
7 across the state to expand the consultation
8 services they offer to providers and
9 families.

10 This year's Executive Budget also
11 provides over \$100 million in funding for
12 after-school programming, an overall increase
13 of \$17.7 million from last year's Executive
14 Budget. The budget also combines the
15 previous Advantage and Empire State
16 After-School programs into one single
17 program, reducing administrative burdens for
18 providers.

19 Of course, Governor Hochul's
20 commitment to New York's children, youth and
21 families, and vulnerable and marginalized
22 populations runs so much deeper than
23 childcare, and this year's budget makes the
24 critical investments in the programs and

1 services that enable OCFS to continue
2 supporting, uplifting, and promoting their
3 development. This year's budget includes an
4 increase from \$4.4 million to over
5 \$10 million to raise the minimum wage of
6 employees of state-funded contractors
7 operating OCFS programs.

8 Governor Hochul has also included a
9 COLA increase in every budget she has
10 proposed since taking office. This year's
11 1.5 percent COLA will once again benefit the
12 families and voluntary agencies who care for
13 New York's children in foster care, and
14 adoptive parents.

15 As New York's first female governor,
16 Governor Hochul knows and cares deeply about
17 the matters most important to women. Not
18 only has she been fighting for women
19 balancing motherhood and careers by making
20 historic investments in childcare, but the
21 Governor has also made tackling New York's
22 troublingly high rates of maternal mortality
23 a hallmark of her administration. OCFS
24 applauds Governor Hochul's focus on

1 addressing the maternal and infant health
2 crisis in the Executive Budget, which
3 includes \$2 million in new funding to reduce
4 the risk of Sudden Unexpected Infant Deaths
5 by providing something so many of us take for
6 granted -- a safe crib.

7 As the Governor noted in her State of
8 the State, sleep-related deaths are the most
9 common type of preventable child fatality
10 that comes to the attention of state
11 officials, resulting in more than 120 infant
12 deaths per year. Portable cribs will be made
13 available to underresourced families who need
14 them most.

15 Since taking office, Governor Hochul
16 has also made keeping all New Yorkers safe a
17 top priority, as she understands that
18 ensuring there are effective interventions
19 for youth who are at risk of engaging in
20 criminal activity is critical to improving
21 outcomes for our young people and
22 strengthening local communities. This year's
23 budget includes a \$3 million increase in
24 funding, to nearly \$11.4 million, to enhance

1 the Supervision and Treatment Services for
2 Juveniles Program, or STSJP.

3 Since its inception in 2011, STSJP has
4 been a key component of New York's vision to
5 transform the youth justice system by
6 incentivizing local programs intended to
7 divert at-risk youth from placement in
8 detention or residential care and to safely
9 maintain them in the community.

10 I would be remiss if I didn't take an
11 opportunity to also commend Governor Hochul's
12 Executive Budget investments designed to
13 increase the prosecution of domestic violence
14 cases among high-risk offenders, and for
15 prioritizing solutions for the mental health
16 crisis, particularly among our children and
17 youth. OCFS is a proud partner with OPDV to
18 help survivors recover and gain stability,
19 and with OMH on important cross-system
20 collaborations, to advance the Governor's
21 goals.

22 Before I close, I would just like to
23 express my gratitude once again for all
24 you've done to bolster our mission to provide

1 truly equitable and impactful services
2 grounded in the dignity of our children,
3 families, and communities. They definitely
4 deserve that. While we all have different
5 roles to play, I'm confident that the results
6 of our partnership, along with the Governor's
7 unwavering support, is something we will all
8 be proud of.

9 Under Governor Hochul's leadership,
10 New York is a stronger, healthier, safer and
11 more affordable New York than when she took
12 office, and this year's Executive Budget
13 continues to advance that progress.

14 Thank you for this opportunity to
15 speak directly to you today. I welcome any
16 questions or comments you may have.

17 Thank you.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very
19 much, Commissioner. We appreciate it.

20 Commissioner Guinn.

21 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Good
22 morning. Good morning, Chairpersons Krueger,
23 Persaud, Davila and Hevesi, and other members
24 of the Legislature.

1 My name is Barbara Guinn. I am the
2 acting commissioner of the State Office of
3 Temporary and Disability Assistance. I
4 welcome the opportunity to speak with you
5 today about Governor Hochul's Fiscal Year
6 2025 Executive Budget and its support for
7 critical benefits and services our agency
8 provides on behalf of New Yorkers.

9 OTDA is responsible, in conjunction
10 with local social services districts, for the
11 delivery of benefits that provide economic
12 assistance and support to eligible families
13 and individuals throughout the state. This
14 work includes helping very low-income
15 New Yorkers meet their essential needs, such
16 as housing, food, and other basic
17 necessities.

18 Since I have the opportunity to
19 address you today, I'd like to start by
20 thanking the staff of our office for their
21 dedication and efforts to serve low-income
22 New Yorkers in an unprecedented manner over
23 the past few years. Our office played a
24 vital role in helping New Yorkers navigate

1 the economic uncertainty caused by the COVID
2 pandemic, as well as its lingering financial
3 impacts.

4 Through this work, OTDA delivered
5 \$18 billion in pandemic-related emergency
6 food, housing, and utility benefits in direct
7 support of lower-income households in our
8 state. These efforts enabled our agency to
9 go above and beyond to meet the challenges of
10 providing an unprecedented amount of
11 assistance to many New Yorkers, some of whom
12 were seeking assistance for the very first
13 time.

14 Governor Hochul's Executive Budget
15 maintains the essential funding for our
16 agency's core programs. These include Public
17 Assistance, which currently provides monthly
18 income support for more than 600,000
19 individuals; the Supplemental Nutrition
20 Assistance Program, with more than
21 2.8 million monthly recipients of this vital
22 food assistance; the Home Energy Assistance
23 Program, which issued more than 1.5 million
24 benefits last winter, totaling more than

1 \$400 million; Child Support Services, which
2 collected more than \$1.6 billion on behalf of
3 nearly 615,000 families last year; and
4 disability determinations, through which our
5 staff completed over 187,000 medical
6 eligibility reviews for residents seeking
7 federal and state disability benefits.

8 These programs are essential to
9 helping millions of individuals in our state
10 each day and to support stronger families and
11 stronger communities.

12 As cochair of the Child Poverty
13 Reduction Advisory Council, I can share that
14 in 2023 the council made great progress in
15 our work to develop a plan to reduce child
16 poverty by 50 percent within 10 years.
17 Additionally, investments and reforms
18 Governor Hochul and the Legislature have made
19 since the Child Poverty Reduction Act was
20 enacted are already making progress toward
21 this goal.

22 This progress includes expanding the
23 Empire State Child Tax Credit to add children
24 under 4 years of age, who were previously

1 excluded; investing over \$7 billion over four
2 years in childcare to expand caregivers'
3 ability to access affordable childcare;
4 raising the minimum wage by about \$2 per
5 hour, phased in over the next couple of
6 years, and indexing this wage to inflation
7 moving forward; and implementing strategic
8 changes to help Public Assistance recipients
9 with earnings retain more of their benefits,
10 with the goal of encouraging work and
11 economic mobility.

12 These initiatives alone have the
13 ability to reduce child poverty in the state
14 by 7 percent. The council will build on this
15 progress and work toward reaching a consensus
16 and issuing recommendations this year to meet
17 our collective goal of significantly reducing
18 child poverty in our state.

19 Governor Hochul's commitment to
20 reducing poverty continues with the 2025
21 Executive Budget proposal to invest
22 \$50 million to support locally-driven
23 anti-poverty initiatives in the cities of
24 Rochester, Syracuse, and Buffalo. These

1 three communities have some of the highest
2 child poverty rates in the nation.

3 The budget also makes other targeted
4 investments to assist families in need, such
5 as \$128 million for OTDA's Homeless Housing
6 and Assistance Program. The program funds
7 capital projects that create permanent
8 supportive housing for families and
9 individuals who have experienced
10 homelessness. It also is the only state
11 resource for the development of emergency
12 shelters, which often play a critical role in
13 communities' comprehensive homeless services
14 systems.

15 Governor Hochul also has committed to
16 join the federal Summer Electronic Benefit
17 Transfer Program for Children, or Summer EBT.
18 The program is aimed at reducing hunger and
19 food insecurity among children who are unable
20 to access free and reduced-price school meals
21 during the summertime. Eligible families
22 with school-age children will receive \$120
23 per child during the summer months.

24 The Executive Budget invests

1 approximately \$13 million to support the
2 administration of this program. Summer EBT
3 is expected to provide over \$200 million in
4 federal benefits to serve over 2 million
5 children in New York State.

6 We are also excited that the Executive
7 Budget continues efforts included in the
8 fiscal year '24 budget and invests an
9 additional \$23.7 million to provide
10 year-round employment opportunities for
11 at-risk youth. This includes the Summer
12 Youth Employment Program, totaling
13 \$50 million, and the Youth Employment
14 Program, totaling \$38.8 million.

15 The year-round Youth Employment
16 Program targets areas of the state plagued by
17 high rates of gun violence as part of
18 Governor Hochul's comprehensive effort to
19 address this issue. Both programs are
20 evidence-based and provide additional income
21 for low-income households, critical career
22 development services, as well as positive
23 outcomes for program participants and their
24 communities.

1 As you know, we work closely with our
2 partners in the local departments of social
3 services, who administer many of the programs
4 we supervise. These agencies play a critical
5 role in connecting New York families with
6 public benefits. The 2025 Executive Budget
7 invests more than \$17 million to enable
8 social services districts to increase
9 qualified staff needed to provide
10 family-centered, trauma-informed services.
11 With the additional staff, they can offer
12 greater support to families as a unit and
13 help address any challenges to their
14 well-being and help them attain financial
15 stability.

16 Reducing child poverty and helping our
17 fellow New Yorkers meet basic needs and
18 advance economically is at the core of our
19 agency's work. We look forward to our
20 continued partnership with the Legislature in
21 the coming weeks and months.

22 Thank you for the opportunity to
23 testify, and I welcome your questions.

24 Thank you.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. Thank
2 you, Commissioner Guinn.

3 I am going to allot myself -- and this
4 sounds selfish -- 10 minutes to ask you some
5 questions, and then I'll move on to some of
6 my other colleagues.

7 And, Ms. Guinn, I thank you for your
8 testimony. Most of my questions are going to
9 be for Commissioner Suzanne Miles-Gustave.

10 So good morning. How are you?

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: {Inaudible.}
12 Will you introduce your additional members,
13 and I will do the same. Sorry.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Go ahead. No,
15 feel free. I'll get my list.

16 Go ahead, Senate.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. I
18 just wanted to interrupt by introducing
19 Senator Scarcella-Spanton, Senator May, and
20 Senator Oberacker.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

22 I would also like to introduce
23 Assemblymembers Buttenschon, Jackson, Jones,
24 and Lee are all here. Thank you all for

1 coming.

2 Jo Anne Simon as well? Okay. She's
3 hiding from me. Okay.

4 (Laughter.)

5 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Oh. And
6 Mr. Anderson over there.

7 (Laughter.)

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. Welcome to
9 all of you. All right, Commissioner, thank
10 you. And thanks for resetting the clock.

11 So I first want to start by thanking
12 you and OCFS for all of the great work that
13 you do. And particularly on a personal
14 level, you've been so gracious in teaching me
15 a lot about what you do and what your agency
16 does. And it really means a lot, and I'm
17 grateful.

18 And thank you to OTDA and all of their
19 staff as well.

20 So I'm going to spend the first
21 portion of my questions talking to you about
22 workforces, just various workforces. But I
23 think we're in a little bit of a hole from
24 the prior administration. I also want to say

1 there's some really good stuff in this
2 budget, and I'm grateful to Governor Hochul
3 for her leadership on a variety of issues.
4 We have seen a change, a sea change over the
5 last three years with the new administration.

6 However, because of the prior
7 administration and their mindless austerity,
8 every one of our workforces, every one of
9 them is underresourced, all of them. And
10 they're all in dire circumstances. And I'll
11 go through them one by one, but the question
12 will be essentially the same: How do we dig
13 out of these holes so our workforces can get
14 paid enough that we're not seeing the kind of
15 dropoff in turnover rates in these
16 workforces, which is bad for the services but
17 terrible for the kids they're trying to
18 service.

19 So I guess the -- let me start with
20 the domestic violence workforce, who has not
21 received a cost-of-living adjustment since
22 2008. How do we help them to get paid
23 properly? We don't see money in the
24 Executive Budget. So I'm trying to get a

1 sense of how we address this problem, because
2 it's a longer-term problem.

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

4 Thank you for that question, Assemblyman
5 Hevesi.

6 And we do appreciate your partnership
7 as well. My staff, they're the ones who
8 really accommodate you most often with the
9 questions, so I thank them. But your
10 partnership is appreciated.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

12 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: I
13 would agree. I know that we are all trying
14 to figure out how to support our workforce.
15 There are certain sectors that we've been
16 able to invest in more than others. But to
17 your specific question about the DV
18 community, although they are not statutorily
19 included in the COLA -- and I defer to the
20 Legislature on any changes there -- they --
21 it is not as if their rates have not changed.
22 They have not been stagnant.

23 So their rate is subject to a growth
24 factor, and so there have been growth factors

1 implemented in their rate for the past
2 several years. We can get you numbers of
3 that growth. But we hear from our DV
4 providers all the time. Much like our
5 foster-care providers, the MSAR rate includes
6 a growth factor and trend factors that we can
7 increase that COLA.

8 So for DV providers, although they're
9 not -- they don't have the COLA in the
10 statute, their rate does increase with
11 specific growth factors. And we can get you
12 specifics on that.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I appreciate that
14 answer. And so we have introduced a bill in
15 the Assembly to catch all of the parts of our
16 human services workforce that are not
17 eligible for the COLA. And that is language
18 that we would like inserted into the budget.
19 I think we'll be pushing for that in our
20 houses as well.

21 Is that something -- because you see
22 that there's a gap, even when we do COLAs,
23 right? Every time my colleagues and I do
24 COLAs we think we're doing a great thing; we

1 come back five minutes later and you have
2 people yelling at us: What about us? We've
3 been left out.

4 So we have a bill to address that. So
5 I would ask you to take a look at that. I
6 know everything here costs money, but this is
7 what happens when you spend over a decade of
8 keeping all of these programs and their
9 workforces at zero. So that's one.

10 I'm going to talk about next -- I'm
11 going to move on -- same topic, childcare.
12 Great investments by the Governor. By the
13 way, the Governor's focus on childcare has
14 been amazing. And that, complimented with
15 Speaker Heastie and his leadership and Senate
16 Majority Leader Cousins have caused us and
17 led us to invest billions of dollars.

18 However, when you're talking about the
19 childcare workforce now -- and we have given
20 them several rounds, using stimulus funds,
21 and some not -- of stabilization grants and
22 even workforce enhancement. But it's just
23 not doing what we need to do. So we've
24 invested, what is it, 7 billion, or close to

1 that. But if we don't pay the workforce,
2 we're going to continue to see a lack of
3 childcare in New York State. Is there
4 something that we can do to address that
5 problem? Because even the bonuses and the
6 workforce retention grants that we did last
7 year, they didn't have the uptake that we
8 thought they would.

9 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
10 I would agree with you that the Governor's
11 proposals have been historic. So under her
12 leadership, right, we've committed to
13 \$7 billion over four years to support
14 childcare. This year alone, there's almost
15 1.8 billion in the budget for childcare
16 assistance.

17 But I understand your point. We have
18 invested, although be it with pandemic funds,
19 over \$1.4 billion dollars in Workforce
20 Stabilization Grants. A majority of those
21 grants were focused on worker retention, so
22 these dollars had to go directly to the
23 workers to retain them.

24 But I think we need several

1 strategies, right, to retain our workforce.
2 I really look forward to our Childcare
3 Availability Task Force. As you know, the
4 Governor reconvened the task force, gave them
5 several charges. One of those were
6 contemplating the workforce issues. Another
7 one was creating a roadmap to universal
8 childcare.

9 I think all of those need to be
10 contemplated, along with the Legislature, in
11 the context of the budget. I think we all
12 have that North Star goal of paying our
13 workers more, potentially doing more for
14 families with respect to childcare. But it
15 needs to be measured, and in the context of
16 the budget.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Understood. And
18 I appreciate that. By the way, I'll ask you
19 a question later on, if I can, about the
20 timing of the report from the Childcare
21 Availability Task Force.

22 But again, another area -- workforce
23 yet again -- foster care and preventative
24 services workforce. Again, we appreciate the

1 1.5 percent COLA for some parts of that
2 workforce. There are others that we leave
3 out.

4 And then particularly for the
5 preventative services workers, does the
6 administration -- does your administration
7 look on the 65/35 reimbursement to
8 counties -- which I believe should be
9 75/25 -- as a way of paying that workforce?

10 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
11 the 62/38 that's in the budget -- again,
12 longstanding New York commitment to
13 preventive services. That does not include
14 additional funding. So that is the funding
15 that we've dedicated for a decade, almost, if
16 not more, to making sure that we focus on
17 preventive services for families who need
18 support as a way to prevent their entrance
19 into the child welfare system.

20 I do think that, as you mentioned, we
21 need to look at how to retain workers in all
22 of our industries, including preventive and
23 protective and our child welfare workers in
24 the local districts.

1 But that 62/38 is open-ended, right,
2 so counties can hire as many CPS workers as
3 they need. Granted, there's a local share,
4 similar with preventive workers. But I agree
5 with you that we're trying to do many things
6 in partnership with our local districts to
7 retain local district staff, both CPS workers
8 and preventive workers. Working with our
9 civil service partners, you may have heard of
10 the HELP program. I know commissioner Hogues
11 talked about it yesterday. We've benefited
12 from that HELP program, counties have
13 benefited from that HELP program, getting
14 more people into the industry. It's
15 difficult to retain with the current salary,
16 to your original question. But we need to
17 recruit the next generation to make
18 government service a positive and for it to
19 be a touted career for those coming out of
20 college.

21 So hopefully with that HELP program
22 we're recruiting more folks into our
23 industries. And retention, we're working on
24 programs within our local districts to retain

1 employees, much like retaining employees in
2 my industry -- in my agency.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Understood. So I
4 appreciate that answer. And I just want to
5 tell you on a personal level I think the
6 65/35 reimbursement to counties is the best
7 public policy that I've seen in government.
8 And the reason why you increase that number
9 to 75 is to incentivize counties to get into
10 the business of preventing problems for kids.

11 So we're going to keep coming back at
12 that until we do it. And I just do want to
13 say on the record while we are at 62/38
14 reimbursement, that violates the law. The
15 law is a 65/35 reimbursement. So I just want
16 to put that on the record.

17 And I know that that was something the
18 last administration enjoyed doing, going
19 below the law. But this administration has a
20 different tack. So I'd hope we will be able
21 to change that.

22 And then the last workforce I want to
23 touch on is the after-school workforce -- and
24 there's many more, but the after-school

1 workforce. First, thank you for your --

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: I
3 didn't hear that.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: The after-school
5 workforce.

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
7 After school, thank you.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Yeah, absolutely.

9 So thank you for the proposal in the
10 Executive Budget that adds \$100 million.
11 Thank you so much for combining the two,
12 Advantage After School and Excelsior. That
13 has been a stain on New York State, the fact
14 that you had some kids at this level, some
15 kids who are disadvantaged at a lower level.
16 It was disgraceful of the last
17 administration. So thank you for that.

18 But the after-school programs believe
19 that they need to get their per-student rate
20 up to \$4300 per child to pay the workforce.
21 Is that something that the Executive would be
22 open to?

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
24 we were -- we are excited that the Executive

1 Budget added 17 million additional dollars to
2 our existing program.

3 And yes, the intention was always to
4 combine them, to reduce the administrative
5 burden on everyone -- on providers, on OCFS,
6 because we do facilitate those contracts
7 directly. So we look forward to issuing our
8 new RFP, which is not quite out yet.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: That is a serious
10 buzzer. Okay.

11 (Laughter.)

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very
13 much, Commissioner. Appreciate it.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And it even
15 applies to you, even though you're running
16 the hearing.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: No, I'm not so
18 sure about that.

19 (Laughter.)

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So, Senate.
21 Okay, our first questioner will be
22 Chair Brisport.

23 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you,
24 Madam Chair. And thank you to our

1 commissioners for your time and your
2 willingness to answer our questions. Mine
3 are almost entirely for Commissioner
4 Miles-Gustave at OCFS, and predominantly on
5 childcare.

6 I think I want to start by responding
7 to a section of your testimony saying
8 New York is now a national leader in
9 increasing affordability and access to
10 childcare.

11 I just want to add on, you know, I do
12 want to say that we are starting to recover
13 from a pandemic that did hit our childcare
14 sector -- when it was already in a state of
15 crisis -- with multiple closures across the
16 state. And although we've taken some steps
17 to stem the bleeding, the underlying crisis
18 has not been addressed. And I'd like to talk
19 about how this Executive proposal for the
20 budget compares to the enormous scale of that
21 crisis.

22 In particular, the shortage of
23 childcare providers that New Yorkers were
24 facing before the pandemic has not been

1 addressed. Childcare slots are up less than
2 3 percent from the lowest years of the
3 pandemic, according to data from the OCFS
4 website. We know that one root cause of the
5 problem is the poverty wages for childcare
6 workers, with childcare educators earning
7 less than 96 percent of occupations in
8 New York State. And for the past few years,
9 the State Budget has included some workforce
10 grants to temporarily boost wages, but no
11 significant investment in raising childcare
12 wages long term.

13 Why does the Governor's budget
14 proposal not include measures to permanently
15 increase wages rather than just issuing
16 one-time bonuses?

17 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
18 thank you, Senator Brisport, for that
19 question.

20 I think it's hard to argue that this
21 administration and this agency has done
22 incredible things for childcare. When we do
23 say New York is a national leader, it's
24 because we are one of the few states that

1 have increased the eligibility for CCAP to
2 the highest allowed by federal law, to
3 85 percent of SMI. A handful of states have
4 done that.

5 So we've increased the pool of
6 families who are eligible and can take
7 advantage of childcare. That is increasing
8 access.

9 I agree that we need to collectively
10 continue to think about how to increase wages
11 for the sector. In last year's budget, if
12 you recall, we increased the market rate for
13 all childcare providers to the 80th
14 percentile from the 69th percentile, where it
15 had languished for quite some time. The
16 federal recommendation is 75 percent. So
17 again, we are above what the federal
18 government has recommended.

19 And increasing the market rate for
20 childcare providers does allow providers to
21 increase salaries. Some providers received
22 over a 30 percent increase because of that
23 market rate increase.

24 I do think we're all very hopeful that

1 with our partners we can collectively look
2 towards a couple of things: Really managing
3 the workforce crisis and creating that
4 framework for universal childcare with our
5 partners in the Childcare Availability Task
6 Force.

7 So we do look forward to their report
8 and recommendations. I think the statutory
9 charge for that task force was to do just
10 that, to set about creating a framework for a
11 phased-in rollout of universal childcare.
12 Because that is, again, the North Star goal
13 for all of us. I think we need to take
14 measured steps, and we've done a lot in the
15 past two years. And look forward to, like,
16 the negotiations between the Legislature and
17 the Executive on this budget.

18 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

19 And I want to respond to the market
20 rate. I appreciate we've increased the
21 percentage of the market rate survey. I was
22 reading through a study from ILR Buffalo
23 reports that found that New York State
24 subsidy rates still fall far short of

1 covering the actual costs of childcare in
2 New York State. And I believe we both spoke
3 about this at last year's hearing and both
4 agreed that New York's childcare model does
5 not compensate for the true cost of care, and
6 that it doesn't make sense.

7 Do you know why this year's budget
8 still doesn't compensate providers for the
9 true cost of care?

10 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
11 I know that -- to your point last year, we
12 were reeling from disappointment when the
13 federal government did not pass the Build
14 Back Better bill, which would have allowed us
15 in all states to move toward cost of care.

16 There are some federal rules out right
17 now that we in the childcare industry are
18 waiting for the Office of Child Care to
19 finalize. I think the movement from
20 all avenues -- from local, state, to federal
21 partners -- are moving towards potentially
22 universal childcare, which was in the federal
23 bill that didn't pass, and the true cost of
24 care, which we have not transitioned to.

1 So I know in our market rate survey we
2 did include a few questions that tried to get
3 at that cost of care, but we are not there
4 yet. So we are still under a market survey
5 framework. The survey results are back.
6 We're analyzing those. That data, the actual
7 new survey -- the market rate should be out
8 sometime in October, I believe.

9 But I know that is the goal, because
10 we want to fully understand how to support
11 the industry.

12 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

13 Another piece of this report did a
14 poll that said the overwhelming majority --
15 79 percent -- of respondents would support
16 public funding for universal childcare. You
17 know, a goal that is shared, making it a free
18 public service akin to K-12 public education.

19 This state could certainly choose to
20 raise the necessary revenue to do so in this
21 year's budget by ending tax breaks on
22 millionaires and billionaires. In fact,
23 Washington, D.C., raised taxes on the rich in
24 order to fund additional childcare

1 incentives.

2 If the Governor and Legislature agreed
3 to fully fund universal childcare by taxing
4 the rich, how would that impact the
5 efficiency and mission of your agency?

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: I
7 definitely defer to the Legislature and the
8 Executive on any negotiations. And if that
9 should be passed and a bill signed by the
10 Governor, OCFS would certainly implement it.

11 But I think with any industry, if
12 there is more investment, we can do more. I
13 think we all can agree that all of our social
14 services industries would like more funding.
15 If we had more funding, we can do more for
16 sure.

17 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

18 Also in the report it showed that
19 42 percent of families with children in
20 New York, an adult has stayed out of the
21 workforce because of childcare needs. For
22 most of those families, childcare was not
23 affordable. And nearly one in four parents
24 kept out of the workforce reported that

1 childcare was simply no longer available or
2 accessible in their area.

3 We know from the Cornell report that
4 many of the poorest areas of New York have
5 even fewer childcare slots now than they did
6 in 2021, at the height of the pandemic. Has
7 OCFS conducted any economic analysis of what
8 the economic cost to New York has been from
9 the lack of availability of childcare?

10 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
11 I wouldn't say we've done an analysis of that
12 specifically. But I do know that we've
13 focused our efforts on providing families
14 with resources and supports to do just that,
15 to find available childcare.

16 We have childcare resource and
17 referral agencies throughout the state that
18 do just that. They work with providers, they
19 work with parents, and they help to -- they
20 help parents find available childcare.

21 I know that we've also invested in
22 several supply efforts. So we had our
23 Childcare Desert Grant last year to build
24 supply, and it in fact did contribute to the

1 supply in New York State. And in this year's
2 proposed budget, we are proposing that
3 \$5 million for the family childcare networks
4 to, again, support these home-based and
5 group-family-based childcare providers so
6 that they can become a sustainable model.
7 They're already the largest pool of providers
8 we have in New York State, but they need
9 supports. These are entrepreneurs and small
10 business folks.

11 So those are the types of supports
12 that we would like to give the industry to
13 help them grow.

14 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

15 And one of the ways in which parents
16 can become burdened in accessing childcare is
17 the way we so closely tie work hours to
18 childcare. And this Legislature has now
19 passed twice a bill to decouple work hours
20 from the childcare hours eligibility.

21 And right before Christmas
22 Governor Hochul vetoed the bill that would
23 decouple childcare assistance from a parent's
24 exact work requirements, suggesting she

1 intended to revisit this issue in the
2 Governor's budget proposal. However, I
3 didn't see anything in her proposal about
4 this.

5 Did Governor Hochul discuss the issue
6 of decoupling with you at all?

7 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
8 the decoupling bill was not in this year's
9 budget. I think, as the veto message
10 indicated, the Executive is open to
11 discussing that in the context of the budget.

12 That specific bill had about a
13 \$140 million price tag, and that investment
14 was not contemplated in the financial plan
15 for last year.

16 And we do recognize that families need
17 flexibility. I think that's why in our
18 series of strategies over the past several
19 years we've tried to make childcare more
20 accessible and affordable for all families.

21 I think that the heart of the
22 decoupling bill speaks to the burden that
23 applying for childcare, receiving childcare
24 puts on a family. And because of that, we've

1 done a lot to make the process smoother. As
2 the Governor mentioned in last year's budget,
3 our systems are antiquated, right, but we've
4 been moving towards fixing that.

5 So this year OCFS issued the first
6 prescreener on our website to attract
7 families to the OCFS website to see if they
8 are eligible for childcare. It is just a
9 prescreener, so then they can get referred to
10 their own districts. And we are working on
11 an online application that we are in testing
12 right now.

13 So, you know, there are providers out
14 there that provide nontraditional care. So I
15 think making it easier for families might --
16 might definitely help.

17 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. Your
19 time is up.

20 Assembly.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: (Inaudible.)

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: (Inaudible.)

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

24 Good morning.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Chair, forgive me
2 for interrupting. If I could just ask the
3 commissioners to lean a little forward or
4 speak closer into mics. Some of the members
5 are having trouble hearing. Thank you very
6 much.

7 Sorry for the interruption.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: I'm sorry, so I
9 have two questions for Barbara Guinn.

10 The first one is regarding the overall
11 public assistance caseload. It's projected
12 to increase by 19,000 recipients, the biggest
13 increase of which is in the safety-net single
14 population. What factors are contributing to
15 this increase?

16 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So thank
17 you, Member. Certainly there is a projection
18 for the public assistance caseload to
19 increase. We have, after years of decline or
20 even steady public assistance caseloads, we
21 have seen significant rises over the past
22 year to two years.

23 The increase is largely based on, you
24 know, an economic model that looks at and

1 helps use economic factors to project the
2 number of individuals who are likely to need
3 public assistance in the coming year. So it
4 obviously is tied to, you know, efforts to
5 get people to work, which is obviously our
6 objective, is to provide the assistance while
7 folks need it and then to provide support so
8 that they can go to work.

9 And I would just mention that, you
10 know, efforts like the investments in
11 childcare certainly will help families move
12 in that direction.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Thank you.

14 I'm going to address the elephant in
15 the room, and that is can you provide us an
16 update on how much of last year's \$1 billion
17 has been distributed to New York City for
18 shelter costs for asylum seekers? Only
19 because my colleagues have been asking these
20 questions and we have not gotten any clear
21 answers.

22 This year there's a proposal to give
23 \$2.4 billion. So we would like to know how
24 much of that \$1 billion that we were able to

1 allocate last year was spent.

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Sure. So
3 first I just want to say that the investments
4 that were included last year, as well as the
5 significant investments included by
6 Governor Hochul this year, are essential to
7 helping New York City address this
8 humanitarian crisis. It is a crisis, and
9 it's one that Governor Hochul understands
10 that the state needs to help the city to
11 address.

12 With respect to the reimbursement
13 that's been provided to New York City to date
14 from the 1 billion, to date the city has
15 submitted requests for reimbursement that
16 total -- in terms of the state-share portion
17 would be about 325 million. That amount is
18 only through September of 2023, and we do not
19 think that it reflects all costs. So there
20 is definitely considerable cost yet to be
21 claimed, and the city is still expecting to
22 fully draw down the billion dollars that was
23 included in the current budget.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: As you are

1 aware, we're seeing this played out in the
2 news every day, all day. And in my mind I
3 thought the billion dollars was already
4 spent. But if you say 300 million out of the
5 billion -- what was the number --

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: About
7 325 million has been claimed by the city to
8 date with respect to the state share for
9 their cost.

10 But that does not reflect all the
11 costs incurred by the still. Additional
12 claims are expected. And the city is
13 indicating that they expect to draw down the
14 billion dollars.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Thank you.

16 My next question is going to be to
17 Suzanne Miles-Gustave. We have also seen --
18 the entire world has seen it played out on
19 the news. Providers, especially providers
20 that are probably familiar to families and
21 are not aware but are licensed -- how much of
22 this money or this increase in childcare is
23 going to be used for oversight to make sure
24 that these incidences do not happen again?

1 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

2 Thank you, Assemblywoman Davila. I know we
3 spoke previously about the tragic Bronx
4 fatality, I think you're referring to, which
5 was abhorrent, should never have happened.

6 But I think it's just an indication
7 that we all have to be a lot more vigilant
8 when it comes to the opioid epidemic and the
9 gross negligence of some providers. And
10 unfortunately, we've had to look at our
11 training, look at our outreach. It is a
12 shame that we have to train providers on
13 fentanyl exposure, but that is the world
14 unfortunately that we're living in.

15 So we are educating our providers. We
16 are educating our licensers and our
17 registrants to understand this new world.

18 As a result of that tragic, tragic
19 fatality, we did a lot in partnership with
20 Department of Health and OASAS to create
21 information to go out to providers, to give
22 them access to that info. We are working on
23 a training video for our providers with
24 respect to fentanyl. And we have increased

1 our inspection requirements for New York
2 City.

3 We currently have a contract with
4 DOHMH. They do our inspections for our
5 providers. And we are in talks with them to
6 increase the inspection rates for those
7 providers in New York City. So all that
8 is -- is being implemented currently as we
9 speak.

10 But I agree with you that we are in a
11 different time right now. That specific
12 instance was a criminal activity. It's, you
13 know, sometimes hard to compensate for
14 criminal activities. But we are -- we've
15 taken that incident seriously, and we've
16 stepped up our training, education and
17 inspections.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: And I just want
19 to close with this. I do believe that most
20 people don't understand this, but growing up
21 in Bushwick, I see it at the corner of my
22 house right now -- even marijuana, which is
23 legal, is being completely laced with
24 fentanyl. People don't understand this. So

1 I think that there needs to be a conversation
2 regarding that information as well.

3 And providers should be held
4 completely liable. Not just their licenses
5 taken away -- completely liable. Marijuana's
6 part of the problem as well. And I
7 understand, we made it legal. But legal is
8 legal. We're buying from farms that we know
9 where it's coming from. But now there has
10 been a different market that has been
11 created. And, you know, we just don't -- we
12 need to educate our providers that that's
13 also an issue.

14 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
15 And just to be clear, I would agree with you.
16 Our health and safety requirements have
17 always included identifying instances where
18 health and safety would be a critical
19 impediment to a childcare service and the
20 children in that area.

21 So although, right, marijuana is
22 legal, it is not legal for underage youth.
23 So that would not be a new piece of
24 information that our regulators would need.

1 We've always trained them to make sure that
2 they can spot any health and safety risks in
3 a childcare service area.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Thank you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. I
6 think we don't have any more introductions
7 right now, but before I start with Senator --
8 oh, Senator Weik is here. And Senator O'Mara
9 is here. He also was not here before.

10 I just want to answer also
11 Assemblymember Davila's question. If they
12 are legal, licensed stores, I would be very
13 interested in hearing that anyone thought
14 they were spiking product. The problem is in
15 your community, almost all those stores are
16 illegal. They are not licensed. They are in
17 violation of endless laws. And hopefully in
18 the budget we are going to be trying to be
19 much stricter about being able to padlock
20 them.

21 But you are not wrong. One of the
22 reasons that drugs are so dangerous, and why
23 we wanted to legalize, was to make sure that
24 the products being sold to everyone were

1 safe, as opposed to what's going on in the
2 illegal market. So thank you.

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: We are seeing a
4 lot of marijuana being laced with other
5 drugs.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: But it's not from
7 the legal stores.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: No, not at all.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: No, I know. But
10 I'm not saying you're wrong, I think it's
11 just a reinforcement of why using the legal
12 product is so important.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN DAVILA: Absolutely.
14 Absolutely.

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Sorry. Didn't
16 mean to do an editorial discussion on your
17 time.

18 With that, Senator Roxanne Persaud,
19 chair.

20 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you. Thank
21 you.

22 Good morning, Commissioners. It's
23 always great to see you. And I appreciate
24 everything that you and your staff do when we

1 reach out.

2 I'm going to start by addressing
3 Commissioner Guinn. You know, we had the
4 conversation about the backlog in New York
5 City. And, you know, it was a positive
6 conversation. And we thought everything was
7 going in the right direction. And then the
8 reports came out telling us otherwise.

9 It seems to be that they're clearing
10 up their backlog, but more people are being
11 denied. Can you tell us, why is that
12 happening? And what is your agency going to
13 do about that to ensure that the city is not
14 making up rules to clean up their backlog by
15 denying applicants?

16 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN:
17 Absolutely, Senator. You know, I assure you
18 that the timely and appropriate processing of
19 public benefit applications is essential to
20 the work that our agency does. And so we
21 understand the need for oversight to ensure
22 that each social services district, including
23 New York City, is appropriately processing
24 applications and doing so timely.

1 I believe you may be referring to the
2 mayor's report that was issued yesterday, and
3 then also a news story also about denials.
4 With respect to case processing, the city has
5 made significant progress in terms of
6 reducing the backlog. The backlog was quite
7 high during the summer months, and the city
8 has been taking steps to add workers to
9 address that backlog. The backlogs are down
10 significantly from where they were in the
11 summer, which is what's reflected in the most
12 recent mayor's report.

13 With respect to denials, we have
14 looked into that, and we are seeing an
15 increase in denials across the state. It
16 isn't New York City alone. In looking at
17 some of the factors that could be leading to
18 those denials, I'll say, you know, a few
19 things.

20 One, whenever you have a situation
21 where cases are not being processed quickly,
22 you're going to have individuals who are
23 going to submit another application. Right?
24 Because they're concerned, they haven't heard

1 back, and so they submit another application.
2 That's one factor that's playing out
3 throughout the state that we're hearing from
4 many offices throughout the state.

5 Additionally, you know, when you
6 improve access to benefits where people can
7 apply more easily, that also sometimes means
8 more people are applying who may not at the
9 end of the day be eligible.

10 Again, we have seen an increase in
11 denials. I think we are going to do a deeper
12 dive to look more specifically at the denial
13 population. Each month we have staff out
14 that are providing oversight and doing case
15 reviews.

16 The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance
17 Program is an area that we are very much
18 focused on in terms of making sure those
19 benefits are getting out timely. And we will
20 certainly add a specific review in the coming
21 months to specifically look at denials to
22 make sure that those cases are being denied
23 appropriately.

24 I am told that management within

1 New York City has taken a look at this matter
2 because they too want to make sure that
3 workers are processing cases appropriately,
4 and that by and large they are finding the
5 denials to be appropriate. That doesn't mean
6 they aren't finding some issues. And based
7 on any issues that they're uncovering, they
8 are certainly providing additional training
9 to their staff. Because anyone who's
10 eligible should certainly be given the
11 benefits they deserve.

12 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you for that.

13 Can you also give us -- you don't have
14 to give it to us now -- of the number, from
15 the backlog, what percentage do you think
16 were duplicates?

17 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: I'm sorry,
18 what percentage --

19 SENATOR PERSAUD: What percentage of
20 applications were duplicates? Because if
21 they're saying that it could be the denials
22 are based on duplicate applications, what
23 percentage of those applications in that
24 backlog were duplicates?

1 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right.

2 And I do not have the percentage of
3 duplicates, but we can certainly get that
4 information to you. As when we meet with
5 social services commissioners, both
6 individually and as a group, we are certainly
7 focused on timeliness and accurate delivery
8 of benefits. And that is what they are
9 reporting.

10 And so we've been trying to do work to
11 help them better identify those duplicates at
12 one time so that they are able to more
13 quickly take action on any applications that
14 have come from that household.

15 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

16 We had a legislation last year to
17 create a fiscal cliff task force which was
18 ultimately vetoed by the Governor. Tell us,
19 what is it that we need to do to find out
20 what is necessary for folks to survive in the
21 State of New York?

22 The fiscal cliff task force is
23 essentially to understand the needs and what
24 is it that we need to do so that people get

1 to the point where they're weaned off of
2 government assistance. If there's no task
3 force that's informing us as to what needs to
4 be done, what else can we do to get to the
5 right answer?

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right.
7 So, Senator, we're very happy to work with
8 you on this topic regardless of a task force,
9 to the extent that we're able.

10 Looking at the extent to which people
11 are able to earn their way off benefits
12 without facing a steep cliff is certainly a
13 worthwhile goal, and it is something that the
14 state has taken recent actions to try to
15 address.

16 You know, pleased that in
17 Governor Hochul's first budget we were able
18 to get some changes through that are
19 essential and that we have wanted to get
20 through for many, many years. And what those
21 changes did is it eliminated some of the
22 artificial cliffs for public assistance. So
23 just because you hit poverty or just because
24 you hit a certain threshold doesn't mean your

1 benefits should go to zero. So those cliffs
2 were eliminated.

3 We also increased the amount that any
4 recipient of public assistance can earn and
5 save. So for public assistance, we've
6 definitely made some steps in the right
7 direction.

8 And then also last year, with the
9 support of the Legislature -- and I know a
10 particular interest of yours -- we were able
11 to also exclude earnings for public
12 assistance once a person enters a new job
13 100 percent for six months, and then also
14 very importantly to not count stipends or
15 other income derived when someone's in a
16 training program. So that change was really
17 critical to allow people to participate in
18 necessary skill development without having to
19 make a choice between increasing their skills
20 so that they can attain economic mobility or
21 meeting their basic needs. It allows them to
22 do both.

23 I would say that the investments in
24 childcare and the increases in eligibility

1 for childcare are also another very important
2 step that the state has made to allow people
3 to earn more and make work pay so that they
4 are not worse off by working due to the
5 increased cost associated with childcare.

6 Lastly, I would just say that there
7 are some federal programs that we are
8 advocating to increase earnings disregards
9 for, to align with what we've done in
10 New York.

11 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay, thank you.

12 Can you tell me about the year-round
13 employment program? What areas are we
14 covering, and how many youth are in that
15 program?

16 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So the
17 year-round employment program is targeted to
18 at-risk youth in the areas that are
19 identified by DCJS as part of the GIVE
20 program. So really targeted to areas with
21 high rates of gun violence.

22 SENATOR PERSAUD: Do you have an
23 updated list of those areas?

24 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: We do.

1 SENATOR PERSAUD: Can you send it to
2 us?

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Absolutely
4 we can send you that list.

5 SENATOR PERSAUD: And I just need to
6 know what's the -- how many youth are in that
7 program. Because, you know, we've seen a
8 spike in gun violence, but we're not seeing
9 resources going to the areas where there is a
10 spike in gun violence. So I'd just love to
11 see what --

12 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yeah,
13 happy to send you the list of each
14 participating area. They all started the
15 programs up in January of this year, so we're
16 pleased about that. And the expectation is
17 that the program will allow about
18 2,500 youth, at-risk youth to be served
19 year-round with this employment and mentoring
20 opportunity.

21 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. So what would
22 it take for us to have a year-round fully
23 funded Youth Employment Program? You know,
24 not just we're funding Summer Youth

1 Employment, but the amount of funding that
2 we're giving -- every year you hear us saying
3 the same thing -- it's not enough. We just
4 increase the funding to cover the increase in
5 minimum wage, but we're not capturing as many
6 youth as we should be capturing in summer
7 youth. What would it take for us to do that?

8 Because we continue to ask for
9 money -- and I promised my folks that I would
10 not say the amount of money I'm asking for,
11 but we need to invest in our youth program to
12 ensure that the year-round employment program
13 is fully funded. So thank you for that.

14 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yeah,
15 thank you, Senator. We're big proponents of
16 the Summer Youth Employment Program. But
17 right, it is limited to the summer months.
18 And if there is, you know, a way that the
19 budget can come up with additional funds, we
20 would be very pleased to administer it.

21 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

22 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Thank you.

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

24 Assembly.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,
2 Senator.

3 We have been joined in the Assembly by
4 Assemblymembers Eachus, Alvarez, Lunsford,
5 Simone and Clark. Thank you all for coming.

6 And now to Assemblymember Ed Ra,
7 ranker of the Ways and Means Committee.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you very much.

9 Good morning, Commissioners.

10 Commissioner Guinn, if I could just
11 follow up quickly on the answer about the
12 migrant funding. So you said \$325 million
13 through September. Is that just like housing
14 contracts? Because I know obviously in the
15 financial plan we've got up to about
16 1.9 billion. But that's, you know, stuff
17 that's gotten through the Department of
18 Health and other agencies.

19 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right.

20 Right. The 325 million that's been
21 reimbursed to date is by and large for
22 temporary emergency housing-related costs.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. Thank you very
24 much.

1 And I did ask Homeland Security last
2 week regarding the plan that was approved by
3 your agency and the Department of Budget and
4 whether any aspects of that could be made
5 public regarding, you know, what the city's
6 overall plan was. So I would just reiterate
7 that concern to you as well.

8 The other thing I wanted to ask about
9 was fiscal cliffs. We had a, you know, a
10 task force, I guess you would call it, bill
11 that was passed last year that was vetoed by
12 the Governor. I'm not aware of any
13 initiative within the budget. I think it's
14 definitely an issue.

15 I believe the bill passed unanimously,
16 so it had very bipartisan support to look at
17 this issue. Because, you know, too often
18 individuals are faced with difficult
19 decisions with advancing themselves but then
20 have a concern that they may lose out on
21 benefits as a result.

22 So is the department doing anything
23 with regard to what that task force would
24 have done in looking at this issue so we can

1 try to come up with some fixes to assist
2 those individuals?

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yeah,
4 absolutely. It's something that we are
5 focused on. And we'd be happy to work with
6 your office to provide additional information
7 absent a formal task force.

8 You know, so Governor Hochul has made
9 several changes in recent budgets to have
10 significant changes with respect to public
11 assistance programs, to eliminate artificial
12 cliffs that were in place previously. So
13 pleased to say that individuals are able to
14 earn more -- currently it's about a 62
15 percent earned income disregard for public
16 assistance -- save more, and then also the
17 investments in childcare obviously help
18 reduce costs that individuals otherwise would
19 incur when they go to work.

20 Governor Hochul is fully committed to
21 supporting families and helping them enter
22 the workforce. And we agree that individuals
23 should not have to make a choice between
24 additional work hours and having that offset

1 more -- you know, their increased wages be
2 less than any loss in benefits.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: And with regard to
4 something that was in last year's budget, the
5 income disregard provision, I know the
6 department put out a directive I think at the
7 end of last year regarding this. Are we
8 expecting formal regulations to be
9 forthcoming? And if so, when?

10 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yes, we
11 have fully implemented that consistent with
12 the date in the statute. So we did issue the
13 directive at the end of December. So it is
14 being implemented, and we certainly are
15 moving forward with corresponding regulations
16 that are almost complete. So I would expect
17 those to be issued within the coming months.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay, thank you for
19 that.

20 One other issue in this budget. There
21 is this one-time \$50 million appropriation
22 for Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse for
23 antipoverty initiatives. Can you elaborate
24 on any specific plans that you have for that

1 money?

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. So
3 we will -- you know, as indicated by Governor
4 Hochul, these will be locally driven, but we
5 certainly will be providing a bit of state
6 direction. So the plans will be developed
7 with the counties, in consultation with the
8 mayors, in terms of what they think would be
9 most effective in reducing childhood poverty
10 in their cities.

11 We would like to see investments that
12 make long-term changes, not just kind of a
13 one-off. So it can either be something that
14 changes the system that's available to
15 support families, or it could be direct
16 payments to families that really put their
17 entire family on a different path from an
18 economic mobility standpoint.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay, thank you.

20 And lastly, assuming these, you know,
21 initiatives are successful, would this be
22 something your agency would look to expand in
23 the future, not just in cities but to rural
24 areas as well?

1 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. I
2 can't speak to what future investments may be
3 made, but I would say that the Child Poverty
4 Reduction Advisory Council is looking at
5 childhood poverty with respect to a state
6 lens in order to come with specific
7 recommendations to have statewide impact with
8 respect to reducing childhood poverty.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you,
10 Commissioner.

11 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: You're
12 welcome.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
14 Senator Rolison, ranker.

15 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you,
16 Madam Chair.

17 And Commissioners, thank you for being
18 here this morning.

19 I'm going to direct my questions in
20 the area of OCFS. I had recently met with
21 the Childcare Council of Dutchess and Putnam
22 and talked about a variety of things after
23 last session. And one of the things that was
24 brought up was the Child Care Resource and

1 Referral, CCRR. And they indicated that that
2 has not seen an increase in 10 years and is,
3 you know, critical to the sustainability of
4 childcare for a lot of reasons.

5 What are your thoughts on that,
6 Commissioner?

7 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

8 Thank you, Senator. I would say I would
9 agree. But we've already resolved that
10 issue. So we are in the process of
11 negotiating a new contract with our CCR&Rs,
12 and we've increased their funding for a
13 couple of different projects they have.

14 I know that CCR&Rs are go-to technical
15 assistance providers, so there are several
16 initiatives that we're contemplating right
17 now that require technical assistance. And
18 although some of those have to be RFPd, our
19 CCR&Rs are the most -- the best suited to
20 provide that specific technical assistance to
21 our childcare providers. So I would not be
22 surprised if they receive those contracts as
23 well.

24 But we would agree, they are

1 instrumental to our ecosystem.

2 SENATOR ROLISON: And thank you for
3 that. That's good to hear. I did not know
4 that.

5 Because one of the things that really,
6 you know, concerned the Childcare Council's
7 individual providers is, you know, the lack
8 of a business plan from many of our providers
9 because they just don't have the ability to
10 do it or the time to do it, which impacts
11 their business, which impacts childcare.
12 Which impacts families, going to work, and
13 all the things that -- I know that you know
14 all of that, of course, right?

15 But these childcare providers that
16 aren't even -- they're not even -- some of
17 them it's tough to even collect the monies
18 and document it. The business plan, where --
19 what is OCFS doing -- is it through, you
20 know, the CCRRs? Is that the main area that
21 can really be providing the assistance to
22 create a viable business?

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
24 That's one of the structures, yes.

1 So I think that's why we're so excited
2 to roll out, if passed in the budget, the
3 family childcare networks. Because as
4 mentioned, our family and group family
5 daycare providers are the largest component
6 of our childcare framework -- mostly small
7 businesses, predominantly run by women of
8 color. And we know that we need to give
9 those small businesses, those entrepreneurs,
10 the appropriate business supports to maintain
11 and sustain their business, because they
12 provide the childcare for the state.

13 So that childcare network -- and we
14 have to, right, RFP that out as well -- but
15 that childcare network will be that business
16 support. It will be hopefully business
17 coaching, some peer-to-peer support, to
18 really create a foundation for those group
19 family daycare providers and a go-to resource
20 for those exact specific questions.

21 SENATOR ROLISON: In the area of
22 reimbursement, I've heard -- we heard it last
23 year during budget hearings and a hearing
24 that Senator Brisport had on childcare early

1 in the session -- was the reimbursement based
2 on enrollment, not attendance. That seems to
3 be if the child is not there.

4 Can you elaborate on that?

5 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
6 For after-school or for general childcare?

7 SENATOR ROLISON: Just in general.

8 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
9 General.

10 SENATOR ROLISON: In any of the
11 programs and funding through OCFS.

12 It seems to me that's a challenge,
13 because the money's already allocated and
14 it's already in the budget, and these
15 children, if they're not there one day
16 because they're sick or their siblings are
17 sick, they're there the next day. So why
18 can't we fund based on enrollment and not
19 attendance?

20 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
21 as a general framework we do -- the money
22 follows the child, right? The family is
23 eligible for childcare assistance.

24 However, I think we accommodated that

1 issue last year because now, statewide,
2 families can have up to 80 absences. And
3 every childcare provider, every county, it
4 was not consistent a year ago, and now it is.
5 Up to 80 absences, and that childcare
6 provider payment will still go to the
7 provider.

8 And providers can now have up to
9 20 closure days. So that is consistent
10 across the state. And that's built into our
11 financial plan. That is what our new
12 regulations for childcare assistance
13 provides.

14 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you for that.

15 I have 15 seconds. Real quickly, once
16 the federal pandemic funds are exhausted,
17 what's your thoughts on that?

18 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
19 we've been using our pandemic funds for
20 things like the childcare workforce
21 stabilization. So they've not really been
22 baked into our ongoing financial commitment.
23 So I think that -- I'm sure the Governor will
24 continue her commitment of 7 billion over

1 five years.

2 SENATOR ROLISON: Thanks,
3 Commissioner.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
5 much.
6 Assembly.

7 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
8 Four years. Thank you.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.
10 Chairman Kim.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you, Chair.
12 I have a couple of questions for
13 Commissioner Guinn. Thank you for your
14 testimony today.

15 I want to first thank my colleague
16 Anderson, Member Anderson, for raising this
17 particular issue around stolen SNAP benefits.

18 We've seen recently in my district as
19 well a trend that's rising. I personally
20 have gone through the process of taking a
21 disabled person in a wheelchair to the SNAP
22 office in LIC, with their home-care worker,
23 and trying to navigate the system and trying
24 to figure out where's my \$200 for the month,

1 and he can't get any food on the table. And
2 it was like a seven-hour process from getting
3 from Point A to Point B to even get clarity
4 that, hey, somebody's stole your ID.

5 And the only solution that was left
6 for that person was, Oh, you should just
7 change your pin code and call it a day. And
8 that's what they told us at the SNAP office.

9 There was no accountability, there was
10 no way to track what happened here, like who
11 took that \$200. So my question here is, do
12 we have any accountability and effort to, you
13 know, to figure out how much money we've lost
14 so far? Are there any protocols, are we
15 working with any, you know, federal agencies
16 or local authorities to hold some of these
17 accountable? And how are we going to fix
18 this moving forward instead of just changing
19 individual pin numbers?

20 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right.
21 Thank you for your question.

22 Definitely the skimming of public
23 benefits, including SNAP, is a serious
24 nationwide problem. Our agency has been

1 working with law enforcement, with the US
2 OIG, inspector generals and others to try to
3 support efforts to stop this action.

4 Thanks to the Governor and this
5 Legislature, we now have a better answer than
6 just change your pin. Provisions were
7 included and have been implemented as of this
8 past August that permit us to replace stolen
9 benefits. So those provisions allow us to
10 replace both SNAP stolen benefits and also,
11 thanks to the Legislature, also to replace
12 public assistance benefits.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Yeah, those are all
14 great things, and we were definitely helping
15 the victims get their benefits back. But if
16 you don't actually fix how you're getting
17 hacked and how they're doing this, this is a
18 free-for-all.

19 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: That means these
21 people are going to be, hey, there's free
22 money here, we're going to continue to attack
23 and hack the system.

24 So I think we need to figure out the

1 next solution, how to create a more secure
2 payment system so we can root out some of
3 these targeted attacks.

4 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yeah,
5 you're absolutely right. And one effort that
6 we will be putting in place next month will
7 allow recipients to easily and simply lock
8 their benefits so that they cannot be
9 accessed until they need them. And so that
10 we'll roll out next month.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

13 Senator John Liu.

14 SENATOR LIU: Thank you, Madam Chair.

15 First I want to underscore
16 Assemblymember Ron Kim's issue. The stealing
17 of people's benefits is a serious, serious
18 issue. We happen to share the same
19 constituency, but as you mentioned, it's a
20 problem statewide and perhaps nationwide as
21 well.

22 So whatever new technology we can look
23 at as well as just any measures to both keep
24 the benefits secure and streamline the

1 process for New Yorkers who need these
2 benefits, that would be much appreciated and
3 much needed.

4 My question is for the other
5 commissioner, which is about the after-school
6 programs. Because I think more and more of
7 us are coming to the realization that
8 after-school programs, the benefits far
9 outweigh the costs. And so my question to
10 you is, what is your agency doing with
11 after-school programs? I know there was a
12 merging of two separate programs. Has that
13 saved any money? And can we now extend the
14 programs to more and more schoolkids across
15 the state?

16 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

17 Thank you, Senator, I appreciate that
18 question.

19 So at OCFS we are very excited about
20 our combined Advantage and Empire program.
21 Those are the two separate programs. So in
22 this budget the Governor proposes an
23 additional allocation of 17.7 million so that
24 the whole component is \$100 million.

1 We know that there's been -- there
2 have been some issues with our after-school
3 program. As mentioned, OCFS administers
4 those contracts directly with providers in
5 the community. And providers suffered during
6 COVID, there's no mistake about it. We had
7 to pivot several times during COVID. We
8 changed our budget format from enrollment to
9 attendance and then, with the outreach of
10 providers, at their request we changed the
11 framework back to an expense-based budget.

12 So that's taken some time because
13 those pivots required contract amendments at
14 every stage. So it's been a tough go for our
15 providers. We've lost some seats because of
16 that -- because of provider loss. So
17 currently we serve about 34,000 students with
18 our current after-school program.

19 Again, the effort to combine them is
20 to make the program stronger. We know that
21 we need to create a framework for providers
22 to sustain their program, and that was an
23 issue with the switching from enrollment to
24 attendance. It's very, very difficult to run

1 a sustaining program.

2 So we hope that -- we're still working
3 on that framework currently. The RFP is not
4 out yet.

5 SENATOR LIU: I think we're out of
6 time here. But the point -- I would
7 underscore also the necessity to expand more
8 of these programs across the state: 34,000
9 is a tiny number.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

11 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
12 Thank you, Senator.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

14 Assemblymember Darling.

15 ASSEMBLYMEMBER DARLING: Thank you,
16 Commissioners, for your work and for being
17 here today.

18 As the chairwoman of the Subcommittee
19 on Foster Care for the State of New York, I
20 want to amplify a major concern. When our
21 foster children age out of the foster care
22 system, many of them have shared that they
23 feel like they've fallen off of a cliff.
24 Many of our children experience housing and

1 job insecurities amongst other issues. And
2 one way I know that we can tackle this issue
3 is an increase in funding for the Foster
4 Youth College Success Initiative.

5 So we need an investment of
6 \$10 million, and I say this often -- all the
7 time -- we can invest in our children today
8 or pay triple to repair the negative impact
9 of lack of investment now. Excuse me, later.

10 So what other plans or measures are in
11 place within the proposed budget to best
12 support our foster youth here in New York
13 State?

14 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
15 Thank you, Assemblywoman Darling. I would
16 agree with you wholeheartedly. We want to
17 invest in all of our children.

18 We know that we have to spend
19 specific time and resources to really bolster
20 our supports for our aging-out youth. These
21 are youth who have been traumatized and grown
22 up, at times, in foster care. Many of those
23 youth don't have permanent resources. They
24 are free for adoption but have not found that

1 forever family.

2 So we're doing a couple of things, and
3 it's -- we're very excited that the
4 Governor's budget adds about \$3 million in
5 addition to some of our prevention, right,
6 funding for older youth. We have youth
7 development funding, we have our Chafee
8 funding. So our federal funding provides
9 funds for older youth. During COVID we were
10 able to initiate a direct test transfer
11 program for our older youth. We spent all of
12 our money, and those youth got upwards of
13 \$2,000 for -- and they can use it for
14 whatever they wanted to.

15 ASSEMBLYMEMBER DARLING: They said
16 that was really helpful, that cash.

17 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
18 And we spent all of our money and were able
19 to get a reallocation from the federal
20 government from states who did not spend
21 their money. So we just received another
22 \$2 million to put back into the Chafee portal
23 and \$3 million that we're going to use to
24 spend on claims from counties who have been

1 administering Chafee funds.

2 So although the Chafee funding is
3 limited, we're trying to, right, leverage
4 that as best we can.

5 We are also rethinking what aging out
6 of foster care even looks like. We are
7 partnering with a national partner to think
8 about permanency. Right? Again, not every
9 older person gets a forever family. Not
10 every older person can age out into
11 independent living. Everyone needs a support
12 system. So we're rethinking what permanency
13 looks like. And hopefully we'll create a
14 framework for all of our older youth to make
15 sure that they age out from foster care into
16 a network of some sort.

17 ASSEMBLYMEMBER DARLING: Perfect.

18 Commissioner, I'd just ask that we
19 include the youth and people who have
20 experienced the system as well as legislators
21 who are interested in assisting. I would
22 love to be part of that process.

23 Thank you.

24 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

1 Would love to have you. Thank you.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

3 Senator May.

4 SENATOR MAY: Thank you -- (mic off;
5 inaudible) -- I have two questions. Sorry.

6 I carry a bill to establish a new SNAP
7 minimum of \$100 raised from the 23 that is
8 there. And I know OTDA would implement that,
9 or help implement that.

10 Can you tell us what that
11 implementation might look like? And
12 especially at the county level, how we would
13 do that?

14 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So you're
15 referring to a state-funded supplement to
16 SNAP --

17 SENATOR MAY: Exactly.

18 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: -- to
19 increase everyone's minimum benefit, right?

20 So, you know, SNAP clearly is a very
21 effective anti-poverty, anti-hunger program,
22 and the administration of the program, you
23 know, in the scheme of things we administer
24 goes quite well in terms of being able to

1 access families quickly.

2 With respect to state funding, if
3 there were state funds added as a supplement,
4 I think we would certainly need to work
5 through various accounting issues and
6 technical issues with our EBT vendor. You
7 know, but in the event the Legislature and
8 the Executive determine that a state
9 supplement should be implemented, we would be
10 very happy to work with you and our vendors
11 to find a solution to issue those benefits as
12 soon as possible.

13 SENATOR MAY: And would, say, Double
14 Up Food Bucks still be able to be applied to
15 that funding as well?

16 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: In the
17 event that the Double Up Food program, right,
18 that they could -- they could change their
19 model also to apply to state-funded benefits
20 as well as the federally funded SNAP, and
21 that would be important in order both to
22 encourage both, you know, the purchase of
23 healthy fruits, vegetables and also support
24 local farmers. Yeah.

1 SENATOR MAY: Right. And local
2 stores, actually, too.

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yes,
4 absolutely.

5 SENATOR MAY: My second question is
6 about -- so I represent Syracuse, which ranks
7 number two in the country for child poverty,
8 and Rochester and Buffalo are always together
9 with Syracuse at the top of that sad list.

10 I applaud the Governor for recognizing
11 this problem in the budget with that
12 \$50 million. Do you have information about
13 how that would be distributed and how we
14 would determine the impact of it after it was
15 distributed?

16 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. So
17 the budget does indicate that about
18 25 million would go to the City of Rochester
19 and then about 12.2 million each to Syracuse
20 and Buffalo.

21 We're happy that the appropriation
22 language does also carve out some funding so
23 that we can evaluate. So we will be able to
24 contract out, most likely, with an expert in

1 the area of studying economics and childhood
2 poverty so that we can specifically measure
3 the outcomes of those.

4 With respect to what's funded,
5 we're -- you know, we're going to work with
6 the county social services agencies, county
7 executives and also the mayors of each of
8 those cities as they develop a plan. And
9 what we would like to see is investments that
10 make real long-lasting change, whether it is
11 something that is part of the ecosystem of
12 the provision of supports for families or if
13 it is direct payments to families to really
14 turn their lives around and help them move
15 not only out of poverty but hopefully well
16 beyond poverty.

17 SENATOR MAY: So you see it as
18 relatively flexible in terms of the kinds of
19 things that it could --

20 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: It is
21 relatively flexible, just we want to make
22 sure we have outcomes.

23 SENATOR MAY: That's great.

24 And I know a lot of these programs

1 suffer from the slowness of distributing the
2 funds. Would you expect that this would be
3 fast-tracked in some way?

4 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: I mean, I
5 would expect that -- we are hopeful that the
6 Legislature will see to pass this within the
7 budget that is passed.

8 And due to that expectation, we will
9 start working with the areas prior to budget
10 enactment.

11 SENATOR MAY: Thank you.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

13 Assemblymember Mitaynes.

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Good morning.

15 I have a question for each of you.

16 With the recent success of the
17 promised New York City pilot program
18 subsidizing childcare for undocumented
19 families, has OCFS examined the possibility
20 of a statewide program of that nature, since
21 the Governor excluded undocumented children
22 from receiving aid in the past?

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

24 Thank you for that question, Assemblywoman.

1 So we understand the burden of
2 childcare on those families whose children
3 aren't eligible. Unfortunately our federal
4 funds are really specific and children's
5 status is most important. So some families
6 where their children do have immigration
7 status that it's eligible, even if that
8 family's undocumented, that child will be
9 eligible for childcare assistance. But if
10 not, our federal funds unfortunately can't be
11 used in that way.

12 However, I know that we do have a
13 facilitated enrollment program in New York
14 State. We have a provider in New York City
15 and a provider for the rest of the state.
16 And in this year's -- last year's budget, two
17 specific grant programs were approved. One
18 is a program for families who weren't
19 otherwise eligible -- so families who are
20 above the eligibility rate, families who are
21 potentially undocumented.

22 It is a limited fund, but it is a
23 possibility. And we are committed to working
24 with the Legislature to see how we can

1 accommodate all families.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

3 What is OTDA doing to ensure that
4 people who have recently lost EBT money to
5 skimming are reimbursed for the funds that
6 they've lost?

7 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So in
8 addition to outreach to households who have
9 applied in the past for skimming, we are
10 working closely with social services
11 districts to make sure that they are
12 appropriately implementing the new ability
13 that we do have to reimburse families and
14 individuals for lost Public Assistance as
15 well as SNAP benefits.

16 And I'm pleased to say that to date
17 we've been able to reimburse \$20 million back
18 to low-income families and individuals, and
19 we want to make sure that anyone who is
20 subject to skimming is able to get a
21 reimbursement to the extent that we're
22 permitted to under law.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: And is the
24 limit of two reimbursements per year

1 preventing people who had their money stolen
2 from being reimbursed?

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So there
4 is a limit on -- for each household, that
5 they can get reimbursement up to two times
6 per year, with each of those issuances
7 equaling up to two months of benefits.

8 You know, we would hope through more
9 education and information that those
10 households would do everything they can to
11 protect their benefits, and we are rolling
12 out a change next month that we will strongly
13 publicize and look for help from all the
14 legislative members to also inform
15 constituents about the ability to immediately
16 lock their card when it's not in use.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Inaudible.)

19 SENATOR MURRAY: Thank you, Chair.

20 Thank you, Commissioners, for being
21 here. I hope this is working okay.

22 Commissioner Miles-Gustave, this is
23 mainly for you. You and I last year, we
24 talked about childcare and we talked about

1 collaboration with the business community.
2 Has there been any of that since last year?
3 Have you been working with the business
4 community as far as childcare and solutions?

5 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

6 Yes, Senator. We're very excited about
7 several of our programs.

8 So currently available, open today, is
9 a tax credit for employers who have created
10 childcare slots for their employees. We
11 rolled out the Employer Supported Child Care
12 Tax Credit program in early January. The
13 window unfortunately is short, so
14 applications close today. So businesses
15 listening, please submit your applications.

16 And those are for tax credits for
17 businesses who have created infant and
18 toddler slots in the 2023 tax year, they can
19 get a tax credit. We do anticipate it
20 opening again next year for the 2024 tax
21 year. So we hope that's a good incentive for
22 employers to start supporting childcare slots
23 for their employees.

24 We're also in the midst of rolling our

1 what we affectionately call the Tri-Care
2 program -- the Tri-Share program, but it's
3 secondly the Employer Supported Child Care
4 Pilot. So that is a program in last year's
5 budget where we will -- and there's going to
6 be an RFP and a facilitator to manage the
7 pilot. But we're hoping to solicit employers
8 who are going to support and significantly
9 pay for a portion of childcare slots. If
10 they pay a third, the state will pay a third,
11 and that employee will pay a third.

12 So those are the types of business
13 integrations that we're hoping to continue to
14 roll out.

15 SENATOR MURRAY: That's great.

16 And now when you say childcare slots,
17 what exactly do you mean?

18 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
19 Just a spot for a child.

20 SENATOR MURRAY: But for specific
21 facilities or opening facilities in their
22 business? Or is it optional?

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
24 It's optional for the -- for both programs,

1 I can't say we've been streamlining, but I
2 will say that we've been supporting potential
3 licensees. If you're looking to open a
4 childcare, we are aware that we have a
5 capacity issue. There's a supply-building
6 division in my office, and so they're looking
7 to partner with whoever needs to -- who wants
8 to partner to open childcare. That worked
9 really hand-in-hand during our Desert
10 Program, and we helped folks who would not
11 have normally been able to open childcare
12 programs through that grant program.

13 But day-to-day business is helping
14 providers create and sustain that network of
15 childcare.

16 SENATOR MURRAY: That's great.

17 Now, one other issue that was brought
18 to my attention was when getting some of the
19 childcare assistance, there were some
20 stipulations like certain -- with, you know,
21 close to home, childcare close to home. Some
22 were saying wouldn't it be easier to use like
23 a voucher system to pick which childcare
24 company you want to use -- maybe closer to

1 work, maybe make it easier for someone that's
2 going to work.

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
4 Right.

5 SENATOR MURRAY: Are we working on
6 flexibility there as well?

7 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
8 a primary tenet of our childcare program, and
9 promoted by the federal government, is family
10 choice. So families should always be able to
11 choose where they send their child.

12 There are some jurisdictions that have
13 very strict processes that may or may not be
14 funded by federal childcare dollars, but
15 those programs funded by federal childcare
16 dollars are required to give family choice.

17 SENATOR MURRAY: Okay, thank you.
18 That might have been the problem; it might
19 have been a local issue there.

20 Because I also want to say thank you
21 for all you're doing, and I also want to
22 thank the Governor for being very open to
23 working and finding solutions. So I really
24 appreciate your efforts.

1 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

2 Thank you. Thank you, Senator.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

4 Assembly.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember

6 Buttenschon.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: Thank you,

8 Commissioners. I echo the previous comments

9 of my colleagues on the importance of

10 after-school, childcare, and Early

11 Intervention programs.

12 I represent the Utica-Rome area, and

13 I'm a lifelong resident of that district.

14 And unfortunately I have to tell you that we

15 buried another child last week due to gun

16 violence.

17 This is something that -- we've had

18 over a hundred youth and gun violence

19 incidents. In fact, a resource officer was

20 shot in the head by a child on a school

21 property.

22 These incidents are new to my

23 district. This is not something that my

24 community is used to seeing. The parents of

1 the child that have used guns are asking for
2 secure, safe rehabilitative environments for
3 their children to live in. They'd pled with
4 me that they can't have their children in
5 their homes at this time due to concerns of
6 other children and violence.

7 You testified that you had the
8 incentives of diversion placement, and I
9 appreciate that. But every child is
10 different. How will you address the question
11 that the parents are asking of you?

12 I also -- I will finish with my
13 questions, because I know you possibly won't
14 have time to answer and I will have to get
15 them in writing, so I appreciate that.

16 Also, every child is different. And
17 we're facing many challenges of dual
18 diagnosis. What new programs do you see that
19 you will develop with your fellow
20 commissioners? And again, I ask "new
21 programs" because this is not working in the
22 district I represent.

23 And finally, can you advise me of the
24 importance of the two-on-one system, as this

1 is something that we have seen within the
2 community that collectively brings us
3 together.

4 And one question for Commissioner
5 Guinn. Did your office have any input on the
6 cities that will be receiving the
7 Anti-Poverty Initiative funding? Because
8 poverty is overwhelming in my district over
9 the last few years, and we weren't
10 considered. And we have to work at this
11 holistically and collectively.

12 I thank you for all the work that you
13 and your team do, as I know I see them here
14 and I -- I do reach out quite frequently. So
15 I know you answer. But I have to talk to
16 these parents. And we can't have this.

17 Thank you.

18 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: I
19 can go first. I'm not sure how much time
20 we'll have, Assemblywoman Buttenschon, but I
21 appreciate your comments, your sentiments. I
22 know we work very closely with you. You're
23 very passionate about your counties, and we
24 are as well. So we know that gun violence

1 has been a problem and crime is a problem.
2 Specifically leaving out of COVID, we've seen
3 a higher need for more programs. We can talk
4 more specifically about those initiatives.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

6 Senator Cleare.

7 SENATOR CLEARE: Good morning.

8 My question is similar to the previous
9 question regarding the poverty --
10 anti-poverty funding for Rochester, Syracuse
11 and Buffalo. And I'm happy that we are
12 looking at anti-poverty, especially childhood
13 poverty.

14 But why are there no similar programs
15 for other poverty-stricken areas of the state
16 like South Central Brooklyn, South Bronx,
17 Harlem? There are other pockets of poverty.
18 And I just want to understand what was the
19 strategy, what was the thinking in not
20 including those areas.

21 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right.

22 Including these areas, they were chosen --
23 these are just areas of the state that by
24 many measures consistently rank to have very

1 high rates of child poverty, both in the
2 state and in the nation. That does not mean
3 that there are not other parts of our state
4 that have rates of childhood poverty that are
5 absolutely unacceptable.

6 We will work, you know, based on the
7 appropriation that has passed, to implement
8 and implement in a way that hopefully we can
9 learn things that are relevant that can then
10 be extended statewide. You know, this is one
11 item, one investment. It doesn't mean that
12 childhood poverty is not something that needs
13 to be addressed at a statewide level.

14 I would refer back to our
15 Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council.
16 This year the council will make specific
17 recommendations to the Governor and the
18 Legislature on efforts that we could
19 implement as a state that will reduce
20 childhood poverty in our state by no less
21 than 50 percent. We believe we can do it.
22 We believe child poverty is something that
23 can be solved. It requires thought and it
24 requires investment, and we look forward to

1 sharing those recommendations with all of you
2 at the end of this year.

3 SENATOR CLEARE: Well, I just want to
4 urge the state to look at these other areas,
5 because there has been a long history.
6 There's a lot of data. And we know that we
7 need -- it relates -- child poverty relates
8 to crime, it relates to many other things
9 that are existing in those areas as well. So
10 I think we should have a more global approach
11 to anti-poverty.

12 The other question I have -- and of
13 course I want to talk about after-school. We
14 need after-school. Across the board, we
15 don't have enough. Our children need
16 after-school. So I'll lend my voice to that
17 as well.

18 But the other thing I want to ask
19 about is the nonprofit human services workers
20 who go out every day to provide services for
21 New Yorkers and have not seen the raise that
22 they need to take care of their own families.
23 So this year we have a budget that again
24 leaves out a number of state human service

1 work -- contracts, in the COLA language,
2 under OTDA and other agencies.

3 What can we do to bridge the gap?

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And you will have
5 to answer that question offline.

6 SENATOR CLEARE: And she'll send it to
7 me.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Or put it in
9 writing so all of us can share it.

10 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
11 Sure.

12 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember
14 Chandler-Waterman.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN: All
16 right. Thank you, Commissioner. A little
17 trouble there.

18 So I'm going to talk about
19 after-school, like my colleagues, about the
20 after-school program, particularly Empire
21 State After School Program, which as a
22 nonprofit exec I had the privilege to be at
23 the inception of that program.

24 And our district, predominantly Black

1 and brown -- East Flatbush and also parts of
2 Canarsie, Brownsville and Crown Heights. So
3 you know that there's a big uptick when it
4 comes to gun violence.

5 We created a task force that basically
6 came up with, from education and public
7 safety, is that we need more after-school
8 programs. Right? So it was severely, as you
9 know, underfunded, 150,000 for 110 kids.
10 There's delays when it comes to the funding
11 process. I know that the CBOs have not
12 received their money for the last school
13 year. And they're doing another school year,
14 and I don't think they received those funds
15 either.

16 There is a delay in -- on
17 dispossession, delay in Galaxy for the school
18 to administer, for staff to support. And
19 then also it's due to expire, and we need an
20 extension, an expansion, with also more
21 funds.

22 So I just want to make sure that how
23 do we work out these issues that impact this
24 community-based organization through direct

1 services, which of course impacts our -- all
2 the staff being paid a living wage, our
3 parents, our youth. And it causes a whole
4 bunch of issues that of course escalates on
5 the ground with gun violence.

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

7 Thank you, Assemblywoman. I appreciate that
8 question.

9 So I would agree. OCFS is delighted
10 to be one of the implementers of our
11 childcare after-school programs in New York
12 State. We are only one of, right, a
13 couple -- New York State SED administers some
14 after-school, but our Empire and Advantage
15 programs are obviously administered by OCFS.

16 So we are, as indicated in the budget,
17 combining those to strengthen them. So we do
18 recognize that we've -- we had issues coming
19 out of COVID. It was difficult because there
20 were no kids in schools, and we changed our
21 contracts to a different type of budget. It
22 was difficult for our nonprofit providers to
23 adhere to those new rules; we then changed it
24 back.

1 So there's been a lot of ups and downs
2 for the community. We want to save all that
3 stress. In combining them, it streamlines
4 the requirements, it streamlines the
5 administrative burden on both the CBOs and
6 OCFS. Again, we are still in the process of
7 finalizing the RFP, because we do know it's
8 expiring. We have every intention to let an
9 RFP out so that in the next school year folks
10 know who will receive those after-school
11 contracts.

12 But we are focused on strengthening
13 the program and making sure that those
14 providers are sustained.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN:
16 Okay. We want to make sure there's not a lot
17 of red tape with the RFP. But we can talk
18 and work together on how we can make sure --
19 make sure the CBOs are in the process of
20 figuring out how that could work best for
21 them to procure the funds. Because they have
22 to pay their staff, and it's going to be a
23 problem on the ground.

24 So I look forward to continue talking

1 to you about it.

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

3 Happy to do that.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Mic off;
5 inaudible.)

6 SENATOR BROUK: Okay. Hi, good
7 morning, Commissioners. Thanks for joining
8 us today.

9 Today we've heard a lot about the
10 anti-poverty funding, so I'm actually going
11 to continue with that trend.

12 I not only am proud to represent the
13 City of Rochester, but I also am a
14 born-and-bred Rochesterian myself. And I
15 always want to say there's amazing things
16 about Rochester. I am so proud to have been
17 raised there and certainly instilled with the
18 values of my family there, and a lot of
19 incredible things have come out of Rochester.

20 Unfortunately, though, most of the
21 headlines that we see these days are about
22 things like poverty, things like higher rates
23 of violence. So much so that last year my
24 office took on the task of really digging

1 we can do in one year to alleviate massive
2 amounts of not just poverty, but really
3 concentrated. And I want to just quickly say
4 to have concentrated poverty and to grow up
5 in that, it means that that's all you see.
6 So to be a young person, all you see is other
7 hungry young people. Right? When you go to
8 school, all you see is overcrowded
9 classrooms. That's all you know. And we
10 know that that affects your outcome.

11 So my question to you is, how did you
12 land on the 25? And are there thoughts
13 around how to create sustained funding?

14 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So with
15 respect to the amounts, I mean, those were
16 based on, you know, decisions that
17 Governor Hochul and her team made in terms of
18 how to invest.

19 I think 25 million is a significant
20 amount of money, but it's certainly --
21 because it is one-time, we need to make sure
22 that those investments are done in a way that
23 we can learn something from it and/or make a
24 significant difference for children, very

1 specific families in those areas of
2 concentrated poverty.

3 You know, we agree, we certainly
4 understand the trauma that poverty creates
5 for children and creates for families. And
6 that's why I think as a state we all need to
7 do everything we can to reduce childhood
8 poverty.

9 You know, I would point to, in
10 addition to the specific investment, you
11 know, so many other things that are -- as
12 part of this budget, are important in terms
13 of --

14 SENATOR BROUK: Sorry, just -- to not
15 {unintelligible} but really quickly, I just
16 need to know, are there limitations on what
17 municipalities could use this for? And
18 you'll have to write that to me.

19 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: It's very
20 flexible, and we'd be happy to work with
21 the counties.

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

23 Thank you.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

1 Assemblymember Maher.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Thank you.

3 Hello. Two questions.

4 Specifically, one is on youth
5 employment. I see that the budget has
6 increased, and I just want to say I've had
7 personally experience with this program with
8 several of the counties that I represent in
9 the Hudson Valley, and they are doing
10 tremendous work. We are working with local
11 youth and local families and school districts
12 to identify the youth and their families who
13 could work in these jobs. But we are losing
14 some opportunity with the income threshold.

15 And just like we've seen that
16 threshold increase for childcare services and
17 assistance, would it be possible and is it
18 part of the conversations in the future to
19 increase that for the youth employment, both
20 year-round and in the summer, to catch more
21 youth who are just at that cliff of
22 eligibility?

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: The funds
24 that we are using to support this program are

1 federal Temporary Assistance to Needy
2 Families, and so that does have a limit of
3 the 200 percent of poverty.

4 Certainly would be willing to work
5 with you and see if there is any flexibility
6 there. The federal government has actually
7 kind of hinted in a different direction that
8 they're going to be a bit more strict with
9 respect to income limits for that program,
10 that states wouldn't have any opportunity to
11 exceed the 200 percent. But we certainly,
12 you know, are glad to see that you've
13 recognized the positive impacts that these
14 programs have. And we certainly encourage
15 all areas to really conduct outreach to reach
16 the neediest -- the neediest youth in the
17 counties.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Is there an
19 opportunity to use a different pot of funding
20 from the state to increase that threshold,
21 especially if the feds are going in the
22 opposite direction?

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So at this
24 point we are solid in terms of the federal

1 200 percent of poverty level. In terms of --
2 it would require, obviously, a different
3 funding source to be identified.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Yes. Okay, that's
5 something I would advocate for, just on the
6 record.

7 The second part is, do you audit these
8 programs? I know that some counties do it on
9 their own and some contract with nonprofits.
10 Just seeing how we're maximizing every single
11 federal dollar, what is that audit process
12 like? And would love to have access to some
13 of those statistics to see if our model in
14 some counties work where maybe they don't
15 work in others.

16 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. We
17 do. We go out and visit programs, many
18 programs on an annual basis to get a sense of
19 how they're using the funds, the populations
20 that they're targeting. And obviously we do
21 look at the cost per, and do everything we
22 can to keep administrative costs associated
23 with the program down.

24 There's a lot of variation among the

1 counties both in terms of the type of jobs
2 that are available and also the length of the
3 program. So that also makes a difference.
4 But we do perform reviews of those programs,
5 and we'd be happy to talk with you about what
6 we've found.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: I'd love to know
8 whether it's an audit that's available via
9 Excel. Just the statistics on how many
10 counties are using all of the money, is there
11 an allotment from year to year that they're
12 not hitting because they're not being able to
13 sign up the youth because of the threshold.
14 I'd love to be able to quantify that, both in
15 my district and statewide, to see if there's
16 things that we can do to address it.

17 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. I
18 mean, by and large counties are spending
19 every single penny of the Summer Youth
20 Employment Program funding.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: And even the
22 year-round, the newly established year-round?

23 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: The newly
24 established year-round just started, so it's

1 yet to be seen. But I would expect similar
2 outcomes because they're very -- you know,
3 they're not only meaningful programs but
4 they're also very popular programs for youth
5 throughout the state.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: I couldn't agree
7 more.

8 I definitely want to pivot now to
9 childcare. So I know that the minimum wage
10 increase, the \$2 per hour, there are a lot of
11 things in here that speak to those that are
12 providing employment for childcare providers.
13 But there are a lot of childcare providers
14 that are hindered because of some red tape
15 and bureaucracy that does exist in the State
16 of New York, or so they say. And I just
17 wanted to talk a little bit about increasing
18 ratios and what that process is like.

19 So if you have an emergency -- a
20 facility closed and there's an emergency and
21 there's weeks before parents can find a
22 childcare provider, some of them have to
23 drive an hour to and from work. But if there
24 was a process in place to easily allow,

1 temporarily, the ratio to change for existing
2 providers -- how are those conversations
3 going with your office and are there any
4 recommendations being made?

5 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
6 I think those conversations are ongoing. And
7 thank you for your question, Assemblyman.

8 You may know that we were able to
9 waive some of our regulations during COVID.
10 And so to the extent that some of those
11 waivers might be helpful to the provider
12 community on a more permanent basis, we're
13 open to those discussions.

14 So if you have not gotten an answer or
15 you think the issue has not been resolved,
16 we're happy to contact you.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Fantastic. Thank
18 you, and thank you both.

19 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
20 Thank you.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

22 Our next questioner is Senator Tom
23 O'Mara.

24 SENATOR O'MARA: Good morning. Thank

1 you for being here, and your testimony.

2 Commissioner Miles-Gustave,
3 regarding -- there have been a couple of
4 questions already on the Advantage and Empire
5 State After School programs. What -- my
6 understanding is that the RFPs are not out
7 yet. When do you expect the RFPs to come
8 out? And it's also my understanding that
9 many agencies still have not been notified of
10 awards under the 2024 programs.

11 What's the status? And when can
12 people expect to see these come out?

13 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

14 Thank you, Senator, for the question.

15 So we are excited about our new
16 combined after-school program. The RFP is
17 almost finalized. We do anticipate it being
18 released in the next several -- I'll say
19 weeks, to jinx myself. But hopefully really
20 soon. We do understand that providers need
21 to know what their plan will be for next
22 September. So we know we're in a limited
23 time frame here. But that is in the works.

24 With respect to your question about

1 previous payments, I know we've had some
2 challenges with those iterations of
3 contracts. So many of our providers who are
4 in the middle of a contract amendment have to
5 close out that contract year before they get
6 allocations or before they can even claim for
7 the following year.

8 So we unfortunately have a lot of
9 providers who we call constantly. We have a
10 team here working on making sure there is no
11 backlog of those after-school contracts. And
12 we give very personal technical assistance to
13 all of our contract providers.

14 Some contractors just don't have the
15 capacity to continue, right, to finalize one
16 year to then move on to the next. So we're
17 trying to work with the providers who are
18 still on our open list, and we track those
19 very specifically, try to close those
20 contractors out so they can then move on to
21 the next year's funding.

22 SENATOR O'MARA: Okay. So they can't
23 even apply until they're closed out?

24 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

1 No, I'm not saying they can't apply to the
2 new RFP. But they can't access their
3 subsequent year's funding until they close
4 out their previous year.

5 SENATOR O'MARA: Okay. Will the
6 coming RFPs, are they going to be -- for what
7 period of time? A five-year period of time?
8 Or what period of time? Or just annually?

9 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
10 I'll get back to you on that. Good question.

11 SENATOR O'MARA: Okay. Are there --
12 other than these two programs, Advantage and
13 Empire State After School programs, are there
14 any other after-school programs in the budget
15 that I haven't brought up?

16 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
17 we do intend to fund, through some additional
18 after-school funding, out-of-school time for
19 older youth. So we recognize that our
20 after-school programs are school-age
21 childcare, really care for folks under 12 --
22 kids under 12. That's our school-age
23 childcare.

24 We know that there needs to be

1 specific focus on middle school, high school
2 kids, and specific youth development
3 programming focused on those children after
4 school or out of school, during that time.
5 So we do plan to create a program and to fund
6 in a couple of regions a very specific
7 out-of-school-time pilot for older youth.
8 But that's in progress.

9 SENATOR O'MARA: Is -- with the tight
10 time frame it seems to be ready for the start
11 of the next school year. Is there any
12 possibility of extending the current
13 contracts?

14 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
15 Well, the new RFP will be ready for the next
16 school year. Programs will have allocations
17 for next school year. And we're hoping to
18 have the older youth out-of-school-time
19 programs be ready for next year as well.

20 SENATOR O'MARA: Okay. Thank you.

21 And perhaps for both of you, just in
22 general with regards to the \$2.4 billion
23 allocation for the migrant crisis in New York
24 City, all these programs we talked about with

1 you today, are all those programs also
2 available to migrants, so in addition to the
3 2.4 billion that's allocated in the budget?

4 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So -- I
5 mean, every program's eligibility criteria
6 differs. But with respect -- I mean,
7 migrants -- some migrants are eligible for
8 Public Assistance benefits and some are not.
9 And it does depend on their status. We have
10 expanded the -- you know, last year there was
11 an expansion with respect to Public
12 Assistance to expand the number of
13 noncitizens who are eligible, but clearly
14 many of the individuals will not be eligible
15 for Public Assistance.

16 You know, the Governor's focus --

17 SENATOR O'MARA: What kind of -- those
18 that are eligible, do you have an estimate of
19 the numbers? And, more importantly, what the
20 impact is on these programs for New York
21 citizens --

22 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yeah. I
23 mean, at the moment the numbers who are
24 receiving Public Assistance, it's not a large

1 number. In New York City we are looking to
2 see the future, but our focus also is on
3 helping them secure work, legal employment.

4 SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
6 Assembly.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.
8 Assemblymember Byrnes.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: Thank you very
10 much. All right, looks like we're up and
11 rolling now.

12 I want to thank both of you acting
13 commissioners for being here today.

14 My question, though, will be for
15 Acting Commissioner Miles-Gustave. And that
16 question is about the Raise the Age portion
17 of the budget.

18 You know, I spent most of my life in
19 the criminal justice field as an assistant
20 district attorney, even as a juvenile
21 prosecutor. And I've spent a lot of time
22 with my constituents on these issues,
23 including union members in the Monroe County
24 Detention Center. And what they have

1 collectively told me, and which I see all the
2 time in the news, is that they do absolutely
3 feel that this Raise the Age has caused teen
4 violence to increase, carjackings, repeated
5 offenders, including multiple times, and no
6 consequences.

7 There's general outrage in my
8 community. There's also outrage throughout
9 the entire state. The Governor promised in
10 her State of the State and in her budget
11 address, she promised us that her number-one
12 priority was the safety of New Yorkers. So
13 as we look at this budget, what I see is that
14 Raise the Age is not helping. In fact, I
15 believe it's hurting people and it's creating
16 more victims.

17 How can we start working on any form
18 of the solution when the Executive Budget
19 indicates that it's going to maintain the
20 same funding as last year and that there will
21 be no changes to existing services? How do
22 we get moving forward when it appears we're
23 stagnant, and stagnant is hurting us?

24 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

1 Thank you, Assemblywoman, for that question.

2 I do understand your concern. I read
3 the same sensationalized press that's out,
4 right, that we all do, talking about Raise
5 the Age and talking about the failure of
6 Raise the Age. But I think we all need to
7 bring it back to the intent of Raise the Age.
8 And again, New York State was not unique in
9 this respect. We were one of the last two
10 states in the country to raise the age of
11 criminal responsibility to 16 and 17. So we
12 were behind the eight-ball there.

13 So we are trying to save our children,
14 and not, right, confine them in adult
15 prisons. We know the research on brain
16 science and what that means for youth who
17 experience adverse childhood experiences.
18 They can't make decisions in the ways that
19 adults can. These are children, and we
20 should treat them like children. But we
21 should also be sure to have the supports and
22 services to advance their development.

23 And so I do know that counties are
24 putting alternatives to detention and

1 prevention plans in their country Raise the
2 Age plans, sending them to OCFS and the
3 Executive, and we are approving those plans.
4 So I'd encourage you to go back to your
5 counties potentially to see what the counties
6 are doing with respect to those prevention
7 and alternative to detention programs,
8 because the budget reappropriates
9 \$250 million every year to support those
10 interventions.

11 And I know we're also -- we're
12 colliding with the aftereffects of COVID, and
13 we have -- we're seeing the mental health of
14 our youth decline. So the Raise the Age and
15 the increase in census that we're seeing in
16 detention and operated facilities now also
17 coincided with COVID and --

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: Thank you.
19 Thank you, Commissioner.

20 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: --
21 we know we should provide more services.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BYRNES: My follow-up,
23 then, would be it wasn't that many years ago
24 where we had maybe 12-, 13-, 14-year-olds at

1 the detention center who may have stolen a
2 car, and they were getting services and
3 things of that nature.

4 And now we have at one point, a little
5 over a year ago, there were 10 or 11
6 basically adult males all accused of murder
7 at the detention center -- because they were
8 all shaving, they had children of their own
9 coming to visit them at the children's
10 detention center.

11 And the staff was afraid. They have
12 no ability to defend themselves. The whole
13 dynamics of what should be criminal justice
14 has changed, and I believe not for the
15 better.

16 Thank you, Commissioner.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

18 I think I'm the next Senator before we
19 get to chairs having second rounds.

20 So thank you both for being here.

21 And Commissioner -- sorry, I don't
22 want to call you by your first names --
23 Commissioner Guinn, we had talked about this,
24 but then in the New York Times yesterday

1 there was an article about how the rate by
2 HRA of approving eligibility for benefits had
3 actually been plummeting, not going up --
4 during our conversation, I think you were
5 under the impression perhaps some progress
6 was being made. So I just have to ask, and I
7 know others have brought this up, what more
8 can we be doing to make sure that the City of
9 New York -- and again, I don't know other
10 counties' statistics. I know my city's
11 aren't going the right direction. I mean,
12 they are just shocking: 15 percent on time,
13 that's the rate.

14 And then, second, tying it into what
15 my colleague Assemblyman Hevesi talked about
16 in the beginning, if we were paying a fair
17 share of the administrative costs to our
18 local DSSs, might we actually see improved
19 ability to meet our targets?

20 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Thank you,
21 Senator.

22 With respect to the performance by
23 New York City and other social services
24 districts around the state, I believe when we

1 were speaking we were focused at that time on
2 timeliness. And we have definitely
3 significant improvement throughout 2023 with
4 respect to timeliness in New York City and
5 other places.

6 We're not where we need to be, but we
7 are taking steps in the right direction.
8 That is due to targeted efforts by counties
9 to hire. I think that the HELP program that
10 Commissioner Gustave-Miles referenced also
11 certainly has been a benefit to counties in
12 terms of easing their ability to bring new
13 staff on. We know 38 counties have
14 participated in that and been able to hire a
15 thousand workers just since that program was
16 initiated.

17 So with respect to the denial rate,
18 which I think was the focus of the Times
19 story yesterday, you know, again, we have
20 looked at it. We will look more deeply at
21 the reasons for denials to make sure those
22 are appropriate denials. We have spoken with
23 leadership in New York City about the issue.
24 They have looked into the matter to also make

1 sure that those denials are appropriate.

2 Definitely need to do better there.

3 With respect to hiring, I think that
4 any additional funding to counties to help
5 them hire is always helpful. However, in
6 this particular instance we are not
7 necessarily hearing that counties are unable
8 to hire due to lack of budget authority to
9 hire. It is really tying back to the
10 significant workforce challenges that
11 everyone is facing.

12 So things put in place to help that,
13 including the civil service reforms -- I know
14 some counties have made changes in terms of
15 the requirements for workers to loosen those
16 up while still maintaining, you know, a
17 high-quality workforce, and then also some
18 limited areas where they have been able to
19 provide increased wages for staff to do this
20 work.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

22 And Commissioner Miles-Gustave, so I
23 just was hearing about the Raise the Age
24 concerns from a colleague from other

1 countries much farther north of New York
2 City. So I actually believe in New York City
3 we mostly feel Raise the Age has actually
4 been quite effective. And I think we're
5 seeing a decrease in juvenile crime -- I'm
6 sure not fast enough, I'm sure still too
7 high. But I just don't know, is there an
8 exceptional problem of an increase in
9 juvenile crime in the counties that that
10 Assemblymember represents?

11 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
12 I would defer to my colleagues at DCJS for
13 the official stats.

14 But I know in discussions with our
15 partners we know that overall crime has
16 decreased, juvenile crime has decreased, gun
17 violence has decreased. I do think people
18 are still reeling from that post-COVID spike.
19 But we've invested money in our services and
20 I do believe we're back to our original
21 intention of making sure that we support and
22 serve our young people in age-appropriate
23 situations -- facilities.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very

1 much.

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

3 You're welcome.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I cede the rest
5 of my time.

6 Assembly.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

8 Assemblymember González-Rojas.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Thank
10 you for being here, Commissioners.

11 As a proud member of the Mom Squad, I
12 want to thank you for the Summer EBT
13 inclusion. That's something that -- I wrote
14 a letter in December, when we were up against
15 that deadline. So as moms, we really
16 appreciate that -- that inclusion.

17 Commissioner, there's a recent DOH
18 report that said one in four people were
19 struggling with food insecurity in New York.
20 Are you aware of the minimum benefit for SNAP
21 for an individual?

22 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: I believe
23 people can receive a benefit that is as low
24 as about \$40 per month, but most are 23 --

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: It's
2 \$23 per month.

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: -- \$23 per
4 month. That certainly is not the typical
5 benefit, but it is a low benefit when we're
6 talking about a supplement to help people
7 purchase food.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Do you
9 think that's sufficient to address the food
10 insecurity that we're facing in the state?

11 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Overall
12 the SNAP program is a premier program in
13 terms of addressing food insecurity. But in
14 the event those benefits could be increased,
15 we would support those increases.

16 And, you know, at the federal level I
17 know some changes have been made, and at
18 least I can say it is a program that is
19 indexed each year. But certainly families
20 could use more.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: New
22 Jersey recently increased their rate to \$95 a
23 month. So I have a bill that would increase
24 the rate to \$100 a month, and I hope that

1 we'd have the Executive's support.

2 Last year we funded the Nutrition
3 Outreach and Education Program, NOEP, which
4 is vital in ensuring that communities
5 understand the SNAP program and are able to
6 enroll. We funded it at \$5.45 million, and
7 that included a \$2 million additional funding
8 from the Legislature, right, to support this
9 outreach.

10 So if it's not restored, we're
11 concerned about losing NOEP workers in places
12 that were addressing some of the largest food
13 insecurity challenges, including Buffalo,
14 Rochester, Syracuse. So I'm concerned seeing
15 the additional add that we fought for not
16 included in the budget. So do you know why
17 that money was not included, given the high
18 rates of food insecurity in New York?

19 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So the
20 fact that the Executive Budget does not carry
21 forward a legislative add for next year is
22 not unique to this program, and certainly
23 does not in any way indicate a lack of
24 support for NOEP. We too believe that the

1 NOEP program is key to helping make sure
2 individuals are aware of the benefits that
3 they can receive and helping them access
4 those benefits.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: In just
6 my last few seconds, to clarify, does
7 New York State allow us to replace skimmed
8 public benefits, New York State law?

9 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yes. A
10 New York State law passed -- thankfully --
11 last year does allow us to replace benefits
12 that are stolen.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Thank
14 you.

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

16 For the three-minute chair follow-up,
17 Senator Brisport.

18 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

19 I have a few more childcare questions
20 for you, Commissioner.

21 First, being that we've heard the
22 figure, the \$7 billion figure, mentioned a
23 few times at this hearing. I just want to
24 confirm that that was an amount that was

1 promised over four years. And if you could
2 just confirm how much of that 7 billion has
3 been spent since it was promised, and how
4 much is left to go.

5 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

6 You want me to do math, Senator?

7 SENATOR BRISPORT: Yes, please.

8 (Laughter.)

9 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
10 we can give you the exact amount, but I know
11 there was over a billion last year,
12 1.9 billion this year. And then the rest.

13 But we'll get back to you with the
14 specific breakout in the financial plan.

15 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

16 I'd also like to ask a follow-up
17 question about the differential payment
18 rates. Your testimony mentioned an enhanced
19 payment rate for providers that are
20 accredited by nationally recognized childcare
21 organizations. I know earlier you mentioned
22 a specific price tag from the Executive
23 around decoupling, around 140 million.

24 Is there a price tag for the

1 differential payment rates? And is it more
2 than 140 or less or --

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
4 not yet. I know we're still working up the
5 details of that differential rate. But we
6 are looking towards quality programming, so
7 trying to incentivize providers to increase
8 quality in some way. So that is our effort
9 to do so. But those specific details have
10 not been negotiated yet.

11 SENATOR BRISPORT: Okay.

12 And I also want to talk a little bit
13 about the workforce retention grants from
14 last year. It's my understanding that one of
15 the big reasons why the funding wasn't spent
16 is we were hearing that the government
17 support for workforce retention was difficult
18 to access. And another reason was because
19 there was an overestimate from the Governor's
20 office about how many people would
21 participate in the retention grants.

22 The workforce supplements were
23 decreased because of this overestimate. So I
24 just have a two-part question. Why was the

1 estimate so far off the mark as it was? And
2 when the Governor's office learned the
3 estimates were off the mark, why didn't we
4 increase the amount we were giving to workers
5 last year?

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
7 thank you, Senator. I'm not sure I would
8 characterize last year's program in that way.
9 I would say that we allocated 500 million for
10 workforce stabilization grants, but it is up
11 to that provider to apply for these grants.

12 We built new systems to push this
13 pandemic funding out. So I don't know if
14 it's because of the pace. I have not heard
15 that. But I'm happy to get some specific
16 feedback from you on some of those reasons
17 that you've heard.

18 We are using the remaining pandemic
19 funding in this year's budget to then
20 facilitate additional workforce grants. So
21 the 280, that's the remaining pool of
22 pandemic funds.

23 SENATOR BRISPORT: But given that we
24 are rolling over, was there any consideration

1 of an additional payment last year to
2 workforce?

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
4 I'm not sure if I understand your question.

5 SENATOR BRISPORT: Just as opposed to
6 rolling it over to this year, having stuff
7 left over.

8 I'll follow-up with you another time.

9 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
10 We'll get back, yes.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
12 Assembly.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember
14 Grace Lee.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Good morning.

16 I have some questions for
17 Commissioner Guinn.

18 I want to thank the Governor for
19 helping to secure \$391 million in the budget
20 last year for the Emergency Rental Assistance
21 Program. As of November we had disbursed --
22 the state had disbursed about \$94.8 million
23 helping 14,863 households.

24 I wanted to know if you have any

1 updates on disbursements as of this January.

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: And you
3 are referring to the Emergency Rental
4 Assistance Program proper?

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Yes, ERAP.

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Okay. In
7 terms of total payments out the door for the
8 entire program, we have disbursed about
9 \$3.4 billion to support payments to --
10 293,000 payments to property owners on behalf
11 of low-income tenants.

12 We are very pleased with the
13 additional funds that were included in last
14 year's budget that did enable us to also
15 start processing last year the payments to
16 households whose rents are subsidized.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Do you have any
18 updates on that particular pot of money and
19 how much of that has been disbursed?

20 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right. So
21 with all the money that's available for this
22 program, including those funds, we have about
23 \$180 million left to be distributed.

24 With respect to subsidized households,

1 of the total distributed to date, about
2 188 million has been distributed to
3 subsidized households, and most of the
4 applications that we have in-house that
5 remain to be paid are associated with
6 subsidized households.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Great.

8 Have you had any challenges pushing
9 the money, getting the money out to -- or
10 processing applications?

11 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: No. I
12 would say that our application process at
13 this point is pretty smooth. It is -- you
14 know, does require a bit of documentation and
15 review, but we have been successful in
16 reaching out to property owners where we do
17 need additional information, and case
18 processing is going quite well.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: All right. We
20 only have a little bit of time left, but I
21 wanted to ask about the \$2.4 billion that the
22 Governor has proposed for migrant assistance.

23 Can you just give us kind of a general
24 overview of how you're looking at

1 distributing that between upstate and
2 downstate, particularly in New York City, and
3 then kind of the services that you're -- how
4 that that distribution will look?

5 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So the
6 \$2.4 billion that is in the budget to serve
7 and address the migrant crisis will by and
8 large be spent in New York City, to help
9 New York City address the crisis.

10 The vast majority of funds are
11 associated with temporary housing so that we
12 can keep people off the streets, and then
13 there are also services for case management,
14 legal assistance and health items.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LEE: Thank you.

16 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

17 For her three-minute chair follow-up,
18 Roxanne Persaud.

19 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

20 So for OCFS I'm just going to ask
21 general questions, and if you can send us
22 back the numbers.

23 With the consolidation for
24 after-school programs, can you tell us how

1 many students would be served by this
2 consolidation, and could you give us a
3 breakdown by counties?

4 Also, how many students were
5 previously served in those programs, and by
6 counties also.

7 And will there be an expanded capacity
8 with the new -- with the consolidation of the
9 after-school programs? If you could just
10 send us those numbers.

11 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:
12 Okay.

13 SENATOR PERSAUD: For OTDA, we talked
14 about the increase in SNAP benefits. And
15 could you tell us when was the last time
16 there was an increase?

17 And as you know, I have legislation
18 that was introduced last year that would
19 benefit families more because we would offer
20 an increase in SNAP benefits of cash
21 assistance, utility payments, and index it to
22 inflation. So could you tell me, you know,
23 what's your thinking on that?

24 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Sure.

1 The SNAP program, which derives from
2 federal statute, is indexed every year. So
3 it does receive a slight increase intended to
4 keep up with the cost of food.

5 The Public Assistance benefits are not
6 indexed and have not been increased in many
7 years.

8 SENATOR PERSAUD: Okay. So, again,
9 the legislation looks to increase that. And
10 I would hope that, you know, both houses and
11 the Governor would take that into
12 consideration because the people who benefit
13 greatly from it, they will benefit because of
14 the number of increases that they'll be
15 receiving. So if we can continue to work on
16 that.

17 I want to again push on the COLA for
18 human services. We know -- you know, you
19 hear me say it over and over -- we would love
20 to have the COLA across the board, not the
21 select populations that have been receiving
22 it. And we give the breakdown of every
23 population that should, and so we're hoping
24 that the Governor will include that in the

1 final budget this year, and so that the human
2 service workers will be paid accordingly.

3 So thank you very much.

4 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Thank you,
5 Senator.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember
8 Burdick.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Yes, thank you.

10 This is a question for the acting
11 commissioner of OTDA. And this relates to
12 ESHI. And as I understand, there's
13 210 million that's proposed to maintain
14 operational support for current and new
15 supportive housing, an unchanged amount from
16 last year.

17 I have a question with respect to
18 supportive housing for -- transitional
19 housing for those released from our
20 correctional facilities. This is something
21 that I've been grappling with since getting
22 into the Assembly. It seems to be an area
23 that falls between the cracks. HCR handles
24 permanent housing, they don't handle

1 transitional housing. DOCCS doesn't have
2 line items for this. And also I'm troubled
3 that it's operational support.

4 I'd be interested in understanding
5 what OTDA's plans are with respect to this,
6 and also whether it might consider funding
7 some community-based organizations like
8 Fortune or others that have been very
9 successful in this area. Because that can
10 help guide how we might respond to the
11 Executive Budget with respect to ESHI.

12 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right,
13 thank you. And certainly ESHI and our HHAP
14 program that supports the capital development
15 of supportive housing provides opportunities
16 for people who are formerly incarcerated who
17 are otherwise -- are homeless or are facing
18 homelessness.

19 With respect to -- I know that the
20 Department of Corrections and Community
21 Supervision has recently implemented some
22 transitional programs --

23 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Sure, I'm aware
24 of that. But if you can tell me what is OTDA

1 doing. Are you building new supportive
2 housing?

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yes. Yes.

4 And we do also have supportive housing
5 programs that are administered by
6 organizations such as the Fortune Society,
7 Osborne and others who clearly do a really
8 good job --

9 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: If I may
10 interrupt --

11 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: -- in
12 supporting this population.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: -- because of
14 limited time. So is some of that 210 million
15 actually going towards new supportive
16 housing?

17 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yes. Yes,
18 the ESHI program is available to support new
19 providers every year. And certainly part of
20 our portfolio --

21 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: And as you're
22 mentioning, with community-based
23 organizations that might be providers and
24 might be the developers?

1 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Right.
2 Typically there's a developer and then there
3 is a provider. Often they're separate and
4 the providers are often the nonprofit
5 organizations that have expertise with
6 serving the specific population being served.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN BURDICK: Great. Thank
8 you so much.

9 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: You're
10 welcome.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: All right, here
13 we go. Assemblymember Lunsford.

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Thank you so
15 much.

16 My question is for Commissioner
17 Miles-Gustave. I'm going to ask you some
18 questions about our foster care agencies in
19 light of the Child Victims Act claims.

20 As you know, many of our counties' CPS
21 services are provided by voluntary
22 not-for-profit service providers. These
23 foster care agencies serve over
24 90,000 children statewide. And according to

1 a recent survey, there's over 800 claims
2 under the Child Victims Act against these
3 services, 40 percent of which have no
4 insurance.

5 Given, of course, we care very much
6 about the victims of these heinous acts and
7 they deserve every dime of recompense they
8 can receive, the reality is that the payment
9 of these claims is going to have a drastic
10 financial impact on these foster care
11 agencies that are providing a legally
12 mandated government service.

13 Is there a plan for what to do in the
14 case of financial failure for some of these
15 organizations?

16 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

17 Thank you, Assemblywoman Lunsford.

18 So at OCFS we completely are aligned
19 with the intent of the Crime Victims Act, and
20 we know that victims deserve the justice they
21 seek. At the same time we do recognize, in
22 partnership with our provider community, that
23 there are some unintended consequences of
24 this legislation. And much of the burden is

1 falling on the current component of those
2 providers, and their insurance policies, many
3 of them no longer have them.

4 So we do recognize this is an issue,
5 and we're talking with our partners
6 constantly about potential solutions. So we
7 agree that the foster care voluntary agency
8 ecosystem is critical to the service delivery
9 provision of those services for our
10 population. So we know they are very
11 important. But we are trying to work with
12 them to create a solution.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: I think this
14 is one of those circumstances where not just
15 for the children who in these foster care
16 agencies have disproportionately experienced
17 ACEs already -- and being displaced again
18 would be very traumatic -- but also for our
19 counties who would be left having to pick up
20 this emergency.

21 An ounce of prevention is worth a
22 pound of cure, and I just encourage you to
23 try to find solutions -- some I may have
24 ideas for -- for how to deal with this in a

1 way that is proactive and not reactive.

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

3 Yes.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN LUNSFORD: Thank you

5 very much.

6 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

7 Thank you.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

9 Assemblymember Clark.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thank you. See,

11 we're so -- we all work well together.

12 (Laughter.)

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: This is to our

14 OCFS commissioner. So good to see you again.

15 I am going back to childcare. Many, many

16 questions; I could be here all day, but I

17 will abide by my time limit.

18 First, on presumptive eligibility, we

19 have heard from the feds that their

20 dollars -- that this is a completely useable

21 form that we can use their dollars for. Last

22 year we were -- you know, one of the biggest

23 issues we're seeing both upstate and in

24 New York City is some longer and longer

1 waiting times to get approved for childcare
2 subsidies.

3 And given the fact that this can be
4 the difference between being able to start a
5 job, being able to, you know, put your child
6 somewhere safe when you do start the job,
7 getting approval for your childcare subsidies
8 as quickly as possible is really important.
9 We know presumptive eligibility works; it
10 should actually be increased in terms of the
11 metrics used.

12 But if we could get assurances that
13 the federal dollars -- you know, last year we
14 were able to allow counties to opt in, which
15 they sort of already can -- and could before.
16 But if we could get assurances that the
17 federal dollars could be used in that way,
18 would it be something -- would it be OCFS
19 looking at making it more of a required way
20 to approve subsidies so that we could get
21 them out quicker?

22 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE: So
23 thank you for your question,
24 Assemblywoman Clark.

1 So I know we're looking at presumptive
2 eligibility. And as you mentioned, we made
3 it optional for the districts. And they
4 would be, you know, required to put their
5 district dollars in if they went through a
6 process and that family was in fact not
7 eligible. So I know we're open to having
8 conversations about how we continue to move
9 down this path to getting better access to
10 families, and I know presumptive eligibility
11 is a way to get families more quickly into
12 that provider --

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: We have heard it
14 out of the vice president's mouth, so I think
15 we can figure out some ways to get there to
16 make it work for us here in the state.

17 My last two questions, the cost of
18 care -- I know Senator Brisport has talked a
19 bit about it. You know, would OCFS support
20 us moving to that system? We can move to it
21 if we pass it, if we change from market rates
22 to cost of care. Would OCFS -- you know,
23 this bill had passed many years ago, a
24 previous Governor did veto it. But we know

1 we have a much more supportive Governor.

2 Could we get OCFS's -- you know, would
3 OCFS be on board to sort of get to the point
4 where we were able to pass it and actually
5 make it the rule that we use to set subsidy
6 rates?

7 And my last question is on
8 differential pay. We allow counties a 5 to
9 15 percent. Why not just, at this point, ask
10 all counties to go to 15 percent? We know
11 most do 5 percent. One of the biggest issues
12 we hear is nights and weekends and
13 nontraditional hours is the biggest need and
14 it's why childcare dollars aren't being used.

15 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

16 Okay. I forgot your first question, but I'll
17 move to the second one. We'll get back to
18 you on all of that.

19 (Laughter.)

20 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: That's a great
21 answer.

22 (Laughter.)

23 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember
24 Manktelow.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Here we go.

2 Thank you.

3 Commissioner Guinn, just a couple of
4 questions back to the theft of the SNAP
5 benefits. So you said I think earlier that
6 an individual could be reimbursed up to two
7 times, is that correct?

8 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Up to two
9 times per year, with each instance covering
10 up to two months of benefits.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: So in that
12 situation, if two times doesn't cover it or
13 it happens again, what happens to the
14 individual then?

15 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: We would
16 have no authority to reimburse them for
17 additional dollars that were stolen.
18 Certainly there are emergency benefits that
19 could be issued if they are in fact without
20 food. But we would expect the retroactive
21 benefit -- the replacement benefits that were
22 able to provide for their immediate food
23 needs.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Okay. So --

1 and you said -- I believe that you said that
2 you've used up to about \$20 million of
3 reimbursement so far. Is that correct?

4 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yes.
5 We've been able to distribute \$20 million to
6 replace stolen benefits at this point.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: So we have the
8 original 20 million plus the other
9 20 million, so now we're at 40 million.

10 Of that 20 million, the reimbursement,
11 where did that come from?

12 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: So it
13 comes from both -- if it's SNAP, it comes
14 from the federal government, from federal
15 funds that are authorized to replace stolen
16 benefits in the manner that we're doing in
17 New York State.

18 And if it's Public Assistance dollars,
19 it comes from state, local or federal
20 dollars, depending on how that Public
21 Assistance case is funded.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: So it's
23 possible some of our local counties would
24 have to be part of that reimbursement, is

1 that correct?

2 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Yes. If
3 it's a safety-net case, the localities do
4 have a cost associated with those issuances.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: And of the
6 individuals that are actually out there
7 stealing the benefits, how many of them have
8 been caught at this point?

9 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: That's
10 definitely not something I can speak to.
11 It's being handled by law enforcement.

12 We have heard cases of individuals
13 being caught, and certainly hope that they're
14 all caught, because it's unconscionable.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Is there a
16 follow-up from law enforcement to let you
17 know where they are with all that?

18 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: I do not
19 believe there's any obligation for law
20 enforcement to keep us informed about their
21 investigations.

22 There are times we are providing
23 information to support investigations.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Okay, I

1 appreciate your time, and thank you for
2 answering my questions.

3 ACTING COMMISSIONER GUINN: Okay.

4 Thank you.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Absolutely.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay, thank you.

7 I believe, unless I'm mistaken, I will
8 be the last to ask questions. And hopefully
9 this will be an easy one.

10 But I want to go back to the topic, if
11 I can, of Raise the Age. So first, I really
12 appreciated your answer, Commissioner. From
13 my estimation, Raise the Age is one of the
14 best programs, a stunning victory for us in
15 2017-2018. And it was right on the science,
16 as you said. It's right for kids. It is
17 absolutely a great program.

18 And we're taking political hits on it,
19 and I think there's a reason for that. So
20 two things I want to address.

21 So first, one problem that I want to
22 identify right off the bat is when that
23 program was created in 2017-2018, we had a
24 prior Governor who had a history of being

1 Age had been fully funded every year since
2 2017-2018, we're close to \$800 million or a
3 billion dollars that would have gone out the
4 door.

5 We have -- one of my colleagues, Michi
6 Solages, has a bill that we will be looking
7 to put into this budget that separates the
8 capital portion of Raise the Age -- because
9 you know that's a component -- but the other
10 piece of it, it stops it from being a
11 reimbursement grant and allows the providers
12 to get the money up front. And I think the
13 reason why we're getting into this trouble is
14 we're asking providers to lay out money they
15 just don't have.

16 So the question for you is, is the
17 Executive open to changing the dynamic of the
18 Raise the Age program not to be a
19 reimbursement grant, to be an upfront grant?
20 And in that way we can get the money to those
21 kids, get the money to those families, and
22 make Raise the Age the program that it should
23 be.

24 ACTING COMMISSIONER MILES-GUSTAVE:

1 Thank you, Assemblyman. I would defer to my
2 principals on that specific question.

3 However, I do know that we do need
4 more outreach to our counties to make sure
5 that they're taking full advantage of those
6 funds of the counties that have Raise the Age
7 plans. We have approved -- about 39 approved
8 Raise the Age plans. So that means every
9 county does not have an approved Raise the
10 Age plan.

11 So I do think that, right, there's
12 more money to be spent. We fully, right,
13 fund that appropriation every year,
14 100 percent reimbursement for Raise the Age
15 incremental costs for those counties. So I
16 do believe we all can be doing more.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. I agree,
18 we need to do more for the entire state and
19 New York City.

20 Thank you both for your testimony here
21 today. We very much appreciate it. Thank
22 you.

23 PANELISTS: Thank you.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

1 (Off the record.)

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,
3 Commissioners, we really appreciate it.

4 Panel B. I'd like to call up New York
5 State Office for the Aging, Acting Director
6 Greg Olsen; and the New York State Department
7 of Veterans' Services, Reverend Viviana
8 DeCohen is the commissioner.

9 Please come on up.

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And if people
11 need to grab the leaving commissioners,
12 please take your conversations out in the
13 hall so that we are not interfering with the
14 next panel.

15 (Pause; off the record.)

16 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Commissioners,
17 thank you. Welcome.

18 Assembly first?

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes, the whole
20 day. It's your day. Assembly, then Senate.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Let's talk about
22 taxes. I'm loving this job.

23 (Laughter.)

24 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Just kidding. To

1 the chair at home.

2 Assemblymember Jones. We're going to
3 lead off with you, sir -- in a second.

4 Sorry, we were going to questions. I
5 apologize.

6 Commissioner, you're up first.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes, let's do the
8 testifiers first.

9 Ten minutes each, please.

10 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: We can go. We
11 can go right to questions if you want.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: No, no, I want
13 you to go first.

14 Thank you, Commissioner. Go ahead.

15 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: You got it.
16 How you guys doing today?

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: All right.

18 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: It's great to
19 be here, Chairperson Krueger, Chair Hevesi,
20 of course Chairs Kim and Cleare, a pleasure
21 knowing and working with you guys. I got to
22 shout out to Assemblyman Jones and I thought
23 Senator May was here, the previous chair, and
24 really all the distinguished members of the

1 Legislature. Always happy to be here to
2 testify.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Move the mic
4 closer.

5 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, it's
6 never a problem I've usually had, but I
7 appreciate that.

8 My name is Greg Olsen. I'm the
9 director of the New York State Office for
10 Aging. Honored to testify, as always, on
11 Governor Hochul's Executive Budget that seeks
12 to make New York more affordable, more
13 livable, and a safer New York, while opening
14 doors to the communities and people who have
15 historically been blocked from equal chances
16 at success.

17 The proposed Executive Budget includes
18 many proposals that support older adults and
19 their families across agencies, even amid
20 efforts to close a \$4 billion budget gap
21 through responsible steps that safeguard
22 opportunities and supports for millions of
23 New Yorkers and their families.

24 I am pleased to testify on the

1 provisions of Governor Hochul's proposed
2 budget that directly affect the New York
3 State Office for Aging, along with additional
4 budget proposals that will positively impact
5 older New Yorkers and their families and move
6 towards a broader goal of creating a more
7 affordable and livable New York.

8 The Governor's State of the State
9 message and subsequent Executive Budget
10 proposal builds upon accomplishments passed
11 in last year's budget and sets New York on a
12 path for a better future regardless of age.

13 Utilizing the state's 2019-2024
14 Prevention Agenda as the umbrella, and
15 instituting a Health Across All Policies
16 approach, New York State agencies are
17 incorporating health considerations into our
18 planning, programs, and initiatives. As
19 agencies, we're committed to working together
20 and considering how our policies fulfill
21 New York's pledge as the first age-friendly
22 state in the nation.

23 We are further strengthening and
24 coordinating this vital work through the

1 Governor's priority of developing a State
2 Master Plan for Aging. This master plan is
3 consistent with the goals and work that
4 New York has been engaged in to improve
5 communities for people of all ages and create
6 healthy environments through which we can all
7 grow up and grow old successfully.

8 In 2018, as you know, New York became
9 the first "age-friendly" state in the nation,
10 receiving that designation from AARP and the
11 World Health Organization. New York was
12 first because we ranked high at the time in
13 the eight domains of "age-friendly," and
14 because of our plan to move forward in a
15 comprehensive way to systematically build
16 age-friendly and smart-growth principles into
17 how government operates and functions.

18 Through much-needed investments, the
19 Governor's FY '25 Executive Budget expands
20 and strengthens that foundation with
21 initiatives that will help individuals access
22 needed services and lead healthy lives by:

23 Increasing funding for vital services
24 such as the CSE, Community Services for the

1 Elderly program, elder abuse and nutrition
2 funding;

3 Continuing the funding for the Master
4 Plan for Aging;

5 Continuing the \$23 million in historic
6 investments for older New Yorkers across the
7 state for those who are awaiting services,
8 bringing that amount of investment up to
9 \$122 million since 2018;

10 Continuing the \$2.9 million to expand
11 efforts to combat isolation, bridge the
12 digital divide, improve overall health and
13 wellness, reducing depression, addressing
14 elder abuse, and strengthening NYSOFA's
15 stipend program for volunteer recruitment and
16 retention.

17 You guys have always had my testimony
18 in the past; it's usually a few pages. This
19 one is a lot thicker because all of these
20 innovations we have been testing, and I put a
21 sample of them in there so you can see the
22 incredible return on investment for either
23 things we are already fully subsidizing that
24 doesn't cost an older adult anything, or

1 things that we're piloting in terms of
2 reducing loneliness, isolation, and improving
3 overall health and wellness. So I encourage
4 you to check those out. It's really
5 exciting.

6 We're continuing our bill-payer
7 program with Ann Marie Cook and Lifespan --
8 who will be testifying after us -- in
9 10 counties to prevent and mitigate financial
10 exploitation of older adults;

11 Providing an additional \$1 million for
12 our state's E-MDT, an Enhanced
13 Multidisciplinary Team approach to combating
14 elder abuse in all its forms;

15 Maintaining funding for the Long Term
16 Care Ombudsman Program, which serves as an
17 advocate, as you know, for residents and
18 their families in nursing homes and other
19 facilities;

20 Investing an additional \$3.4 million
21 in cost-of-living adjustment funds for
22 providers;

23 And for the first time establishing an
24 interagency Elder Justice Coordinating

1 Council to better plan for and connect the
2 various agencies and systems that prevent and
3 address elder abuse.

4 The Governor's budget provides the
5 support necessary to continue our
6 trailblazing initiatives. Again, I
7 referenced those a second ago. Examples
8 include:

9 Our award-winning animatronic pet
10 project, which to date has provided more than
11 27,000 pets to older New Yorkers. This model
12 is now being replicated in 35 states across
13 the country;

14 Our partnership with GetSetUp, which
15 helps provide 4,500 lifelong learning, health
16 and wellness classes to individuals over the
17 age of 50 that is completely free for anybody
18 over 50;

19 Bringing the Virtual Senior Center, a
20 "self-help in the city" model to 19 counties
21 in upstate New York;

22 Being the first in the nation to
23 actually use AI positively through the use of
24 ElliQ. We have over 900 units out throughout

1 New York State. That's also being replicated
2 across the country;

3 Our partnership with GoGoGrandparent,
4 which is a specialized ride share project to
5 increase additional transportation options
6 statewide;

7 And then many, many caregiver
8 initiatives to support caregivers and
9 individuals themselves through Trualta, Arch
10 Angels, Memory Lane TV, Relish-Life, and I
11 could go on.

12 We've implemented more than 20 public
13 and private partnerships to combat isolation
14 and loneliness, improve overall health and
15 wellness, increase physical activity, support
16 informal caregivers and care receivers,
17 promote technology, promote the development
18 of new relationships and friendships with
19 others. We have measured for efficacy all of
20 these -- and again, I encourage you at
21 another time to reference what I've provided.
22 That's just a sample.

23 I'm proud to say that NYSOFA is a
24 national leader in the implementation of AI

1 and other technology in serving older adults
2 and their families. NYSOFA is also the
3 nation's first state in the country to
4 partner with the National Association of Home
5 Builders to make Certified Aging in Place
6 Specialist certifications available to our
7 case managers. We're also the only state in
8 the country that mandates certification of
9 our case managers and our health insurance
10 counseling and assistance programs.

11 The budget, though, is about more than
12 just NYSOFA. As you know, in all of our
13 daily lives we don't just touch one system,
14 and older adults do not just touch the State
15 Office for Aging.

16 One of the great commissioners is the
17 one sitting next to me, and we work so
18 closely together because we have 440,000
19 veterans who are over the age of 60.

20 And so those are just some of the
21 partnerships that we have to have and
22 maintain in order to leverage the skill that
23 other agencies have so that we can serve
24 people holistically.

1 The following other key investments in
2 this budget I'd like to just mention:
3 obviously, increasing affordable housing
4 stock; eliminating the copayment for Insulin;
5 investments in clean water and a greener
6 economy; energy affordability; strengthening
7 medical leave for those with disabilities and
8 health needs; expanding access to oral health
9 and dental care; strengthening
10 anti-discrimination laws for Section 8
11 voucher recipients; strengthening storm
12 resiliency and emergency response;
13 investments in victim assistance; investments
14 to make New York a leader in AI; and
15 reinvigorating the Most Integrated Setting
16 Coordinating Council, which is really charged
17 since 2005 with developing and implementing
18 the state's Olmstead Plan -- and pleased to
19 see that.

20 All of those things are important to
21 individuals over 60 and their families. We
22 will continue to engage anyone, anywhere,
23 anyhow who can help us improve the lives of
24 older adults and their families.

1 I'm especially proud of our work to
2 significantly increase access for our
3 hard-to-serve individuals and communities.
4 NYSOFA has worked tirelessly with our county
5 partners to reach diverse communities, and
6 these data efforts are paying off. I want to
7 have a special shout out to Colleen Scott, on
8 my staff, who works every single day
9 internally and externally to increase our
10 ability to serve hard-to-serve communities,
11 as well as my staff for many of the
12 accomplishments that we have.

13 According to our assessment data, all
14 of our core services saw an increase in
15 serving minority older adults, and I'm really
16 proud of that. We will continue to focus on
17 diversity, equity, and inclusion and work
18 with experts to provide training on cultural
19 competence, trauma-informed training, support
20 for the unique needs of the LGBTQ+ older
21 adults, and more.

22 As you guys know, I always appreciate
23 coming to talk to you about the great work
24 that we do. And as always, I'm happy to

1 answer any questions after Commissioner
2 DeCohen.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.
4 Commissioner, please.

5 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you.

6 Good afternoon, Chairs Krueger and
7 Hevesi and esteemed members of the Senate and
8 Assembly. I'm Viviana DeCohen, commissioner
9 of the New York State Department of
10 Veterans' Services and proud veteran of the
11 United States Marine Corps. And I'm honored
12 to provide testimony on Governor Hochul's
13 2024-2025 Executive Budget.

14 Under Governor Hochul's leadership,
15 and with the support of the Assembly and the
16 Senate, DVS has continued to deliver on
17 behalf of New York's veterans and their
18 families. Throughout Governor Hochul's
19 administration, DVS has made it a priority to
20 expand our agency's reach and visibility
21 within the community, and to bring more
22 veterans into contact with the state and
23 federal benefits that they have earned
24 through their military service.

1 This has included significant success
2 improving our connections with veterans as
3 they complete their term of service and
4 transition back to civilian life. It has
5 also included the establishment of a network
6 of digital kiosks around the state to provide
7 veterans with information about important
8 services available to them through DVS. We
9 are also continuing to work toward launching
10 a network of Mobile Veterans Centers, which
11 will boost these efforts even more.

12 In addition to all this, DVS has
13 cultivated relationships with public and
14 private partners at every level, giving rise
15 to successful initiatives to connect veterans
16 and their families with everything from
17 essential needs to events and opportunities
18 for community members to show their
19 appreciation to our veterans.

20 This record of progress continued in
21 2023, and our accomplishments over the past
22 year are a testament to our commitment to
23 holistic care for the empowerment of
24 New York's veterans and their families.

1 Over the past year, DVS began
2 operating New York's first State Veterans
3 Cemetery, launched a new Veterans Memorial
4 Registry website, awarded millions of dollars
5 in capital grants to nonprofit veterans
6 organizations around the state, and
7 established and built on partnerships with
8 nongovernmental partners like the Bombas sock
9 company and Carnegie Hall.

10 In 2023, DVS also continued to provide
11 nourishing meals to veterans and
12 servicemembers facing food insecurity, in
13 collaboration with Hello Fresh and
14 community-based partners. We have now helped
15 deliver nearly 1.5 million fresh meals since
16 the program began. Over the past year our
17 veterans benefits advisors also helped
18 distribute \$200,000 in FreshConnect Checks
19 around New York State, helping put more fresh
20 food on the table in veteran households.

21 On top of all this, our Veterans
22 Benefits Advising Program secured a
23 remarkable \$68.47 million in monthly --
24 that's over \$800 million -- recurring VA

1 benefits payments through 35,000 filed claims
2 in 2023. This substantial tax-free federal
3 financial support directly impacts and
4 improves the lives of veterans and military
5 families, ensuring they receive the benefits
6 they rightfully deserve for their military
7 service.

8 Governor Hochul's Executive Budget
9 proposal includes \$1.25 million in
10 appropriations that will help DVS hire even
11 more veterans service benefits advisors,
12 allowing us to assist more veterans with more
13 claims and ultimately put even more tax-free
14 dollars, federal dollars, in the pockets of
15 New York's veterans and their families.

16 DVS remains steadfast in developing
17 responsive strategies amid changing
18 demographics and societal shifts. We are
19 delivering on our mission to "find and serve"
20 veterans where they work and live, as
21 demonstrated by the more than 500 outreach
22 events in which DVS staff participated across
23 New York State in 2023.

24 DVS, in collaboration with the

1 New York State Office of Mental Health --
2 OMH -- the State University of New York --
3 SUNY -- and the New York State Dwyer
4 Coalition, has also continued its efforts
5 with a working group dedicated to enhancing
6 the effectiveness of the Joseph P. Dwyer
7 Program. This collaborative effort has
8 resulted in the development and release of a
9 comprehensive set of tools to support both
10 new and existing Dwyer Program chapters in
11 fulfilling their mission.

12 Over the past year, we also provided
13 training and accreditation to veterans
14 service officers in every county of New York
15 State and hosted the largest National
16 Association of State Directors of Veterans
17 Affairs, known as NASDVA, conference in
18 recent history, with over 48 states and three
19 territories in attendance. This underscores
20 our commitment not only across the state, but
21 also across our nation, to ensure the
22 highest-quality services for those we serve.

23 Our collaborations with external
24 partners have also furthered our commitment

1 to addressing fundamental needs. For
2 example, through a collaborative effort with
3 Bombas, we distributed 15,000 pairs of
4 socks -- we call it Sock It To Me -- across
5 the state to our veterans facing housing
6 insecurity. Bombas has already pledged
7 another 5,000 pairs of socks, allowing us to
8 reinforce our dedication to ongoing support
9 while emphasizing the importance of holistic
10 care for our New York veterans.

11 In response to the unique challenges
12 faced by veterans, we also continued our work
13 with vital mental health resources such as
14 "Worried About a Veteran," a first-in-the-
15 nation program aimed at preventing suicide
16 amongst our servicemembers and veterans by
17 empowering family members with tools and
18 resources to intervene early. This
19 initiative reflects our commitment to
20 addressing mental health as a critical
21 component of overall well-being.

22 Governor Hochul's 2024 State of the
23 State initiatives and fiscal year 2024-2025
24 Executive Budget actions reinforce her

1 administration's dedication to advancing
2 veterans' well-being. One proposal involves
3 collaboration with various partners on the
4 development of a comprehensive medical
5 "pocket card" for healthcare providers. This
6 is crucial, given findings from the New York
7 Health Foundation revealing that fewer than
8 3 percent of New York's medical providers had
9 adequate veteran or military cultural
10 competency. The card aims to equip them, our
11 medical professionals, with essential
12 information, enriching the quality of care
13 for our New York veterans.

14 Additionally, we acknowledge the
15 importance of representing the vast diversity
16 of those who serve. This impetus behind the
17 Governor's initiative to establish New York's
18 Women's Veterans History Trail, spearheaded
19 by DVS, honors the exceptional legacy of over
20 62,000 women veterans in the state, aiming to
21 document and celebrate their extraordinary
22 contributions to military service throughout
23 New York's rich history, and ensuring that
24 their barrier-shattering service continues to

1 inspire future generations of New Yorkers.

2 Lastly, we remain committed to
3 ensuring that the unique needs of the
4 veterans we serve are met. To this end,
5 under the Governor's initiative, DVS is
6 collaborating with partner agencies and
7 organizations to develop specialized mental
8 health support tailored explicitly for women
9 veterans, focusing on combating alarming
10 suicide rates. This pioneering toolkit and
11 training program represent a crucial lifeline
12 for women veterans across New York,
13 highlighting our commitment to their mental
14 health and overall welfare.

15 As commissioner of the New York State
16 Department of Veterans' Services, I am proud
17 to share the transformative journey we have
18 undertaken under Governor Hochul's
19 leadership. The actions taken by the
20 Governor and DVS -- and all of you -- signify
21 a resolute commitment to prioritizing
22 veterans' needs, and our 2023 accomplishments
23 highlight the tangible impacts of this
24 dedication. With nourishing meals, benefits

1 advising, mental health resources, strategic
2 partnerships and more, we have truly laid a
3 foundation of comprehensive care across the
4 entire state.

5 Governor Hochul's 2024 State of the
6 State and Executive Budget proposals will
7 allow us to continue our important mission.
8 As we navigate challenges and pursue
9 innovation, we remain dedicated to "finding
10 and serving" veterans wherever they are,
11 ensuring that New York's veterans and their
12 families receive the highest-quality
13 benefits, programs, services, and resources.

14 Your continued support is invaluable,
15 ineffable. Together we will continue to
16 champion the well-being of our esteemed
17 veteran community.

18 I look forward to answering any
19 questions that you may have. Thank you.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great. Thank
21 you, Commissioners. We very much appreciate
22 it.

23 We're going to go to Chair Kim for his
24 questions first.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you, Chairman.

2 Thank you both for your testimonies
3 today.

4 Director Olsen, I have four rapid
5 questions, quick answers, followed by some
6 deep-dive questions.

7 Does the New York State Office for
8 Aging manage or oversee Medicaid-related
9 payments or reimbursements?

10 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: No.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Is it accurate to
12 say that investing in the State Office for
13 Aging helps save the state billions in
14 Medicaid costs in the next five years?

15 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: I don't know
16 about billions, but certainly saving because
17 the clients who are Medicaid-eligible we're
18 able to keep them off of Medicaid.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Okay. Well, our
20 calculation sees that we can save up to
21 billions of dollars in the next five years if
22 we invest in NYSOFA.

23 Does NYSOFA reimburse MLTCs or utilize
24 managed-care organizations for payment to

1 providers?

2 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: No.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: So to summarize,
4 NYSOFA pays directly to providers, counties,
5 municipalities, for non-Medicaid-related
6 services for older adults who, if you don't
7 serve, will try to spend down or impoverish
8 themselves to qualify for Medicaid services
9 managed by MLTCs or managed-care
10 organizations. Correct?

11 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: If we can't
12 provide the service and that's the only
13 option, then that's something we assist with,
14 yes.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: So changing
16 subjects, unfortunately, you know, our
17 long-term care and end-of-life care has
18 become a system, in my opinion, of extracting
19 maximum money from our state rather than
20 providing patient- and worker-driven
21 solutions by investing in the right places.
22 I had hoped by now the New York State
23 Master Plan on Aging could have started these
24 honest and bold conversations so we can

1 finally start building solutions.

2 Do you feel optimistic that the
3 Master Plan on Aging would accurately address
4 the lack of investment and funding for aging
5 services?

6 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: I do,
7 Assemblyman. And I know that there has been,
8 you know, within the 400 meetings and several
9 dozen town halls, the investments in terms of
10 the front-end prevention not only in NYSOFA
11 but other areas, is at the forefront. Which
12 is why we're talking about social
13 determinants of health and value-based
14 payments to actually pay for the things that
15 are valuable.

16 So yeah, I believe that the Governor
17 wants to create a mechanism to look at not
18 siloed approaches but a whole-systems
19 approach.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: The Executive
21 Budget, Greg, proposes Article VII
22 legislation that would establish an Elder
23 Justice Coordinating Council with SOFA to
24 protect older adults from abuse and

1 mistreatment, in enhanced collaboration
2 between the state agencies involved in
3 elder justice.

4 What are the Governor's elder justice
5 priorities, and why is this council needed?

6 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, this
7 council, Assemblyman, is huge. So you know
8 we are the only state in the country to have
9 an E-MDT. Certainly Ann Marie can speak to
10 that if you have a round of questions next
11 time.

12 But what this will do is really help
13 us create at the state level a similar
14 structure at the local level. There are a
15 lot of different state agencies and partners
16 of theirs that are also dealing with elder
17 abuse, financial exploitation, et cetera. So
18 that's OCFS, DFS, Victim Services,
19 State Police, et cetera. So it will allow us
20 to come together to set those priorities and
21 then develop a standardized response
22 leveraging the assets of each system so that
23 we're looking at people holistically and
24 helping to meet their needs.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: You know, you
2 brought up the Long Term Care Ombudsman
3 program, and we've been focused on this, my
4 colleagues and I, for the last several years,
5 and I'm sure many will follow-up on that
6 topic as well.

7 We had a slight increase last year in
8 our budget, and with that increase we saw a
9 slight improvement in performance of weekly
10 visits. I think we went from like 9 percent
11 to 12 percent, which still isn't great, but
12 it's a step in the right direction. But why
13 is the Executive cutting the program instead
14 of going to invest more, since you are
15 actually performing and going in the right
16 direction?

17 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, and I
18 think the agreement that you guys had with
19 the Governor last year to add that 2.5 was
20 huge, because as you know, as the number of
21 volunteers goes down, it's really something
22 where you need FTEs. And that's what the
23 money went to.

24 You know, I think others have

1 testified to this. It doesn't -- not having
2 legislative adds picked up doesn't mean that
3 there's less or no value in those services.
4 That's just kind of the way that this process
5 runs, as you know. And I'm really hopeful
6 because we've only now been a couple of weeks
7 since the budget's come out, and the State of
8 the State, that we have now until, you know,
9 April 1st to have the dialogue about what the
10 priorities are statewide. And I'm hopeful
11 that this as well as EISEP will be part of
12 that mix.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Yeah, I mean it's
14 one of the -- I think it's one of the
15 successful stories of us not getting
16 everything that we wanted because we've had,
17 I think, capacity issues to scale this
18 program. But we've done it; we were scaling
19 incrementally, and we're committed to working
20 with the Executive in investing in the right
21 amount so we can build that capacity and
22 build the public side to oversee the nursing
23 home and long-term-care facilities.

24 So I hope we can find the solution

1 here to continue to build --

2 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, thank
3 you for your support.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Social adult
5 daycares, it's been something that our
6 committee has been focused on for the last
7 one year. There's been rampant unchecked
8 growth of these adult daycares. They're
9 popping up everywhere down in New York City,
10 unlicensed sometimes -- most of the time.
11 And they are -- some of them are just ghost
12 centers. They are liquidating benefits and
13 giving kickback money for older adults
14 without providing any breakfasts, lunches or
15 any services.

16 And I'm hoping this year we can figure
17 out a solution how to streamline the
18 certification and oversight process and
19 NYSOFA can play an active role in rooting out
20 the bad operators. Because in the midst of
21 all that, my constituents and our
22 constituents desperately need places where
23 they can tackle their social loneliness and
24 isolation. And the successful ones provide

1 invaluable service where people are
2 constantly socializing and feeling better
3 about their mental health.

4 But it only takes one bad apple, and
5 we have a lot of bad apples that's dragging
6 down this market. So I'm hoping we can do
7 something together to fix this.

8 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I mean
9 we're always interested in that. And
10 Assemblyman, you know, there's two models for
11 social adult day: There's a medical model
12 under MLTC. That's really what you're
13 referring to, and that's a Health Department,
14 Office of Medicaid Inspector General. And
15 then there's our social adult day programs
16 which, again, we do monitor and oversight as
17 well.

18 But all of the SADs programs are
19 required to use our standards at NYSOFA as a
20 minimum base. So I think that there's a
21 collectively larger issue with SADs, but I
22 think what you're referring to in terms of
23 the city is the reason we created this
24 process at the state, because of those

1 problems that you identified.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: I'd like to close by
3 focusing on something that you and I both
4 enjoy talking about and tackling, which is
5 social loneliness and isolation. I
6 understand the administration launched
7 something that we talked about for a while,
8 creating an Ambassador to Loneliness in
9 Dr. Ruth. There was major news around this
10 last year.

11 What specific actions is Dr. Ruth,
12 Ambassador for Loneliness, taking right now
13 to help New Yorkers cope with loneliness?

14 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, first
15 you have to thank Senator Krueger, who is
16 really the brains behind that. And
17 appreciate all your support, Senator.

18 Look, you and I have talked a lot
19 about this, and the same with Senator Cleare
20 and others. Loneliness and isolation is not
21 just a huge public health problem for older
22 adults. It certainly is for kids as well.
23 So, you know, there are two other countries,
24 Japan and the UK, that have identified an

1 Ambassador to Loneliness because it is a
2 public health epidemic.

3 Having the ability to have somebody
4 like a Dr. Ruth in New York State who can
5 work with the Governor and can work with our
6 agency, Office of Mental Health, and others
7 to really raise awareness on what the problem
8 is and that there actually are solutions that
9 communities can engage in that are either
10 no-cost or low-cost.

11 But if we don't have this out in the
12 forefront all the time, we get bombarded by
13 other things. So having a spokesperson that
14 can really talk about this issue is what the
15 whole goal was. So we collectively worked up
16 a plan that we are -- you know, have just
17 finalized to kind of work with Dr. Ruth over
18 the next year to be able to highlight some of
19 these things and put something -- you know,
20 put a process in place that makes sense.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: So I only hope that
22 we can recruit more ambassadors and create a
23 robust program around the state, and hope
24 that they can also play some sort of liaison

1 role between all the agencies in terms of the
2 services available to older adults. That's
3 something that I think is critically needed,
4 because almost every agency touches the older
5 population, and having an active
6 ambassador-like program to let our
7 constituents -- especially down in New York
8 City, who may not actually know many of the
9 SOFA-related services -- be aware, that would
10 be great.

11 Thank you for your time today.

12 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank you,
13 Assemblyman. Thanks for your partnership and
14 support.

15 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

16 Senator Cleare, chair of the
17 Aging Committee.

18 SENATOR CLEARE: Hi, good afternoon.
19 Thank you. Thank you for your testimony and
20 thank you for coming here today and all the
21 work that you are doing around social
22 isolation -- I know we had some great
23 programs in my district -- and older
24 New Yorkers really appreciate it. But social

1 isolation is a big problem.

2 I want to talk a little bit about the
3 budget that we have \$44 million -- 44 million
4 more dollars than last year. And I just
5 wondered how come we're not using this money
6 to increase LTCOP. Is this -- is the
7 \$44 million figure attributable to federal
8 funds? Or how does NYSOFA plan on investing
9 that money?

10 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, there's
11 not an increase of 44 million in our budget.

12 SENATOR CLEARE: It looks like it.

13 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: So we got a --
14 you know, we're around 178 million in state,
15 which is a little bit more than where we were
16 last year. We got an additional 7.3 million
17 from the federal government this year. And
18 the counties still have almost \$50 million of
19 unobligated ARPA funds that are available to
20 them through September 31 {sic} of 2024.

21 SENATOR CLEARE: The only mention we
22 have of the Master Plan on Aging in the
23 Governor's proposed budget is that you need
24 another million dollars to continue to fund

1 it. But can we expect the proposals under
2 discussion to emerge in time for policy and
3 fiscal consideration?

4 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: So, you know,
5 we had -- a first interim report came out.
6 We're expecting the second report to come out
7 fairly soon.

8 I can tell you, Senator, just by some
9 of the people who are behind me or may not be
10 here today, they're on many, many, many of
11 the subcommittees. And I'm sure that, you
12 know, between now and the end of the budget
13 cycle or the end of session, they'll be
14 communicating with you about what's been
15 discussed and what some of the
16 recommendations are.

17 But in terms of the formal report,
18 that should be out -- you know, it's
19 forthcoming fairly soon.

20 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. HMH Part F
21 makes changes to the Special Needs Assisted
22 Living voucher programs. So why are those
23 changes needed? I think you have to be -- in
24 order to be eligible you have to be a

1 resident. And would this make it harder for
2 people to qualify for the program? And are
3 we excluding people by making that change?

4 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: I'm not
5 familiar with that change, so if it's the ALP
6 program, Assisted Living Program under the
7 Health Department, that would be the
8 Health Department.

9 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay, I'll get back
10 to you with that one.

11 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Sorry about
12 that.

13 SENATOR CLEARE: I'm going to go to
14 New York City for a minute. Currently
15 New York City's budget from NYSOFA for older
16 adult services is 35 percent of the state's
17 allocation, when roughly 40 percent of all
18 New York State's older adults live in the
19 city. Why the 5 percent gap, and what can we
20 do to close it?

21 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I'm not
22 sure where that figure came from. My
23 figure's about 43 to 44 percent of our
24 funding goes to New York City, because our

1 funding is formula-based, meaning it's a
2 percentage of the 60-plus population in
3 New York, which we have 4.84 million people.

4 So the city has almost 2 million
5 people, so they're in or around 43,
6 44 percent, not 35.

7 SENATOR CLEARE: So you're saying it's
8 the math. I'll compare math with you.

9 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: I would love
10 to. If I'm wrong on that, I'll be the first
11 one to admit it. But that's been
12 traditional.

13 Again, it's -- it's not something that
14 we control. We have an interstate funding
15 formula that has to be approved by the
16 federal government, and that's how our
17 federal and state money gets distributed
18 across the state, is by the proportion of a
19 county's 60-plus population as compared to
20 the whole.

21 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. This next
22 question is about home care and the recent
23 55-cent-an-hour increase, which -- well, it
24 effectively disregards the wage disparity

1 for -- within the sector, excluding home care
2 workers funded through EISEP.

3 Are we going to -- and this happened
4 before, I know, and the state made up for it.
5 But we just want to know are we going to do
6 that again to make sure that everybody is
7 getting parity across the board.

8 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes, that's a
9 great question. I'm glad that you asked.

10 So EISEP is just one funding stream
11 for our home care program. It's significant,
12 but it's 48 percent. So we use a variety of
13 funding streams to provide personal care
14 Level 1 and 2.

15 We have covered the rate increase for
16 the counties, or at least directed them that
17 they could use the COLA dollars to make up
18 that gap, because the MLTCs received the rate
19 increase, our network did not, and we used
20 those COLA dollars to do that.

21 Many of our counties are providing,
22 and they're able to negotiate their own
23 rates. We don't dictate that. So in some
24 parts of the state you're going to have a lot

1 higher rates in order to secure an aide to
2 keep somebody at home and stay off of
3 Medicaid.

4 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. Currently
5 there's 16,000 individuals and their families
6 waiting for non-Medicaid home and
7 community-based care, but the Governor's
8 proposed budget cuts the \$9.3 million
9 legislative add from the program that
10 delivers those services.

11 We need an additional investment of
12 \$51 million to address the waiting lists. Do
13 you see us restoring that money in any way to
14 help?

15 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, as I
16 mentioned before, legislative adds are
17 traditionally not added. I hope that you all
18 see the value of those types of programs and
19 services and that, you know, between now and
20 the end we will have a dialogue. And if
21 those are priorities, you know, for you guys
22 as well as they are for us, those types of
23 things will be restored.

24 There are long-term services that get

1 really difficult to turn on when dollars go
2 away, like the stimulus funding. But there's
3 many things on a waitlist, like a home
4 modification or transportation, that counties
5 could absolutely be tapping that \$50 million
6 that they have until the end of September.

7 But I think that's -- to your
8 question, that's going to be a dialogue over
9 the next couple of months.

10 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. Of all the
11 adult care facilities, a whopping 88 percent
12 do not get a weekly visit, which is the state
13 goal of the LTCOP. Yet the Governor's
14 proposed budget cuts the \$2.5 million from
15 LTCOP, so we need an additional \$15 million
16 to reach the LTCOP goal of one visit -- just
17 to get one visit once a week.

18 What are the plans for us to do that?
19 We can't cut the two and a half; we actually
20 need much more than that.

21 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yup, so the
22 two and a half that you all agreed to two
23 years ago was baseline, and we are really
24 thankful for that. This two and a half that

1 was a legislative add last year, as you know,
2 was not covered.

3 I think that the Governor, from what
4 she has said and what she has done since she
5 took office on how important getting to the
6 bottom of quality-of-care issues in nursing
7 homes, has made that a priority. So again, I
8 think between now and the end of the budget,
9 folks like yourselves and others that
10 recognize the value of the LTCOP program, the
11 reduction in the volunteers and the need for
12 FTEs, this will be a part of -- part of the
13 budget negotiations.

14 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. And -- thank
15 you for that.

16 We have an unfunded aging service
17 mandate that has left area agencies on aging
18 with a \$10 million deficit, curtailing their
19 ability to provide service and keep up with
20 demand. An additional \$10 million is needed
21 to cover the deficit. We can talk about it.

22 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Senator,
23 what's the unfunded mandate?

24 SENATOR CLEARE: Well, this is part of

1 the visits. So we have to make sure that we
2 get the money to the agencies. Yeah, I think
3 that's a part of the last thing that we
4 talked about, the LTCOP program.

5 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Okay.

6 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay? And the State
7 Office for the Aging for the last five years
8 has been required to submit an annual report.
9 We haven't gotten the annual report -- I'm
10 going to shorten this question --

11 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Our general --

12 SENATOR CLEARE: -- to the State
13 Legislature on how funds appropriated to
14 address the waiting lists have been spent.

15 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, that --
16 we do -- we've published that report already,
17 and I'm drafting the next one. So I'll make
18 sure that you get that. That went -- that
19 was public last year.

20 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. Okay. All
21 right. So that's all those questions that I
22 had. Thank you.

23 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank you,
24 Senator. Appreciate you.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
2 Assembly.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.
4 Chair Jean-Pierre.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Good
6 morning. There we go. Good morning. Thank
7 you both for your testimony.

8 Commissioner Olsen, I would love to
9 hear more about the Ambassador to Loneliness
10 program, if you can share that with my
11 office. And my office will reach out.

12 But most of my questions are going to
13 be directed to Commissioner DeCohen.

14 Thank you for being here. We missed
15 you at our hearing back in December. But I
16 have a few questions.

17 The first one is the Executive Budget
18 proposes 1.1 million in reappropriation, an
19 additional 500,000 for emergency and
20 temporary housing. Can you tell me if that
21 1.1 million has been spent? And if not, why
22 not? And why the additional 500,000?

23 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you
24 so much for the question, Assemblymember and

1 Chair, and for all that you do.

2 We are actually still dotting the I's
3 and crossing the T's for that \$1.1 million,
4 and we are going to be having the
5 announcement in the coming weeks. We have to
6 implement that program from scratch, as you
7 know, and we wanted to ensure that once it is
8 launched, that everything is going to be set
9 for that.

10 I don't have to tell you the
11 importance and the need of our veterans
12 across this state for not only housing needs
13 but housing emergencies that this can speak
14 to. While we've been out there as well, you
15 know, this goes a little bit beyond the
16 housing. This goes also to those veterans
17 who are housed who have disabilities and
18 incur emergencies within their homes.
19 Something like being without a washing
20 machine is so vital and so crucial. Those
21 who are behind in rental situations, those
22 who are behind in mortgage situations.

23 So we're looking forward to announcing
24 this rollout in the coming weeks.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: So how did
2 we get to the additional 500,000?

3 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: That I'm
4 going to have to get back to you on, because
5 we were not on that part, we were on the part
6 with the \$1.1 million grant for the housing.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay. So
8 look forward to talking to you more about
9 that.

10 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Yes.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: My next
12 question is Section 4 of the Veterans Service
13 Law requires that DVS prepare and submit a
14 report on homeless veterans every three
15 years. The report was due in June 2023. Do
16 you know what the delay is?

17 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Yes. We
18 had actually brought aboard a special
19 engagement coordinator to be able to have
20 boots on the ground to be able to get that
21 data and those numbers. And because the
22 person is still new, we're still new,
23 onboarding, we're getting ready to have those
24 numbers for you anytime now. I have to --

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Do we know
2 a date? Do we have a date?

3 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: -- and have
4 it pulled.

5 It should be within the next 30 to
6 60 days. It won't be long. Within that
7 timeline.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay. In
9 2022, the DVS annual report indicates that
10 the Discharge Upgrade Advisory Board did not
11 receive any applications. Does DVS have an
12 estimate of how many veterans have less than
13 honorable or bad paper discharges?

14 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: I do not
15 have those numbers. Again, we will have to
16 get back to you on that.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay.
18 What resources does the department use
19 currently to reach out to veterans who may be
20 seeking a discharge upgrade, and are there
21 plans to improve that outreach?

22 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Currently
23 we're still utilizing the restoration of
24 honors. To date we have restored 50

1 restoration of honors and upgrades. Our
2 "find and serve" method to where we are boots
3 on the ground with our veterans benefits
4 advisors -- you see our executive deputy
5 commissioner and our general counsel, who are
6 sitting next to me, our book bags and
7 briefcases and pocketbooks have become our
8 offices, because we are now interfacing with
9 our veterans across the state.

10 Part of our "find and serve" has also
11 been extended to our houses of worship for
12 our faith-in-service, where we are finding
13 those within the houses of worship.
14 Interestingly enough, we're finding that a
15 lot of our pastors and our bishops and rabbis
16 are themselves people who served who were in
17 need of upgrade discharges within their
18 houses of worship, and for themselves. So
19 this has also allowed us to extend our
20 offerings of upgrades and the restoration of
21 services.

22 And again, we're no longer putting the
23 restoration of services in the mail. We are
24 now parlaying, we're calling them over the

1 phone to let them know that they have been
2 upgraded and to congratulate them. Or we are
3 giving them in person. So glad to say that
4 I've met with a good dozen or more of them in
5 their homes to deliver the restoration of
6 honors in person from New York City, Bronx,
7 all the way to Buffalo.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay,
9 awesome. Just for the sake of time, I'm just
10 going to keep going. How many applications
11 have been received for grants under the
12 Veterans Nonprofit Capital Fund Program?

13 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We're so
14 glad to say that currently we've done the
15 first round: 39 veteran organizations have
16 received the grantee award to allow for a
17 capital grant for improvements for their
18 organization.

19 The second round is now in effect, and
20 the deadline is going to April 19th. And so
21 we're hoping that those that were not in the
22 first round can get in the second round so
23 that we can distribute that second part of
24 the 2.6 million.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Sorry,
2 just want to stop you. What outreach methods
3 are you using in order to get it out for
4 April 19th?

5 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Good.
6 Good. We've already utilized all of the
7 social media platforms. We utilized our
8 distribution list, and we've reached out to
9 all of our county partners to get on their
10 listserv as well.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay. And
12 the kiosks. Can you quantify how many
13 veterans actually have been served in --
14 under utilizing the kiosks.

15 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Good.
16 Good. We're still in the portion of
17 gathering data because we have actually
18 upgraded our kiosks to become digitalized.
19 And so now we -- instead of nine kiosks we
20 have now deployed 13 kiosks and counting. We
21 have more money that has been allocated for
22 additional kiosks, and we've had much more
23 requests.

24 I have to tell you we're excited now

1 to have these not only roll out in places
2 like here in the Concourse where they can now
3 be utilized and digital by our state
4 partners, but we're now getting requests and
5 we're hopeful to now see them in places like
6 the Jacob Javits Center in New York City,
7 Grand Central Station, and some of the
8 airports.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay. And
10 my last question is in your testimony you
11 said that the "Veterans Benefits Advising
12 Program secured a remarkable \$68.47 million
13 in monthly" -- and that is an almost 8,000
14 increase of claims reported from 2022.

15 How is DVS maintaining quality and
16 responsive representation to fill these
17 almost 8,000 more claims from last year?

18 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Well, this
19 is what we've done with boots on the ground.
20 That "finding and serving" has been so
21 instrumental, our Governor has given us an
22 additional 1.25 million for additional
23 veteran benefits advisors. I want you to
24 know now that our veteran benefits advisors

1 are sitting with our veteran in a holistic
2 approach, taking care of everything that they
3 need within their claims and beyond, for
4 their households.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay.

6 Well, that's all I had. Thank you so much.

7 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you.

8 Thank you.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
10 much.

11 Next up is our chair for Veterans,
12 Senator Scarcella-Spanton. Ten minutes.

13 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you,
14 Chair.

15 And thank you so much, Commissioner,
16 for all the work you do and for your service.

17 One of the first things I wanted to
18 ask about and bring to your attention is the
19 Comptroller recently laid out a report of the
20 personal income tax checkoff. There is close
21 to three -- there's a little over
22 \$3.4 million of that money that has not been
23 disbursed yet in the last six years. So it
24 goes for veterans remembrance and cemetery

1 maintenance and operation, homeless veterans
2 assistance, Veterans Home Assistance Fund,
3 and military family relief.

4 Specifically for the cemetery
5 maintenance, they actually saw the biggest
6 increase of any tax checkoffs of over
7 \$950,000. And with interest, it has
8 \$1.5 million sitting waiting to be disbursed.

9 So my question would be, is why hasn't
10 this money gotten out yet and what can we do
11 to help you get it out the door to the groups
12 who need it?

13 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you
14 for your question, Senator. Thank you for
15 all the work that you do as well.

16 As you know, we recently took over the
17 cemetery, and we're still in the writing
18 phase and still dotting all the I's and
19 crossing all the T's to ensure those things
20 as well. Right now we wanted to ensure that
21 it continued to run at the same high-quality
22 level that it was serving, and to ensure that
23 they have all the staffing and the needs to
24 be able to maintain it at that high standard.

1 But these are things that we are
2 working on diligently, and we're checking
3 them off one by one.

4 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Okay. And
5 so what will the mechanism be for -- let's
6 say for homeless veterans assistance? That
7 has close to \$1.4 million sitting waiting to
8 be drawn down. Will you create something for
9 organizations to request that funding? How
10 will you get that funding out?

11 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We can get
12 back to you on that so that we can have a
13 solid answer for you.

14 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Okay,
15 perfect.

16 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you
17 so much.

18 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: That
19 brings me to my next question. We had -- the
20 budget has 1.1 million for Homeless Veterans
21 Housing Program. And this year we have --
22 the Governor's recommending 600,000 in
23 funding for this program. Can you provide
24 more of the details on this funding?

1 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Again,
2 we're going to be getting this out within the
3 coming weeks. But just to let you know,
4 again, it will be for our veterans who have
5 emergency needs, those who may be behind in
6 their rent, in their mortgage. We're even
7 getting phone calls -- and again, we want to
8 ensure that the needs of all our veterans are
9 met. Things like emergency refrigeration and
10 things of that nature that we're looking to
11 put in there.

12 Again, just dotting the last I's and
13 crossing the last T's. So when I say the
14 coming weeks you're going to hear this
15 announcement, the coming weeks you'll hear
16 this announcement and all the criteria for
17 our veterans to be able to utilize this.

18 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Perfect.
19 I think it will be a great addition if we're
20 able to figure out in the next couple of
21 weeks how to draw down those additional funds
22 that have been sitting. I think that will go
23 a really long way.

24 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Absolutely.

1 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: And do you
2 know how many veterans received homes through
3 the use of last year's funds and how many
4 homes would be provided in this year's funds
5 with that \$600,000 allocation? Or is it not
6 just for homes, it's for homeless veterans,
7 so it's different serv -- it's like the
8 refrigeration --

9 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: That's
10 correct.

11 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Okay. How
12 many veterans does New York State Department
13 of Veterans' Services serve annually? And
14 essentially how many veterans reach out to
15 the office monthly? Are you keeping track of
16 that number?

17 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: As you
18 know, we serve over 688,000 veterans -- let
19 me say this, because this is something that I
20 want us to have a clear understanding of.
21 When we say "veteran" -- and now that I am
22 going across this entire state, that is not a
23 good representation of those who have served.

24 And, you know, Senator Ashby, you

1 know, thank you for your service.

2 We are now utilizing the term on our
3 flyers and advertisements and working with
4 even our county veteran officers, who know
5 all of the veterans within their town. Now,
6 when we sit and we say for those who've
7 served, and we're setting up a table, a
8 totally different population is coming forth
9 to say I served, I was in the Army for four
10 years, but I was just a photographer, I did
11 this or that. That number is not a good
12 representation.

13 But because we are doing the "find and
14 serve" and we are approaching this for those
15 who have served, in the smallest of towns
16 where they're saying there's maybe one or two
17 women veterans, 50-plus came out in a small
18 town.

19 So, you know, we say 688,000; we know
20 that there's much, much more -- many more
21 than we have served. Twenty-four percent
22 being served in the national average, because
23 17 percent are for those with the
24 disabilities.

1 What we're seeing now -- and again,
2 we're not waiting for anyone to come inside
3 the building. People may not know that you
4 exist. We want them in front of us. The
5 difference of having them in front of us --
6 and I can testify as a veteran who's done
7 this and gone on a website to get a resource,
8 I have my VA Health card. For years I did
9 not know of any other resources. Now we have
10 the testaments and the letters of people that
11 are sitting in front of our veteran benefit
12 advisors -- not in the office, but when we're
13 at the supermarket, when we're in the
14 laundromat, when we're now involved in the
15 houses of worship and their health and
16 wellness days, to be able to let them know to
17 do a benefits check for those who served.
18 The numbers have quadrupled.

19 And again, we are now bringing in over
20 \$800 million in the past year. That's data
21 and that's a quantitative number that we can
22 say doing the qualitative work, the
23 phenomenological of allowing the veteran
24 their voice to tell us what it is that they

1 need, and to meet those service needs. And
2 this has been with your help as well in the
3 past year that has made the difference.

4 To ask the veteran not just about
5 their claim but everything that's going on in
6 their life, in their home, has made the
7 difference.

8 We just did a Fabulous Friday where we
9 highlighted one of our veteran benefits
10 advisors because the gentleman wrote a letter
11 and said that if he did not sit with her and
12 if she did not ask him about the ideation of
13 suicide and do the Columbia protocol, then
14 that would have been his last day. So he
15 wrote a letter because she asked him those
16 questions and traded off to our partners, and
17 he was able to get the services that he's
18 still here.

19 The other letters talk about going in
20 to find one resource and leaving with five
21 more.

22 And to let you know, our partners
23 across the state, we no longer have to send
24 them across the water or across the road to

1 get these resources. Now they can go home
2 and furniture is being delivered. Baby
3 items, through Operation Babies, is there.
4 Diapers, the diaper program that we're
5 getting ready to roll out. A baby crib.
6 Book bags for their children. This has all
7 been because of your assistance across the
8 state, and we see the difference.

9 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Yeah, and
10 being mindful of time, I know -- thank you.
11 I really appreciate the great work you guys
12 are doing, and I think those mobile service
13 vans have gone a long way.

14 How many mobile service vans were you
15 able to obtain last year with the \$300,000
16 allocation?

17 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We're
18 getting ready to roll out three. We actually
19 put the bid through twice; we didn't get any
20 takers. This time we put the bid through
21 again and we were specific with letting them
22 know the accessibility and the technological
23 services that we want on them. We're looking
24 forward to having them out. When they roll

1 out now, we can literally do the "Sock It to
2 Me" across the state with the socks on there.
3 Hopefully the diapers will be on there.

4 But also just to let you know, you
5 know, VBA reps are there also. They can get
6 the FreshConnect tickets and services for
7 food. They can also be told about the legal
8 services, free legal services through our
9 partners like the New York State Bar
10 association that's now helping our veterans
11 with everything with -- from their life, from
12 adoption, which we're helping a couple right
13 now, to divorce, all the way down to wills.

14 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: That's
15 great.

16 You know, one of the things we've
17 discussed in detail -- and again, I really
18 thank you for your partnership. We always
19 try to make sure we bounce ideas, and you've
20 been fantastic with that. You know, I think
21 it's really difficult for veterans returning
22 home to figure out what services they are
23 qualified for. What do you do to encourage
24 veterans or those who served -- I will change

1 my language too -- to get enrolled with the
2 VA or let them know what New York State
3 offers?

4 And we've spoken about a lot of ideas,
5 but would love to see that, being mindful of
6 time.

7 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Yeah, thank
8 you, Senator.

9 As you know, again, Executive Deputy
10 Commissioner Joel Evans and myself have now
11 signed I think 10,000-plus "welcome home"
12 letters that have gone out. We've been able
13 to do this with the Department of Defense and
14 working now with so many of our military
15 installations to be able to capture those
16 folks when they're getting home. The
17 difference is now it doesn't say call an 888
18 number. It now has the name of one of our
19 veteran benefits advisors on there. They can
20 now call Susie and Donna. And we're doing
21 the handhold with them of all of their
22 benefits.

23 Again, we're no longer just claims.
24 We've expanded beyond that. We can get your

1 claims, do you have a family, does your
2 spouse need employment. Everything from A to
3 Z. And that's because of your help, so thank
4 you so much.

5 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you.
6 Thank you, commissioner.

7 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you.
8 Thank you.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you, Chair.
10 Assembly.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.
12 Assemblymember Jones. This time I
13 mean it.

14 (Laughter.)

15 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Thank you. Don't
16 start to clap yet.

17 Thank you for being here,
18 Director Olsen.

19 Commissioner DeCohen, thank you for
20 your service. I see we have a few of our
21 local veterans up there. Thank you for your
22 service as well. My questions -- and thank
23 God for the Dwyer funding, getting that
24 statewide was an initiative that many of us

1 here worked on a couple of years ago, and we
2 have it.

3 My questions will probably be to
4 Director Olsen, but I think they're very
5 relevant with both of you here, since -- what
6 is it -- over 440,000 of our over-60 are
7 veterans.

8 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Unbelievable.
10 Many in my area as well.

11 So I have to drill down -- I'm going
12 to ask you a couple of questions; I have to
13 drill down on the budget. Okay, I see a
14 little discrepancy, it must have been an
15 oversight. I see we have less money in our
16 Office for the Aging budget than we did last
17 year. And I say that because I'm looking at
18 EISEP. We'll drill down on that. I know the
19 chair talked about it as well.

20 I see the 9.3 million add is gone. I
21 see other funds down. We're talking about
22 that non-Medicaid-eligible list. All right?

23 I hate to talk about return on
24 investment when we're talking about our

1 veterans, our loved ones, our neighbors, our
2 family members. But unfortunately this is
3 one of the few areas we have to talk about in
4 human services. We have to talk about return
5 on investment when we're talking about our
6 neighbors, our loved ones, our veterans. We
7 have to talk about it because we're so
8 severely underfunded every year.

9 Okay, let's talk about return on
10 investment. Director Olsen, is directing
11 money towards EISEP and other programs on
12 this list a good investment? Do we get a
13 good return on investment?

14 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, I think
15 we do get a good return on investment.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Does it save
17 Medicaid dollars?

18 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: I believe it
19 does, because the average person is an
20 83-year-old low-income female, lives alone,
21 four to 10 chronic conditions, three ADL
22 limitations, six IADL limitations. They're
23 on our caseload between five and seven years,
24 for under 10,000.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: When is New York
2 State going to wake up and realize that this
3 is a good ROI in actually servicing our loved
4 ones, our veterans, our neighbors? When are
5 we going to wake up? That's a rhetorical
6 question, when are we going to wake up.

7 Second -- I only have 30 seconds left,
8 time clock -- is the Master Plan on Aging
9 released?

10 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: There's a
11 first interim report, there's a second report
12 that's going to be coming out shortly, the
13 final in '25.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: And is there any
15 funding in the budget as it sits right now to
16 implement anything in the Master Plan for
17 Aging?

18 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: The money in
19 the budget for the Master Plan is to continue
20 the process that will end at the end of '24.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Nothing to
22 implement the plans.

23 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Not at this
24 point, because the recommendations are just

1 being put in.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN JONES: Thank you.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

4 Ranker Senator Ashby.

5 SENATOR ASHBY: Thank you, Chair.

6 Commissioner DeCohen, thank you for
7 being here.

8 In 2022 the division was upgraded,
9 elevated to a department. Right? And that
10 gives a higher status -- you're a
11 commissioner now, right -- and also allows
12 for an increased budget, you would think, and
13 access to federal funding. Have you seen an
14 augmentation in your staff since then?

15 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you
16 for that question, Senator Ashby.

17 I don't have to tell you because you
18 see what's happening out there. As a result
19 of the Governor's 2022-2023, we know that
20 just even our veterans service organizations
21 had received 150 percent increase from the
22 10,000 to 25,000 --

23 SENATOR ASHBY: Commissioner DeCohen,
24 have you seen an -- have you augmented your

1 staff?

2 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Yes. Thank
3 you. The 1.25 million that the Governor has
4 just given us to increase our veteran
5 benefits advisors is allowing for an increase
6 across the state to be able to do that.

7 But I don't have to tell you that we
8 are standing on a beach with sand, and what
9 we have done with this sand is not to ask for
10 more sand. But what we've done, showing in
11 the dollars that we brought in for the past
12 year, of over \$800 million, speaks for
13 itself.

14 We've done together incredible work
15 across this state with what the Governor has
16 given us.

17 SENATOR ASHBY: Have you seen an
18 increase in maybe federal partnership, being
19 now a department that allows you to garner
20 federal funding? What federal partnerships
21 have you had?

22 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Right.
23 Well, I have to tell -- I have to tell you
24 that now what we've done is we've been called

1 to Washington to be able to participate in
2 things like the Women Veterans Center of
3 Excellence and the meetings with the
4 Honorable --

5 SENATOR ASHBY: Has any of this
6 resulted in an increase in your budget as a
7 department?

8 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: This --

9 SENATOR ASHBY: Because what I'm
10 looking at now is a \$2.4 million cut. So
11 you're a department now, you're a
12 commissioner, and you're seeing a cut.

13 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: No, what --
14 let me tell you what you don't see. What you
15 don't see are the initiatives that we were
16 already working on where we already had the
17 money set aside in our budget. Things like
18 the Women Veterans Trail that's coming on,
19 the health pocket card that we have, the
20 toolkit and all of the programs that we have
21 for the suicide prevention. Those were
22 already allocated in the budget with what
23 we've had.

24 Listen, we have our veterans at the

1 table, and they are all being fed. And
2 again, who dares to be on the beach and say
3 we don't have enough sand? We have beach.

4 And again, the 1.25 million that's
5 been given to us to add additional veterans
6 benefits advisors, the partnerships that we
7 now have -- because we are a department --
8 with our intrastate agencies, people like
9 Greg Olsen that we're now having caregiver
10 programs -- we have expanded tremendously.
11 Our arms are stretched.

12 SENATOR ASHBY: Now that you're seeing
13 a cut, \$2.4 million cut, what programs do you
14 anticipate cutting?

15 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We have not
16 seen -- see, it looks like a cut. Let me --
17 let me be clear --

18 SENATOR ASHBY: It does, because
19 that's the arithmetic, that's the math. It's
20 a cut.

21 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: The math --
22 the math -- the math is equated to our work
23 bringing in over \$800 million in tax-free
24 federal benefits back into the pockets of our

1 veterans and families. And that's what we
2 want, increase for our veterans, and that's
3 what we have. We have increased -- we have
4 sand on the beach.

5 SENATOR ASHBY: Commissioner DeCohen,
6 that's -- I mean, that's just not true. It's
7 a cut. It's a \$2.4 million cut. And in --

8 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Senator --

9 SENATOR ASHBY: In the last six years,
10 we've neglected to disburse over \$3 million
11 to veterans nursing homes, to burial
12 services.

13 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Senator
14 Ashby --

15 SENATOR ASHBY: This is a department
16 now, right?

17 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you,
18 Senator Ashby. It's a --

19 SENATOR ASHBY: This is a department.
20 We're supposed to be getting new resources.
21 What in your communications to the Governor
22 or even the federal government has led to an
23 augmentation of this department? Can you
24 tell me?

1 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Senator
2 Ashby, as the boots on the ground going
3 across this entire state, we are seeing all
4 of the funds that this Governor and this
5 administration again has given to our
6 veterans service officers and our counties.
7 We are going in, they have acquired, with the
8 money given --

9 (Overtalk.)

10 SENATOR ASHBY: Commissioner DeCohen,
11 I understand that. I've been to Niagara
12 County and Nassau County as well on behalf of
13 our veterans, advocating for the
14 Dwyer Program, advocating in fact for your
15 division to be elevated to a department. And
16 what are we seeing as a result of that?

17 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We are
18 seeing an increase in services for our
19 veterans across the state, the veterans, the
20 very homes that I have been to and gone into,
21 we have seen increase there, especially with
22 our amazing veterans --

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you,
24 Commissioner.

1 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: -- service
2 officers.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: We're going to
4 cut off this line of questioning.

5 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you.
6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: But thank you. I
8 think you were clear with your answers.

9 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you,
10 Senator.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Next up is
12 Senator May --

13 Oh, I'm sorry, Assemblymember.
14 Assemblymember.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Outrageous.

16 (Laughter.)

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember
18 Clark, please.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Excellent.
20 Thank you. I am going to stick to Aging for
21 now, so you are on the hot seat. Thank you,
22 Director.

23 Quick questions, first on the Long
24 Term Care Ombudsman Program. Obviously we've

1 heard it. You know, we see what the Governor
2 did on elder abuse; we understand that she
3 kept the dollars in her budget proposal to
4 continue the expansion of the work Lifespan
5 is doing on elder abuse. You know, I think
6 what our colleagues here are confused by is
7 why she didn't do that on the Long Term Care
8 Ombudsman Program, understanding that we are
9 trying to professionalize it.

10 Do we have a current understanding of
11 where we are with FTEs, how many were hired
12 last year? And do we sort of have the buy-in
13 from the Office for the Aging that getting to
14 the point where we have the needed dollars to
15 make sure it was fully professionalized, to
16 ensure we are getting the visits that we need
17 into these facilities happen?

18 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, thanks,
19 Assemblywoman. We absolutely can provide
20 that data for you. The number of FTEs we
21 hired, the increase in those places visited.
22 You don't have to question on whether we have
23 buy-in in this program or not. I think that,
24 you know, in prior administrations it hasn't

1 always risen to the top as the value that it
2 is.

3 I think that this chamber and this
4 Governor think differently, which is why we
5 see the increases. And again, you know, not
6 to mimic what everybody else has been saying,
7 we do have a \$4 billion deficit, tough
8 choices need to be made, but this is the
9 start of the process and I'm hopeful that
10 we'll end -- you know, this will be discussed
11 in the next couple of months.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Okay. And on
13 the critical question, what is the budget
14 number to remove everybody from waiting
15 lists?

16 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: It's not as
17 easy to say. So if you had a workforce that
18 was available, and includes PC aides or what
19 have you, it would probably be between 40 and
20 \$50 million.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Okay. I mean, I
22 just think these are -- as we see the
23 population aging -- it's probably one of our
24 most increasing; we've seen the reports that

1 it's also the most growing in poverty -- I
2 just think putting a concerted effort to get
3 people off waiting lists for literally basic
4 needs is something we really need to think
5 about.

6 My last thing -- and it's less of a
7 question but more of a sort of plug to put in
8 your mind as we look at the 1115 Medicaid
9 waiver and understand the social determinants
10 of health.

11 And understanding a program like
12 Community Care Connections and what we've
13 seen it do with Medicaid dollars to keep
14 people out of our health systems and instead
15 care for our aging New Yorkers, I just want
16 to add -- or just throw it out there that I
17 really think as we look at what to fund
18 through social determinants of health, we
19 really look at that program, we look at
20 expanding it across the state and
21 understanding its effectiveness to really
22 help our older New Yorkers.

23 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Could not
24 agree with you more. The CCC program is one

1 of several initial BIP Innovation Grants that
2 have shown a great ROI, and the 1115 waiver
3 actually does have 1.75 million that we've
4 worked with Ann Marie to expand.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

6 We'll try Senator May now.

7 SENATOR MAY: Thank you,

8 Chair Krueger.

9 And hi, Director Olsen.

10 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: How are you,
11 Senator?

12 SENATOR MAY: I'm going to follow up
13 on the Long Term Care Ombudsman question.
14 And just what percentage of the visits are
15 being made by volunteers right now, do you
16 know?

17 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Are you just
18 looking for volunteers or are you looking for
19 everybody?

20 SENATOR MAY: Well, we want to move
21 away from the volunteers. That was part of
22 the goal, was to professionalize it.

23 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, so we
24 can get a breakdown for you. I don't think

1 we want to move away from volunteers. I
2 think what we want to do is have a robust FTE
3 and volunteer, because we've lost 600 of them
4 over the last decade.

5 SENATOR MAY: Okay. But you -- are
6 you confident that we're moving in the right
7 direction on this?

8 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, I think
9 the resources that, you know, the Governor
10 and the Legislature provided us, you know,
11 that's what that money goes to.

12 So, yeah, we can absolutely show you a
13 pre and post, where we are because of those
14 resources. And, you know, we're not all the
15 way. We can always do better. But we have
16 significant improvement, and I think that's
17 exciting.

18 SENATOR MAY: Okay. And then we
19 passed the Reimagining Long-Term Care Task
20 Force bill a couple of years ago, and you're
21 one of the statutory cochairs. Has -- have
22 there been any meetings? Are there plannings
23 for meetings? Do we need to do an extender
24 for --

1 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Not all the
2 appointments have been made yet. So we are
3 waiting for those appointments to be made. I
4 believe they're on the Legislature's side.
5 And then we are eager to get going with our
6 partners at the Health Department.

7 SENATOR MAY: Okay. Thank you.

8 And then more of a comment, but
9 Commissioner, I hope that you're aware of the
10 program we have in Syracuse for the Tiny Home
11 for Good, which is building tiny homes for
12 homeless veterans. I would love it if you
13 would come up and -- if you haven't seen that
14 and seen what's happening there, it's a
15 pretty exciting program too.

16 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you
17 so much. I would love to see it. I actually
18 know the developer of that program prior to
19 coming aboard.

20 SENATOR MAY: Oh, great. Well, we'll
21 look forward to seeing you in Syracuse.

22 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you
23 so much. Thank you.

24 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Do you mind if

1 I tag along on that one?

2 SENATOR MAY: Absolutely.

3 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: I'm a big fan
4 of micro homes.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

6 Assemblymember Manktelow.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Thank you,
8 Chair.

9 Good afternoon, everyone.

10 And Director Olsen, I heard you say
11 earlier that -- your partnership with our
12 veterans. And I know that as our veterans
13 are getting older, we have our Vietnam
14 veterans, we have our Korean War veterans,
15 we have our -- we even have some
16 World War II veterans. And I know
17 Senator Ashby and myself, we have legislation
18 to look at senior -- or veterans nursing
19 homes across the board.

20 Is that something that your office
21 could help us get across the finish line?

22 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: You know, I'm
23 not sure. I'd be happy to talk with you more
24 about that.

1 We are identifying veterans in the
2 community, and that's why we have such a
3 great partnership, because we literally
4 screen for veteran status so that we can make
5 a soft referral to DVS and their partners to
6 access the 105 federal, state and local
7 benefits.

8 But I'd love to talk to you more about
9 that.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: All right.
11 You know, as we talked about the budget, I
12 believe that \$2.4 million cut, you know, that
13 would go a long way towards nursing homes for
14 our veterans long term. And I'd love to work
15 with both of you on that, because I think
16 it's a very important initiative.

17 And thank you for partnering with our
18 commissioner, and I appreciate that.

19 Commissioner, good afternoon. Semper
20 fi, my friend.

21 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Good
22 afternoon. Good afternoon. Semper fi.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Thank you for
24 your service.

1 Back to talking about the budget. I
2 had spoken with some of our county veterans
3 officers out in the counties, and we actually
4 have one up here behind you. And one of
5 their issues is with funding about getting
6 vehicles to have vehicles that they can drive
7 around within their county to help service
8 the veterans at the same time as well.

9 Is that something your office could
10 help push forward with the Governor's office
11 as far as helping to create funding for them
12 to have vehicles to accomplish that?

13 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you
14 for that question, first of all. And thank
15 you for your work as well and your service.

16 That's a question that I would refer
17 them to our county veterans officer in one of
18 the counties, because he actually utilized
19 that increase in budget to purchase a vehicle
20 to -- for his county to be able to service
21 their veterans better.

22 As you know, that amount had a
23 150 percent increase, went from the 10,000 to
24 25,000. And that was one of, again, our

1 county veteran service officer in Tioga
2 County who was able to acquire and purchase a
3 vehicle. In fact what he did with that
4 amount of money just within his organization
5 has been remarkable.

6 And so many -- let me just say that so
7 many, all of our 60-plus counties have done
8 remarkable this past year in serving our
9 veterans. And because I'm there, I'm able to
10 see it firsthand, those who are outdoors
11 without services that now have a 100 percent
12 claim, and their lives are better. And
13 again, the many letters that we have, I wish
14 we could bring the letters. And I wish we
15 could bring those veterans themselves, who
16 can attest to the great work that's being
17 done throughout New York State.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: All right. I
19 appreciate the answer. And thank you for
20 that answer.

21 Another question. Years ago, back in
22 I believe 2019 was the last year that the
23 Boys State -- are you familiar with Boys
24 State, put on through the Legion? That was

1 actually a line item in the budget. It was
2 appropriated I believe at \$150,000 back in
3 2019. I believe that hasn't happened since
4 then.

5 And I was wondering what your comments
6 are about getting that funding back, getting
7 that funding back to the Boys State program.
8 Do you have a comment on that?

9 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Oh, that's
10 something that we can definitely talk about.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Because I
12 think it's a great program that brings a lot
13 of young people forward, and I think we need
14 to do that.

15 I've only got a little bit of time.
16 Back to the Veterans Cemetery. It was great
17 to see you out there last Memorial Day. It
18 was good to see you there, New York State
19 Veterans Cemetery out in West Sampson State
20 Park back then.

21 I know that there's \$4 million,
22 1 million for capital improvements and
23 another 3 million for a maintenance facility.
24 It's my understanding, speaking with the

1 director out there and the head of the
2 grounds crew, that the equipment that's being
3 used is actually leased through a private
4 contractor. Do we foresee the state taking
5 that over and providing that equipment for
6 that cemetery?

7 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Well, we
8 were happy to actually keep the grounds --
9 the groundskeeper on contract because he was
10 happy, he's been doing this for years. It
11 was his desire to stay on. And so when he
12 allowed us to know that he already has his
13 own equipment, he's familiar with that
14 equipment and the usage, we were happy to
15 take him on as well as allow him to continue
16 on with the use of that. Everything's been
17 going well on that.

18 And should we ever have to, then we
19 know that the money is there to do that.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Okay, thank
21 you. So I just want to be sure that money is
22 there, because that's not going to last
23 forever.

24 And my time is up. Thank you both.

1 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you.

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

3 Senator Rolison.

4 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you, Chair.

5 For Director Olsen, I am interested in
6 knowing a little bit more about the Elder
7 Justice Coordinating Council, as a former
8 police officer involved in cases involving
9 elder abuse.

10 What is the time frame for that
11 report? I just don't see it in my notes. Is
12 there one?

13 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: I think that
14 there is. I don't have that in front of me.
15 I can get back to you.

16 But both -- there's a couple of
17 existing committees at the state level that
18 this is not going to eliminate. But we work
19 extensively -- and again, Ann Marie's a great
20 person to ask the same question to -- State
21 Police, Sheriffs Association, DAs --

22 SENATOR ROLISON: Will they be, you
23 know, brought into this --

24 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: State Police

1 is actually named in that.

2 And there's a coordinating council --
3 and I always mess up the name, it's really
4 long -- that I sit on with -- it's run by
5 DCJS and the State Police. And so all of
6 those, you know, folks that have already been
7 meeting on things like this for years can
8 help influence this new council by bringing
9 in all the various players that deal with
10 this issue, from law enforcement to service.

11 SENATOR ROLISON: Do you -- and again,
12 because this part is new to you, do you see
13 any short-term goals of this council that
14 would be able to advise and give the
15 Legislature, you know, guidance on
16 potentially strengthening laws against
17 elder abuse and holding people accountable
18 for it in a different way than we are right
19 now?

20 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I think
21 that will be part of, frankly, the
22 deliberations.

23 I think the earliest short-term thing,
24 frankly, Senator, is connecting the dots.

1 And what I mean by that is too often a lot of
2 agencies don't work that closely together
3 because they're -- you know, they're focused.
4 And we work with everybody that's been named
5 in there -- Office of Court Administration,
6 et cetera.

7 So this will be a really good
8 opportunity to understand what everybody
9 does, what our assets are, what we need to do
10 together. And I can't imagine things like
11 that aren't going to come out of this, is
12 what can we do better, what statutory changes
13 may be needed, other types of enforcement
14 actions.

15 SENATOR ROLISON: Good. And you had
16 said, director, that you, you know, currently
17 are sitting on some of these groups that are
18 meeting --

19 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes.

20 SENATOR ROLISON: And what -- just in
21 my last 50 seconds, what do you see, as
22 director of Office for the Aging, how that
23 information from the professionals who are
24 doing the work every single day will be able

1 to advise this interagency council to make
2 concrete recommendations to the state, to the
3 Governor, and to the Legislature? Do you see
4 that happening?

5 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I do.

6 I think we specifically have to reach
7 out to existing coordinating councils and
8 then we -- you know, out of our 62 counties,
9 we currently have 60 with an E-MDT program,
10 two more coming. And that is everybody at
11 the community level, from a geriatric
12 psychiatrist to a forensic accountant to a
13 district attorney, law enforcement,
14 et cetera.

15 You know, I've been doing this work a
16 long time, and not at the macro level, at the
17 micro level. If we are not getting the
18 advice and guidance from people at the
19 ground floor, then we're not doing our job.
20 So I am fully in lock step with your
21 questioning.

22 SENATOR ROLISON: Thank you for that.

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

24 Assembly.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

2 Assemblymember Eachus.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Thank you.

4 Mr. Olsen, I love your exuberance when
5 you show up here.

6 I'm going to make more statements than
7 questions because there's so much and so
8 little time.

9 Ombudsman program. I'd like to hear
10 in the future about what you're doing to
11 recruit volunteers and whether we still have
12 that requirement where the volunteers can
13 have no relatives in the actual facility that
14 they're checking. You know, that's not
15 helping you to get the volunteers in.

16 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: We'll get that
17 for you.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Yeah. And then
19 the other thing that we discussed was the
20 reporting of the ombudsman and how it kind of
21 just is choppy and doesn't come back and all.

22 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Okay.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: And then the
24 final thing is the ElliQ AI companion

1 program. Nine hundred units are nothing. If
2 they're being successful, you know, let us
3 know what kind of money you need for the
4 future to hopefully bring more of those
5 on board.

6 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I
7 appreciate all those questions. We'll get
8 the first two answers to you. I have folks
9 here helping to take notes.

10 You see some of the outcomes data that
11 we have for ElliQ. It's only 900, but we're
12 the first state in the country, at least from
13 a state agency perspective.

14 And then one final thing. I'm Greg.
15 My dad's watching; he's Mr. Olsen.

16 (Laughter.)

17 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: And I want to
18 thank our chair, Mr. Kim, because I think he
19 was the one that really kind of started with
20 the ElliQ program and brought us aware of it
21 and all, so --

22 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah. And the
23 Assemblyman has another project that we're
24 working on with another tech, out of

1 South Korea. So we're excited about that.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Thank you.

3 Commissioner DeCohen, thank you for
4 your service. And again, just some more
5 statements, probably.

6 First of all, Boys State/Girls State.
7 I am making requests for money from -- for
8 those of 150,000 each. The last time we did
9 the money for Girls State they turned it
10 back. I don't know why.

11 The second thing is, you mentioned
12 diapers and helping veterans. There is such
13 a thing as a diaper bank. You might want to
14 check into that and see if you can work
15 together to do that.

16 The question I do have is the capital
17 grants. You said the second round is
18 April 19th, to apply for those capital
19 grants?

20 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: That's
21 correct.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Where do they go
23 to apply for them?

24 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Everything

1 they can -- to get the information -- well,
2 they can get the information on our website
3 now, and that will direct them to go through
4 the grants gateway.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Okay, thank you.

6 And then the digital kiosks, I know
7 you mentioned those. I would hope that you
8 take and -- you consider counties, various
9 different counties, that have a large number
10 of veterans in it and maybe a county center,
11 you know, government centers and so on like
12 that.

13 And then also once the mobile veterans
14 centers come online, I hope you use us to
15 maybe ask if we can bring those mobile
16 centers into our districts. I know we would
17 all love to share them, but we would love to
18 have them there too.

19 So -- and then the final thing that I
20 have is you mentioned about 10,000
21 welcome-home letters. I'm surprised you're
22 able to get that information, because usually
23 the Defense Department doesn't let that
24 information out. And some of the county

1 departments would love, if possible, to have
2 that information to make contact with those
3 veterans.

4 Thank you.

5 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you,
6 sir.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

8 Next is Senator Weik.

9 SENATOR WEIK: Thank you.

10 Thank you, Commissioner, for your
11 service to our country, and thank you for
12 being here today and for your testimony.

13 I represent Nassau County and part of
14 Suffolk County, home to the most veterans in
15 all of New York State. So a kiosk in Suffolk
16 County would be very welcome.

17 But we also represent so many
18 veterans, and we're always looking for more.
19 And it looks like we're getting significantly
20 less. So when we look at the Dwyer Program,
21 we've only got an increase of about a
22 million, which really doesn't do much for the
23 Dwyer Program.

24 We're also looking for more capital

1 improvement money. Because of COVID, so many
2 of our American Legions and our VFWs were
3 shut down. They were unable to raise funds
4 to do things like repair their roof, update
5 their bathrooms and so on. And that's really
6 usually where the Dwyer programs take place.
7 These centers are essential for our veterans.

8 And then of course the money that was
9 collected from the income tax not being
10 distributed and just sitting there, not
11 available to our veterans, not being used for
12 our veterans.

13 You seem to be okay with the
14 status quo with the Governor cutting your
15 budget. I'm just curious, are you planning
16 on asking for more Dwyer money, and are you
17 going to be asking for more money in the
18 budget this year?

19 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you
20 so much for your question. And thank you,
21 Senator, for your service as well.

22 Again, what's not seen is that the
23 Governor has doubled her money to Dwyer.
24 They'll be getting about \$8 million in their

1 program. We've been happy to continue to
2 work with Dwyer, which has been a magnificent
3 program from the incep, working with them
4 with, now, partners like OMH and SUNY, who
5 have developed the toolkit and the question
6 and answering.

7 Again, the 24 million and the cuts
8 that everyone is talking about, those are
9 legislative adds that are not expressed in
10 the Executive Budget. That looks like a cut,
11 but they will be put back in through your own
12 negotiations for the final budget enactment.

13 SENATOR WEIK: So I appreciate your
14 rose-colored glasses approach to this, but
15 it's still a cut. And we still need more
16 money. Our veterans have been neglected and
17 underfunded for a very long time.

18 And I appreciate that you've formed
19 relationships with our federal partners in
20 order to bring in more of those federal
21 dollars for our veterans. But we need you to
22 be asking for an increase in Dwyer. And we
23 need you to be asking for an increase to the
24 budget this year. And we're not going to

1 accept no for an answer.

2 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you
3 so much for that.

4 And again, there has not been any cuts
5 for our veterans. This Governor is very well
6 aware of the dignity and what our veterans
7 have earned and deserve. We have gotten that
8 money for Dwyer. Dwyer has more money.
9 Again, the 150 percent increase for our
10 veteran service officers across the state;
11 the testimonies and the changed lives of our
12 veterans, whose homes I'm now going in from
13 New York City, Bronx, to Buffalo, is a
14 testament, as well as the money that we're
15 bringing in, testament to what this Governor
16 has done.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very
18 much, Commissioner.

19 Assemblymember Alvarez.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN ALVAREZ: Thank you all
21 for your testimony today.

22 I'm honored to serve in the Assembly
23 Committee on Aging. I have a couple of
24 questions for each one of you. I'm going to

1 speak with the commissioner of Veterans'
2 Services first.

3 What if any services are available for
4 our veterans, our heroes, at the New York
5 State Division of Veterans' Services office
6 in the Bronx, which is located in my district
7 at the VA Medical Center in the Bronx.

8 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: I'm sorry,
9 could you repeat the question? I missed a
10 portion of it.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN ALVAREZ: Yes. What if
12 any services at the DVS offices in the
13 Bronx -- in the Bronx, located in my
14 district. What if any services are available
15 in that division?

16 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you
17 for that question, Assemblymember Alvarez.

18 And again, thank you for your service.

19 We've been happy to say we have been
20 working with the Bronx, the J.J. Peters and
21 the Bronx, period. We have veterans benefits
22 advisors that are on-site there. We are part
23 of the food distribution program. We are a
24 part of the Operation Baby, where baby

1 clothes are coming out of that office. We
2 just did movies across the state, and the
3 Bronx was one of those sites where we had the
4 movies for our veterans for Veterans Month.
5 The FreshConnect checks are being given out
6 that our Governor increased from \$20 to \$50,
7 and a host of other services.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN ALVAREZ: How the cuts
9 that we are right now discussing on the
10 Governor's budget is going to impact the VA
11 office in the Bronx, if any?

12 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: I'm sorry,
13 say it --

14 ASSEMBLYMAN ALVAREZ: So we're talking
15 about the cuts, right, the Governor is
16 proposing for the Aging Department {sic}. So
17 the question is, what of those cuts is going
18 to affect my veteran office in the Bronx?

19 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you,
20 Assemblymember Alvarez.

21 Let me say again, just so that you
22 know, there is no cut. What we're -- when
23 we're saying cuts, people are referring to
24 what's known as legislative adds that are not

1 in the Governor's Executive Budget. But
2 those are the things that would be formulated
3 that are being discussed now to be in the
4 final -- final budget. They look like a cut
5 to you; there are no cuts to our veterans.
6 Their services, especially in the -- I'm a
7 Bronx girl, the boogie-down Bronx -- to
8 Buffalo is secure with all of the services
9 being given to veterans.

10 We are working with folks like the
11 diaper banks. Just to let you know, some of
12 our diaper banks where we were volunteering
13 are running out of diapers themselves, and
14 this is why it's important that this clarion
15 call be given now, because we have
16 active-duty servicemembers who are coming to
17 us requesting diapers because the diaper
18 banks are running low.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN ALVAREZ: Thank you.

20 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you,
21 sir. Thank you, sir.

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

23 I think it's my turn. I think the
24 first question will be for both

1 commissioners.

2 So yesterday we had the Workforce
3 Hearing and we had the various state
4 agencies, Civil Service and Labor and others,
5 and quite a few unions all saying we
6 desperately need people to apply for state
7 jobs. And I must admit, I was thinking,
8 well, are we reaching out to older
9 New Yorkers and making sure they know that
10 there are state jobs? Because I'm an older
11 New Yorker, and I have a great job working
12 for the state, just for the record, and I
13 think there are a lot of older New Yorkers
14 who would actually love the opportunity. I
15 hear from them all the time. They were laid
16 off in their fifties, they can't seem to get
17 back into the labor market, they need to.
18 They have great skills, great experience.
19 And the same story for veterans, whether or
20 not they are older veterans or younger
21 veterans.

22 So what are both of your agencies
23 doing to help support New Yorkers who happen
24 to be veterans or older or both to know about

1 and be encouraged to apply for state jobs?

2 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: You mind if I
3 go first?

4 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: No problem.

5 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Well, thanks,
6 Senator. I'm an older worker in a state job
7 too.

8 Senator Cleare's going to be thrilled
9 with your question and my answer. So
10 Senator Cleare's had a bill two years in a
11 row that has passed to create an older worker
12 workforce development project. That bill is
13 now being implemented administratively
14 between -- in the Labor Department, which is
15 the right place to do that, in consultation
16 with us.

17 So we have met twice, we're developing
18 our action plan. And I'll tell you the three
19 general things and then a couple of other
20 things, and I'll turn it over to the
21 commissioner.

22 You know, with the one-stop shops we
23 oversee the Title 5 program, the federal
24 workforce program for 55-plus. There's

1 obviously a recognition that older adults,
2 whether you're 50 or over, experience
3 discrimination. So part of this office is
4 going to address workforce discrimination.
5 We have a lot of data on what the positives
6 are for hiring an older worker. But we live
7 in an ageist society, so we've got to deal
8 with that.

9 It would be the ability to skill,
10 re-skill or up-skill older workers. That
11 absolutely can use technology. I know Beth
12 is following me from AARP, and one of the
13 things I love about them is their data. For
14 the first time in history, a report just came
15 out from them that older adults use
16 technology at the same rate as everybody
17 else. We shouldn't be surprised -- I see
18 everybody here who's over 50 using technology
19 just like I do, exactly. So we're excited
20 about that.

21 One of our partnerships is with the
22 GetSetUp, and they have a national
23 partnership with Easter Seals, who is one of
24 the national Title 5 providers. So what

1 they've been able to develop is 83
2 different --

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Mic off;
4 inaudible.)

5 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Sorry. Oh,
6 I'm sorry. GetSetUp has a workforce training
7 platform we want to expand. Sorry about
8 that, Senator.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Inaudible.)

10 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you,
11 Senator Krueger.

12 We've been working also with our civil
13 service to get the information out about our
14 55-c program. We actually just had a
15 LinkedIn event for our 55 and over,
16 Staying Alive and Rocking Your Profile, in
17 which they were able to learn about the many
18 jobs and opportunities and the testing
19 requirements for that.

20 In that wise also, our veteran benefit
21 advisors, because DOL has been such a
22 wonderful partner in giving us the available
23 list on an ongoing weekly basis of jobs that
24 are provided, we're able to work with them.

1 Also going back into our houses of
2 worship with our Faith in Service, where our
3 older population is, this is the information
4 that we've also been getting out to them that
5 many of them were not aware about with this
6 55-c program. And they're now taking that
7 opportunity, because one of our veterans who
8 hadn't worked in 35 years is now employed.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Exactly. That's
10 great. Thank you.

11 So back to you, Greg.

12 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Sorry.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: That's okay.

14 So Assemblyman Hevesi brought this up
15 before with social services. But with the
16 previous Governor, I forget his name --

17 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Me too.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: -- he didn't like
19 the previous mayor, and so New York City kept
20 getting cut. So I don't feel that way about
21 the current Governor's attitude towards my
22 home city.

23 But 40 percent of older New Yorkers
24 live in New York City, but we're only getting

1 35 percent of SOFA funds in New York City.
2 Is that like just an accident we haven't
3 fixed yet?

4 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Senator Cleare
5 had raised that before, and that is not my
6 understanding. And I've been around a long
7 time. It's usually 43, 44 percent. I will
8 verify that and get back to you both.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Will you, please?
10 Okay, because that's -- I'm getting different
11 messages even after Senator Cleare asked the
12 question.

13 Do we know the numbers of people on
14 county by county EISEP waitlists?

15 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes, we do.
16 But it's not EISEP. Again, we have an
17 in-home program that EISEP is one funding
18 stream. So the answer to that is yes.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. Can we get
20 that, then, from you?

21 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Sure.

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

23 And same question for case management
24 services for older New Yorkers by county.

1 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yup.

2 Absolutely.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. Do we
4 also have a home meal waitlist?

5 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So I'd love all
7 those waitlists.

8 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: You got it.

9 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

10 Oh, my goodness, I finished my
11 questions early. I should have let you go on
12 about the --

13 (Laughter; overtalk.)

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: The Assembly will
15 take my time. Thank you very much, both of
16 you.

17 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: You've known
18 me; you know you had to cut me off.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes. No, thank
20 you for your work.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,
22 Senator.

23 Assemblymember Buttenschon.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: Good

1 afternoon, Commissioner and Director.

2 Commissioner DeCohen, thank you for
3 your service and to all the veterans here,
4 and those listening today.

5 Commissioner, the demographics of my
6 district in the Utica-Rome area have many
7 veterans with children. So as you look at
8 the housing initiatives, I wondered if
9 children -- or families with children are
10 considered within the rubric as you are
11 looking at this money and its being
12 allocated.

13 I also -- I'll put in all my questions
14 because I think you're probably going to have
15 to answer in writing, so thank you to both of
16 you.

17 Regarding the capital funding program
18 that was initiated last year, many of the
19 nonprofits that I work with struggle because
20 there's working boards and possible issues
21 with some of the information that they've had
22 through transfers of those working boards.

23 So how much money have you actually
24 allocated out or secured to those different

1 individuals that have requested capital
2 funding? And do you have staff directly
3 working with these nonprofits to help support
4 their efforts, as this is new territory for
5 many of them.

6 And Director Olsen, regarding
7 long-term care, is there a clear discrepancy
8 across the State of New York in regards to
9 the reimbursement rates, or is that a
10 standard rate across the state?

11 And finally, as you look at the budget
12 that has been presented to both of you, can
13 you identify what's missing and what you
14 think is needed to ensure that you can
15 provide for those that you serve?

16 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you
17 for those very thought-provoking questions.

18 First of all, family members of our
19 veterans have always been a part. That's why
20 it's always been veterans and their families.
21 And again, because we have expanded into a
22 department, when our veteran is sitting in
23 front of us, our veteran and their families
24 are sitting in front of us.

1 And so we've been able to extend the
2 questions as far as the needs of the family
3 members: Do you have school-age children?
4 Do they need book bags? Could they utilize
5 clothing?

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: I'm sorry,
7 I just want -- I'm referring to housing with
8 our homeless veterans. That in my community,
9 they're coming to us with concerns that the
10 housing is needed not only for them but their
11 children.

12 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Oh. Yes.
13 Yes. In fact we've been supporting those
14 supportive housings that have already been
15 going up for our veterans and their families.
16 This includes our veterans who are dads with
17 children as well.

18 And then working to your other
19 question, 39 veteran organizations have been
20 awarded. The 2.6 million -- we have the
21 other 2.6 million to be given out. And this
22 will be in increments from 25,000 to 75,000.
23 And they're able to utilize the grants
24 gateway that has a revolving video on there

1 with step-by-step questions to them.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,
3 Commissioner. I appreciate it.

4 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Can I just let
5 the Assemblywoman know I'll follow up in
6 writing on her question to me?

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: Thank you
8 very much.

9 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: You're
10 welcome.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And all questions
12 in follow-up should come to Ways and Means
13 and Finance for distribution to everyone.
14 Because even if we didn't individually ask,
15 we all want to know.

16 Okay, Senator Stec.

17 SENATOR STEC: Thanks, Madam Chair.

18 Good afternoon.

19 A question for Commissioner DeCohen.

20 There's about 700,000 veterans living
21 in New York State, and your budget is looking
22 at a \$2.4 million reduction at the same time
23 we're -- the same budget proposes sending
24 \$2.4 billion to New York City for illegal

1 immigrants.

2 How does that jibe for the veterans,
3 the 700,000 veterans? What kind of message
4 do you think that sends to our veterans?

5 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Once again,
6 you know -- please forgive me, but again, the
7 2.4 million is not a cut. We're responding
8 and referring to legislative adds that again,
9 once you come together and formulate, will be
10 in the final -- the final budget.

11 SENATOR STEC: If I could talk about
12 those legislative adds. So the spreadsheet
13 that I have in front of me, I count 18
14 legislative adds that have been zeroed out,
15 all over the state, some having to do with
16 Helmets to Hardhats; one in particular
17 relevant to my district, North Country
18 Veterans Association; Vietnam Veterans of
19 America; the Outdoor Rx Program; VFW. You
20 know, these are all legislative adds that
21 total \$3.4 million.

22 Why were they all zeroed out?

23 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Right.
24 Those are the ones that are initially zeroed

1 out, again, because they don't go into the
2 Executive Budget. But those are the ones
3 that are always renegotiated -- I know you're
4 going to do a great job in doing that, to
5 bring them into the final budget.

6 SENATOR STEC: Why do we have to fight
7 with the Executive to get this funding put
8 back in? What game is this that we're
9 playing?

10 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: There's no
11 fighting. And, you know, again, we know that
12 once the final budget comes out, you're going
13 to do a great job of, you know, getting those
14 back in. As you always do.

15 SENATOR STEC: All right, so homeless
16 veterans' housing. In the enacted 2024
17 budget there's \$1.1 million for homeless
18 veterans. Again, this is near and dear to my
19 heart, because we're talking about
20 \$2.4 billion to New York City for illegal
21 immigrants' housing. One-point-one million
22 dollars in the enacted budget, and the
23 Executive's proposed cutting that more than
24 half, to 500 million {sic}. Did we solve

1 veterans' homelessness in New York State?

2 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Again,
3 that's -- that's not being cut. We're
4 getting the --

5 SENATOR STEC: It's a cut. The 2024
6 enacted budget is 1.1 million, and the
7 Governor's proposed 2025 budget is 500,000.
8 How's that not a cut?

9 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Again,
10 these are -- again, these are the legislative
11 adds that are usually -- usually cut out of
12 there. The one -- the one --

13 SENATOR STEC: Who cut it? Did the
14 Legislature cut that? This is the Governor's
15 budget. This is your department's budget
16 that a lot of us fought to create this
17 department, and I think a lot of us are a
18 little disappointed in what we're seeing from
19 it.

20 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: You should
21 not be disappointed. You should be very
22 elated with the work that's been done across
23 this great state with what this Governor has
24 given.

1 And again, when we're talking about
2 qualitative, forget that. The quantitative
3 numbers are proving themselves. What this
4 Governor has given under this administration,
5 you have not seen these numbers before.

6 SENATOR STEC: Thank you, Madam Chair.

7 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We're on a
8 beach with sand, and we don't dare say the
9 beach doesn't have enough sand. We have
10 enough sand.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very
13 much.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: In case anybody's
15 missed it, I believe you've answered that
16 question four times now.

17 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Yes.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So no more asks
19 of that question. Thank you.

20 Assembly.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember
22 González-Rojas, please.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Thank
24 you so much.

1 Thank you both for your service and
2 for being here.

3 Director Olsen, I just want to share
4 that I'm personally navigating a system which
5 feels disconnected even as a member of the
6 Legislature, to try to get home health
7 service for my mother, whose cognitive
8 function is rapidly declining, but she does
9 want to stay in her home. So I really want
10 to give a shout out to the wonderful folks at
11 the Association on Aging in New York that
12 have been a lifeline to help me navigate it.
13 It is very difficult to understand the
14 patchwork of support that exists.

15 Can you talk about -- I understand
16 that older people make up and spend about
17 \$72 billion in this state, right, contribute
18 to our economy. And I just think about the
19 waiting lists and the challenges and the
20 barriers that they often have to face in
21 getting care.

22 I also understand that the Aging
23 budget is less than 8/10ths of 1 percent of
24 the entire New York State budget.

1 I just want to make sure that we're
2 doing our job to advocate for our older
3 New Yorkers. So can you talk about how --
4 what kind of clients are served by NYSOFA and
5 what is the cost of that care versus Medicaid
6 or nursing home placement? Because most
7 people want to age at home.

8 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, no
9 question people want to age at home. And,
10 you know, none of this is our fault, but we
11 have to recognize we live in an ageist
12 society. And we keep talking about "them" as
13 they're not going to be us with 10 years,
14 right?

15 So, you know, just getting that
16 through my head, it's been difficult. We've
17 been -- you know, some of the data you cited
18 is data that we've aggregated to really make
19 that case, that 75 percent of older adults
20 consider themselves very healthy, they're
21 active, engaged, volunteering, working.

22 It's that 25 percent. We don't really
23 have a system. We have a crisis-driven --
24 you know, when somebody needs something, it's

1 usually in a crisis, because as families,
2 you're talking about your mother, you know,
3 you're going out of your way to do what you
4 can do until you can't do it anymore. Right?

5 So, you know, the cost of our services
6 are cheaper because we intervene earlier, and
7 that's the key. So I think what we want to
8 do, in addition to our private pay for
9 individuals that can afford it, or people
10 like me that can buy it on behalf of my
11 parents -- which we're the only state in the
12 country that has to implement that -- to
13 develop a front-end system that focuses on
14 prevention so that Medicaid,
15 hospitalizations, rehab, nursing homes are
16 the last resort. I think that's what we're
17 trying to get at with the Master Plan as the
18 mechanism to get there.

19 Growing older is not the problem. How
20 we've organized our caring economy is the
21 problem. And that's what needs to -- that's
22 what we need to fix.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: And
24 back to the Master Plan -- and my colleague

1 asked about dedicated funding for it, and you
2 said it's about the implementation. At what
3 point do we imagine that we're going to have
4 to ensure allocation for not just the process
5 but the implementation?

6 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, so the
7 funding now, our 2.5 million if that million
8 goes through, and then the recommendations
9 are going to come to everybody, and then
10 there's decisions that are going to have to
11 be made --

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

13 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: -- above my
14 pay grade.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Thank
16 you.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.
18 Senate.

19 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
20 Senate Ranker Tom O'Mara.

21 SENATOR O'MARA: Good afternoon.
22 Thank you for your time today and your
23 testimony. I want to thank Commissioner
24 DeCohen and Counselor Fishbein for coming to

1 New York State's first and only
2 Veterans Cemetery, in Seneca County at
3 Sampson, for the Wreaths Across America. It
4 was a great event, and your recognition of
5 that and being there was very important. So
6 thank you for that.

7 And in regards to -- I wasn't going to
8 have any asks for you, but since we've
9 confirmed that there is no cut to the budget,
10 we'll -- there is a need at the State
11 Cemetery for grounds personnel and equipment.
12 Currently right now I believe they're relying
13 on a private contractor for burials, which
14 should that not be available, then burials
15 would have to stop.

16 So if you could look at that and
17 prioritize there's some personnel and
18 equipment there, now that we're proud --

19 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: It's
20 already in the works.

21 SENATOR O'MARA: -- the proud owners
22 of -- it's already what?

23 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: It's
24 already in the works, Senator.

1 SENATOR O'MARA: Excellent. Good to
2 hear.

3 Next on PTS and treatment of PTS.
4 I've been a champion for years of the
5 Research and Recognition Project, which is a
6 RTM protocol. It's accepted nationwide. The
7 New York State and national American Legion
8 is advocating for this. And the New York
9 State Legion put up \$100,000 to train I think
10 30 counselors for that. And they're
11 dispersed around the state.

12 The Research and Recognition Project
13 needs help with referrals, getting veterans
14 to take that step to come into treatment. I
15 know there's been efforts underway to get
16 more funding for that.

17 But what can you do with the current
18 programs you have going on -- you mentioned
19 mobile services here -- to highlight that
20 program and those options? Because that
21 really is an effective treatment and puts PTS
22 in remission for many, many veterans and
23 other PTS sufferers.

24 So what do you have in the works to

1 help foster funneling veterans that need that
2 to it?

3 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you
4 for that question, Senator O'Mara.

5 We've known Dr. Bourke now -- I think
6 I've known him, oh, gosh, for 10-plus years,
7 and his work is widely known.

8 Since we've become a department, you
9 know, we've been working more heavily within
10 our partners or with OMH and SAMHSA and we've
11 had several virtual programs that we've had
12 with our partners. We just recently had one
13 for the PTS with one of our women veterans
14 program organizations. It was a "lunch,
15 learn and laugh" program where information
16 was given with that.

17 And again, just working more closely
18 with our state partners to ensure that those
19 things are built in. That's part of what's
20 on our form now when our veteran is sitting
21 in front of us, to ascertain the need and to
22 stem the tide of loneliness and things from
23 PTS.

24 SENATOR O'MARA: You know, I've worked

1 with this for a long time. There's certainly
2 a reluctance of many veterans to engage in
3 the treatment, and I think it needs to be
4 fostered a little more to encourage that,
5 because we have trained these counselors
6 around the state, and I believe they're in
7 the major areas of like Buffalo, Rochester,
8 Syracuse -- 30 of them that have been
9 trained, and they're providing services for
10 PTS patients. Not so much veterans at this
11 point, but other causes of PTS, and it's
12 effective.

13 So please put that into your arsenal
14 of referring people to these things.

15 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Absolutely.
16 Yes, sir, we'll certainly look into it,
17 Senator.

18 SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you very much.

19 And just to follow up on federal aid,
20 following up on Senator Ashby's -- you know,
21 what are -- what is the department doing to
22 try to leverage federal aid for many of these
23 programs for veterans, whether it's suicide,
24 whether it's PTS?

1 I mean, what's in the works to seek
2 out those funds to bolster the budget of the
3 New York State Department of Veterans
4 Affairs?

5 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: You know,
6 right now we're still in continued
7 conversations. We've had a couple of them
8 personally with the Honorable Denis
9 McDonough. We have a return visit back next
10 month as well, to foster these things.

11 We know that there's also a backlog in
12 the claims being processed for our veterans.
13 And we know that also so many of our veterans
14 don't have access to their medical records;
15 that's causing them even more stress and PTS.
16 So ascertaining those records and ensuring
17 that we have a high-quality claim, as well,
18 you know, as continuing talks with
19 Washington.

20 SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you very much.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
22 Assembly.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,
24 Commissioner.

1 Assemblymember Burdick.

2 ASSEMBLYMEMBER BURDICK: Thank you.

3 And for the Commissioner of Veterans
4 Affairs, thank you for your work.

5 There's some interest in a veterans
6 cemetery in Westchester County, and I'd
7 appreciate your letting me know the process
8 and let me know who I can email on that.
9 That would be terrific.

10 Second thing, a situation was brought
11 up with a woman veteran who's on an advisory
12 committee of mine, about the VA in Montrose.
13 And it was brought to my attention that
14 there's really no woman doctor, no
15 obstetrician, gynecologist there. And I
16 would just ask that you take a look at it.
17 It just to me is not serving the needs of
18 women veterans.

19 Last, homeless veterans housing. And
20 while I recognize the additional 500,000
21 that's mentioned, I'm still quite concerned
22 about the adequacy of the appropriation for
23 homeless veterans. And to what extent are
24 you working with OTDA on this and feel that

1 that need is being addressed there instead?

2 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Well,
3 again, that's the program that's being rolled
4 out.

5 I do want to also go back to let you
6 know that I just had a meeting with
7 Director Ryan Ashe and Deputy Director
8 Kevin King for Montrose, for the veterans
9 housing. And this was one of the topics that
10 we spoke of, and they are on that program.

11 And we are going to be working more
12 closely with them as well to have seminars on
13 boards and lunch-and-learns for them as well,
14 to be able to ensure that our veterans across
15 the state -- but that was one of the topics,
16 just so you know. We just met a week ago,
17 and we're going to be hand in hand helping
18 them the more to increase our leverage for
19 the veterans and their families throughout
20 all of the state homes -- St. Albans,
21 Montrose, all of them. Batavia.

22 (Overtalk.)

23 ASSEMBLYMEMBER BURDICK: And in
24 particular as well is addressing the needs of

1 women veterans, correct?

2 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: That's
3 correct.

4 And just to let you know,
5 Assemblymember, we were one of the people
6 that were on the original focus group --
7 before Assemblymember Alvarez left -- for the
8 Bronx, where there were no women's services
9 prior to that. Now there's women's services,
10 there's a mammogram machine, there's women's
11 health with GYN and all of those same things.

12 That was why we were able to step up
13 and say that this is something that we can
14 certainly assist with, because we've done it
15 before and the needs for women veterans
16 continue to be a concern.

17 ASSEMBLYMEMBER BURDICK: I appreciate
18 that. And if I could, you know, offline,
19 send you some additional questions on that,
20 I'd very much appreciate that.

21 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you
22 so much.

23 ASSEMBLYMEMBER BURDICK: Thanks so
24 much.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

2 We have a follow-up three minutes from
3 Chair Cordell Cleare.

4 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

5 I want to go back to the Aging and
6 talk about a very important topic. I see it
7 here in your testimony, and I'd like you to
8 expand a little bit on senior housing. They
9 are the fastest-growing population. Rents,
10 particularly in New York City, are
11 unaffordable to the young, the middle-aged,
12 and definitely to the older New Yorkers.

13 What are we doing for seniors in
14 housing?

15 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I mean,
16 housing in general is a huge issue. The
17 Governor has a \$25 billion, five-year
18 Housing Plan. It's equally as important to
19 our population. I mean, whether in the city
20 or upstate New York -- the housing stock
21 upstate is 60 years old. You could be
22 evicted because of frailty or a shut-in
23 because of that. It wasn't designed for
24 older adults. It was designed for men in

1 their twenties.

2 So we need the 800,000 housing units.

3 A lot of those decisions, as you know, as a
4 home-rule state are local decisions. And
5 hopefully, you know, this body and the
6 Governor's office and others can come to an
7 agreement and start building safe, affordable
8 enabling housing stock. We need it.

9 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. And also you
10 mention here expanding access to oral health
11 and dental care. I have a bill calling for
12 the state marketplace to offer a dental plan,
13 which it does not currently.

14 I also have a bill saying that seniors
15 should have free dental.

16 What is -- how are we expanding --

17 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: So that
18 proposal's in the Medicaid budget. I can
19 follow up with you on that.

20 But you're absolutely right. In terms
21 of all older adults, it's dental, it's
22 hearing and it's vision.

23 SENATOR CLEARE: Yeah. Well,
24 particularly with the dental, because, you

1 know, that affects them eating, getting
2 proper nourishment. Oral health is related
3 to so many other parts of senior health.

4 If I could just go back to, you know,
5 this math problem we have between each other.
6 I think that -- you know, I got a question
7 from DFTA: "Why is the administration
8 supplanting state funding commitments for
9 older adult services with federal dollars,
10 rather than increasing state funding to meet
11 the growing older adult population in
12 New York?"

13 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: So this is
14 a -- there's a question from DFTA to me?

15 SENATOR CLEARE: Well, it's a question
16 to me, to --

17 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: To ask me.

18 SENATOR CLEARE: Yes.

19 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: And so the
20 question is why are we going after federal
21 funding?

22 SENATOR CLEARE: Apparently we are
23 supplanting state funding commitments for
24 older adult services with federal dollars.

1 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: No, that -- I
2 mean, that could not be so off.

3 So there are four funding streams for
4 our suite of services. The federal, which is
5 the least amount of money we get, which is
6 why we literally -- our office, with the
7 association, organized the nation to try to
8 get a \$1.8 billion increase because we get so
9 little from the feds --

10 SENATOR CLEARE: We've got 10 seconds,
11 so I think that you are --

12 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Then you've
13 got the state, then you've got the counties,
14 and then you've got the individuals
15 themselves.

16 We do not supplant anything. A
17 hundred percent of our funding goes to the
18 counties by population. Period.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. Thank
20 you, Commissioner.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.
22 Assembly.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember
24 Simon.

1 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Yes, I'm over 50
2 and using technology.

3 (Laughter.)

4 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: I know, crazy,
5 right?

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: I would really
7 love that report, because I can't get my
8 husband to text, and he's like way older than
9 me, so.

10 Thank you.

11 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: You're
12 welcome.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Yeah, it would
14 be very helpful. I have to --

15 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Sure, happy to
16 do that.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: -- shore it up a
18 bit. So -- thank you.

19 So, Commissioner, thank you for your
20 service as well. And let me just ask a quick
21 question about World War II veterans.

22 What are we doing to identify them, to
23 recognize them, to help their communities
24 know who they are, what they've done? You

1 know, we've done a small level in my
2 district. We have the one World War II
3 Veterans Memorial in the city in my district,
4 and quite a number of World War II vets still
5 with us, although fewer and fewer. What is
6 your office doing in that regard?

7 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you,
8 Assemblymember Simon, for that question.

9 I am also wearing a bra that is older
10 than a lot of people on this panel today.

11 (Laughter.)

12 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: And so I
13 think you know that my background is also in
14 gerontology. And so this is one of the
15 reasons that our "find and serve" program,
16 but also our Faith in Service, which goes
17 back to the houses of worship. Pew Research
18 shows that our houses of worship are occupied
19 by this generation. And so our Faith in
20 Service has gone back to these houses of
21 worship to identify them.

22 We've been ensuring a few things that
23 I'm very proud of, ensuring that those who
24 are Purple Heart recipients have been

1 inducted into our Purple Heart Hall of Fame
2 in Windsor. And we have taken the busload
3 back there to see it for the first time. The
4 Assemblymembers with our chair and Senate
5 right behind you have ensured that our
6 Korean War vets and our World War II veterans
7 were recognized right here at the Capitol
8 with programs. We've been having --
9 attending events and participating again
10 throughout the Bronx to Buffalo, where
11 they're recognized. Getting them on the
12 Honor Flights has been our heart's desires.
13 Our going back to recognize their birthday.

14 But going in with proclamations from
15 our Governor to recognize them for the
16 monumental services that they have given --
17 not just in Veterans Month, but all year long
18 we're there. I'm so glad and sad to say I'm
19 attending many of their funerals. But also
20 some of our older veterans who are getting
21 married are now calling upon us, and I've
22 performed now 21 marriages of our 70-and-over
23 veterans.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: God love 'em.

1 What about women? You know, women
2 veterans in that era weren't really military
3 in some ways -- but --

4 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We'll get
5 back to you.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. Thank
7 you both.

8 Senate.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: -- you can tell
10 us about that.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

12 And Senator Scarcella-Spanton for her
13 three-minute follow-up as chair. Thank you.

14 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you.

15 And thank you for answering all the
16 questions today.

17 My question is -- and we've discussed
18 this before -- about a veterans resource
19 registry. It's unfortunate to say, but it's
20 true; I've learned more sitting on this side
21 than on the other side when my husband got
22 out of the military and we transitioned back
23 to civilian life.

24 Everything is not in one neat way as

1 it should be. That means jobs for veterans
2 and their spouses, housing opportunities,
3 housing incentives. That's not always clear,
4 even pointing to -- and I would encourage you
5 guys to move this maybe front and center,
6 because a lot of times ways that veterans get
7 help are through their family members.

8 And I think the word about a veterans
9 program sounds wonderful. I would be more
10 interested in how you connect that veteran or
11 the family member of that veteran to
12 services. And also I would encourage you to
13 maybe bring that more front and center to the
14 website so people are aware of it.

15 But I think it's really important to
16 have that available for family members. And
17 I would just want to hear more about that
18 program and what it does to connect those
19 veterans and their family members to services
20 they need.

21 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you
22 so much, Senator.

23 You know, we look forward and we're
24 grateful for being able to work with you on

1 would be to implement a veterans registry on
2 the New York State DVS website so everything
3 is in one spot? That's something we really
4 want to advocate for and help you obtain.

5 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: We're still
6 formulating those numbers from our last
7 meeting, so we'll have that to you very
8 shortly. Excited to work with you on that.

9 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you
10 so much.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

12 Assemblymember De Los Santos.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN DE LOS SANTOS: Thank you
14 for your time here today. I have a few
15 questions related to funding support.

16 On the 2.4 billion allocated to
17 migrant funding, how much of that funding has
18 been allocated to the National Guard? And
19 can you tell us what that covers and what the
20 National Guard is exactly doing with the
21 funding?

22 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: I have to
23 get back to you on that, sir --
24 Assemblymember.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN DE LOS SANTOS: Okay.

2 And in terms of funding for nonprofit
3 organizations, how much of the funding will
4 be provided to the nonprofit organization for
5 legal services and transportation services?

6 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Which --

7 ASSEMBLYMAN DE LOS SANTOS: From the
8 2.4.

9 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Are you
10 talking about the legislative adds and the
11 allocation of those dollars?

12 ASSEMBLYMAN DE LOS SANTOS: Correct.

13 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Again, that
14 will be part of, you know, your determination
15 in the allocation for the final budget.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN DE LOS SANTOS: All right,
17 thank you.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,
19 Commissioner.

20 I have two more, but I'm going to ask
21 one quick question myself. The legislative
22 add process -- I've been here for 19 years.
23 Almost every year Governors have zeroed out
24 the legislative adds. It's par for the

1 course. Am I correct?

2 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: That's
3 correct.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: So there's no
5 reason to believe why the numbers being at
6 zero in the Executive Budget is going to
7 translate into any kind of cut at the end of
8 the process. Is that correct?

9 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: That's
10 correct, Assemblyman Hevesi.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: All right. Thank
12 you very much, Commissioner.

13 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you,
14 sir.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember
16 Chandler-Waterman.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN:
18 Thank you so much. I like the details and
19 the wit, and the outfit.

20 I have -- my father-in-law, my father
21 all served, and I have a lot of young people
22 as well that's veterans in my district. And
23 a lot of questions that come up -- and I know
24 it's been echoed here by my colleagues a

1 lot -- about the housing for senior veterans
2 and non-seniors, and then where the
3 Department of Aging and also the Veterans
4 Department, they work together to support
5 them so they don't fall through the cracks.

6 And then also with the non-seniors,
7 making sure they don't fall into the cracks.
8 Because they could be 20-somethings coming
9 home, and then sometimes they're overlooked.

10 And then of course we've got to talk
11 about the mental health services, the
12 wraparound services. We have older adults'
13 centers where we could also capture and maybe
14 work in partnership with.

15 So like where's the collaboration?
16 And then the housing situation is such a big
17 deal, as we talked about, and the mental
18 health services and supportive housing too,
19 right, where we have those built into those
20 housing for the senior veterans and
21 non-senior veterans.

22 I know I said a lot, but it's all
23 entangled and works together.

24 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Good.

1 Good. I do -- I do want you to know that we
2 have our veteran benefits advisors that are
3 inside many of our supportive houses now, our
4 SSSV housing.

5 As you know, all of our veterans,
6 those who served don't always check the
7 box when they're coming in. And again, it's
8 educating on and going in and saying "for
9 those who served" so we are capturing them
10 right there so that they can get the HUD
11 voucher and they can get all of the
12 resources.

13 Also now we're working with our
14 schools where we're going back in, because
15 not only do women -- are the ones who
16 incentivize their husbands to go and get the
17 benefits, but also children, we have
18 children. So now we're working with our
19 boards of education to get back into the
20 schools to ensure that our children know
21 about resources that they're taking home in
22 their book bags to their family members. And
23 the response has been wonderful, wonderful
24 with this.

1 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Did you want
2 me to respond?

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN: Yes,
4 the older adult centers, is there any
5 partnership --

6 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, I think
7 you're spot on. That's exactly right, is all
8 of this stuff is connected. There's not one
9 system, and it's an all-hands-on-deck, right,
10 to leverage the resources that we had.

11 With DVS we've done a lot of
12 cross-training of our case managers with
13 their folks, knowing what we do, what they
14 do. As I mentioned earlier, we screen for
15 veteran status, we could make that handoff.

16 I think the challenge we have, whether
17 we're in New York City or anywhere else, is,
18 you know, you have 59 triple As, area
19 agencies on aging, New York City being the
20 biggest one, and then another 1,200
21 community-based organizations that we work
22 with. And that doesn't include towns,
23 municipalities, 5500 faith organizations. So
24 there's a lot more that we all could be doing

1 to make sure that whether you're a veteran or
2 a child or a family, there's a ton of
3 resources out there that are desperate, and
4 how we pull those things together to help.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,
6 Commissioner.

7 We have two more Assemblymembers. I'd
8 like to return to Chair Jean-Pierre for her
9 second.

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay. I
11 just want to thank you again and just clarify
12 what I said earlier.

13 So from the veterans benefit advising
14 program, last year the agency reported 7,656
15 benefits being -- payments. And this year,
16 35,034. So that's just a huge difference in
17 allocations. So I just want to know if you
18 can just jot it down, just to clarify, when
19 you get the answers back to me -- back to all
20 of us.

21 And the next question I have is in how
22 many of DVS's 111 FTEs are veteran benefits
23 advisors, and how many claims does each
24 advisor actually work on? And how has DVS

1 been able to ensure that the claims are being
2 handled in a timely and efficient manner,
3 given the increase in the number of
4 PAC-related claims? PCAP claims, sorry.

5 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Yeah, we
6 can get back to you on that as well.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay,
8 perfect.

9 And with the increase of women
10 veterans -- we've seen an increase of women
11 veterans, and unfortunately women of color
12 have been disproportionately receiving lack
13 of -- connected to lack of resources. How --
14 what mechanisms, what outreach, what boots on
15 the ground is DVS doing to reach out to women
16 veterans?

17 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you.
18 Thank you so much --

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE:
20 Particularly women of color, too.

21 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Yes, thank
22 you so much for that question.

23 The Governor's budget has allowed us
24 to hire a veterans -- women veterans

1 engagement coordinator. We currently have a
2 women veterans virtual systems across the
3 state with our women veterans organizations
4 and the foundations, where we're bringing
5 holistic approaches.

6 We're getting ready to have our Black
7 History Program coming up this month, and we
8 have our Governor's appointee for our
9 faith-based, Pastor Cora Washington, who is
10 going to be on that program along with
11 Minister Conrad Washington from D.C.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Perfect.
13 I saw that program.

14 Just for the lack of time, what is the
15 current percentage of veterans across New
16 York State utilizing programs within the
17 department? Because we went from a division
18 to a department.

19 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Yes. Yes.
20 Currently we can get back to you with that as
21 well.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay,
23 please. Those numbers are critical to the
24 budget process. Thank you.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

2 And Assemblymember Chair Kim to close
3 for his second.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Greg, do you have
5 the updated -- any updated data on the unmet
6 needs?

7 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes. We
8 started a formal process, so every September
9 we're collecting electronically, and that's
10 public information.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Do you have like a
12 general lump-sum number of people on the
13 waiting lists?

14 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: It's not
15 people, Assemblyman, it's services waiting
16 for. Because we have many people that get
17 multiple services.

18 So we have services. I believe it's
19 about 18,500.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Eighteen thousand
21 five hundred, okay.

22 Yeah, I just want to close by saying,
23 you know, when I was driving up here I was on
24 a call with a local constituent, her name is

1 Martha, a 75-year-old, lives in my district.
2 And she qualifies for Medicare, but she's not
3 qualified for Medicaid. And she is living by
4 herself and is actively looking for some
5 solutions around home care.

6 And, you know, if she were to call
7 NYSOFA or any of the affiliate providers and
8 programs, what is the most likely outcome for
9 a 75-year-old non-English-speaking immigrant
10 woman living by herself, Medicare but
11 non-Medicaid, looking for some sort of
12 community and home care solutions in the
13 State of New York?

14 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yeah, so what
15 we would recommend, Assemblyman -- I'll get
16 this for you -- is our Queens, New York,
17 Connects Coordinator. I have one in each
18 borough. What this individual will be able
19 to do, using the language of the
20 individual -- we require a language line for
21 all the counties, including our agency as
22 well, so we can communicate with people that
23 aren't English-speaking -- and start going
24 through a screening process, see what the

1 individual needs.

2 If she needs, you know, PC Level 1 or
3 a home-delivered meal and is eligible for
4 those types of things, then they can work
5 within the local resources in Queens to try
6 to identify that service.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Okay. But at this
8 point, with the lack of the fully funded
9 program, or of all the services and people on
10 the waiting list, the likely outcome of this
11 person -- she's not entitled. This isn't a
12 right that she has, right? So --

13 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Yes. Our --

14 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Unless we, you know,
15 as advocates, as elected officials, do
16 whatever we can to lift any layers and try to
17 connect them, most likely, as a consumer, if
18 she's making all these calls, taking all
19 these steps, as you said, she's going to be
20 put on a waiting list for services.

21 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Not
22 necessarily. So it depends on where we are
23 in the state. There's more home care aides
24 in the city. Obviously it's a nationwide

1 crisis; I'm not debating that.

2 But the nuances of the people that we
3 serve -- we have people coming on and off
4 programs all of the time. Because of their
5 age, their frailty maybe changes. So I
6 wouldn't necessarily say, you know, she's
7 automatically going to go on a waitlist,
8 because I can't say that that's true at all.

9 But that's the process. And I'll make
10 sure that I get you the right place to go,
11 Assemblyman, to help this woman. And if you
12 need help from me, let me know.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. That
15 is it for this panel. I'd like to thank both
16 commissioners and everybody in your agencies
17 for all the work you do on behalf of our
18 seniors and veterans. Thank you very much.

19 NYSOFA DIRECTOR OLSEN: Thank you
20 guys, and thanks for your longstanding
21 support. I really appreciate it.

22 DVS COMMISSIONER DeCOHEN: Thank you.
23 Thank you so much.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Again, anyone who

1 wants to ask questions of these commissioners
2 as they leave, please take your conversations
3 outside so the next panel can be called down.
4 Thank you.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: And at this time
6 I'd like to call Panel C. From AARP
7 New York, Beth Finkel, the state director;
8 New York StateWide Senior Action Council,
9 Gail Myers, the deputy director; Essential
10 Care Visitor, Marcella Goheen; and Lifespan
11 of Greater Rochester, Ann Marie Cook,
12 president and CEO. Thank you all.

13 (Pause.)

14 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. I'd like
15 to remind everyone, both members of our panel
16 and our elected officials here, that we all
17 get three minutes. In a moment, when we are
18 settled, we'll get started.

19 (Laughter.)

20 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I've got to
21 remember that one. That's pretty good.
22 Okay. All right. We're ready to go with
23 this panel. I think we should go in order.
24 Ms. Finkel, if you are prepared to go.

1 Yeah, you've got to hold it down.

2 MS. FINKEL: Okay. Thank you so much.
3 Thank you, Senator Krueger, and thank you so
4 much, Assemblymember Hevesi, and I want to
5 tell Senator Cleare -- who I see has stepped
6 out for a second -- but I want to thank her
7 and I want to thank Assemblymember Kim, the
8 Aging Committee chairs. And they're just
9 really outstanding.

10 New York's aging population is
11 exploding. We all know that. Between 2010
12 and 2020, 65-plus went up over 30 percent.
13 And we have to really be cognizant of those
14 numbers and how they're changing so rapidly.

15 Right now, as everybody heard, there
16 is waiting lists. That number varies because
17 there are questions about how that gets --
18 the numbers come in aggregate, and so you're
19 going to hear different numbers. The numbers
20 I have, we believe, is 16,000 individuals.
21 But I think it's back to that service number
22 that's important that Greg mentioned.

23 So there are -- those families are
24 waiting for non-Medicaid home and

1 community-based services, and those services
2 obviously include transportation, adult day
3 home, delivered meals and respite. And where
4 all these families are waiting on waiting
5 lists, we have -- we do not have the public
6 information down to the county level of these
7 people that are waiting for EISEP services.

8 So I really appreciated that question
9 about getting the county data in, because
10 that's what can help us determine where we
11 need to go. There are 2.2 million family
12 caregivers in New York State statewide. And
13 you know that if they're not in place and
14 supported, then those people are going to end
15 up on Medicaid and end up in institutions
16 which we all pay so much money for.

17 So AARP is asking for \$51 million.
18 That is the 42 million that we need to get
19 rid of the current -- the waitlist, plus we
20 have to make up the 9 million that we got cut
21 from last year. So that's where we are at,
22 the 51 million.

23 I also just want to second -- on the
24 Long Term Care Ombudsman, I know we've been

1 talking a lot about that. You all know about
2 it, so I'm not going to go into detail. But
3 we know that's where our most vulnerable
4 older adults are, in these institutions, and
5 we learned the hard way during COVID that we
6 can't ignore their needs.

7 So the Governor's budget cut
8 2.5 million. We were saying we need
9 15 million for long-term-care ombudsmen to
10 get that one visit per nursing home every
11 single week, which is exactly what CMS
12 recommends. We are so far from that, as the
13 data just came out earlier, with only
14 12 percent getting a visit.

15 And the only way we can get that --
16 and so agree with the director that we need
17 to professionalize it. We value our
18 volunteers. We always want our volunteer
19 component, but we can't be totally reliant
20 upon it. So the FTEs and the proper training
21 are absolutely crucial. And we can't be
22 stepping backwards, which is what it seems is
23 happening. So again, 15 million for that.

24 I want to talk about data matching.

1 Last year we got data matching on utilities
2 and EAP, and we were thrilled about that.
3 Now we're going to the next increment. We
4 want to see data matching on EPIC and
5 HEAP data so that people can get help paying
6 for their pharmaceuticals.

7 And we know that --

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. I
9 apologize.

10 MS. FINKEL: Oh, okay. One more plug
11 for the food stamps increase on -- that
12 Representative Rojas mentioned, because AARP
13 is very much in favor of that \$100 amount.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very
15 much. I appreciate it.

16 MS. FINKEL: Thank you.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Ms. Myers.

18 MS. MYERS: Thank you for the
19 opportunity to testify today on behalf of
20 New York StateWide Senior Action Council.

21 We have a number of requests, the
22 first of which is to restore the funding for
23 our Patients' Rights Helpline. That program
24 had a \$200,000 legislative add over the last

1 several years. We ask you to do that once
2 again; otherwise, we are facing a cut.

3 We also are asking you for an
4 expansion of funds for the Managed Care
5 Consumer Assistance Program to reach more
6 eligible New Yorkers who have not yet applied
7 for the Medicare Savings Program, when you so
8 well increased that.

9 All that has been said about the need
10 to reduce waiting lists and to improve the
11 capacity for the future. I also wanted to
12 point out to you, however, that the State
13 Comptroller just issued a report on the
14 personal income tax, monies from the
15 checkoffs that have not been allocated
16 throughout state agencies, and for NYSOFA the
17 Senior Wellness and Nutrition Program has
18 accumulated a fund balance of \$341,886. So
19 let's please put that into meals for the
20 elderly.

21 On the EISEP program, I implore you to
22 consider the impact of the cuts that are
23 going to happen in Medicaid because of the
24 previous MRT's recommendation that went into

1 statute that changed the number of ADLs and
2 changed the community Medicaid lookback.
3 That will be going into effect shortly. And
4 we would like you to say, Get rid of that.

5 There will be an impact if Medicaid
6 stops providing the services for future
7 eligible people on the EISEP program, which
8 is 100 percent state-funded. Wouldn't it be
9 better to have that funded under Medicaid
10 appropriately? Also because that cut is
11 going to eliminate, in many cases,
12 housekeeping services which the EISEP program
13 would otherwise provide. So please look into
14 that.

15 On the EPIC program, we have a couple
16 of recommendations for you. One is our bill
17 that the chairs have introduced on improving
18 benefits and transparency. But we also
19 support the bill to increase -- to allow the
20 EPIC program to provide people with credible
21 coverage, not a Part D plan.

22 And then a new piece. The Governor
23 has done a good job in eliminating -- if you
24 agree -- the copayment for diabetes. We

1 would recommend that the EPIC program also
2 guarantee a zero copay for people under EPIC
3 for that -- for insulin, excuse me.

4 There are a number of cuts in the
5 Medicaid budget that we are incredibly
6 disturbed about -- not even having seen yet.
7 But we also would encourage you to remove the
8 asset test for the non-MAGI adult who's
9 applying for Medicaid. And we support the
10 Home Care Savings and Reinvestment Act.

11 On quality of care, we do not support
12 allowing nursing home aides to administer
13 medications and we do not believe in the
14 change in oversight for the assisted living
15 facilities.

16 Three quick things on economic
17 security. We support the SNAP benefit
18 increase to the minimum SNAP benefit. We
19 applaud the medical debt positions in the
20 Governor's budget; we'd ask for a few extra
21 changes to that.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

23 MS. MYERS: And we love the dental
24 care provision that Senator Cleare has put

1 out.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very
3 much. I appreciate it.

4 Ms. Goheen.

5 MS. GOHEEN: Hi, I'm Marcella Goheen,
6 wife of Robert Victor Viteri, who's entering
7 his eighth year of aging in place in a
8 nursing home. It's good to see some familiar
9 faces who were helpful to us during COVID.
10 So thank you, Senator May and Ron Kim.

11 We executed care for two years prior
12 to this at home to medicate his rare
13 neurodegenerative disorder. There was a
14 crisis point where I had to surrender him to
15 a long-term-care facility. During this time
16 at home I spent \$30,000 a year on private
17 caregivers just to keep him safe, because we
18 didn't qualify for anything.

19 I founded essentialcarevisitor.com as
20 a platform in Robert's name to help families
21 advocate during COVID to best advocate for
22 their loved ones that we were separated from.
23 Today we triage emotional trauma, confusion,
24 loss and grieving that a caregiver might go

1 through when they have to make that decision
2 to institutionalize their loved one.

3 We are a peer-to-peer model. We offer
4 two care jobs a week, and with service to
5 family caregivers statewide and nationally.

6 Robert -- what I really want to
7 testify about is Robert and the over 100,000
8 vulnerable New Yorkers aging in long-term-
9 care facilities are living under disastrous
10 limitations of the care system right now. In
11 his own words, before disease took his
12 speech -- he's nonverbal now -- he told me "I
13 never want to be a burden." I remind him to
14 this day that his aging and illness is not
15 his fault and as his wife I will honor my
16 oath to serve him. I wish New York State
17 would feel the same about the members of this
18 population.

19 Robert and I are not anecdotal
20 evidence. We are two people of nearly almost
21 10 million folks in New York, 5 million over
22 60, and 4.1 million caregivers to New Yorkers
23 who are aging and identify as a caregiving
24 family, whereby the five to seven hours a day

1 represents a portion of over \$4.1 billion of
2 uncompensated care. This data is reflected
3 in the Aging Association of New York's
4 testimony that cites also that my husband is
5 one of those contributing to the \$72 billion
6 a year that this aging population contributes
7 to both city and state taxes. So where's the
8 money?

9 I'm currently -- I'm freaked out.

10 (Laughter.)

11 MS. GOHEEN: They may call it
12 caregiver stress, but I'm not understanding
13 the budget proposals that reflect random
14 allocated cuts to Medicaid that will impact
15 the lifeline of my husband's services and
16 supports.

17 I have 50 seconds. I've never
18 understood the litigation of how we can't
19 serve care when the dollars and the money
20 keeps flowing. And the solution, I believe,
21 is what has happened with my husband is we've
22 developed a person-centered care system
23 around him that includes a holistic approach
24 whereby, over the past eight years of him

1 being in a long-term-care facility, he's been
2 to the hospital two times. And that's during
3 COVID.

4 So what does that tell you? That
5 New York State must invest in the aging
6 population that's only going to get more and
7 more dense, and that we need to provide
8 overhauled programmatic innovative
9 transformation. I sit on three subcommittees
10 of the Master Plan on Aging. We need to
11 invest in that plan when it's finished, and
12 invest now -- not wait till 2026, not wait
13 till 2025. But there are 400 members of
14 talented individuals who are amazing at this
15 work and who need to be heard.

16 Thank you.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you for the
18 testimony, and perfect timing as well.

19 (Laughter.)

20 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

21 Ms. Cook.

22 MS. COOK: Yeah, good afternoon. I'm
23 Ann Marie Cook. I'm president and CEO of
24 Lifespan of Greater Rochester.

1 We serve a lot of older adults each
2 year, but really what I am, I'm just an aging
3 service provider. I've been at Lifespan over
4 28 years, and I've seen this new convergence
5 of issues unlike I've ever seen before. And
6 I'll run through these briefly, but they're
7 all important: Dramatic increase in the
8 older adult population; dramatic increase in
9 poverty of older adults. I heard you talk
10 about childhood poverty -- no one talks about
11 older adult poverty.

12 The workforce shortages that are going
13 on today. The dramatic increase in scams,
14 almost always targeted toward older adults.
15 Workforce shortages, and I would say the
16 stress on the family caregivers. It is
17 incredible, as families have become smaller
18 and more geographically dispersed, what it's
19 doing to those family caregivers that remain
20 today.

21 So when I looked at the proposed
22 Executive Budget, I have to be honest with
23 you, what I said is this budget in no way
24 will meet the needs of older adults who need

1 our help right now. And I was very
2 disappointed.

3 I just want to reiterate one thing
4 Director Olsen said. Our aging service
5 network saves Medicaid dollars. On average,
6 we serve people 6.5 years, less than \$10,000
7 per person per year. If they were in a
8 nursing home it would be \$140,000 per person.

9 Most of our clients are over the age
10 of 80, and almost all of them have multiple
11 needs for activities of daily living help.
12 And we're supporting them in the community.

13 The other thing I have to say -- I
14 talked about scams, but elder abuse is alive
15 and well but still a very hidden problem in
16 this community.

17 They talked about -- I'm so thrilled
18 about the focus on enhanced multidisciplinary
19 teams, but in the process both the Senate and
20 the Assembly have always supported direct
21 intervention for older adults being abused.
22 That legislative add was cut from the budget,
23 and I respectfully request that that get
24 added in too. That's how we get the cases to

1 the enhanced multidisciplinary teams so those
2 social workers are out there working.

3 And finally I also want to talk about
4 the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program. I
5 think it's a travesty, quite frankly, that we
6 don't support the Long Term Care Ombudsman
7 Program and have those advocates in every
8 long-term-care facility here so that those
9 individuals receive the quality of care and
10 quality of life we have promised.

11 And finally, I will just have to say
12 one of my dear friends, Becky Preve, who
13 isn't here today -- but she said to me, "At
14 what age do you think older New Yorkers
15 become irrelevant and we don't care?" And I
16 said, "We have to make sure that answer is
17 never."

18 Thank you so much for all of your
19 support and for allowing us to speak today.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

21 Any Assembly?

22 (Discussion off the record.)

23 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Senator May.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Rachel May.

1 SENATOR MAY: Sorry. Hi. Hi,
2 everybody. Wonderful to see you all, and
3 thank you for your persistent and creative
4 attention to these issues, and Marcella, for
5 your just -- everything you do.

6 I guess I wanted to follow up about
7 the LTCOP program with you, and we heard from
8 Greg Olsen that there's progress happening.
9 Is that your sense? And it sounds like you
10 don't feel like it's happening fast enough,
11 if --

12 MS. COOK: I don't know if it's
13 happening fast enough, Senator. But the
14 \$2.5 million from last year made a huge
15 difference in our ability to not only recruit
16 additional volunteers but also hire
17 additional staff, and that's what we need to
18 professionalize this. It was a great first
19 step -- I would say a first step of several
20 steps we need to take.

21 But it was very disheartening, quite
22 frankly, to see that 2.5 million eliminated.

23 SENATOR MAY: Thanks.

24 And then talking about poverty, as

1 many of you did, I do carry a bill to raise
2 the minimum SNAP benefit from \$23 to \$100.
3 My understanding is it's mostly older
4 New Yorkers who are at that minimum. Do you
5 have a sense of how many people that you work
6 with would benefit from the increase?

7 MS. COOK: I'd have to get back to
8 you. But that bill would be huge for us.

9 And we can even see in our senior
10 centers the last week, last 10 days of the
11 month, they have to come in and take bags of
12 food with them because they've run out of
13 food for the month.

14 MS. FINKEL: I would just add, a lot
15 of older adults don't bother to even apply
16 because it's not easy applying for SNAP. And
17 one of the reasons they don't apply is
18 because the benefit is so low.

19 And I would say one more thing is yes,
20 and it's particularly for older adults it
21 really hurts.

22 SENATOR MAY: Yeah. Okay. Thanks.

23 And then I guess my last question was
24 about the Medicare Savings Program that we --

1 AARP especially worked to put in place. Can
2 you tell us how that's going? Are people
3 participating?

4 MS. FINKEL: Yes. The numbers are
5 significantly going up. But there's still a
6 lot of room for improvement. We've been
7 working with DOH to get the word out more
8 and also with New York City. And we'd like
9 to do more of that. So yes.

10 SENATOR MAY: Do you need help? Is
11 there anything we should be doing to help you
12 with that?

13 MS. FINKEL: Well, I think, you know,
14 absolutely more publicity about it. And then
15 the basic thing is the data matching. Right?
16 And that's what we've been talking about. We
17 got the data matching last year on utilities.
18 This year we're looking for it on EPIC,
19 against HEAP, because the benefit is similar.

20 And I think you're hearing that again
21 and again. So often we're hearing -- looking
22 at providing these services for women and
23 children, which is absolutely needed, but why
24 are older adults being asked to wait? And we

1 keep asking ODTA, what can't you do what
2 you're doing for family and children, do it
3 now for older adults?

4 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

5 SENATOR MAY: Thank you.

6 MS. FINKEL: Thank you.

7 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

8 Assembly.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Chairman Kim.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you.

11 I just want to say, Marcella, I just
12 find your journey and just being here just
13 very inspiring, and turning so much of your
14 pain as a caregiver into finding a purpose in
15 your advocacy to be very inspiring.

16 Unfortunately, I think there are so
17 many other caregivers that are sandwiched
18 between older adults and their own families
19 that have given up, that are completely
20 traumatized and feeling unproductive, don't
21 want to participate in anything.

22 And I'm just -- do you -- I just
23 wonder, do you also see that in your own
24 communities? Because there's something --

1 there's a phenomenon that's happening, I feel
2 like, with productive members of our
3 community all of a sudden just tapping out,
4 saying, I'm not -- I just don't want to work,
5 I can't do this, I feel paralyzed. And I
6 wonder what the impact of that is to our --
7 not only our society but to our economy.

8 And I bring this up because we framed
9 the investments of your services as a moral
10 duty, but I really think there's a huge
11 economic impact of underinvesting and
12 allowing working middle-class families to
13 say: You're on your own taking care of your
14 older adult. What does that do to our
15 morale? What does that do to our
16 productivity?

17 MS. GOHEEN: So I love the question.
18 And I didn't get to my paragraph about the
19 PTSD and the trauma of caregiving and the
20 post-COVID experience that we're seeing with
21 formal caregivers on the frontlines, in
22 collaboration with the informal caregivers --
23 where there's a disassociation. There's four
24 responses to trauma: Disassociation, numb,

1 and perfectionism and then hypervigilance.

2 Which is me.

3 (Laughter.)

4 MS. GOHEEN: But on the front lines
5 right now there's a disassociation in nursing
6 homes whereby the caregivers formal are
7 actually not taking people out of bed. And
8 their rationale is, Well, we can't take one
9 person and not the other, that's not fair, so
10 we're not going to take anybody out of bed.

11 So that's the conditions of the
12 nursing homes right now.

13 In terms of family caregivers, we're
14 mortified. I keep advocating for them to
15 Zoom out and be there five -- as much as they
16 can in order to collaborate with the care.
17 But there's a big missing gap that's not
18 being treated. I don't know where it might
19 be in the budget for Governor Hochul. But
20 there needs to be addressed the PTSD of what
21 happened during COVID for both the formal
22 caregivers, the families, in order to
23 recalibrate. That's a scientific fact.

24 Like if you don't take that space --

1 just like veterans coming back from war --
2 then there's no place to start. And the way
3 it is manifesting is in terms of family
4 advocates like you mentioned. If they've
5 lost their loved ones during COVID, they
6 don't want anything to do with it, but they
7 know there's still not a resolve. Because
8 there's people aging in New York that are
9 going to need these long-term-care services
10 in nursing homes.

11 Aging in place in a nursing home is
12 aging in place. That's what it is for my
13 husband. That is his home. And we need to
14 do the work to serve them where they are.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN KIM: Thank you.

16 (Off the record.)

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great. Thank
19 you.

20 I'll use my three minutes, and I
21 believe I'm the last of the Assemblymembers
22 to speak.

23 So first, Ms. Goheen, thank you for
24 your testimony. I really do appreciate it.

1 I'd like to share that my father
2 recently passed away. Over the last couple
3 of years of his life he had Lewy body
4 dementia.

5 So the difficulty for caregivers, I
6 believe, even as dramatic and poignant as
7 your testimony was, is even understated. It
8 is brutal to see a family member slowly being
9 stripped away from you, and then you look at
10 the resources that are available to you --
11 almost nonexistent. So I hear you, and I
12 appreciate it.

13 And thank you for all the programs you
14 do for caregivers. That means a ton to me
15 and many of my colleagues.

16 And I do want to touch on one other
17 point -- with the limited time I have -- as
18 well, about the Long Term Care Ombudsman
19 Program.

20 So I've been to a lot of facilities
21 over the last couple of years. That's just
22 part of the process. And while we have a
23 sign on the wall on every one saying "Call
24 the Long Term Ombudsman," the fact that we're

1 not funding this program -- and it's at
2 12 percent, it's -- they're able to hit
3 12 percent of the nursing homes in the state?
4 You're right, that is a disgrace.

5 And particularly when you're talking
6 about people who are in desperate need,
7 desperate need of advocates on the ground. I
8 can't get this. I need that. You need the
9 Ombudsman Program.

10 I am so grateful for all of your
11 testimony and all of the work that you do.
12 It's just greatly appreciated. I don't have
13 a question, I just wanted to opine for a
14 minute. So thank you for all your work and
15 your testimony here today. Thank you.

16 MS. GOHEEN: Thank you.

17 MS. MYERS: Can I just take 30 seconds
18 on that point? The Ombudsman Program is
19 vital, and it is not in every facility.
20 Generally for our Patients' Rights Helpline,
21 we tell people what their rights are and then
22 we tell them to call the ombudsman to be
23 on-site and help them uplift their rights.
24 And they call us back and they say, they just

1 are not available for -- and, you know, great
2 programs, but they're not available.

3 Three weeks ago I had that happen in
4 Albany County, and someone was being denied
5 coverage for an extended stay that was within
6 Medicare, and told to apply for Medicaid,
7 which she's not eligible for, in order to get
8 services. And we had to spend hours to tell
9 them that they were using the wrong standard
10 to tell her she was no longer eligible for
11 Medicare. Hours of time doing that, saving
12 her tens of thousands of dollars, and she
13 finally, successfully, was able to transition
14 to home.

15 So people are not being able to hold
16 up their rights because the ombudsmen --
17 because there's not enough of them there to
18 be present. And also because, you know,
19 we're all stretched as thin as we can be.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I wholeheartedly
21 agree. Thank you very much.

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Ashby.

23 SENATOR ASHBY: Thank you for being
24 here.

1 In regards to previous comments for
2 staff and mental health and nursing homes,
3 are you aware of any peer-to-peer programs
4 that are going on, whether they're internally
5 driven through the setting or from a larger
6 stature?

7 MS. COOK: I mean, our ombudsman
8 region's a nine-county region in the
9 Finger Lakes. And oftentimes in several
10 homes there are, you know, resident councils
11 and those kind of things, those kind of
12 informal peer-to-peer helping, if that's what
13 you mean.

14 But on a statewide basis, no.

15 SENATOR ASHBY: How about from a
16 staffing level?

17 MS. GOHEEN: Oh, can I?

18 MS. COOK: Yeah, go ahead.

19 MS. GOHEEN: So I just -- how do I do
20 this?

21 So we actually, at our home, we have a
22 150-member family council and we have a
23 family essential program that we'd love to
24 get funded, whereby we have a peer-to-peer

1 model where we collaborate with the formal
2 caregivers. We have social workers giving
3 them our phone number, family caregivers who
4 can't navigate the system. And it's amazing
5 because it is a Me Too movement where --
6 forgive that word -- that, you know, you
7 know, coming from another family member,
8 exactly where that particular consumer is,
9 whether they're in the first three months of
10 admitting their loved one in a long-term-care
11 facility, or they're in their six-to-12
12 month, or when they're a month and leaving or
13 a year and leaving, or whether they're going
14 to be a long-term stay like my husband, who's
15 been there for eight years.

16 So we have an informal program going
17 on, and it works magically, especially during
18 this disastrous staffing crisis where nursing
19 homes aren't even answering their phones, but
20 yet they're still getting reimbursed
21 Medicare, Medicare dollars every day, which
22 we don't understand.

23 SENATOR ASHBY: And you've seen that
24 as effective?

1 MS. GOHEEN: It's amazing. And we
2 have just started shopping the program to
3 various people in New York State because we
4 want it to be funded.

5 It stands before the ombudsman
6 program. We're not professionals. But it
7 actually deescalates a lot. And we have a
8 system where we're going to try to work with
9 the social workers on how to formalize it and
10 document it so that family caregivers within
11 long-term-care institutions never have to be
12 alone.

13 You're talking about people being
14 dropped off from the hospital and you have a
15 stack of papers and you have nowhere to go.
16 And we do see those signs of the ombudsman
17 program, but we didn't -- I didn't know where
18 our ombudsman was during COVID, had no idea.
19 No disrespect.

20 But that's very real, and we need the
21 systems and support on the frontline.

22 SENATOR ASHBY: Thank you.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember
24 Eachus.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Thank you, Chair.

2 I just wanted to comment also about
3 the ombudsman program. I think we need
4 education. We especially need education in
5 these nursing and caring facilities. This is
6 the least punitive way that we can
7 communicate with the folks that run that and
8 those programs, and they don't understand
9 that.

10 I think they think that, you know,
11 everybody's there just to pick at them and
12 point things out. And yet, you know, what --
13 what comes after this? After this is the
14 Department of Health that comes and slams you
15 with penalties and fines and so on like that.

16 So on my committee, with Aging, I will
17 talk with them about, you know, if there's
18 some program we can't get out there,
19 informing the nursing homes -- because
20 there's a limited number of nursing homes out
21 there -- that they should understand that
22 this program benefits them. And it really
23 does.

24 MS. COOK: No, I agree. And I do

1 think the name, a lot of people don't even
2 know what that word means, "ombudsman." So
3 we need to be there. That's when you really
4 begin to pick up the quality of care and
5 quality of life issues, is when you're there
6 all the time. And that's why we need this
7 critical program to ensure we're in every
8 facility in New York State every single week.

9 (Off the record.)

10 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Cordell
11 Cleare.

12 SENATOR CLEARE: Come on now. All
13 right. Thank you. Thank you all for your
14 testimony.

15 You heard me ask the commissioner
16 questions related to the 16,000 waitlist.
17 And you heard his response. And I want to
18 know what -- your thoughts are on that, as
19 well as -- I'm sorry, I just came back from
20 getting something. I know you all spoke
21 about the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program.
22 If there's anything you have to add to that,
23 let me know.

24 And also he talked about the report

1 that was due to the State Legislature and
2 that it has been filed already, so if you
3 could confirm or --

4 MS. FINKEL: I'm sorry, could you --
5 I'm having trouble hearing you.

6 SENATOR CLEARE: The State Office for
7 the Aging, there's a report that's due to the
8 Legislature.

9 MS. FINKEL: Right.

10 SENATOR CLEARE: And I know some of
11 you had asked about that report.

12 MS. FINKEL: Yes.

13 SENATOR CLEARE: And I just -- you
14 heard his answer to that question, so I just
15 want to know.

16 MS. FINKEL: Thank you. Thank you for
17 giving me that opportunity to clarify that.

18 So he's giving you aggregate numbers.
19 He's not giving you those numbers by county.
20 What we need is to understand it by the
21 county. And so that would be very, very
22 helpful. And -- yeah, so we can all
23 consistently have the same numbers that we
24 can all understand, and then we can all plan

1 appropriately that way.

2 MS. COOK: Senator -- oh.

3 MS. MYERS: If I may. I'll be fast.

4 We also need to know what are the
5 barriers. Are there capacity issues? Why
6 can't -- if the money isn't being spent on
7 one thing and it's moving to something else
8 where there's a need, that's -- that's a good
9 thing. But it keeps hiding what the barrier
10 is to why it isn't being spent.

11 So if it's EISEP home services, what
12 is the barrier? That the money might be
13 going to congregate meals or transportation,
14 that just shows more money is needed there.
15 But what are the barriers?

16 So if you can add that into your
17 request for a report -- sorry, one minute.

18 MS. FINKEL: So can I add one more
19 thing?

20 We've been actually -- AARP has been
21 starting to ask county execs individually,
22 what is your -- because we want to get the
23 information. And we did hear Nassau County
24 is now moving from a five-day-a-week home

1 delivery to a four-day-a-week home delivery.
2 What does that mean? It means that they have
3 to deal with the budget that they have, and
4 that's their solution, which we all know is
5 probably the worst possible solution.

6 I know you all talked about isolation
7 quite a bit. And sometimes that's the only
8 person that those people see at their door,
9 and that's the only person who can check and
10 say, Mrs. S. is not looking so good today,
11 we'd better get, you know, some help out here
12 for her.

13 So I think that's important. And
14 that's again why we have to get this
15 county-specific data, so there's total
16 transparency.

17 MS. COOK: I will have to say I think
18 Director Olsen was correct. There's about
19 18,000 older New Yorkers waiting for
20 services, and we estimate it would take about
21 \$51 million to serve them.

22 SENATOR CLEARE: We said those
23 numbers, too.

24 Thank you.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. I
2 think I'm the last questioner, and just one
3 question. And it's controversial, I get it.
4 I'm exploring whether we should have the
5 Justice Center oversee nursing homes.

6 Some people love it, some people hate
7 it. See, I got a yes and a no just on this
8 panel. And so it's not going anywhere very
9 quickly. But when we originally proposed the
10 Justice Center years ago, there was a
11 discussion about including nursing homes. It
12 was to address people in vulnerable
13 institutional settings not being watched over
14 carefully enough -- or for us, the
15 government, to be doing something since we
16 were paying for it.

17 So I'm going to embrace it again at
18 the Mental Health Hearing where the Justice
19 Center comes. But -- I don't even know if
20 there's time for any of you to jump in and
21 answer, but I just wanted to throw that out
22 to you for now.

23 MS. GOHEEN: I'll answer that. I've
24 worked with the Domestic Violence Justice

1 Centers with Michael Bloomberg. I wrote some
2 curriculums for them way back. And in terms
3 of it being borrowed to a structure in a
4 long-term care facility, I think it's
5 brilliant for a lot of reasons.

6 Because on the frontlines, especially
7 now, post-COVID -- and I want to remind the
8 State Legislature that we're in a post-COVID
9 environment, which is very different. These
10 caregivers are stressed, dissociated, numb.
11 The administrators are numb. They're not
12 here right now. So in order to put a
13 structure, any structures on the frontline
14 that would have justice systems and supports,
15 is what I'm going to say, for the vulnerable
16 New Yorkers that -- Bob has me, my husband
17 Robert Viteri has me to the day he takes his
18 last breath. But there are, you know,
19 684 other people in my husband's nursing home
20 that don't have a Marcella.

21 So I think that those checks and
22 balances, the way Safe Horizons works, a
23 center would be brilliant. Because it would
24 be interdisciplinary, it would be

1 multigenerational. It would also open up
2 space for people to get into this kind of
3 workforce.

4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

6 MS. COOK: Senator, I just wanted to
7 comment. I obviously shouldn't play poker,
8 because you read my face immediately.

9 (Laughter.)

10 MS. COOK: But I would really have to
11 think about it. I have seen the
12 Justice Center as we work with older adults
13 with developmental disabilities. And of
14 course those situations go there and,
15 honestly, get bogged down in a lot of
16 bureaucracy.

17 So I do think we need to do something
18 with nursing homes and really investigate
19 quality-of-care issues better than we do
20 today. But let me think about your
21 suggestion --

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Please.

23 MS. COOK: -- and get back to you.

24 Thank you.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Please. Thank
2 you. Thank you.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. I believe
4 that's it. Thank you to this panel for your
5 testimony. It's greatly appreciated.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
7 much.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I would like to
9 call up Panel D. From ECE On The Move,
10 Shanita Bowen, the chief operating officer.
11 From the Chinese-American Planning Council,
12 Jessica Hsieh -- I hope I pronounced that
13 right -- respite coordinator. From the
14 Early Care and Learning Council,
15 Meredith Chimento, the executive director.
16 And from All Our Kin, Steve Morales, New York
17 State policy director.

18 Please come on down.

19 Thank you. Thank you all for coming.
20 Let's go in order, if we can.

21 Ms. Bowen, the floor is yours.

22 MS. BOWEN: Thank you to the Senate
23 and Assembly chairs for the opportunity to
24 testify, and especially to Senator Brisport

1 and Assemblymember Hevesi for their
2 outstanding leadership in childcare.

3 Good afternoon. I'm Shanita Bowen,
4 16 years as a family childcare provider and
5 chief operating officer of ECE On The Move,
6 representing the voice of the family
7 childcare workforce in New York City.

8 Family childcare is a childcare
9 business in residential settings, the second
10 largest modality of care, second to legally
11 exempt, and among small businesses that are
12 systemically set up to fail financially.

13 We are paid by a faulty market rate
14 system that is so low, it paints the picture
15 of Black and brown women working for pennies
16 on the dollar to take care of children in her
17 neighborhood while miraculously offering
18 quality service, and knowing full well that
19 she is juggling the usual small business
20 expenses like worker's comp, taxes, business
21 supplies -- the list goes on.

22 And now, effective this month, the
23 minimum wage just went up, which means that
24 her assistants' pay goes up.

1 Family childcare in New York City will
2 continue to do what they've been doing, which
3 is go without or go with little.

4 Gladys Jones, founder of ECE On The
5 Move, says that childcare should be as
6 effortless and accessible as breathing: We
7 have it for all who need it without
8 consideration. Which is why family childcare
9 providers and parents care about universal
10 childcare and being paid by the true cost of
11 care model.

12 We want fair, equitable wages fit for
13 early care educators who are proud of their
14 work, their resources, their pay, all
15 resulting in children who go on to be
16 autonomous citizens who give back, such as
17 you all as Senators and Assemblymembers.

18 But once again, early care educators
19 in residential settings are not among those
20 to be let into the middle-class door,
21 forgetting that childcare is the cornerstone
22 of economic development. Accessible and
23 affordable childcare enables parents,
24 particularly mothers, to participate fully in

1 the workforce. This, in turn, boosts
2 productivity, increases tax revenues, and
3 reduces dependency on social assistance
4 programs.

5 Also forgetting that a strong
6 childcare system reduces the reliance on
7 social assistance programs as families become
8 more self-sufficient. Moreover, with parents
9 actively participating in the workforce,
10 there is an increase in tax revenues,
11 providing additional resources for public
12 services and infrastructure.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

15 Ms. Hsieh.

16 MS. HSIEH: Okay. Thank you for the
17 opportunity to testify today. My name is
18 Jessica Hsieh, and I'm speaking about the
19 Chinese-American Planning Council today --
20 CPC.

21 CPC provides vital resources to more
22 than 80,000 people per year in the five
23 boroughs, from daycare to afterschool
24 programs to senior services and home care. I

1 used CPC service as a child with immigrant
2 parents. I used CPC service as a teenager
3 for the Summer Youth Employment Program. And
4 as an adult, I joined the Undo Poverty
5 Initiative, a community-led plan to combat
6 poverty and promote economic mobility in
7 Flushing.

8 Through my participation in this
9 group, I was able to secure a full-time job
10 at CPC as a respite coordinator, where I work
11 directly with community members with
12 developmental disabilities. And I allow them
13 to socialize and have, like, a social hour.

14 As you can see, CPC has been an
15 integral part of my life, as being on the
16 side of providing the service to me and me
17 providing back to the community members who I
18 serve.

19 Human service workers make 70 percent
20 of what government employees make for the
21 exact same role, which we do in more
22 languages, in a culturally responsible way.
23 Fifty percent of my colleagues in the home
24 care sector are eligible for SNAP and other

1 public benefits.

2 Each year you hear from providers who
3 struggle due to the underfunding of
4 governmental budgets balanced on the backs of
5 low-income neighborhoods and BIPOC
6 communities. Yet each year the state
7 perpetuates poverty-level wages for human
8 service and home care workers, who are
9 predominantly immigrant women of color like
10 myself.

11 As federal COVID-19 relief funding is
12 quickly running out, our community members'
13 needs have only continually grown. The food
14 lines are longer, not shorter. Half of the
15 Asian households in New York are
16 rent-burdened. One-third of AAPI seniors
17 live below the poverty level and cannot get
18 home care and other supports needed to stay
19 in their homes safely.

20 The state must invest in our social
21 net by allocating a 3.2 percent COLA for all
22 human service workers and passing the wage
23 board bill; expanding the AAPI equity budget
24 to provide long-term healing for our

1 community; investing in the home care
2 workforce through Fair Pay for Home Care and
3 the Home Care Savings and Reinvestment Act;
4 uplifting our immigrant communities through
5 the Unemployment Bridge Program; addressing
6 the housing crisis by passing good-cause
7 eviction and the Housing Access Voucher
8 Program; increasing SNAP benefits; and
9 tackling the climate crisis by making our
10 public transportation accessible and
11 affordable.

12 Thank you.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Ms. Chimento.

16 Good to see you.

17 MS. CHIMENTO: Nice to see you. Nice
18 to see all of you.

19 There's the microphone.

20 The Early Care & Learning Council is
21 the membership organization for the 35
22 childcare resource and referral agencies
23 located throughout New York State. You heard
24 a lot about them today.

1 I'm here to thank you. For the first
2 time in close to 15 years, CCR&Rs will
3 realize a 20 percent contract increase. It's
4 incredible. We are grateful. I have sat
5 here for six years saying, please, have
6 this -- you know, make sure this takes place,
7 and it did.

8 We are beyond thrilled about some of
9 the investments in childcare. There's still
10 a need for more, of course. We support the
11 addition of after-school funding, \$5 million
12 for Staffed Family Child Care Networks to
13 expand the business supports for family and
14 group family childcare providers, and of
15 course the liquidation of the unspent
16 Workforce Retention Grant funding.

17 We of course have an ask. We are
18 looking to increase -- we're looking for an
19 increase with our Infant Toddler Mental
20 Health Services, \$4.5 million annually.

21 Infant Toddler Mental Health
22 Consultation was launched in 2019. We have
23 42 consultants around the state that provide
24 critical supports to childcare providers,

1 looking at the social-emotional supports
2 necessary to run quality childcare. There's
3 not enough consultants.

4 We are asking with that additional
5 4.5 million to focus on New York City, an
6 addition of 12 Infant Toddler Mental Health
7 Consultants. Over 50 percent of children
8 under 5 are located in New York City, and
9 four Mental Health Consultants are not
10 enough. We're asking for 14 in the rest of
11 the state, so that would be Long Island and
12 throughout the rest of New York State.

13 Mental Health Consultants look at
14 reducing the expulsion and suspension of
15 Black and brown boys in childcare, who are
16 suspended and expelled at a rate much higher
17 than their white counterparts.

18 Coupled with that increase in mental
19 health funding, we request \$1.5 million
20 annually to start to add seven equity
21 positions, or equity officers, located in the
22 seven OCFS regions. This program will create
23 anti-racist curricula, culturally responsive
24 early care in education, and work closely

1 with the Office of Children and Family
2 Services' DEIA committees to eradicate
3 systemic and institutionalized forms of
4 discrimination.

5 Mental health consultation, coupled
6 with these DEIB positions, will ensure that
7 the early childhood field will provide
8 much-needed support programs to ensure that
9 the sizeable federal investments made
10 throughout the pandemic are not wasted.

11 We must continue to enhance the social
12 emotional supports that educators and
13 children desperately need. To me, Infant
14 Toddler Mental Health Consultation, coupled
15 with DEIB programming, will move mountains in
16 increasing the quality of early care and
17 education.

18 As a member of the Empire State
19 Campaign for Child Care, Raising New York,
20 and the Child Care Availability Task Force,
21 we ask you to prioritize continued investment
22 in the childcare sector, raising wages for
23 our educators who struggle immensely just
24 meeting their most basic needs.

1 Thank you.

2 MR. MORALES: Honorable Senators,
3 members of the Assembly, my name is Steven
4 Morales. I'm the New York policy director at
5 All Our Kin.

6 All Our Kin is a nonprofit
7 organization that trains, supports and
8 sustains home-based family childcare
9 educators in New York City, and we are also
10 proud members of the Empire State Campaign
11 for Child Care.

12 I want to talk a little bit about what
13 family childcare is, though my colleague
14 Shanita said it really well. Family
15 childcare is paid care that takes place in
16 the home of a licensed childcare
17 professional, and it is one of the most
18 common childcare arrangements in our state.

19 There are roughly 10,500 providers
20 across the state with the capacity to care
21 for over 140,000 children. Family childcare
22 programs offer not only family stability, but
23 they offer children opportunity: the
24 opportunity to explore, the opportunity to

1 build strong relationships and develop skills
2 that will remain with them for the rest of
3 their lives.

4 I encourage each of you to think for a
5 moment about your early childhood, about the
6 caregiver who you knew you could trust. I
7 hope that we all have fond memories of that
8 person or many people in our lives who helped
9 us grow into the people we are today, and
10 that is what childcare offers. And that is
11 what this essential workforce means to our
12 children.

13 The reality is that educators are
14 taking money out of their own pockets to make
15 up for our state's broken childcare system.
16 According to a New School study, family
17 childcare educators in New York City earn
18 only \$10.61 per hour. And I worry that
19 because many educators have managed to hold
20 on by the skin of their teeth, that we are
21 taking their sacrifices for granted.

22 If the pandemic taught us anything, it
23 taught us that childcare is essential for
24 working families, for our economy. And over

1 the last few years, the Governor and the
2 Legislature have stepped up and expanded
3 childcare access, and that's great. But
4 unfortunately, pandemic emergency funds are
5 expiring and the Executive Budget offers no
6 new investments in the childcare workforce,
7 which is going to put all of the progress
8 we've made at risk.

9 That is why we are calling for an
10 investment of \$1.2 billion in a permanent
11 Childcare Workers Fund. This is the most
12 crucial investment that we can make to ensure
13 that this essential workforce can continue to
14 serve our communities. Without it, educators
15 will continue to be forced to leave the field
16 for more reliable jobs in retail and food
17 services, and that will mean families lose
18 access to the care that they need.

19 We also call on the state to fund the
20 bipartisan childcare decoupling legislation
21 that passed overwhelmingly last year but was
22 vetoed. I think we can all agree that making
23 sure families can access care when they need
24 it is a commonsense reform for our modern

1 economy.

2 And finally, we're encouraged by the
3 Governor's proposal to pilot family childcare
4 networks, which are the gold standard for
5 supporting family childcare educators. We
6 want to see those funded and implemented
7 well.

8 In conclusion, we all know the
9 importance of childcare. It's time to
10 permanently invest in the childcare workforce
11 so that they and families across our state
12 know that they can stay here to thrive.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Brisport.

14 SENATOR BRISPORT: Well, thank you,
15 Madam Chair.

16 And thank you to our panelists for
17 coming here today, but also for the great
18 work you do.

19 My questions are for ECE On The Move
20 and All Of Our Kin. They're about the
21 stabilization grants. You can answer all of
22 them or whichever ones you want. But have
23 you observed any difficulties in accessing
24 those workforce grants? Were they enough to

1 stabilize the childcare sector? And would
2 you consider the childcare sector stable now?

3 MS. BOWEN: We are very grateful for
4 the stabilization grants. They help keep
5 doors open. That is now over. So childcare
6 providers are facing decisions on whether to
7 take work in retail or work in fast food. So
8 people are making decisions right now as to
9 whether -- stabilization is a band-aid. It's
10 just a temporary fix on a very long-standing
11 problem. And so we need a permanent
12 solution.

13 And I meant to mention -- I didn't
14 know about the buzzer -- but ECE On The Move
15 supports Empire State Campaign for Child Care
16 in the ask for a permanent workforce fund to
17 stabilize the family childcare sector and all
18 childcare sectors. We don't need to worry
19 about instability in receiving pay and taking
20 care of children.

21 MR. MORALES: I don't have much to add
22 to that. Absolutely. The stabilization
23 grants were good for what they were supposed
24 to be, and they're gone. And we need a

1 permanent solution.

2 SENATOR BRISPORT: Great. And with
3 the remaining time, we also heard a bit about
4 reimbursement rates. Do you think the
5 practice of reimbursing at 80 percent of the
6 market rate is sufficient? And if not, why
7 not?

8 MR. MORALES: I think it's pretty well
9 documented. There have been a series of
10 studies how the market rate does not
11 reimburse nearly enough, up to ten to \$15,000
12 a year per child less than it actually costs
13 to an educator to provide that childcare.

14 So increases are always good, but if
15 we're not paying that full cost, educators
16 are taking that money out of their pockets.

17 MS. BOWEN: Family childcare providers
18 would like to be paid for what it costs to
19 offer care. They must be able to pay their
20 assistants good rates for educating young
21 children and then have a salary for
22 themselves. Right now they're not taking
23 home pay. Right now they're paying their
24 assistants and they're doing above and beyond

1 to assure quality in their programs and they
2 are not pocketing any money for themselves.

3 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. No
5 more Senators? Okay.

6 Hi, everybody. Thank you for your
7 testimony today, all of you. One quick
8 question, I guess, or a question for all of
9 you.

10 Is there any way in New York State
11 that our childcare system would be successful
12 without a permanent workforce fund?

13 MS. CHIMENTO: No.

14 MR. MORALES: No.

15 MS. BOWEN: Absolutely not.

16 MS. HSIEH: Definitely not.

17 (Laughter.)

18 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Cool. Great. I
19 appreciate that. And that's what we need to
20 remember -- we'll get to -- that's what we
21 need to remember going forward. And I think
22 you'll notice that some of the questions for
23 the commissioners earlier -- we started with
24 the workforce, we're going to end with the

1 workforce, this is all about the workforce.

2 So we totally agree.

3 I do want to say thank you to
4 Ms. Hsieh for her testimony for CPC, which is
5 really powerful in that you were receiving
6 services and are now helping others to
7 receive services. And I wholeheartedly agree
8 about the COLA, the cost of living for the
9 human services workforce. Not only do we
10 need to increase the COLA, but first we need
11 to make sure that everybody's in the COLA.

12 I am -- I'll opine for two seconds.
13 I'm tired of having COLAs get done in the
14 New York State budget and then 50 people
15 coming to me after and saying, But you forgot
16 about us. It is bad government.

17 And I guess my questions are -- only
18 for Ms. Chimento, if I can -- the Governor
19 did put in some money for the infant and
20 toddler mental health, which I thought was a
21 very good start. Am I right that that's a
22 good start, or are they off-topic? How can
23 we do it? Please.

24 MS. CHIMENTO: Sure. Thank you, yes.

1 So it's \$1.7 million for the seven
2 Infant Toddler Mental Health Resource
3 Centers, which have been flat-funded since
4 2019, since the inception. That 1.7 million
5 will allow for cost-of-living adjustments for
6 the 42 mental health consultants; travel;
7 professional development; overhead for the
8 organizations that operate them.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: But this is not
10 the addition of any new -- of these workers.

11 MS. CHIMENTO: No. What was
12 referenced in the State of the State -- which
13 was a doubling of Infant Toddler Mental
14 Health Consultants -- was not accurate. It's
15 actually just the addition of 1.7 million.

16 Which is why we're asking for the
17 additional 4.5 million, to add more Mental
18 Health Consultants.

19 New York State is a model state with
20 Infant Toddler Mental Health Consultation.
21 We should be very proud of this program. We
22 need more consultants. We need more
23 consultants in New York City to serve
24 50 percent of the children, but we need them

1 around the rest of the state. And that's
2 what the request is for.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: That's
4 exceptionally helpful. Because I actually
5 briefed my colleagues and said that the
6 Governor had taken a first step towards the
7 asks from the CCR&Rs, and apparently I was
8 wrong. So this is very helpful --

9 MS. CHIMENTO: There is -- there is an
10 increase, yes.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: No, no, no.
12 There is an increase, but not for what we're
13 looking for out of this budget.

14 MS. CHIMENTO: Absolutely.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: So we appreciate
16 the increase. So --

17 MS. CHIMENTO: Exactly. We're on the
18 same page.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: We're on the same
20 page.

21 MS. CHIMENTO: Absolutely.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I think we're
23 talking a weird language, but we get it.

24 MS. CHIMENTO: Yup.

1 (Laughter.)

2 MS. CHIMENTO: We're always in sync.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. And then I
4 guess with the two seconds I have left,
5 Mr. Morales, if you could tell us, at some
6 point in the future --

7 (Laughter.)

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: -- how the
9 Governor's pilot for family and group
10 childcare would -- is being rolled out. And
11 if you think it's a good use of that
12 \$5 million.

13 With that -- is it 7 or is it 5?

14 MS. CHIMENTO: Five for staffed
15 networks.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Five for
17 staffed -- that's correct.

18 Okay, thank you all. We very much
19 appreciate your testimony.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Oh, I'm sorry.
22 We're not done yet. My bad.

23 Ms. Mitaynes, Assemblymember Mitaynes.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

1 We keep talking about the need for
2 revenue to fund our very important programs.
3 So the question is for all of you. Do you
4 support revenue-raising proposals to finance
5 public goods and services that improve the
6 quality of life for New Yorkers? Do you
7 support taxing the rich?

8 Mr. MORALES: I will let you all
9 handle the politics for how you raise the
10 funding. But I -- what our -- my perspective
11 and our perspective is that we have to find
12 the funding. So that could take whatever
13 shape it takes.

14 But there is an essential need to fund
15 this childcare workforce and to make sure
16 that every child and family in this state who
17 needs childcare can access it. And so that
18 takes money, and I'm happy to help, you know,
19 think of ways to find that money.

20 MS. HSIEH: Yes. Because it's only a
21 portion out of their money that's coming back
22 into the communities that we serve, the
23 under -- the low-income population that we
24 serve.

1 Why not? We're all people. At some
2 point of life, tomorrow you can go bankrupt
3 and need that service. So why not help
4 today? Thank you.

5 MS. BOWEN: Family childcare believes
6 that childcare should be a public good. So
7 by any means necessary, however you can get a
8 great quality education for our young ones,
9 pursue it. It is a public good. It should
10 be available to all who need it.

11 MS. CHIMENTO: Yeah, I agree. I think
12 there's got to be creative ways to generate
13 revenue. We talked about it with the launch
14 of the \$4.8 million Tri-Share program, which
15 would be the public-private partnership to
16 invest in childcare.

17 I think there is a new project, it's a
18 million-dollar Business Navigator project, to
19 speak to businesses about underwriting the
20 cost of childcare.

21 Increased taxes always work too.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay, thank you.
23 I think that is the end of the questions for
24 this panel. Thank you all. I very much

1 appreciate your testimony today.

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

4 I'd like to call down Panel E. We'll
5 keep rolling right along. From the Schuyler
6 Center for Analysis and Advocacy, Dede Hill,
7 policy director. From the Cornell ILR
8 Buffalo Co-Lab, Steve Peraza, who's a senior
9 research and policy associate. From the
10 New York Association of Training and
11 Employment Professionals, we have
12 Therese Daly, the interim executive director.
13 And from COFCCA, the Council of Family and
14 Child Caring Agencies, Michelle Newman, the
15 associate executive director.

16 Thank you all.

17 Which one of you is from Cornell?

18 (Laughter.)

19 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Sorry. It was
20 just too easy. Sorry.

21 (Laughter.)

22 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Sorry. Ms. Hill,
23 please, get us started.

24 MS. HILL: (Mic issue.) It's not --

1 Oh, there I go. Thank you.

2 Thank you for the opportunity to
3 testify today. I am policy director for the
4 Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy.
5 We are a nonprofit dedicated to improving
6 public systems that serve low-income and
7 disenfranchised New Yorkers, and we are
8 laser-focused on ending child poverty and
9 establishing universal childcare in New York.
10 We are also proud members of the Empire State
11 Campaign for Child Care.

12 Turning first to childcare, we welcome
13 the Executive Budget's increased investments
14 in the state's childcare assistance program.
15 This is building on the historic investments
16 New York has made over the past two years
17 that has made tens of thousands of New York
18 families newly eligible for assistance.

19 However, and I'm going to echo what my
20 colleague said in the last panel, those
21 expansions will mean nothing to families if
22 they cannot find a childcare program with
23 capacity to care for their child. And
24 childcare programs are shuttering classrooms

1 and closing their doors altogether because
2 they cannot recruit and retain staff due to
3 low wages. And I'll join the chorus: What
4 we need is a permanent line of funding for
5 childcare workforce wage supplements. We
6 also need a rate increase for family, friend,
7 and neighbor providers.

8 And to be very clear, the Executive
9 Budget allocates no new funds for the
10 childcare workforce, it just directs that
11 leftover federal pandemic funds that were
12 allocated in last year's budget that were
13 intended to be paid out in full to the
14 workforce last year. That is all that is in
15 the budget.

16 Also missing in the Executive Budget
17 is funding to end the state's inequitable
18 practice of tying childcare assistance to the
19 exact hours a parent works, and the practice
20 of excluding children from childcare
21 assistance due solely to their immigration
22 status. For any parent or caregiver who
23 needs to work, childcare should not be a
24 barrier.

1 Turning to child poverty reduction, I
2 want to urge inclusion of the MILC pilot in
3 the final budget to create a cash transfer
4 program to parents of infants at a critical
5 period in their development.

6 With respect to the Executive Budget
7 proposal to address concentrated poverty in
8 three communities, it is important -- we're
9 excited to learn more details. It is
10 important to note that the proposal is
11 supported by one-time funding, yet we know
12 that to truly turn the tide on child, family,
13 and community poverty requires sustained
14 public investment over many years.

15 Thank you for your fortitude. I look
16 forward to your questions.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

18 Mr. Peraza, please.

19 MR. PERAZA: My name is Steve Peraza.
20 I'm a senior research and policy associate at
21 Cornell ILR Buffalo Co-Lab. We study the
22 world of work, and we provide partners,
23 practitioners, and leaders -- like you
24 guys -- with actionable intel to help

1 workers.

2 I want to thank you for the
3 opportunity to present testimony today on the
4 2024-2025 New York State Executive Budget.

5 I'm here to report findings from a new study
6 published by Cornell ILR Buffalo Co-Lab, and
7 it's called "The Status of Child Care in
8 New York State."

9 Number one, the policy changes in the
10 fiscal year 2021-2022 have had uneven results
11 across New York State. In our report,
12 Buffalo Co-Lab has shown that the initial
13 influx of New York State funding helped to
14 stabilize the childcare industry during the
15 pandemic, but since the pandemic there has
16 been little progress in the availability and
17 accessibility of childcare across the state.

18 Our research shows an unevenly
19 changing childcare landscape with minor gains
20 in aggregate capacity and meaningful losses
21 in many areas across the state, particularly
22 in upstate counties and low-income
23 communities where childcare deserts and near
24 deserts already existed.

1 Number two, childcare capacity is
2 ticking up, but the industry diversity is on
3 the decline. Data from New York State's
4 Office of Children and Family Services show
5 that statewide both the number of licensed
6 childcare providers and the number of slots
7 available through these providers increased
8 modestly since 2021.

9 In the aggregate, New York State
10 experienced a net gain of 75 licensed
11 providers from 18,731 slots. The increase
12 was driven almost wholly by growth among
13 group family daycare providers, which
14 increased by 501 providers and
15 7,829 childcare slots. These trends did not
16 spill over to family daycare providers. This
17 class of providers lost 381 establishments
18 and 2,938 childcare slots since 2021.

19 And number three, childcare's economic
20 return on investment is really high. We
21 found that if you invest \$1 billion into the
22 New York State childcare industry, you'll see
23 back \$1.8 billion in economic activity,
24 20,300 new jobs.

1 Finally, a childcare compensation fund
2 would raise wages for all childcare workers.
3 Per our analysis, if all childcare workers
4 earning below \$23.55 per hour were elevated
5 to that level, and if those workers earning
6 at or above that level were given 20 percent
7 retention raises, then the median annual
8 subsidy per worker would be on the order of
9 \$13,000 per year.

10 If the model called for a minimum wage
11 of \$23.55, then the total cost of raising
12 wages for childcare workers would be nearly
13 \$800 million per year.

14 Thank you.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you, sir.

16 Ms. Daly, please.

17 MS. DALY: Testing. Hi.

18 Good afternoon, Chairpersons Krueger,
19 Feinstein, Persaud, Davila, and
20 Assemblymember Hevesi, as well as the
21 distinguished persons of the Senate and
22 Assembly. Thank you for allowing NYATEP this
23 opportunity to testify before you on this
24 important topic.

1 My name is Therese Daly, and I'm the
2 interim executive director of NYATEP. We're
3 the statewide workforce development
4 association representing New York education,
5 job training, adult education, postsecondary,
6 and employment providers.

7 NYATEP's members serve over
8 1.2 million New Yorkers annually in education
9 and employment services, and support
10 thousands of businesses in the region as they
11 train and employ talent. We greatly support
12 your -- we greatly appreciate your support
13 and efficacy of the fiscal year 2024 enacted
14 State Budget that included a one-time income
15 disregard for individuals completing an
16 approved employment program.

17 We have some concerns, though, with
18 the language requiring individuals are only
19 eligible for those whose income does not
20 exceed the 200 percent federal poverty level.
21 We believe that this language limits the
22 number of people who are able to participate
23 because of the cap. This excludes
24 individuals in New York City and Long Island.

1 We are asking the Legislature to
2 include in their one-house budget proposals
3 Senator Persaud's Bill S8374, which would
4 remove the federal poverty level requirement
5 for recipients where it concerns one-time
6 disregard of earned income.

7 And as you know, Governor Hochul
8 launched the Office of Strategic Workforce in
9 2022. The office has since announced only
10 \$35 million in funding released to the
11 several projects of the \$150 million set
12 aside for grant funding. Despite the hope,
13 this funding is highly inflexible and
14 includes zero for the grant program. Without
15 a state-dedicated investment, the only
16 workforce funding that the state has is from
17 the federal Workforce Innovation and
18 Opportunity Act -- which has been, honestly,
19 on the chopping block as of late.

20 Our success as a state will be
21 measured by how well we support these
22 New Yorkers as they recover from the
23 pandemic. So our ask: We urge the Governor
24 and the Legislature to spend down the

1 \$150 million in grants that will provide
2 much-needed flexible funding into the
3 workforce system.

4 We also ask that you remove the policy
5 barriers that make it difficult for poor
6 New Yorkers to access good jobs.

7 And NYATEP strongly recommends both
8 the one-house budget proposals include S8374,
9 as above mentioned, and it would remove the
10 federal poverty level requirement for
11 recipients where it concerns the one-time
12 disregard of earned income.

13 Thank you very much.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

15 Ms. Newman.

16 MS. NEWMAN: Hi. My name is Michelle
17 Newman. I'm the associate executive director
18 at COFCCA. We represent over 100 nonprofit
19 organizations providing child welfare
20 services in New York.

21 We were encouraged to see the
22 Governor's State of the State highlight the
23 significant mental health needs of youth.
24 Her Executive Budget, though, falls short of

1 providing the immediate supports needed in
2 child welfare, a critical component of the
3 behavioral health system in a few key ways.

4 First, I want to strongly emphasize
5 the sectorwide ask for additional investments
6 in human services. The COLA, funding it at
7 3.2 percent instead of the proposed 1.5. We
8 also strongly encourage inclusion of the
9 Hevesi-Persaud bill to apply the COLA
10 equitably across the sector. For our
11 members, that means including prevention
12 programs and health homecare managers serving
13 children.

14 Second, the network of providers
15 offering behavioral health services across
16 New York is at risk unless we take state
17 action this year to create a Child Victims
18 Act settlement fund.

19 In 2019, the Legislature passed
20 monumental legislation establishing the
21 Child Victims Act, which provided a mechanism
22 to give victims an avenue to seek justice
23 against their abusers. However, without
24 state intervention, some individuals may

1 never receive their due compensation, and
2 thousands more children will be negatively
3 impacted due to the loss of essential
4 services.

5 A recent independent study from
6 SeaChange notes that child welfare providers
7 do not have the fiscal reserves to fund
8 awards to victims where there is insufficient
9 insurance coverage. Unfortunately, we have
10 found that insurance coverage cannot be found
11 at all in almost 40 percent of the cases in
12 this sector. The study concludes that child
13 welfare providers are at risk of either
14 discontinuing essential services or failing
15 completely.

16 In addition to their child welfare
17 programming, our members offer a broad array
18 of programs and services designed to prevent
19 adverse childhood experiences and to promote
20 child safety and well-being. Those are at
21 risk. Examples include migrant services that
22 support over 7,000 families in New York City
23 alone; homeless services, antiviolenace
24 programs that have had a demonstrated impact

1 in reducing gun violence in communities
2 statewide; mental and behavioral health
3 services like HCBS, CFTSS, and Article 31
4 clinic services.

5 Unfortunatly, the prospect of filing
6 for bankruptcy has now become a reality for
7 one of our programs on Long Island, where
8 cases are moving the fastest. We see this as
9 a sign of things to come later this year when
10 cases move in the rest of the state. We need
11 a path forward in this budget cycle.

12 Finally, I want to flag a provision
13 we've learned more about in the health budget
14 impacting our members -- a proposed
15 \$125 million cost savings in health homes
16 serving children. Over 35,000 children and
17 adolescents, primarily young people in need
18 of support with mental health treatment, will
19 be impacted if this goes through.

20 Thank you.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

22 Let's start with Senator Brisport.

23 SENATOR BRISPORT: Great.

24 And thanks again for being here and

1 for all the work you do. I'm not sure if
2 I'll get all those questions in in three
3 minutes, but I'll just start with -- one's to
4 call back to earlier, with the decoupling
5 bill, we heard testimony from OCFS this
6 morning indicating they expected it to cost
7 in the neighborhood of \$140 million. We've
8 seen articles in the press calling that
9 number unrealistic.

10 Do you think that the estimates of
11 this number look accurate?

12 MS. HILL: I can jump in.

13 So our understanding of the
14 assumptions underneath that estimate is they
15 are assuming that every child who is in
16 part-time care now receiving childcare
17 assistance will go to full-time care.

18 We think that that is an
19 overestimation, particularly given that many
20 children are in publicly funded pre-K and
21 they get childcare assistance for the before-
22 and after-care. And so clearly those
23 children will not go to full-time. And then
24 we also know that families make different

1 decisions.

2 I would also just -- one other note,
3 which is there is a real question as to
4 whether it even needs to be lined out in the
5 budget. There is a proposal to increase --
6 to do a quality increase in rates, and that
7 is not lined out in the budget. It's just
8 going to come out of the 1.8 billion for
9 childcare assistance.

10 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

11 And I have some follow-up questions
12 for Schuyler Center and for Cornell.

13 I think I want to start by -- well,
14 for Schuyler Center, in your 2024 State of
15 New York's Children report, you note that
16 childcare educators are less than 96 percent
17 of occupations in New York State. I'd love
18 for you to elaborate on how those low wages
19 currently impact efforts to restore the
20 childcare sector.

21 And for Cornell, I would love for you
22 to elaborate on how the childcare crisis is
23 currently impacting different populations in
24 New York differently. I know in your report

1 you said that slots are up less than
2 3 percent from the lowest year of the
3 pandemic, and that you noted that in
4 22 counties around New York the number of
5 slots have actually declined.

6 So I'll just have those two questions
7 to you in the time we have.

8 MS. HILL: I will just say really
9 quickly that the state has expanded access to
10 childcare assistance to a really great degree
11 such that, you know, more than 300,000
12 children are newly income-eligible for
13 assistance. But we are not keeping pace as
14 far as capacity, and that's because of the
15 workforce crisis.

16 MR. PERAZA: In areas where there are
17 childcare deserts, there is an increasing
18 loss of family daycare providers. We're just
19 expanding a problem there.

20 Additionally, we did find a positive
21 note in places like St. Lawrence County,
22 where there were increases in providers due
23 to childcare-desert grants.

24 SENATOR BRISPORT: Thank you.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very
2 much.

3 Ranker Assemblyman Ra.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you. Thank you
5 all.

6 For COFCCA, regarding the CVA fund.

7 In addition to that, what issues are your
8 providers having in terms of getting
9 reasonable insurance rates now as a result of
10 all these past claims?

11 MS. NEWMAN: So yes, there is a very
12 significant issue in the sector with
13 obtaining liability insurance for our foster
14 care providers. The CVA impact is undeniable
15 in our ability to achieve coverage in the
16 future.

17 Most if not all of our insurance
18 companies are really bailing on providing
19 foster care coverage, period. It is a
20 mandated requirement of the counties and the
21 state that we have that insurance coverage,
22 and it is a real struggle. We have asked in
23 the past for the state to help us in
24 developing a risk pool to address that issue

1 going forward.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. And then there
3 is another issue, I know was in your written
4 testimony that I don't think you got to, so
5 if you want to talk a little bit about the
6 maximum state aid rate in ensuring (A) that
7 the COLA goes through the end of the provider
8 year, as well as the COLAs building on top of
9 one another.

10 MS. NEWMAN: Yes, thank you for
11 raising that.

12 We understand language in the
13 Executive Budget to extend the COLA through
14 the fiscal year for our providers. Our
15 foster care providers funded through the
16 MSAR, that rate year goes through June 30th.
17 However, in the past the state has dropped
18 out the previous year's COLA, so we received,
19 you know, 5.4 percent and then 4 percent,
20 which inherently was a reduction after that
21 was dropped and then the four was added.

22 So in every other sector we understand
23 that that COLA is stacking and that it is
24 reinvested year over year. It is intended

1 for staff, which is a year-over-year cost.
2 We think that that should be applicable to
3 our programs as well.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Great. Thank you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Persaud.

6 SENATOR PERSAUD: Good afternoon.

7 Thank you. I just wanted to thank all of you
8 for your support as we are trying to -- for
9 the income disregards. You know, we've done
10 some of it already, and you're all so
11 supportive in getting us -- you know, getting
12 us to that point. I just encourage you to
13 keep fighting with us so that we can keep
14 removing those blockages and that families
15 can be lifted up.

16 I also want to ask you about
17 legislation that we've introduced, what's
18 your thoughts about it, where we're asking
19 for an increase in SNAP benefits, cash
20 payments and utilities payments, and also
21 matching it to inflation. What is your
22 thought on that?

23 And there's also another bill that
24 another Senator -- a couple of others have

1 where they're asking for the increased SNAP
2 benefits just to extend to \$100 minimum.

3 What are your thoughts?

4 Any and all of you.

5 MS. HILL: I'm happy to start.

6 Absolutely support all of those
7 proposals. First of all, we know that cash
8 supports are one of the most effective ways
9 to reduce child and family poverty, and we
10 need more of them, and particularly in the
11 areas that -- you know, SNAP benefits and
12 home heating.

13 We also know that food insecurity is
14 on the rise, and this is due largely to the
15 lapse of the federal -- you know, during the
16 pandemic there were different federal
17 supports that expanded SNAP assistance, also
18 dramatically increased the federal child tax
19 credit. And as a result, now that all of
20 these have been pulled back, what -- you
21 know, families are having to make choices
22 again. And we know that families typically
23 will pay their rent before they'll fill the
24 refrigerator. And so we're seeing food

1 insecurity through the roof.

2 We are also really supportive of the
3 School Meals for All, which also addresses
4 this issue.

5 SENATOR PERSAUD: Yeah. We also know
6 that School Meals for All and the Summer EBT
7 is not going to cover all of the children
8 because of the way the federal guidelines
9 are. And so we're asking for a way to fix
10 that. We'll see what the federal government
11 says.

12 And just to be clear, SNAP is already
13 adjusted for rate of inflation. It's the
14 others that are not.

15 MS. HILL: Thank you.

16 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you all very
17 much. And again, thank you for your support.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

19 Assemblymember Maher.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Hey, everybody.

21 So first I wanted to ask a question
22 for Ms. Newman. I just wanted to say thank
23 you for your testimony, all of you. And I
24 was curious what you thought about some of

1 our providers, our childcare providers, that
2 have come to me, to other offices of my
3 colleagues, to say look, there were issues
4 with our own expenses, with how hard it is to
5 provide childcare.

6 They could really use waivers in terms
7 of increasing that ratio where it is
8 appropriate. Is that a problem that you've
9 run into? What have your experiences been
10 working with the agencies necessary to try to
11 accomplish that?

12 MS. NEWMAN: So while some of our
13 providers do, you know, engage in, you know,
14 and provide childcare services, I would
15 probably defer to, you know, my other
16 colleagues at the table to weigh in on the,
17 you know, specific issues facing providers.

18 I represent them on the child welfare
19 side of the world, so it's -- I'm just not
20 the expert there.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: No problem.

22 Does anybody want to touch that one?

23 MS. HILL: I will just say that
24 childcare in New York State is highly

1 regulated for a very good reason. You know,
2 as a parent of children who are long past
3 their childcare days but spent their first
4 years there, I wanted it to be highly
5 regulated.

6 We also know that quality is tied
7 really closely to close interactions with
8 your caregiver, particularly for young
9 children. And so high ratios means much
10 better quality.

11 Obviously we'd be interested to see
12 some of the details, but that's generally --
13 I just want to be clear.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Okay. No worries.
15 Yup.

16 MS. DALY: And I was just going to add
17 to that -- that was so beautifully said --
18 that we found -- NYATEP issues a report on
19 the workforce, and we just released ours
20 today, actually, on the state of the 2023
21 workforce. And I can tell you childcare is
22 the biggest concern. We have childcare and
23 transportation.

24 But the problem behind it is that one

1 of the parents ends up -- cannot afford --
2 they can't afford childcare, so then one
3 parent must give up a career and one parent
4 must stay home. And if our goal is to have a
5 more equitable workforce, it starts with
6 childcare, it starts with transportation for
7 those individuals to get to the jobs or to
8 drop the children off at the childcare.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN MAHER: Thank you. I
10 agree.

11 And I just want to make sure that our
12 conference and my colleagues on both sides of
13 the aisle just also keep in mind the
14 providers, because we need to do more for
15 those folks that are doing the work. But we
16 also have to be mindful of that business
17 model of a provider so we can encourage more
18 individuals to own and run those businesses
19 in the future, because we need to do that as
20 well.

21 Thank you all for the work you do.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

23 Senate?

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

1 Senator Murray.

2 SENATOR MURRAY: Thank you,
3 Chairwoman.

4 And thank you all for being here. I
5 appreciate everything you do.

6 But I want to target this quickly to
7 Ms. Newman.

8 I met with a group -- representatives
9 from your group earlier in the week. You had
10 mentioned a couple of things that are
11 impacting you such as Child Victims Act,
12 trouble getting liability insurance, things
13 like this. But there's another one that's
14 looming big as well: Labor Law 191,
15 regarding manual labor and frequency of pay.

16 Many of the agencies are having suits
17 filed against them. There are claims being
18 made. And this is happening to companies all
19 across New York. But they're being claimed
20 against them saying that damages -- and they
21 take it back as far as six years that they --
22 damages were imposed, but there were no
23 damages. As far as the frequency of pay,
24 they were getting every penny they were

1 supposed to get, whether they were manual
2 labor or not.

3 Our problem is we have no clear
4 definition of manual labor right now. So
5 they were going on the site that -- yes, they
6 were manual labor, they should have been paid
7 weekly. They were paid biweekly. They got
8 every penny, didn't lose anything. However,
9 they have these massive lawsuits. And I was
10 told that lawsuits facing some of the
11 agencies that you represent were in the
12 numbers of 30 million or so.

13 What would happen -- right now the
14 good news is the Governor put language in --
15 our Article VII language in the ELFA section
16 that says they won't have a private right of
17 action, they can't file suit and get damages.
18 The courts agreed a couple days after that
19 language came out. Looks like that's good,
20 but appeals have been filed.

21 If those appeals go through, what
22 could that do to the agencies that -- I mean,
23 what is the damage we're looking at?

24 MS. NEWMAN: So I would have to check

1 back in with some of our providers to get you
2 details on, you know, the suits that they're
3 facing and the impacts of those.

4 But I will tell you, you know, the
5 study that was done by SeaChange has looked
6 at the fiscal viability of the entire sector,
7 and the surpluses don't exist. There isn't
8 additional funding, you know, in our
9 programs.

10 But I would have to, again, check back
11 in with our providers on that particular
12 issue. And we are looking at those
13 provisions within the Article VII.

14 SENATOR MURRAY: Yeah, I've heard a
15 number somewhere in the area of \$30 million,
16 could be the number.

17 But if this language stays, which I'm
18 strongly urging and hoping that the language
19 stays, it would be okay, they wouldn't have
20 the private right of action, because there
21 were no damages. So -- but if that were to
22 happen, the impact on small businesses -- but
23 I'm concerned about your agencies and the
24 services that are provided -- they couldn't

1 exist. So we --

2 MS. NEWMAN: Thank you for your
3 support.

4 (Laughter.)

5 SENATOR MURRAY: Yeah, we're urging
6 everyone, keep the language, please, because
7 we need that protection.

8 Thank you.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

10 Assemblymember Mitaynes.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

12 The Cornell ILR survey participants in
13 the childcare sector have indicated that
14 providers only have half their classrooms
15 open. Could you say a bit more about how the
16 childcare sector is having difficulty
17 staffing childcare slots and making them
18 actually available?

19 MR. PERAZA: So we're finding that
20 there just aren't enough workers for these
21 providers to service all of the customers or
22 parents that are coming to them. And this
23 has been a major crisis. In a qualitative
24 study of providers in Erie County, a major

1 crisis has been that there have been a lot of
2 subsidized families coming. And because
3 those subsidies aren't meeting the true cost
4 of care, and because workers are leaving,
5 childcare providers, to work in service
6 industries and other local competitors, they
7 have to leave -- our group family providers,
8 family daycare providers are leaving spots
9 open in order to profit. In order to keep,
10 you know, their business balanced.

11 It's been a -- this is one of the --
12 the number-one criticism among providers is
13 that they're unable to actually fill capacity
14 because they cannot pay for the workers that
15 are -- that they employ.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Yeah, and I
17 see the rest of you nodding your head, too.
18 Thank you.

19 I yield the rest of my time.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you,
21 Assemblymember.

22 Assemblyman Manktelow.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Thank you.

24 What we see up in upstate New York,

1 where I'm from, we see a lot of businesses
2 that are moving to providing childcare at
3 their businesses as one of the perks or
4 benefits of working there.

5 I was just wondering, what are your
6 thoughts on that?

7 MR. PERAZA: I think it's a
8 fascinating approach, one that needs to be
9 studied carefully. Because we do see that
10 there are other alternatives. For example,
11 the Governor's kind of approach to Micron
12 and -- so we really want to see -- we need to
13 have both, I think, multiple ways of
14 addressing this problem. Particularly the
15 workforce is the largest one that providers
16 are talking about.

17 But it is particularly interesting to
18 see what this enterprise model will yield.
19 It's not necessarily one or the other,
20 though. I think that's an important
21 designation to make, that we're seeing
22 through this research and then also from the
23 work that our colleagues are doing at Empire
24 State Campaign for Child Care.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Yeah, yeah, I
2 agree. I don't think there's
3 one-size-fits-all here, I think it's got to
4 be from both sides, of course.

5 If businesses choose to do this, what
6 it does is it allows the business owners, the
7 companies, to know they have a good solid
8 workforce. It allows the workers to know
9 that they have a place for their children to
10 go.

11 And my other thought is businesses
12 that do this, would you support them having a
13 tax break for doing so?

14 MR. PERAZA: I think that -- you know,
15 I don't really know if I would support -- I'm
16 not really thinking about it that way, as
17 much as I'm thinking about multiple
18 approaches and economic activity growing as a
19 result of investing in workers.

20 I think the business enterprise model
21 doesn't necessarily directly address the
22 workforce compensation issue. It does
23 address providers, which I think is a very
24 important constituency in this industry. But

1 right now the number-one crisis is workforce.
2 And so my only concern about that particular
3 policy is that it doesn't directly address
4 the workforce.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Well, I think
6 part of it does, because the workforce -- if
7 they don't have a place for their child,
8 you're not going to have the workforce.
9 That's what we're seeing across the board.

10 And just asking you really quick --
11 take your hat off as who you are now. But as
12 a taxpayer, would you support the tax credits
13 for the businesses?

14 MR. PERAZA: Yes.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Perfect.

16 Thank you so much for your testimony,
17 and thank you all for being here.

18 Thank you.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. Thank
20 you very much.

21 I'm going to close with my last three
22 minutes. Thank you to Senator Krueger.

23 Okay, very quickly, because I'm
24 mindful of the time. Yes or no question: Is

1 there any way to have a successful childcare
2 system in New York State without a permanent
3 workforce fund?

4 MS. HILL: It sounds like a double
5 negative or something. But no, there is no
6 way.

7 (Laughter.)

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Say it the right
9 way.

10 MS. HILL: Can I be very clear --

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Did you say it
12 the right way?

13 MS. HILL: Yeah, I'm going to say it
14 in the affirmative. We need a permanent
15 Workforce Compensation Fund for the childcare
16 workforce.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Do you agree with
18 that?

19 (Laughter.)

20 MS. DALY: Yes.

21 MR. PERAZA: Yes.

22 MS. NEWMAN: Who could not?

23 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay, great.

24 Ms. Daly and everybody, thank you for

1 your testimony.

2 I don't have a follow-up for you. I
3 do have other follow-ups, so please forgive
4 me. And I'll ask them quick. So you know
5 what, I'm just going to list them out and see
6 what we can get.

7 So, Ms. Hill, if you could at some
8 point, either during this testimony or after,
9 explain the rate increase for family neighbor
10 childcare, that would be very helpful.

11 Mr. Peraza, I would like to know more
12 about the uneven benefits and what -- who are
13 we hitting? Is this rural, is this minority
14 communities?

15 And then one other thing for Cornell,
16 if I could ask. I'd like to know,
17 potentially long term, how many childcare
18 workers are on public assistance? Because
19 there's a logic to just redirecting that
20 money and paying the darn workforce. Sorry
21 for my language.

22 And then, Ms. Newman -- and I'm sorry
23 about the time -- what would happen if your
24 agencies don't have liability insurance?

1 Those are my questions. So, Ms. Hill,
2 go. Lightning round, I guess. Thank you.

3 MS. HILL: Really fast. With respect
4 to family, friend and neighbor childcare,
5 which we -- it's also referred to as legally
6 exempt childcare -- they have typically not
7 been included -- well, they have not been
8 included in the stabilization grants.

9 And when we think about a workforce
10 fund, the permanent workforce fund, it will
11 likely follow a similar model. A very direct
12 way to raise rates for family, friend, and
13 neighbor is through a rate increase.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

15 Mr. Peraza?

16 MR. PERAZA: Uneven benefits of that
17 bundle of policies, 2021 to 2022, we see
18 75 licensed providers that are new, 18,731
19 slots that are new. But we have seen
20 388 establishments gone among family daycare
21 providers.

22 And then, look, in Erie County we've
23 lost providers, we've lost slots. And our
24 providers are saying, We need more money to

1 help our workers.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

3 And Ms. Newman, with your 26 seconds.

4 MS. NEWMAN: Oh, it's much shorter
5 than that.

6 Without liability insurance, we can't
7 provide services.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Which means that
9 we're violating the law, hurting those kids,
10 and can't provide services.

11 Good. Okay. Thank you all for your
12 testimony. I greatly appreciate it.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Wait, you didn't
14 let the last person answer.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Oh, Ms. Daly, I'm
16 so sorry.

17 MS. DALY: Oh, no, I was just going to
18 say thank you.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Oh. Well, thank
20 you.

21 (Laughter.)

22 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. Thank you
23 to everybody on this panel.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Panel F.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Is that me?

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Yes, it's you.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. Actually,
4 it's Panel -- yup, Panel F. If I can call
5 down Raising New York, Jenn O'Connor, the
6 coalition lead; the New York State Alliance
7 of Boys & Girls Clubs, Justin Reuter, the
8 CEO. The Bridge Project, we have Stephanie
9 Silkowski, director of policy and strategic
10 initiatives. And the Adirondack Birth to
11 Three Alliance, with Kate Ryan, the director.

12 Thank you for coming down.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I just got very
14 good advice from another colleague that we're
15 on F, but if people who are on G want to head
16 towards the front, you can get into place
17 more quickly once Panel F is done.

18 Not that I'm pressuring you at all,
19 you're here. So thank you. Thank you.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Sure.

21 Ms. O'Connor, please.

22 MS. O'CONNOR: Hi. Thank you for
23 having me. Jenn O'Connor, director of
24 partnerships and early childhood policy for

1 The Education Trust-New York.

2 The Ed Trust-New York runs the
3 Raising NY Coalition, and that's a diverse
4 statewide coalition of parents, early
5 childhood education, business and health
6 organizations.

7 A number of our members have already
8 testified here today, so I'm not going to
9 reiterate what they said. But our focus is
10 on improving long-term outcomes for infants
11 and toddlers who are low-income, children of
12 color, and from underserved populations.

13 I'm going to read you a number here:
14 New York State spends \$23.9 billion on all
15 early childhood programs, but of that
16 \$23.9 billion, only \$5.26 billion is spent on
17 childcare, family support, and prevention
18 programs. So I'm going to focus my remarks
19 to those issues.

20 We've got a couple of high points for
21 the Raising NY Coalition. One is to invest
22 in the childcare workforce -- you've heard
23 that over and over again today. New York
24 State has greatly increased capacity, but

1 increased capacity to what? Programs are
2 closing. Providers don't want to be
3 providers, can't be providers anymore because
4 they're not being paid enough.

5 So again, increasing capacity is
6 fantastic, but it doesn't matter if there are
7 no programs for kids to be in. We need to
8 revisit and adopt the decoupling bill. Dede
9 already told you it's probably not going to
10 cost what the state thought it was going to
11 cost, and so we need to look into that again.
12 And we need to support a move toward
13 utilization of a cost-estimation model away
14 from the market rate.

15 We have done a cost-estimation model
16 with Prenatal to Five Fiscal Strategies,
17 which is a national group. We have spoken to
18 OCFS about using that cost model to influence
19 their cost model. They seem very open to
20 that. And so we would just like your support
21 in again moving away from the market rate and
22 towards a cost-estimation model.

23 Our other big issue is home visiting.
24 The state spends about \$46 million on the

1 Healthy Families Program, and that program
2 serves every county in the state at this
3 point. The state also spends a little over
4 \$4 million on the Nurse-Family Partnership
5 program -- that's at the Health table, so I
6 won't bore you with that -- but I will bore
7 you, they want a \$1.5 million increase.

8 But I'll focus my remarks on the
9 Parent-Child Plus program, which only gets a
10 couple hundred thousand dollars. They're
11 asking for an increase to \$500,000 this year.
12 And that expansion is important because they
13 are primarily an early literacy program, they
14 focus on reading. They hire graduates of the
15 program, so folks who work -- who live in the
16 community go back to work in the community.
17 And they also, over the last couple of years,
18 have used expansion dollars to connect with
19 home-based childcare programs.

20 Really, really briefly, Raising NY --
21 also it doesn't sit at this table -- but
22 supports the Working Families tax credit,
23 evidence-based investments in early literacy.
24 We launched the New York State Campaign for

1 Early Literacy yesterday --

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you. Thank
3 you, Ms. O'Connor.

4 MS. O'CONNOR: -- continuous Medicaid
5 coverage for children aged zero to six, and
6 then an 11 percent increase in Early
7 Intervention.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very
9 much.

10 Please, yeah. You've just got to hold
11 it.

12 MS. RIVENBURGH: Sorry. First time.

13 Good afternoon, Chairperson Krueger
14 and Children and Family Chairpersons Brisport
15 and Hevesi and the rest of the committee. My
16 name is Lori Rivenburgh, and I'm with the
17 Town of Wallkill Boys & Girls Club, serving
18 Northern Orange and Sullivan counties in the
19 Hudson Valley.

20 I'm testifying today on behalf of the
21 New York State Alliance for Boys & Girls
22 Clubs, to speak to you about the important
23 role after-school plays in communities across
24 the state, ensuring kids feel safe, valued,

1 and respected. Thank you for this tremendous
2 opportunity.

3 The New York State Alliance of Boys &
4 Girls Clubs represents 118 club sites across
5 New York State serving 92,000 children
6 annually. While this is a substantial
7 number, the fact is every day over
8 580,000 kids in New York leave school with
9 nowhere to go. They risk being unsupervised,
10 unguided, and unsafe.

11 Kids today face many challenges,
12 including gang and gun violence, substance
13 use and abuse and other unhealthy behaviors.
14 Ensuring that they have a safe place to go
15 after school where they feel protected and
16 supported is critical to the future of our
17 young people.

18 For more than 160 years, Boys and
19 Girls Clubs have fostered hope and
20 opportunity by cultivating the potential in
21 every young person. Clubs offer homework
22 help, career readiness, and programs such as
23 arts, sports, and financial literacy -- all
24 in safe and nurturing environments.

1 Everything offered at the club has an
2 educational component which helps children
3 and youth at school, build character and
4 leadership skills, and engage in healthy
5 behaviors.

6 Historically there have been two major
7 funding streams in New York State for after
8 school: Advantage After School Program and
9 Empire State After-School Program. The
10 Executive Budget proposes to combine these
11 two funding streams into a single program in
12 order to create efficiencies and streamline
13 differences between the two programs.

14 We are encouraged by the news that the
15 Executive and OCFS are working on a new RFP
16 for this funding stream, but strongly
17 encourage the timely release of the RFP. And
18 also we hope to see that the RFP is fair,
19 flexible, and allows Boys and Girls Clubs
20 across the state an equal opportunity to
21 apply. In addition, I hope it takes into
22 consideration the differences in communities
23 and size of providers across the state, as a
24 smaller, rural Boys and Girls Club

1 sometimes -- competitive processes have been
2 prohibitive in the past, and our rural
3 communities still see the same challenges as
4 our bigger metro communities.

5 Lastly, we encourage the Legislature
6 to continue to champion additional funding
7 for after-school. Typically the Legislature
8 adds funding for one or two of the previously
9 mentioned after-school programs, and we
10 encourage you to do the same this year. As I
11 mentioned, there are many underserved
12 children and youth across the state who could
13 benefit from additional funding.

14 Thank you for the opportunity to
15 testify today, and I'm happy to answer any
16 questions that you may have.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you so
18 much.

19 MS. SILKOWSKI: Okay. Hello,
20 everyone. Thank you all so much for being
21 here. It's nice to see so many faces still
22 here late in the day.

23 I'm Stephanie Silkowski, and I'm the
24 director of policy for The Bridge Project.

1 We are a cash transfer program for expecting
2 mothers. We have 1200 program participants
3 scattered throughout the five boroughs, and
4 have recently expanded to Rochester and
5 Buffalo.

6 I'm really thrilled to be here to talk
7 about the economic hardships that many of the
8 moms in our program face, and many of your
9 constituents. Poverty and in particular
10 child poverty, as you know well, is high and
11 will likely continue to worsen if economic
12 trends continue.

13 Half of the top six cities in the
14 entire U.S. with the highest child-poverty
15 rates are in New York State. In Rochester,
16 Buffalo, and Syracuse, one in two children
17 lives in poverty -- and New York City isn't
18 far behind, with one in four children living
19 in poverty. Additionally, a recent report
20 showed that almost half of New York City
21 residents can't actually afford to live
22 there, can't afford basic needs, and you need
23 to be pulling in six figures to afford
24 childcare and housing and food.

1 And we can't talk about any of these
2 issues without really centering the
3 disproportionate impact on communities of
4 color. This inequity is also reflected in
5 New York State's really significant
6 disparities in maternal health outcomes
7 across racial lines.

8 We can't continue to turn a blind eye
9 to both child poverty and maternal health.
10 And while some progress has been made with
11 philanthropically funded programs like ours
12 at The Bridge Project, and the now-expired
13 child tax credit, there is really little
14 progress to address the need statewide.

15 So I'm really proud to be here in
16 support of the MILC bill, the Mothers and
17 Infants Lasting Change Allowance bill, which
18 would create a publicly administered and
19 adopted cash-transfer program particularly
20 for low-income moms during the last three
21 months of their pregnancy and throughout the
22 first 18 months of a child's life.

23 There is a ton of research and data
24 that I could point you to on the efficacy of

1 cash transfers, particularly for such a
2 targeted population like the one that the
3 MILC bill addresses. And the MILC bill, I
4 think, is particularly special in addressing
5 two issues all at once in a relatively
6 simple, cost-effective way.

7 If you care about solving child
8 poverty, if you care about addressing
9 maternal health, I would really urge you to
10 support this bill. This would be the largest
11 cash-transfer program of its kind to exist
12 across the country and would really be a bold
13 step for New York State to lead here. So we
14 urge the Legislature and Governor Hochul to
15 include the MILC bill in the budget.

16 And happy to answer any questions
17 about cash-transfer policy, our program, or
18 the bill.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Well, thank you.

20 MS. RYAN: Thank you for the
21 opportunity to testify. My name is
22 Kate Ryan, and I'm the director of the
23 Adirondack Birth to Three Alliance, a
24 coalition of childcare providers, employers,

1 community organizations, and parents across
2 the Adirondacks and the North Country.

3 The alliance is focused on connecting
4 resources to those in need, assisting our
5 community, collaborative opportunities, and
6 supporting policy and funding for young
7 children and their families.

8 The Adirondack region is home to
9 approximately 7,000 children three years of
10 age or younger. Our population density is
11 less than 1/10th of the state average. Our
12 landscape presents unique challenges.
13 Families often need to travel over an hour to
14 access employment, resources, healthcare, and
15 very often childcare. We require an array of
16 options for care such as family, group, and
17 center-based childcare. To do this, our
18 region requires varied strategies for
19 recruitment and retention of providers while
20 also ensuring quality, affordability, and
21 accessibility.

22 Careful consideration is needed for
23 policy and funding to positively impact our
24 communities. Rural regions require childcare

1 beyond our deserts. Although nearly
2 70 percent of our region census tracts remain
3 childcare deserts, this isn't the full story.

4 Families often require childcare in
5 higher-population-density areas not deemed to
6 be deserts, as this is where parents drive to
7 work. Unfortunately, these population
8 centers are sometimes left out of funding
9 opportunities. Increasing capacity in these
10 areas is critical to community and economic
11 success.

12 We need investments in the childcare
13 workforce. I would like to share our support
14 for the Empire State Campaign for
15 Child Care's agenda. As a member of the
16 campaign, we too support the need to invest
17 in the childcare workforce. There is simply
18 not enough capacity until we recognize those
19 in the field must be compensated for their
20 work. We will simply never stabilize the
21 sector decoupling childcare assistance from
22 direct hours of parents' work.

23 The alliance also supports fully
24 funding the policy adopted in 2022 to do

1 this. This simple policy recognizes that
2 family life is dynamic, and if we want people
3 to stay in the Adirondacks, we need to help
4 them do the simple things we all take for
5 granted: Going to the doctor, running
6 errands. When going to an appointment may
7 take several hours of travel, knowing you can
8 access childcare is a blessing and a benefit
9 that will develop in healthier, happier,
10 less-stressed lives.

11 We require continued support of
12 childcare resource and referral agencies.
13 Because we have and require a higher
14 percentage of home-based childcare, our
15 community relies on our CCR&Rs to skillfully
16 target resources to support new providers to
17 become licensed and offer technical
18 assistance and professional assistance to
19 providers. It is critically important that
20 CCR&R's funding formula recognizes the time
21 and effort they need to build capacity in an
22 environment relying on family and group
23 family childcare. Yes, the federal support
24 helped in a time of crisis, but we need

1 continued investment in access, quality, and
2 affordability.

3 Recently the state increased the
4 childcare assistance eligibility threshold,
5 and this has helped families who can find
6 healthcare. But we need to do more to
7 recruit and support childcare providers. We
8 can't forget that these are businesses, many
9 owned by single mothers. We need to invest
10 in their capacity to maintain and grow their
11 businesses.

12 We also need to invest in
13 QUALITYstarsNY to ensure it will provide
14 high-quality childcare. My comments today
15 and the specific recommendations included in
16 my written testimony only address a fraction
17 of the issues faced in the Adirondacks and
18 other rural regions of New York State.

19 I appreciate the opportunity to share
20 these thoughts and hope to work with you to
21 identify strategies to support the families
22 living and working in the Adirondacks.

23 Thank you.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

1 Okay. Sorry, you guys -- oh, yes,
2 perfect.

3 Assemblymember Mitaynes.

4 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

5 This question is for Ms. O'Connor.

6 Can you tell us what sets ParentChild+ apart
7 from other home visiting programs?

8 MS. O'CONNOR: So like I said, there
9 are three main home visiting programs in the
10 State of New York, and then a number of local
11 home visiting programs. They each serve
12 specific populations, so eligibility is
13 different for each of those programs.

14 Like I said, ParentChild+ really likes
15 to hire graduates of the program to go back
16 and work as home visitors in the community,
17 so that's number one. Number two is the
18 focus on early literacy and language
19 development and reading. And number three is
20 their very unique partnerships with childcare
21 programs, with home-based childcare programs.

22 So they have a curriculum that they
23 use to go into those home-based childcare
24 programs and work with those providers like

1 they would work with parents, which we just
2 think is a really great model and a great
3 continuum.

4 So we need all of the programs, but
5 ParentChild+ has been historically
6 underfunded compared to the other programs,
7 and so that's why we're asking for that
8 increase and that expansion.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MITAYNES: Thank you.

10 MS. O'CONNOR: Thank you.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Senator Cleare.

12 Ask and you shall receive.

13 (Laughter.)

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you, Chair.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Sure.

16 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. So first of
17 all, I have to -- I agree with -- you know,
18 you've got to pay people. It's -- that's it,
19 that's the bottom line. People have to get
20 paid.

21 But I want to know more about some of
22 your services in particular. Are they across
23 the state? Where are the services you spoke
24 about? Jenn, I'm sorry.

1 MS. O'CONNOR: So I talked -- so
2 Raising NY is a coalition. So the services
3 that we are supporting are childcare
4 workforce, home visiting workforce, Early
5 Intervention workforce. When we talk about
6 the workforce, we're really talking about the
7 caring community as a whole.

8 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay.

9 MS. O'CONNOR: Statewide.

10 SENATOR CLEARE: All right, thank you.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great, thank you.

12 I think that's it except for me, so
13 please put two hours on the clock for my next
14 round of questioning.

15 (Laughter.)

16 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Sorry.

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'm noticing.

18 I'm watching.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Yeah, I know.

20 I'll never be here again, so I'm going to
21 enjoy it.

22 (Laughter.)

23 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: So, Ms. O'Connor,
24 let me start with you. Can you explain the

1 importance of early childhood literacy,
2 particularly when you focus on the "serve and
3 return" -- that's correct, that's what I'm
4 asking -- and how that prevents adverse
5 childhood experiences and trauma. In less
6 than 30 seconds, please.

7 (Laughter.)

8 MS. O'CONNOR: So when you're talking
9 about the zero to three or zero to five
10 population, you're talking about attachment.
11 You're talking about language development.
12 You're not talking about reading, right, at
13 that point in time.

14 So "serve and return" is me talking to
15 you, you talking to me. Me reading to you,
16 you hearing my voice. You're learning words.
17 And that strengthens the nurturing and
18 strengthens the relationship. And we know
19 that adverse childhood experiences can be
20 mitigated by a relationship with a caring
21 adult.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great. Thank you
23 very much.

24 For the Boys and Girls Clubs, a quick

1 question for you. Very interesting to hear
2 about the timely -- importance of the timely
3 release of the RFP. Please know that we are
4 a resource. If that doesn't come down or the
5 RFP is not where you'd want it, please let us
6 know and we can intervene.

7 One quick question; I think it's a yes
8 or a no. Do you support the After-School
9 Network's ask for ALEP, for the 219 million
10 that is above and beyond what we've got --
11 100 million -- in this year's budget?

12 MS. RIVENBURGH: Yes.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great. Thank
14 you. That was easy.

15 (Laughter.)

16 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Ms. Silkowski, I
17 just want to tell you we hear you about the
18 bill and -- the MILC bill. I don't know what
19 else to say about that except Senator Persaud
20 is right again.

21 And then Ms. Ryan, could I ask you a
22 question? Because this has been bothering me
23 for a while. Because I had the luxury of
24 visiting the Adirondacks; we went to an

1 outdoor childcare center. It was the coolest
2 thing I've ever seen. But part of the
3 problem for childcare in the Adirondacks is
4 transportation. Can you speak to that a bit
5 and how we address that, you know, perhaps in
6 this budget?

7 MS. RYAN: I think the general support
8 of building the workforce around childcare.
9 I mean, the reality is that to break the
10 barriers of transportation, we need childcare
11 close to where the families are. And so that
12 needs to be -- that's often family and group
13 family childcare. And so we have to build
14 the capacity, and we need the providers to do
15 it.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: It's not easy,
17 like, you know, buy a couple of buses to take
18 kids -- no, you've got to fix those deserts.

19 MS. RYAN: I don't think -- yup.
20 Nope.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Got it. I very
22 much appreciate it.

23 Thank you all for your testimony here
24 today. Thank you.

1 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you all
2 very much.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay, Panel G.
4 From the Albany Damien Center, Perry
5 Junjulas, the executive director. From SAGE
6 Advocacy Services for LGBTQ+ Elders, MJ Okma,
7 senior manager for advocacy and government
8 relations. And from Equality New York,
9 Erin Brigid, community organizer.

10 Thank you all for being here tonight.
11 Feel free. Anybody who wants to jump in,
12 thank you.

13 MR. JUNJULAS: I'm Perry Junjulas, I'm
14 the executive director at the Albany Damien
15 Center and also a person who's been living
16 with AIDS since 1995.

17 I can definitively state today that I
18 am alive today because of the investments New
19 York State has made in HIV and AIDS services
20 in New York State, for which I am extremely
21 grateful.

22 I speak to you today on behalf of
23 very-low-income persons with HIV who are
24 homeless and unstably housed outside of

1 New York City who do not have access to
2 rental assistance. Numerous studies have
3 shown that housing is an evidence-based HIV
4 health intervention that enables persons with
5 HIV to take their medications, which extends
6 their lives and stops the spread of HIV to
7 others.

8 Now, since 2016 in New York City,
9 New York State and the city have ensured that
10 every single low-income New Yorker with HIV
11 has had access to housing with the rate cap
12 of 30 percent of their income. This is not
13 the case for persons with HIV outside of
14 New York City.

15 Now, for the past five years, the
16 New York State budget has contained the
17 intent to fix this issue. But the language
18 has not housed one single person with HIV
19 outside of New York City. This year's budget
20 contains the same language that will not help
21 anyone. This language allows but does not
22 require local departments of social services
23 to provide meaningful HIV housing assistance
24 and provides no state funding to support the

1 cost to local districts outside of New York
2 City.

3 To finally provide equitable statewide
4 access to HIV housing supports, we need to
5 correct the relevant Aid to Localities
6 language on public assistance benefits and
7 enact Article VII legislation to do three
8 things: Ensure that every local department
9 of social services provides low-income
10 persons with HIV access to the New York State
11 HIV Emergency Rental Allowance Program to
12 support 100 percent of HUD fair-market value,
13 as it is in New York City. Number two, make
14 affordable housing protections available
15 statewide to cap the share of rent for a
16 low-income person with HIV at 30 percent of
17 income. And number three, recognize the
18 fiscal reality of counties outside of
19 New York City and have the state pick up
20 100 percent of the cost of providing the
21 shelter allowances.

22 Now, providing this assistance is
23 cost-neutral. An analysis by OTDA fiscal
24 staff has determined the costs in the first

1 year would be 3 million, offset by Medicaid
2 savings of 4 million. In the outyears,
3 Medicaid savings would exceed housing costs
4 by as much as 13 million annually.

5 Furthermore, OTDA Acting Commissioner
6 Guinn has expressed support for this change
7 in the budget language.

8 I thank you for listening to the
9 testimony today.

10 MR. OKMA: Hi. Good afternoon. My
11 name is MJ Okma, the senior manager of
12 advocacy and government relations at SAGE.

13 SAGE has been serving LGBTQ+ elders
14 and older New Yorkers living with HIV for
15 over four decades, providing comprehensive
16 social services and community-building
17 programming through a network of
18 LGBTQ+-welcoming older adult centers across
19 New York City. We also engage in partners in
20 the Hudson Valley, Long Island, Syracuse,
21 Rochester, and Buffalo.

22 New York State ranks among the top
23 10 states in terms of percentage of the
24 population that identifies as LGBTQ+, and

1 one-third of LGBTQ+ New Yorkers are over the
2 age of 50. Additionally, the number of
3 New Yorkers aging with HIV is also growing
4 rapidly, with 73 percent of all New Yorkers
5 living with HIV estimated to be over 50 by
6 2030.

7 LGBTQ+ elders and older people living
8 with HIV rely more heavily on community
9 service providers due to thin support
10 networks, yet they're often distrustful of
11 providers after a long history of stigma and
12 discrimination. For many of those elders,
13 New York State is their lifeline.

14 It is because of them I'm here today
15 asking for your support in this year's
16 budget, including a renewal of 300,000 to
17 support LGBTQ+ residents and community
18 members in and around New York State's first
19 LGBTQ+-welcoming affordable elder housing
20 developments; a renewal of 150,000 to
21 increase our multilingual services and
22 programming; a renewal of \$2,000 for the SAGE
23 Veterans Program; and a new funding
24 designation of 150,000 to help meet the

1 growing demand for services among New Yorkers
2 aging with HIV.

3 With your support, SAGE has been able
4 to evolve and expand to best address the
5 widespread disparities facing these
6 populations. We've worked with prominent
7 developers to directly address the housing
8 insecurity experienced by the communities.
9 We grew the upstate footprint of the SAGEVets
10 program. We launched food pantry initiatives
11 to help participants in and around our
12 centers -- that are open for all -- which
13 further integrated them in their community.
14 And we expanded our multilingual programming
15 into Spanish, Mandarin, and Cantonese.

16 Additionally, our SAGEVets program
17 supports the unique needs of LGBTQ+ veterans,
18 aiding in their overall health and wellness
19 and providing referrals to counsel regarding
20 discharge status upgrades. We provide this
21 life-changing support while saving New York
22 significant amounts of funding by ensuring
23 veterans access all their federal benefits
24 instead of relying solely on state programs

1 to address their housing and healthcare
2 needs.

3 This year we're also seeking a new
4 funding designation to expand the
5 SAGEPositive program that connects the
6 growing population of New Yorkers aging with
7 HIV to a wide range of services, including
8 sexual wellness workshops, social events,
9 HIV and STI testing, case management,
10 caregiver support, educational forums, and
11 more.

12 I also want to echo Perry's remark
13 about the urgent call to action to end
14 homelessness among New Yorkers living with
15 HIV by ensuring all New Yorkers have access
16 to the meaningful rental assistance that has
17 been available in New York City since 2016.
18 As currently written, the budget language has
19 not successfully housed a single person with
20 HIV despite being in the past five budgets.
21 This language must be corrected.

22 SAGE also supports the inclusion of
23 A6214 and S7663 in the active budget to
24 increase the SNAP minimum benefit to \$100.

1 Thank you so much.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

3 MS. BRIGID: Thank you for this
4 opportunity. My name is Erin Brigid. I
5 serve as the community organizer for
6 Equality New York, the only statewide
7 advocacy organization dedicated to advancing
8 equality and justice for LGBTQI+ New Yorkers
9 and their families.

10 In 2023 we faced an alarming surge of
11 over 500 anti-LGBTQI+ bills nationwide,
12 including in New York State. This wave poses
13 a serious threat to the progress and safety
14 of our community.

15 Equality New York has been at the
16 forefront working relentlessly to protect and
17 promote the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals and
18 their families. Our organization represents
19 over 120 organizations and 5500 members
20 deeply invested in direct community
21 engagement and empowerment, and it is this
22 diverse and vibrant community that I
23 represent here today.

24 Recent data from the Williams

1 Institute at UCLA indicates that 5.5 percent
2 of New York State's population, equating to
3 approximately 853,000 people, identify as
4 LGBTQI+. Our work has highlighted the need
5 for safer environments in schools for trans
6 and nonbinary youth, improved access to
7 health and legal services, and the
8 rectification of systemic issues that lead to
9 the misgendering and disrespect of our
10 community members.

11 Despite our progress, there remains
12 much to be done. Through initiatives like
13 the LGBTQI+ Advocacy Institute we have
14 catalyzed over three dozen statewide projects
15 tackling critical issues ranging from
16 educational reforms to healthcare
17 improvements. Notable achievements include
18 the establishment of a transgender
19 peer-support program in Rochester hospitals
20 and the development of a gay/straight
21 alliance in schools across upstate New York.

22 A significant challenge we have
23 identified is the lack of specialized skills
24 among governmental service-based

1 organizations to adequately serve LGBTQ+
2 communities, particularly in the transgender,
3 nonconforming, nonbinary individuals.

4 Additionally, many LGBTQ+ individuals
5 are unaware of their rights when interacting
6 with human services. This is especially true
7 for TGNCNB individuals who face significant
8 hurdles in accessing these services,
9 particularly among BIPOC communities.

10 The Gender Expression
11 Nondiscrimination Act passed in 2019 has been
12 a pivotal step in protecting these rights,
13 but there's still a long road ahead.
14 Therefore, we're requesting 100,000 in
15 funding. This amount will make a substantial
16 impact in addressing the physical, mental,
17 and economic challenges facing the LGBTQI+
18 and TGNCNB communities -- 75,000 to conduct
19 12 cultural sensitivity training sessions and
20 25,000 to develop and disseminate a
21 comprehensive Know Your Rights campaign.

22 Thank you so much for considering our
23 request and your commitment to serving the
24 people of New York.

1 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very
2 much.

3 Okay, you guys are stuck with me. So
4 here goes my three minutes.

5 So first, Mr. Junjulas, am I correct
6 in understanding that OTDA has a study saying
7 that this is going to save money, and still
8 we're not doing this? How is that possible?

9 MR. JUNJULAS: {Mic issue.} Sorry.
10 We worked with OTDA fiscal staff on an
11 analysis, and they agreed with our
12 assumptions that showed the Medicaid savings
13 and that we do have backup support from that.

14 So yeah, I do not understand exactly.

15 And also, too, it will prevent new HIV
16 infections. And that's one of the big
17 takeaways here, is that when we get people
18 housed, we're able to take our meds, we do
19 not pass the virus then on to others, and so
20 therefore we can actually end the epidemic.

21 So costwise it makes sense, but also
22 humanwise it makes sense, because we're going
23 to be saving lives through this initiative.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: And that analysis

1 was done in what year? Just curious. I
2 don't need to know this, I'm just curious.

3 MR. JUNJULAS: What's -- I'm sorry?

4 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: The analysis was
5 done in what year?

6 MR. JUNJULAS: The analysis was done
7 this past year.

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Oh, this past
9 year.

10 MR. JUNJULAS: Yeah, this past year we
11 actually --

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Ah, so one would
13 have hoped it would have been reflected in
14 this year's budget, but not so far.

15 Okay. And the language change that
16 you're talking about, it's just a "may" to a
17 "shall," right? That's what you're talking
18 about?

19 MR. JUNJULAS: It's -- it's really
20 just the -- in the Aid for Localities, and
21 also in the Article VII, you know, just to --
22 right now the language cannot house anyone
23 because local districts are not required,
24 they can opt in. And nobody's opting in,

1 because of the money.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Very much
3 appreciate it. We'll look to pursue that in
4 the budget, and I will -- there were a lot of
5 smaller asks for both of those who you gave
6 testimony today. So we'll look to do those.

7 I do -- the one thing, Mr. Okma, if I
8 can, that piqued my attention was the rapid
9 increase of people living with HIV over 50.
10 Could you expound on that? Is that going to
11 be a problem that continues to get
12 exponentially more difficult to handle?

13 MR. OKMA: Yes. It's definitely
14 something that New York State has to take
15 action to invest in now, because it is a
16 rapidly growing population, and this is for a
17 number of reasons.

18 One, just the population as a whole is
19 aging, and thanks to the activism that was
20 born right here in New York State, there's
21 all these medical advances that are allowing
22 people with HIV to live longer lives.

23 MR. JUNJULAS: (Pointing to self.)
24 Alive. Alive.

1 (Laughter.)

2 MR. OKMA: But on top of that,
3 17 percent of new diagnoses last year were
4 among New Yorkers over the age of 50, because
5 of the combination of ageism and -- ageism
6 and HIV stigma means that PrEP -- PrEP, HIV
7 testing, all of these things are not really
8 targeted towards older adults. Which is one
9 of the reasons why programs like SAGEPositive
10 are so impactful.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: That's great.

12 And Ms. Brigid, I don't have a lot of
13 time, but you did pique my interest with the
14 fact that the BIPOC community is not familiar
15 with their rights. Is there something that
16 we can do besides the asks in your testimony
17 to address that? Or it's the asks we should
18 focus on?

19 MS. BRIGID: (Mic off; inaudible) -- a
20 lot of things that had to be abridged because
21 of time was the Know Your Rights campaign
22 that we're planning encompasses both virtual
23 platforms and social media featuring public
24 service announcements, and the distribution

1 of over 1,000 informational posters. And
2 these materials will focus on rights of
3 individuals in schools, healthcare settings,
4 and other human service entities.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great, thank you.
6 I've run out of time.

7 No, I see Assemblymember Simon has a
8 question.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.
10 Thank you all for your testimony.

11 So Erin, from Equality New York. You
12 mentioned a program that was -- if I got it
13 correctly, was a program that helped people
14 get gender-affirming care in Rochester. Or
15 is that -- and I'm curious, (A) did I get
16 that right? (B) Are there programs like that
17 at the other sort of bigger upstate cities?
18 Because New York being different than
19 New York City.

20 MS. BRIGID: Well, it's a -- well,
21 it's not a gender-affirming-care program,
22 it's a -- the Rochester one is a transgender
23 peer-support program.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Okay.

1 MS. BRIGID: So it's -- that would be
2 more -- I don't have all the details on it,
3 but we could get you more details on it.

4 But peer support is generally just --
5 more along the lines of just like a
6 counseling and being able to reach out to and
7 talk to one another.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Yeah. No, I
9 understand what it is. I just had misheard
10 it, obviously, and I was curious about it.

11 Thank you. Appreciate it.

12 MS. BRIGID: You're welcome. Thank
13 you.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you all for
15 testifying. We really appreciate it.

16 And -- I'm sorry, that was outrageous
17 and silly. Senator Cleare, I apologize.

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: That wasn't
19 outrageous.

20 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. Thank you all
21 for your testimony and for hanging in there.

22 I'm alarmed by the rising rates of
23 HIV, especially in the aging community. And
24 if there's something that we can do, if you

1 could let us know what we can do to help
2 mitigate some of that -- education-wise,
3 testing-wise. Is there somewhere where we
4 need to be looking to put funding? I'd love
5 to hear it.

6 MR. JUNJULAS: (Mic issue;
7 inaudible) -- for the rest of state housing,
8 to help people outside of New York City, you
9 know, that certainly will help. Because we
10 absolutely do have persons who are over 50
11 living with HIV who are homeless. I see them
12 during the day all the time at the Damien
13 Center, and they go out to homelessness.

14 The second thing is is that we do have
15 an HIV testing bill to make HIV testing a
16 routine part of care. Too many persons are
17 visiting the ERs and some of the health
18 clinics and they're not being tested for HIV.

19 And so we are looking to streamline
20 the process to make HIV testing a routine
21 part of care. This way we can actually
22 identify new HIV cases, but also if someone
23 is negative, we can get them on PrEP, which
24 can prevent new HIV infections, and also test

1 for STIs and hep C.

2 MR. OKMA: Yeah, what I would add on
3 to that is that there's a great need of just
4 building HIV awareness and competency at
5 older adult centers across the state. Just a
6 lot of people in the sector -- and we've been
7 partnering with NYSOFA for this, and they've
8 been -- Commissioner Olsen has been a great
9 partner, but there is a lack of understanding
10 of HIV in the aging sector. And also
11 sometimes sexual health and wellness is seen
12 as a taboo, and that type of programming is
13 not standardly offered in these settings.
14 And it should be.

15 I think one other thing that would be
16 really impactful is we hear all the time that
17 our participants have not been offered PrEP,
18 or PrEP where they're -- it's not considered,
19 it's not seen as an intervention for them. I
20 think a targeted HIV prevention campaign
21 specifically centering the images and
22 messages for older adults would be incredibly
23 impactful and something that hasn't happened.

24 And I would also add that the Ending

1 the Epidemic Legislative Committee also has a
2 budget request this year for \$10 million to
3 support these types of programs and services.
4 They've instituted a pilot program, about
5 \$4 million for HIV and aging services over
6 five years. That was great. They're really
7 thinking about this. That's not adequate for
8 meeting the growing population.

9 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great. Thank
11 you, Senator Cleare, and my apologies again.

12 And thank you to everyone in this
13 panel. Very much appreciate it.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
15 much.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.

17 PANELISTS: Thank you.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay, Panel H:
19 Supportive Housing Network, Stephen Piasecki,
20 state policy manager; New Destiny Housing,
21 Gabriela Sandoval Requena, director of policy
22 and communications; Immigration Law & Justice
23 New York, Reverend Paul Fleck; and Center for
24 New York City Affairs, The New School,

1 Lauren Melodia.

2 MR. PIASECKI: Shall I get going?

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Yeah, you want to
4 start us off?

5 MR. PIASECKI: Sure, why not.

6 Thanks to the chair. Chair Krueger,
7 Chair Hevesi, Chair Persaud, thank you guys
8 for hanging in there with us. And thanks,
9 everybody that's still here. This is an
10 amazing turnout for somebody like me.

11 (Laughter.)

12 MR. PIASECKI: So appreciate that.

13 And I'm here to change the subject to
14 something completely different -- not for the
15 Supportive Housing Network of New York, but
16 at least for today's testimony. We're
17 focused like a laser on the NYSSHP program,
18 New York State's Supportive Housing Program.
19 This is a legacy program that dates back to
20 the 1980s. And we have in the last couple of
21 years been comparing this program with the
22 current state program known as ESSHI, Empire
23 State Supportive Housing Initiative. I see
24 Assemblymember Hevesi nodding his head,

1 because you were a big champion of that.

2 And the comparison is actually
3 shocking and revelatory. And so this year we
4 formulated a proposal to make NYSSHP more
5 like the ESSHI program, to get NYSSHP to work
6 like ESSHI in a couple of different ways.

7 So I'll paint the picture for you
8 first. I am from the Supportive Housing
9 Network of New York. We're a membership
10 organization with 200 members that are
11 nonprofits around the state that do a variety
12 of different supportive housing.

13 There's about 58,000 units of
14 supportive housing in New York. Not enough.
15 The state is doing a great job working on it
16 with this new program, halfway through
17 towards 20,000 units of supportive housing.

18 NYSSHP also touches 20,000 units of
19 supportive housing in a much different way.
20 NYSSHP is funded as low as \$2700 per person
21 per year, whereas ESSHI starts at \$25,000, so
22 it's 10 times as large. A couple of other
23 differences to note are that NYSSHP primarily
24 focuses on services -- it's almost totally a

1 services program -- whereas ESSHI does both
2 services and operating. That's really kind
3 of a state-of-the-art new model that the
4 state created, and it gives a lot more
5 resources to the ongoing operation and
6 supports of supportive housing buildings.

7 So it's complicated by the fact that
8 NYSSHP works in a lot of different ways all
9 around the state. So we dug deeply and we
10 looked at, you know, what is going on. And
11 of the 20,000 units, about half of them are
12 in New York City, a little bit more than
13 half. And it is a statewide program. But
14 9,000 of the 20,000, NYSSHP is the only
15 services funding available. And, you know,
16 that really means that that 2700 per person
17 is all that's going to services, which is
18 really challenging.

19 Then we dug a little bit deeper as we
20 were doing the comparison with ESSHI, and we
21 saw that 7,000 units -- wow, that was fast --
22 7,000 units are rental -- lacking rental
23 assistance.

24 So our ask, in a nutshell, is

1 \$32 million to start a program to make this
2 conversion and start a five-year plan to do
3 so.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great. Thank you
5 very much.

6 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

7 MS. SANDOVAL REQUENA: Good afternoon,
8 committee chairs and members of the State
9 Legislature. Thank you for holding this
10 hearing and for sticking around and for the
11 opportunity to testify on behalf of
12 New Destiny Housing.

13 My name is Gabriela Sandoval Requena,
14 and I am the director of policy and
15 communications at New Destiny. For those of
16 you who may not be familiar with New Destiny,
17 our mission is really to end the double
18 trauma of abuse and homelessness among
19 domestic violence survivors. And we do this
20 by developing supportive housing for
21 survivors, and shelter, assisting those who
22 are fleeing abuse to obtain subsidies and
23 find housing, and advocating for more
24 resources.

1 We are also a co-convenor of the
2 Family Homelessness Coalition and a member of
3 the Supportive Housing Network of New York.

4 So why do we do this work? Because
5 one in three New Yorkers across the state
6 will experience abuse by an intimate partner
7 in their lifetime, and access to safe and
8 affordable housing will determine whether
9 they leave their abuser, survive, and rebuild
10 their lives.

11 We submitted extended written
12 testimony, so I'd like to use this time to
13 really focus on our number-one priority.
14 That's to protect survivors in the first
15 generation of supportive housing -- that's
16 the New York State Supportive Housing
17 Program, also known as NYSSHP.

18 We are asking that you help us ensure
19 that once our families move into housing that
20 they can access the supportive services they
21 need to heal and the security they need to
22 feel safe in their homes. Currently, NYSSHP
23 only covers 25 percent of what's needed to
24 provide 24-hour security and deliver the

1 services that the survivors and the children
2 deserve.

3 New Destiny opened its first NYSSHP
4 building in 2008, and we're still operating
5 with service rates of less than \$4,000 per
6 family per year. That's compared to the
7 \$25,000 that the newer program, ESSHI,
8 provides. Additionally, ESSHI also includes
9 an automatic 2 percent escalator in each
10 contract. So really the disparity between
11 the two programs is truly indefensible.

12 Like the other 120 nonprofits
13 participating in NYSSHP across the state, we
14 are forced to constantly fundraise from
15 private donors to try to bridge the shortfall
16 and pay our staff a livable wage and provide
17 benefits. But it's impossible, really, to
18 make up the difference, and it's not really a
19 sustainable solution. Our staff and our
20 tenants really deserve better.

21 The supportive housing community
22 proposes a five-year, phased-in approach to
23 reach parity over -- between the two
24 programs, and for this year we're requesting

1 abusing you.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Oh, sorry.

3 (Laughter.)

4 REVEREND FLECK: No, when we were
5 unrolling, with the New York State Council of
6 Churches and the Interfaith Center of
7 New York, the Covenant for Newest New Yorkers
8 we received a heckling by one individual out
9 in the crowd. And they said, "What about my
10 community? What about me?"

11 And being a load of pastors, we had to
12 respond pastorally and say, "This isn't a
13 question of either/or. We agree that you
14 should be entitled to a right to shelter. We
15 agree that you should be entitled to
16 affordable housing. We agree that you should
17 be entitled to stable education. We agree
18 with all those things, as well as healthcare
19 for all."

20 And a conversation ensued, and we were
21 under the impression we changed a heart and a
22 mind at that time.

23 But that's -- that's the core of the
24 covenant rolled out by the Interfaith Center

1 of New York and the New York State Council of
2 Churches, is that we shouldn't have to make a
3 choice between providing these things to
4 New Yorkers who have been here for years as
5 opposed to our newest New Yorkers who've just
6 shown up.

7 Another thing that the covenant
8 contains is a call for transparency and
9 accountability. We saw that here today in
10 the hearing where Assemblyman Ra and his
11 colleague were just hearing for the first
12 time how the \$1 billion had been allocated
13 and spent, and 325 million, in fact, had been
14 spent in New York City.

15 And now we have 2.4 billion allocated
16 in the budget. And I'll have to confess I'm
17 in the immigration legal services business,
18 and I don't know how that money is going to
19 be spent.

20 So I think there is a need for
21 transparency and accountability and how that
22 money is going to be spent. We need to know.
23 I, for one -- again, being in the immigration
24 legal services industry -- would hope that it

1 would go towards the Access to Representation
2 Act, which would provide full representation
3 to individuals in deportation proceedings.

4 Evidence shows that people who have
5 representation are 10 times more likely to
6 win their case than someone who does not.
7 That's real value. That's contributing to
8 families, it's contributing to the economic
9 well-being of our newest New Yorkers.

10 Thank you.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

12 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

13 MS. MELODIA: Hi. Can you guys hear
14 me?

15 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Yes.

16 MS. MELODIA: Okay. My name's
17 Lauren Melodia. I'm an economist at the
18 Center for New York City Affairs at
19 The New School. Thank you for the
20 opportunity to testify.

21 I'm going to bring us back to
22 childcare. We've heard a lot about the
23 mismatch between supply and demand in the
24 childcare sector resulting from a

1 longstanding crisis of low earnings in the
2 sector. And I want to highlight the unique
3 features of the industry and policies
4 contributing to this.

5 So with the exception of high-income
6 households, most New Yorkers can't afford the
7 true cost of care. And as a result,
8 childcare programs charge parents what they
9 can afford to pay, not what it costs to
10 provide care.

11 This flawed market is then codified in
12 New York's Child Care Assistance Program
13 voucher reimbursement methodology, the
14 market-rate methodology. It constrains
15 providers from offering competitive wages to
16 their workers, and it exploits home-based
17 providers who I've found in 2021 earned a
18 median \$10.61 per hour in New York City,
19 while the city's minimum wage was \$15.

20 We've heard many workers have left the
21 industry for higher wages elsewhere, and I
22 want to give an example of what's going on
23 there. In 2021, the median wage of people
24 with a high school diploma was \$18.50 per

1 hour in New York City, which was \$5 more per
2 hour than a center-based childcare worker was
3 earning, and 80 percent of those people have
4 a high school diploma or more.

5 So I'm here to ask the State
6 Legislature to do two things this session.
7 First, pass legislation to develop an
8 alternative cost-estimation methodology for
9 the voucher program, one that includes
10 competitive wages. This is going to require
11 a multiyear federal approval process and a
12 lot of planning for how to actually fund it
13 for the long term.

14 And so that's why we need you to do a
15 second thing, which many people have
16 mentioned today, and that is to expand the
17 Workforce Compensation Fund included in last
18 year's budget and make it a permanent feature
19 of the State Budget until a new methodology
20 has been implemented. The Workforce
21 Compensation Fund must be sufficient to solve
22 the problem.

23 Last year's fund distributed bonuses
24 that were appreciated, but were too small to

1 actually address the underlying labor market
2 issues. I've estimated that a \$12,500 wage
3 subsidy per worker would actually do the job
4 by incentivizing people to continue working
5 in the industry and stabilizing the supply of
6 childcare.

7 For example, it would increase the
8 median pay of home-based providers to
9 \$18.79 per hour -- still lower than what they
10 should be paid, but at least ending the
11 subminimum wage that they're earning today.

12 And, lastly, I want to say that the
13 state is capable of investing in this
14 adequately-sized permanent Workforce
15 Compensation Fund this year. A report
16 published by my colleagues just this month
17 shows that the state has ample budget
18 reserves, including \$13.3 billion for
19 economic uncertainties. I think this
20 warrants use of it.

21 Thank you.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: All right. Thank
23 you very much.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

1 Senators? No, you don't?

2 Okay, I do. May I?

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Please.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
5 much.

6 Thank you, all. I want to go back to
7 the supportive housing two folks.

8 So some of the confusion that I think
9 happens frequently with legislators and when
10 we're just discussing these issues at home is
11 the fact that there are multiple categories
12 of supportive housing in lots of different
13 contracts, city and state, the old contracts,
14 the new contracts -- you two know exactly
15 what I'm talking about -- whether we should
16 be prioritizing more for specific
17 subcategories of people who are in the
18 homeless system or coming out of the prison
19 system or, or, or. Right?

20 Does somebody actually have sort of --
21 or could you prepare a chart showing these
22 categories and the payment differences?
23 Because some of the things that have always
24 shocked me is if you were willing to go into

1 actually working on a big report, which we're
2 calling "The State of Supportive Housing,"
3 that is in process. But I think we can give
4 you those details.

5 But you're exactly right. It's all
6 different rates at different times. Not much
7 if any of it is funded at the rate that is
8 really needed, given all the changes that
9 have occurred that a lot of people have
10 talked about today.

11 Workforce is an issue, obviously,
12 across the map. Workforce is particularly an
13 issue with NYSSHP. And like I said, you
14 know, there's all sorts of different levels.

15 The great thing about NYSSHP is there
16 is a kind of -- it can touch any disability
17 group as long as you have the overlay of
18 proximity to homelessness. And then there
19 are all the other silos that require teasing
20 out.

21 So yeah, we could prepare something
22 for you, Senator.

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I just feel like
24 both the city and the state, even though we

1 never are where we should be on the time that
2 it takes to build more, on the amount of
3 money we're actually providing and keeping up
4 with the problem -- I think half of us don't
5 ever understand what the actual universe
6 looks like out there, because it is so
7 radically different for so many different
8 categories.

9 And I know if I was running one of
10 your agencies, the number of contracts I
11 would have to try to balance and combine
12 would send me off a cliff somewhere.

13 MR. PIASECKI: We used to think we
14 were very smart by cobbling together all
15 these different resources, and now, you
16 know --

17 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: It's not working
18 that way.

19 Anyway, my time is up. Thank you.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Do you have a
21 Senate question?

22 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Is there a Senate
23 question? Oh, Senator Murray.

24 SENATOR MURRAY: Hi. Thank you.

1 A quick question, so -- and I
2 apologize, I didn't -- didn't catch your name
3 on the end.

4 MS. MELODIA: Lauren. Lauren Melodia.

5 SENATOR MURRAY: Lauren, yes, okay.

6 Lauren, I agree with you completely
7 that we need to make permanent -- we need to
8 increase the wages of childcare workers and
9 everything to retain the workforce. We need
10 to do that.

11 We had a discussion -- and I'd like to
12 get your opinion on this. We had a
13 roundtable discussion about that very
14 subject -- well, childcare in general and the
15 different crises we're facing: availability,
16 affordability, and of course the workforce.
17 And we had come up with an idea, what if --
18 and I've heard the term "glorified
19 babysitters," which I think is a terrible
20 term, but it's how kind of the childcare
21 workers are looked at sometimes.

22 Are there classes or could there be
23 classes at community colleges or something to
24 certify -- in other words, get them more into

1 more training, where they're getting into
2 early childhood development and things of
3 this nature, so they're not so-called
4 glorified babysitters but they're offering
5 much, much more? Which in turn could demand
6 a higher salary by the childcare providers
7 maybe asking for a bit more because of the
8 higher quality.

9 I mean, do you see where I'm going
10 with this? What are your thoughts on that?

11 MS. MELODIA: I do see where you're
12 going. And I guess I'll make two points to
13 it.

14 One is that we already do have plenty
15 of training. Licensed and registered
16 programs in the state are required to do
17 extensive training regularly. We have the
18 CDA program, which is an accredited program
19 that people can get this special degree to
20 prove that they are specialized in early care
21 and education.

22 The problem is the wages never meet
23 those expectations. And so what I was trying
24 to say earlier is that you can have a high

1 school diploma in New York City and get 18.50
2 an hour, and you can have more than that
3 working in childcare and be making \$5, you
4 know, less per hour.

5 So I think that the only way we're
6 going to incentivize more people getting
7 trained -- and plenty of people have CDAs and
8 bachelor's degrees and master's degrees in
9 this industry -- is to actually develop a
10 comprehensive workforce career ladder. You
11 know, really think this through on a regional
12 level -- occupations, you know. And it has
13 to go along with -- with wage increases in
14 the same way that we see in the Department of
15 Education.

16 The last thing I'll say is that this
17 is a very unique industry, and that's why
18 using a market to determine price is
19 absolutely the wrong way to go. And that is
20 because you can choose to see if your family
21 can afford childcare that you pay for out of
22 the home.

23 But people often rely on rental and,
24 you know, unpaid care within the household.

1 So that -- the reality of that, which we want
2 people to continue to have that choice, puts
3 downward pressure on wages in this industry.
4 And that's why we need to make sure that we
5 have some -- a wage floor across the sector.

6 SENATOR MURRAY: Thank you very much.
7 Thank you.

8 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

9 Do you have any Assembly?

10 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: No.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Cleare.

12 SENATOR CLEARE: It's just a comment,
13 but -- and I appreciate your answer to that
14 last question.

15 But, you know, childcare really is
16 children being safe, children being cared
17 for, fed, in a safe environment. And there's
18 value to that as it is. You know, there's
19 value just based on it.

20 Of course I agree there should be a
21 pathway to a greater career. But being a
22 mother and having to look for childcare, I
23 wanted my children to be safe and taken care
24 of. That was the most important thing. If

1 you could teach them something else, that's
2 great too. But really the main thing is
3 that. And I think we have to value that, is
4 what I'm trying to say.

5 There's a value to that that people
6 kind of miss and just disregard people who do
7 that kind of work, that they're putting their
8 heart and soul into this. Most childcare
9 providers I know, these are their children,
10 the way they do the job. I know the real
11 people who do it. And my mother cared -- did
12 a different kind of home -- she did home
13 care. But there were children in that family
14 who remained in touch with my mother
15 throughout their adulthood. This is how
16 close -- it's just not a simple thing.

17 So I think that we just as a society
18 don't value childcare the way we should. And
19 the same thing with seniors. The same thing.
20 You know, the people who care for our
21 seniors, we say these are the important
22 things to us, but we don't value these people
23 like that. And they should be paid, because
24 it's something that you can't even put a

1 price on.

2 MS. MELODIA: Absolutely.

3 And just in terms of childcare, you
4 know, we need to boost wages in health and
5 human services across the board. But it's
6 really important to note that one of the most
7 popular models of childcare is a small
8 business that largely women of color run in
9 their homes, family childcare. My mom ran
10 one for 20 years.

11 These people don't have employment
12 contracts, so they don't have any protection
13 or guarantee that they're going to get a
14 wage. And that's why we really need the
15 state to intervene and establish a
16 cost-estimation model that is paying people
17 and guaranteeing that there's a wage floor.

18 SENATOR CLEARE: I agree.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. Thank you,
20 Senator.

21 I think I'm going to close here. So
22 Ms. Melodia, I hear you -- this is just a
23 comment. But thank you for your testimony.
24 And I hear you about the permanent Workforce

1 Compensation Fund, I hear you about the
2 \$12,500. And there is a bill, I believe from
3 my colleague Assemblymember Clark, to deal
4 with the market-rate issue, which I agree is
5 a really big problem.

6 So we'll look to push that. So thank
7 you for your testimony.

8 Reverend Fleck, so thank you for your
9 testimony, sir. My understanding is just
10 generally, the 2.4 billion for immigration
11 services -- the intent of the state is to try
12 to be as flexible as possible. However --
13 with that money to the city. But however,
14 you raise a real point about the cost benefit
15 of putting that money into legal
16 representation.

17 So we will take that back for
18 consideration in the one-house. Thank you.

19 And then to my two supportive housing
20 friends, let me start with this. What the
21 hell happened to my New York/New York
22 agreements?

23 (Laughter.)

24 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: And why do we

1 stop funding NYSSHP? When did -- I'm like,
2 I'm okay with ESSHI if that's the way to go,
3 but this is a -- you know, we've been doing
4 this -- supportive housing is a New York
5 invention. It's one of the greatest things
6 we provide. It solves problems, it saves
7 money, it helps people.

8 How did we get out of the business --
9 except for the Cuomo-de Blasio fight -- of
10 New York/New York?

11 (Laughter.)

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I don't think
13 this governor and this mayor hate each other,
14 so why are we not having another
15 New York/New York agreement?

16 MR. PIASECKI: It's a great point.

17 (Pause; laughter.)

18 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I think they want
19 us to do that.

20 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: So you want us
21 to -- oh, okay. Of course. Of course.

22 (Laughter.)

23 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: So in the absence
24 of any more New York/New York agreements, you

1 think this is the way to go. And it's --

2 MR. PIASECKI: Well, you know, I
3 think, charitably, we're halfway through the
4 ESSHI program. They've been on target at the
5 state level. The New York City response, or
6 the New York 1515 is also moving forward. We
7 have some recommendations to make that better
8 for New York City.

9 Long-run is there's not enough
10 supportive housing to meet the demand.
11 There's 100,000 people that are homeless in
12 New York State at any given point in time.
13 So, you know, the whole point of -- I think
14 embedded in our message is we don't want to
15 lose the existing resources when -- just to
16 build new. And that's -- that's the trick of
17 the trade.

18 A lot of the existing resources are in
19 a position where they need rehab, they can't
20 be rehabbed even though the state has funding
21 for it because they don't have -- they
22 can't -- they don't pencil-out on the
23 operating side on the NYSSHP program.

24 So we want to preserve the existing,

1 we want to build new, and then we want to
2 double it, which is your idea.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay.

4 Understood.

5 And Ms. Requena, with the last couple
6 of seconds, is it my understanding that most
7 of the supportive housing for DV survivors is
8 NYSSHP as opposed to ESSHI? Or is it a
9 combination?

10 MS. SANDOVAL REQUENA: No, it's a
11 combination, I would say. Right?

12 MR. PIASECKI: Yes.

13 MS. SANDOVAL REQUENA: Yes.

14 But I would just second what Steve
15 just pointed out, that as we think of newer
16 programs, right, we should not forget about
17 the existing programs that are really
18 underfunded, and the buildings. I mean, they
19 also need that capital improvement push as
20 well that cannot be addressed because the
21 social part is just not being invested on.

22 MR. PIASECKI: They have -- programs
23 that are NYSSHP, they don't have the safety
24 measures that the new programs can put in the

1 building from the get-go, and that's a real
2 concern. Safety is a big issue.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Very much
4 appreciated.

5 We do have one more Assemblymember,
6 Assemblymember Simon, please. To close.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.

8 Your -- the most recent conversation
9 just made me want to ask a question about
10 supportive housing. One of the things we've
11 talked about a lot is we need more housing --
12 how do we produce it, how much of it is
13 affordable, where is it, and the crying need
14 for supportive housing.

15 But who is building supportive
16 housing, and how do we fund that? Do you
17 have, you know, suggestions for that? It
18 seems to me not-for-profit housing developers
19 are better able to do that, but they don't
20 have enough access to capital. I'm just
21 curious what your experience is and what your
22 thinking is along the lines of how do we
23 actually do it. Because we desperately need
24 to do it.

1 MR. PIASECKI: I think it's all hands
2 on deck. We prefer, for supportive housing,
3 that our nonprofit members are doing the
4 development. We find that works better
5 across the board.

6 There is a huge need for affordable
7 housing, which supportive housing is a subset
8 of that, of course. And it's really
9 important that when the Housing Committee
10 meets, that the focus is on the lowest ELI
11 tenancy, zero to 30 percent of area median
12 income. That's where the gap is. And if you
13 can fill that gap, that helps everyone.

14 Much -- many resources go to higher
15 income bands, and it's not as effective at
16 really addressing the poverty issues around
17 affordable housing.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.

19 MR. PIASECKI: It doesn't trickle
20 down.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Really?

22 (Laughter.)

23 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Anyone else?

24 SENATOR PERSAUD: Just one quick

1 question.

2 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: One quick
3 question. Roxanne Persaud.

4 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: You're welcome.

6 SENATOR PERSAUD: So this is for
7 Reverend Fleck.

8 We're trying to figure your catchment
9 area, if you could tell us the catchment
10 areas.

11 REVEREND FLECK: Sure. We're unique
12 in that we do clinics in different boroughs.
13 So we're in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn, we're in
14 Flushing, Queens, and we are in Chinatown,
15 Manhattan. We do clinics on Saturdays and
16 Monday nights, and then we take those cases
17 back to the office.

18 And then of course we have an office
19 in Hicksville too, where two attorneys are
20 working as well, and do a clinic out there on
21 Long Island. So that's --

22 SENATOR PERSAUD: Can anyone request a
23 clinic, for you to come to a community and
24 offer clinics?

1 REVEREND FLECK: I'd love that, as
2 long as we had the attorneys and the legal
3 staff. We're kind of maxed out as far as
4 that goes. And that's part of what the
5 Access to Representation Act is talking
6 about, is increasing the capacity of
7 providers like ours to hire and train legal
8 staff. But that's the major impediment right
9 now.

10 SENATOR PERSAUD: How many attorneys
11 do you have on staff?

12 REVEREND FLECK: Four.

13 SENATOR PERSAUD: I just wanted to
14 clarify that, because we did see it's four.

15 Okay. Thank you very much.

16 REVEREND FLECK: Sure.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Okay. Thank you,
18 everybody, for your testimony.

19 PANELISTS: Thank you.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very
21 much. Appreciate it.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: And Panel I,
23 please come down. From the New York State
24 Coalition Against Domestic Violence,

1 Joan Gerhardt. From Bivona Child Advocacy
2 Center, Dr. Daniele Lyman-Torres. Hunger
3 Solutions New York, Krista Hesdorfer. And
4 Hudson Valley National Center for
5 Veteran Reintegration, Gavin Walters.

6 Good afternoon -- good evening.

7 (Off the record.)

8 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Ms. Gerhardt,
9 please.

10 MS. GERHARDT: Hi.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: The floor is
12 yours. How are you?

13 MS. GERHARDT: Thank you.

14 I'm Joan Gerhardt, director of public
15 policy and advocacy at the New York State
16 Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Thank
17 you for having me.

18 NYSCADV is recognized by the federal
19 government as the information clearinghouse
20 and resource center on domestic violence for
21 New York State. The Governor proposed
22 several initiatives in the Executive Budget
23 aimed at addressing domestic violence.

24 Most importantly, the Governor is

1 seeking to ensure the continuity of critical
2 victim services in light of devastating VOCA
3 cuts. She's proposed 34.4 million to
4 maintain existing state contracts with these
5 safety-net providers, and 100 million more to
6 support the next round of contracts. It's
7 critical for the Assembly and Senate to
8 accept this funding.

9 As you know, VOCA, or the Victims of
10 Crime Act funding enables thousands of
11 New Yorkers to access services including
12 shelter, advocacy, legal assistance,
13 counseling and more. New York's federal VOCA
14 grant has declined 121.6 million in the past
15 five years, losing 61 percent of its value.
16 Prior state earmarks covered only 23 percent
17 of the shortfall. The Governor's funding is
18 critical to ensure these providers remain
19 available and accessible for New Yorkers
20 experiencing crime.

21 We also urge the Legislature to accept
22 \$5 million to provide direct cash assistance
23 to domestic violence survivors; the
24 \$21 million increase in the ATL budget for

1 OCFS for adult protective and DV services;
2 and 24.5 million to fully implement last
3 year's Fair Access to Victim Compensation
4 legislation. All great news for DV
5 survivors.

6 What is lacking, however, is inclusion
7 of DV advocates into the Governor's proposed
8 COLA. New York relies on experienced,
9 trained DV advocates to provide lifesaving
10 and life-changing support to New Yorkers
11 experiencing DV, most of whom are women who
12 live in marginalized or underserved
13 communities. These services come at a cost,
14 and it's incumbent on the state to value the
15 work and fully pay for it.

16 But once again, these essential
17 workers have been excluded from receiving the
18 Governor's proposed COLA. This has had a
19 disastrous impact on the ability of DV
20 programs to retain and recruit employees. DV
21 and sexual assault programs have lost 1200
22 employees between 2020 and 21.

23 Numerous positions still remain vacant
24 across this sector, which is why so many

1 victims are unable to get the services they
2 need. In fact, on one day in 2022 nearly a
3 thousand people sought services from DV
4 agencies and were told they couldn't get the
5 help they were requesting.

6 We urge the Legislature to incorporate
7 Senator Persaud's and Assemblymember Hevesi's
8 bill, S7793 and A8437, into the State Budget
9 to right this wrong and include DV advocates
10 in this year's COLA.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you very
12 much.

13 DR. LYMAN-TORRES: Thank you,
14 Chairpersons and all members of the
15 Legislature, for the opportunity to address
16 you today.

17 My name is Daniele Lyman-Torres, and
18 I'm the president and CEO of the Bivona Child
19 Advocacy Center located in Rochester,
20 New York, and serving a seven-county region.

21 Child advocacy centers, or CACs, were
22 codified into law in 2006 by the New York
23 State Legislature to serve child victims of
24 severe physical and/or sexual abuse. Today,

1 we state that there are 47 CACs across the
2 state. However, outside of New York City
3 only a few CACs are more than one staff and
4 can provide the multidisciplinary
5 one-stop-shop model, due to a lack of
6 infrastructure and funding in smaller
7 counties.

8 This pushes services into the large
9 regional centers, like the one in Rochester I
10 represent.

11 At the time of the legislation in
12 2006, only \$5.8 million was allocated to the
13 Office of Children and Family Services to
14 implement that policy. I have no idea what
15 happened to those funds then or, nearly
16 20 years later, now the 5.2 million that's
17 included in the budget, but I can tell you
18 it's not being equitably distributed to
19 centers doing the work.

20 The CAC I represent serves more than
21 60 percent of the children seen in the entire
22 western part of the state, which includes
23 Buffalo and Rochester and all the surrounding
24 counties -- and our allocation for CAC

1 services is less than \$270,000 a year, and
2 our operating budget is 4 million.

3 The prevalence of child abuse, severe
4 child abuse, and fatalities has not
5 decreased. One in seven children will
6 experience abuse. In Monroe County alone, in
7 the past three years our child fatalities
8 more than doubled. Seventy percent of the
9 children we see who have been severely abused
10 are under the age of 12.

11 The trauma is off the charts, and
12 here's how it's showing up. Children who
13 experience child abuse are nine times more
14 likely to be involved in criminal activity.
15 About 30 percent of abused children will
16 later abuse their own children. And
17 two-thirds, two-thirds of the people
18 receiving substance abuse disorder treatment
19 were abused as children.

20 Our asks: Increase the funding to
21 child advocacy centers to at least
22 10 million -- heck, today, after what I've
23 heard, I want to double that -- and
24 specifically to ensure that the funding

1 actually reaches the Rochester region.

2 I urge the regionalization of child
3 advocacy centers to ensure that even the
4 existing resources can be better aligned to
5 serve both rural and urban areas.

6 President Obama once said that a
7 budget is more than just a series of numbers
8 on a page, it is an embodiment of our values.
9 If we can't value our children, then we don't
10 value our future. How we treat our children
11 is how we want our world to be. We must do
12 better, New York.

13 Thank you.

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

15 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

16 MS. HESDORFER: Good afternoon, and
17 thank you for the opportunity to testify.

18 I'm here representing Hunger Solutions
19 New York, a statewide nonprofit dedicated to
20 alleviating hunger for all New Yorkers by
21 maximizing federal nutrition assistance
22 programs including SNAP, WIC, school meals,
23 and other child nutrition programs.

24 SNAP is our nation's largest

1 anti-hunger program, providing monthly food
2 benefits to more than 2.8 million
3 New Yorkers. For over 35 years, through a
4 contract with OTDA, we've worked to maximize
5 SNAP by providing statewide outreach and
6 application assistance through the Nutrition
7 Outreach and Education Program, or NOEP.

8 Recognizing the need to fully leverage
9 federal resources to alleviate hunger in
10 New York, last year the Legislature allocated
11 an additional \$2 million in NOEP funding,
12 which enabled us to add 22 new SNAP assisters
13 in high-need and rural counties. Last year,
14 NOEP reached more than 163,000 New Yorkers.
15 Thank you for your advocacy for expanded NOEP
16 services in last year's budget.

17 Unfortunately, that added funding is
18 not sustained in the 2025 Executive Budget
19 proposal, and if it's not restored in the
20 final budget, NOEP will be forced to scale
21 back when hunger is on the rise. Services
22 would be reduced in Albany, Broome, Erie,
23 Monroe, Nassau, Niagara, Onondaga, Rockland
24 and Suffolk counties and in every borough of

1 New York City. Chemung, Cortland, Essex,
2 Franklin, Lewis, Schuyler, and Washington
3 counties would lose all local NOEP services.

4 To sustain SNAP outreach and
5 assistance through NOEP statewide, we ask the
6 Legislature to restore \$2 million in NOEP
7 funding, for a total of \$5.503 million. This
8 modest investment brings an outsized return.
9 Every dollar the state invests in SNAP
10 outreach is federally matched. And because
11 NOEP draws down additional federal SNAP
12 benefits into New York, the program provides
13 an estimated 27-fold return on investment to
14 the state.

15 In addition to ensuring all eligible
16 New Yorkers can connect with SNAP, we also
17 support efforts to make benefit amounts more
18 adequate to meet families' food needs, and
19 encourage the Legislature to provide a state
20 supplement to increase the minimum SNAP
21 benefit to \$100 per month.

22 And I must mention another
23 far-reaching anti-hunger program outside of
24 the Human Services budget, but of great

1 importance to your work. New York must fully
2 fund universal school meals. We are deeply
3 grateful for last year's historic expansion
4 of free school meals, but with more than
5 320,000 students left behind, it's time to
6 close the gap and fully fund healthy school
7 meals for all New York kids.

8 We urge the Legislature to adopt the
9 vital anti-hunger proposals to support food
10 security for all New Yorkers.

11 Thank you.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

14 MR. WALTERS: Hello, everybody. Thank
15 you for having me here, and thank you for
16 being here.

17 I think so much of what everybody says
18 just correlates with one another because we
19 are all advocates seeking so many things
20 within our respective communities.

21 My name is Gavin Walters. I am a
22 United States Air Force veteran. I received
23 my citizenship after I served in the
24 Air Force. I think that was the greatest

1 thing, because that's one of the reasons why
2 I went and served in the Air Force.

3 Now I actually facilitate the
4 Dwyer Program in Ulster County and
5 Greene County. I have colleagues back here
6 that facilitate Essex, Clinton, Franklin, and
7 Schoharie counties. So there's a lot of
8 Dwyer programs, you know, around.

9 And the reason why I'm here is
10 because -- I don't have to explain about the
11 Dwyer programs, because you guys were able to
12 elevate it to be a 62-county program, which
13 is really amazing. But the issue with that
14 is that so many of the programs, the funding
15 that they receive doesn't equate to the job
16 that they even do day to day.

17 And for me, that can speak about
18 Ulster County, I can say that from our
19 enactment in 2020, we have not had a veteran
20 commit suicide that had went through our
21 program. And I could bet you so many other
22 programs can say that any veteran that
23 entered their program received care, service,
24 and resources.

1 We look at the families, because we
2 say nine times out of 10 the families are the
3 ones that is reaching out to us. So we know
4 that part of helping the individuals is
5 connecting the family, caregivers, everybody,
6 to be a part of the process of helping that
7 individual.

8 And something I always say is that,
9 you know, sometimes we're not around, but we
10 can educate the individuals that's around
11 that veteran, and that's one of the biggest
12 things that we want to help with.

13 And unfortunately, with the funding
14 that so many of these programs receive -- and
15 I did the math, and I did so much things to
16 break it down, but it doesn't equate to the
17 things that we're seeing day to day.

18 I work with a veteran that literally
19 had to decide between coming to our program
20 for mental health or getting gas to travel
21 about 25 miles to our program. And that is
22 just a shame where he has to decide between
23 mental health and getting food. So we bring
24 food to him.

1 So food insecurity, housing issues, so
2 many different things that are affecting our
3 military community is just prevalent, it's
4 out there. We see this day to day.

5 There's programs that have, you know,
6 full-time staff, part-time individuals,
7 volunteers. You know, we're a community of
8 individuals reaching out to the community to
9 just get help for the things that we see day
10 to day. And our ask is just \$2.1 million.
11 And that's -- and I actually equated that to
12 the 10 years of inflation that -- from the
13 program's enactment, from 2012 to this, for
14 last year.

15 So we're not asking for big, but just
16 something small enough that we could say,
17 okay, we could get a \$25 gift card to
18 somebody just to get gas or decide to get
19 food.

20 Thank you.

21 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

22 Assembly or Senate?

23 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Senate.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay. Our Senate

1 chair of Veterans Affairs.

2 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: If I can
3 get the mic on.

4 Thank you so much, Gavin, for your
5 testimony. I know how important this funding
6 is.

7 Could you piece the picture for me of
8 how much of an increase would be beneficial
9 for each of those 62 counties so you can
10 continue to do that great work and fill in
11 the gaps where you can? Because, you know,
12 military families are incredibly important to
13 me. I wanted to thank you for also bringing
14 that up, that often it's the families that
15 will connect the veterans to those services.

16 We all want to make sure that the
17 program is funded appropriately so it can be
18 efficient and effective. So tell me, you
19 know, do you have a number in mind of what
20 would be helpful with regard to inflation?

21 MR. WALTERS: Yes. So I can send this
22 to everybody as well, but for every county --
23 for example, I use the example of Genesee,
24 Orleans, and Wyoming, which has 185 split

1 through three counties, and if you -- if they
2 do a 4 percent COLA, that's like \$2,000. And
3 then we keep breaking that down, \$2,000
4 basically is like 80 gift cards for somebody.
5 And if you say 80 gift cards to just split
6 across veterans for a whole year, that -- one
7 thing is that they don't equate veterans that
8 we usually see, which is other than
9 honorable/dishonorable veterans. So those
10 numbers that we see that they count as -- I
11 just got this data -- 580,000 veterans they
12 say is in New York, and that's in 2022, in
13 the Census.

14 So if people are saying 700,000, so
15 many different numbers for veterans -- like,
16 what is the real number in our -- you know,
17 in New York State? So those numbers -- you
18 know, I don't really go by those numbers, but
19 the numbers that we see day to day is
20 dishonorable veterans, other than honorable
21 veterans, veterans that, you know, are still
22 looking to get the discharge status that they
23 deserve.

24 And a lot of -- so that's why I say

1 those numbers, you know -- I laugh at that,
2 sometimes, when I hear like somebody say
3 like, Oh, 22 veterans, but then they reduce
4 the number -- like, no, are you counting the
5 ones that's dishonorable, that's actually
6 committed suicide, because you didn't equate
7 them to be a part of the process of going
8 into VA?

9 I tell folks we're better than the VA,
10 we do so much better work, because we are
11 there day to day, reaching out to veterans at
12 2 o'clock in the morning, going with them to
13 the hospitals. Because we know that if they
14 call the VA, nobody's going to come leave
15 their office and get them from their house.
16 And that's the stuff that we do.

17 And I'm sorry that the numbers just --
18 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: No, no,
19 listen -- we want to be supportive. I think
20 the Dwyer Program has proven to work. Nobody
21 understands veterans like a fellow veteran.
22 So we're going to do everything we can to try
23 to get you there, and we'll be putting in a
24 letter on your behalf to request that.

1 MR. WALTERS: Thank you.

2 SENATOR SCARCELLA-SPANTON: Thank you.

3 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

4 Assembly?

5 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember

6 Jean-Pierre.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: If I can

8 get this on. It's supposed to turn green,

9 right?

10 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Yeah.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: First, I

12 want to say thank you. This -- you know,

13 it's unfortunate that this is the last panel,

14 but this is one of like -- this is the best

15 panel, because this is the

16 boots-on-the-ground panel. We've been

17 talking with agencies, but this is the boots

18 on the ground. This is the folks who are

19 connected to all of the populations, whether

20 it be families, whether it be our veterans.

21 So I just want to say, first, thank

22 you for what you do for very -- with so

23 little.

24 But my question is to Gavin. First,

1 to thank you, which you -- you're working
2 with my office constantly on how we can help
3 make the Dwyer Program work. The
4 Dwyer Program doesn't come out of the
5 Veterans Committee, it comes out of the
6 Mental Health Committee. But we actually
7 support and write a support letter in
8 conjunction with the chair to make sure that
9 we can make the Dwyer Program effective
10 across the 62 counties.

11 But if we can get more realistic
12 numbers, as the Senator mentioned, and if you
13 can send that document, that would be very
14 helpful to see how we can make -- how
15 effective we can make the Dwyer Program. And
16 how much dollars is needed to make it
17 effective across the 62 counties, that would
18 be helpful.

19 MR. WALTERS: Yeah, absolutely.

20 And I can definitely say a lot of
21 programs will benefit from transportation,
22 whether it's having a vehicle -- which we
23 know is one of the hardest thing for rural
24 counties. And I know from my colleagues over

1 here, you know, helping an individual that's
2 in a situation and needs to get someplace,
3 transportation can be the hardest thing for
4 them. And trying to decide if they have to
5 go to a doctor or, you know, just speak to
6 somebody, and the communication as well.

7 So there's so many things that is
8 there that could -- you know, that will
9 definitely help when the funding actually do
10 come to the -- especially the rural counties,
11 just having a vehicle that can transport
12 somebody to a hospital or to get groceries.
13 Because that's a good way to connect with
14 somebody within that car, just talking to
15 them and just having a natural conversation.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE:
17 Absolutely. It's not just the rural
18 counties. You know, I represent Long Island.
19 So when I think of areas in my area where
20 there's no bus transportation or it ends at
21 6:30, how do we -- you know, how do we get
22 veterans from one place -- but the question I
23 have for you now is, what mechanisms do you
24 use for outreach in the communities?

1 MR. WALTERS: Resource fairs. We
2 actually -- I facilitate the Dwyer Coalition,
3 so we actually ask the Reserves and
4 National Guard representatives to actually be
5 in our meetings. We go to the Reserves base
6 and we go to -- we actually go to places and
7 talk to individuals. We go to -- have
8 events. We do so much resource fairs. And
9 we actually put up things in the community
10 that everybody can see us.

11 Unfortunately, we don't have the
12 resources to actually create a website right
13 now, but that is our goal, to create a
14 website, so if anybody wants to look at --
15 for the Dwyer Program or get connected to
16 resources, like my colleagues right here,
17 they could just go straight there and get it.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN JEAN-PIERRE: Okay,
19 thank you.

20 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Cordell
21 Cleare.

22 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you.

23 So I have questions for two of you.

24 Number one, we talked a little bit

1 today about a registry for veterans to know
2 where services exist. And even inside of
3 New York City, you know, my veteran
4 constituents -- I don't necessarily always
5 know all the places that they can go.

6 Maybe -- is that something that your
7 organization is working on or --

8 MR. WALTERS: Yeah, we actually are.
9 Our goal is to actually, with the help of the
10 New York Health Foundation, who's bringing
11 out -- who's going to have a needs assessment
12 coming out later this year for veterans,
13 they're going to hopefully be assisting us
14 with actually creating a website specifically
15 focused and geared towards having resources,
16 whether it's looking for the VSA, looking for
17 housing services, looking for a food pantry.
18 Whatever it is, they click on the website,
19 they know it's veteran-friendly -- anything
20 and everything is going to be right there.

21 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay, thank you.

22 And also for Bivona, I think it is. I
23 know you are talking about services outside
24 of New York City, but it is certainly -- it's

1 still a concern of ours anyway. And I don't
2 know, have you spoken to your Senator?
3 Because she's fierce.

4 DR. LYMAN-TORRES: Oh, yeah.

5 SENATOR CLEARE: Okay. All right. So
6 I will talk to her to see how we can all be
7 helpful with making sure that those services
8 get to people like you who are on the ground,
9 who are servicing our families.

10 DR. LYMAN-TORRES: Thank you.

11 SENATOR CLEARE: Thank you. Thank you
12 all for your testimony.

13 (Overtalk.)

14 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Don't go anywhere
15 yet.

16 SENATOR CLEARE: No, I'm just saying
17 thank you all. This is the last time you'll
18 probably hear from me. But thank you.
19 Hunger is important, and our domestic
20 violence. Thank you.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Assemblymember
22 Ra.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

24 And thank you all for your patience

1 and sticking it out to be here and talk about
2 very important issues.

3 Mr. Walters, thank you for your
4 service. And to your colleagues in the
5 audience, thank you for your service as well.

6 You know, we had a little bit of a
7 discussion earlier, as I'm sure you saw,
8 about whether you would consider this a cut
9 in this budget. But putting that aside --
10 and I think we all are very confident that on
11 both sides of the aisle, in both houses, the
12 advocacy is going to be there to put that
13 money back into the budget. But I will say
14 that what that means is getting back to where
15 we started.

16 We don't want to be just where we
17 started, right? We want to be above that, so
18 that you can do the types of things you're
19 talking about and reach out to additional
20 veterans and do the types of things -- like
21 you said, transportation, things to make sure
22 that people can take advantage of your
23 services.

24 So can you elaborate on just what some

1 additional funding would do in terms of being
2 able to serve additional veterans? Because
3 clearly your track record is great in helping
4 those individuals in your community.

5 MR. WALTERS: Yeah, absolutely.

6 One thing that we will do actually is
7 help veterans that are in housing crisis.
8 With the little bit of funding our county
9 receives, about \$185,000 -- which doesn't
10 equate to nothing these days -- but we're
11 able to at least allocate funds to help a
12 veteran if they come with a family or by
13 themselves and put them in a hotel until we
14 can get them connected to Support Services
15 for Veteran Families, which is SSVF, or any
16 other resources that could help the
17 individual.

18 Where if a dishonorable veteran can't,
19 you know, receive those type of services,
20 that we'll reach out to DSS and other
21 services to say, Hey, what can you do to help
22 this person? Or help someone with, like I
23 said, gift cards, which is the biggest thing.
24 Food insecurity is a major thing that's

1 happening for our county. You know, I focus
2 on the rural area, because our county is
3 pretty rural.

4 So we say food insecurity,
5 transportation. Oh, man. And events,
6 different activities where -- a lot of
7 programs actually will do things where they
8 will take veterans out and do fishing. Or
9 they'll pay -- every program allows a veteran
10 to go there for free. So any veteran that
11 goes there with their family -- we paid for
12 events at a baseball game. We brought
13 everybody out, but also they brought vendors
14 of -- everybody in the community saying, Hey,
15 listen, if you have housing issues, if you
16 have to get connected to food, if you want to
17 get connected to resources, they're there.

18 Because we know veterans are not going
19 to go look for anything. If you have a
20 luncheon and you have resource fairs around
21 there, a veteran will actually get some food
22 and then go talk to somebody like at the
23 Red Cross. They'll say, Okay, what do you
24 have for me? Or they'll speak to someone

1 from the Office of Aging or speak to someone
2 that they'll never call. Because you'll say,
3 Hey, call this person because they can help
4 you -- nope, they're too prideful. They're
5 not going to call anybody.

6 And that's where peer-to-peer has been
7 the absolute best thing for veterans, because
8 so many of us will help a veteran get to the
9 VSA or the department or -- or the VA,
10 because the veterans don't like the VA.

11 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

13 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'm sorry.

14 Senator Roxanne Persaud.

15 SENATOR PERSAUD: I want to thank all
16 of you for your testimony today.

17 You know, Gavin, I hear you. We heard
18 earlier the commissioner -- and I think
19 everyone was pushing, saying you should have
20 more funding, you should have more funding.
21 So I'm pleased that you are telling us you
22 definitely need more funding.

23 And, you know, we will fight with our
24 colleagues to ensure that you do receive the

1 funding that you should, because no veteran
2 should be left without.

3 So thank you for -- thank you for your
4 service, and thank you for your advocacy on
5 behalf of all veterans.

6 MR. WALTERS: Thank you.

7 SENATOR PERSAUD: Ms. Gerhardt, you
8 know, we work together; I want to just thank
9 you again for everything that you're doing.
10 And I want us to continue to talk about the
11 needs of the DV population.

12 I think we have gotten lax in getting
13 our messaging across. We have a number of
14 DV victims in shelter that -- they seem to
15 just be languishing. What can we do to
16 assist them? What supports can we offer
17 them?

18 There are too many of them in our
19 shelters right now, and we're not having the
20 conversations that we were having like a few
21 years ago. You know, we -- it was always DV,
22 DV, DV, DV -- but now we seem not to be
23 having that conversation. I think we need to
24 get back to that, to show them that they're

1 not forgotten.

2 So if you can work with us, you know,
3 just to get that message across --

4 MS. GERHARDT: Absolutely.

5 SENATOR PERSAUD: -- and get the
6 services into the places where they should
7 be.

8 And, Doctor, you know, we hear you.
9 We were having the conversation about, you
10 know, the needs -- the child poverty needs in
11 your area. We would like to work with -- you
12 know, with our colleagues to make sure that
13 you get the resources you need.

14 But we want to also make sure that
15 you're part of the conversation for that
16 child poverty funding that's coming to your
17 community. It's not -- it's great that the
18 money is going there. But if the people who
19 are in the know are not part of the
20 conversation on the disbursement of the
21 money, then we'll have some problems.

22 So I want to make sure that you are at
23 that table when the decisions are being made
24 on how that money is going to be funded.

1 DR. LYMAN-TORRES: Thank you.

2 SENATOR PERSAUD: Thank you.

3 (To Ms. Hesdorfer.) And I'm carrying
4 your NOEP letter pushing for that \$2 million,
5 and I hope my colleagues will continue to
6 support it.

7 But all in all, I thank all of you for
8 your advocacy. Thank you.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Thank you.

10 Assemblymember Manktelow.

11 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Thank you,
12 sir.

13 Joan, really quick. Did you say that
14 you lost 1200 employees? Did I hear you say
15 that really?

16 MS. GERHARDT: Twelve hundred
17 positions across domestic violence and sexual
18 assault programs.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Were they
20 filled positions and you lost that many?

21 MS. GERHARDT: Yeah.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Where did they
23 go?

24 MS. GERHARDT: Well, that's a good

1 question.

2 I think because they're not paid as
3 well as other human service workers, they
4 left to go to other positions within their
5 umbrella organization, let's say. They might
6 have gone to a government position -- you
7 know, maybe to the local department of social
8 services. They might have gone to academia.

9 So I can't say where each one of them
10 went, but the fact is we know there are so
11 many of those positions that are still
12 vacant. Because with the inability to pay
13 living wages for domestic violence advocates,
14 we just can't recruit people into those
15 positions. They'd rather go to healthcare.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Thank you.

17 Gavin, thank you for your service.

18 I was wondering, how much interaction
19 have you had with Commissioner DeCohen?

20 MR. WALTERS: On a -- well, I sat on
21 the Governor's workgroup, so I'm able to
22 speak to her representative. Yeah. Yeah.

23 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: As we've
24 talked about earlier -- earlier today we

1 talked about her budget and the loss of some
2 funding there. We really need to make sure
3 we have that funding. Because I did speak
4 with one of the military -- or, I'm sorry,
5 our veterans up above earlier, and he talked
6 about transportation, as you did.

7 Transportation for him and his office
8 to go out, is that something we should be
9 looking for funding for as well, as far as
10 you see it?

11 MR. WALTERS: Yeah, absolutely. I
12 think transportation's one of the biggest
13 things. And for a lot of conversations that
14 I've had with many of my surrounding
15 counties' colleagues, transportation is one
16 of those things that we've always been
17 saying, How can we address it? Where we
18 talked about Uber and Lyft and how do we
19 mitigate money to them to help transport
20 veterans from Ulster County or Orange County
21 down to the city, where they have to get a --
22 go to an appointment. Where sometimes,
23 unfortunately, our peers, you know, don't get
24 paid enough to travel all that way down there

1 and then come back where it might be like
2 8 o'clock at night, when they leave 8 o'clock
3 in the morning. And that's a typical day for
4 just one person getting transported, because
5 it can be a difficult time for that person.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Yeah, I'm very
7 familiar with it. From my district, my
8 county, Syracuse is an hour away.

9 But I do know that transportation --
10 who the driver is, that peer-to-peer support
11 with that driver, is so crucial to our
12 veterans.

13 And you have our full support. We
14 will work on keeping that funding and see
15 what we can do to find the funding for all of
16 you.

17 And Daniele, thank you for coming
18 down. I was at your place a few weeks ago.
19 Outstanding work, and we'll be there for you
20 as well.

21 DR. LYMAN-TORRES: Thank you.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN MANKTELOW: Thank you.

23 Thank you, Chair.

24 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

1 Senator Murray.

2 SENATOR MURRAY: Yes, closing it out.

3 Mr. Walters, thank you so much for
4 your service. And to you gentlemen as well,
5 thank you. And to all of you for your
6 advocacy. What you do is incredible.

7 Ms. Gerhardt, I'd like to -- a couple
8 of questions. One, in my district we have a
9 workforce housing project that is starting
10 now, some affordable housing, but they've set
11 aside -- the developer is setting aside a
12 certain portion for domestic violence
13 victims, for them to start over.

14 Is that something unique? Or is --
15 are you seeing that, or is that collaboration
16 happening around the state?

17 MS. GERHARDT: We've seen that in some
18 communities. I wouldn't say all.

19 You know, I think the challenge of
20 finding affordable and safe housing is a
21 critical need for domestic violence
22 survivors. So I think that's wonderful that,
23 you know, there's going to be a project in
24 your community. But we certainly need more.

1 SENATOR MURRAY: Okay. Now, another
2 issue -- I've talked to some folks -- I'm
3 very involved with animals and rescue and all
4 of this. And one of the big things that
5 we've run into is that you have domestic
6 violence victims with pets or animals at
7 home, and they won't leave without them. And
8 I can understand that a hundred percent.
9 They're afraid if they do, they're putting
10 them in danger.

11 But we have a shortage with shelters
12 that allow animals. Are we -- is there any
13 funding in the budget to improve on that or
14 to help with that problem? Or are you --
15 again, are you seeing that there are more
16 shelters that are allowing this? Where are
17 we with that?

18 MS. GERHARDT: Well, there's a
19 terrific new shelter in New York City which
20 opened specifically for survivors who have
21 pets.

22 But I will say it is an obligation of
23 every domestic violence program in the state
24 to make accommodations for an individual's

1 pet, whether at that shelter or at another
2 community-based organization in that
3 community.

4 So it's -- it is very troubling that
5 abusers will, you know, take abusive behavior
6 out on animals as well as humans. We
7 recognize that. It is heartbreaking that
8 survivors have to leave their home and leave
9 so many things behind, including their pets.

10 So if they are able to take those pets
11 with them, we want to make every
12 accommodation for them to do that.

13 SENATOR MURRAY: I know space is a
14 problem sometimes as far as at the shelter.
15 Or even an issue where you have to have a
16 separate building, if you're doing it
17 on-site, or finding space at different
18 shelters or rescues. So that's a challenge
19 as well.

20 MS. GERHARDT: Absolutely. But we try
21 to make it work.

22 SENATOR MURRAY: Yes. Yes. And I
23 appreciate what you do, I really do.

24 And finally, Ms. Hesdorfer, I'm with

1 you 1000 percent on Healthy Meals for All.
2 It's a shame we did not get that completely
3 done last year. I'm praying we do this year.

4 But thank you all for what you do.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: Great. Thank
6 you.

7 And I'm going to use my last three
8 minutes, I will close us out.

9 A couple of comments. First,
10 Mr. Walters and the gentlemen in the
11 audience, I want to say thank you for your
12 service and your advocacy. I learned a lot
13 today, and I very much appreciate it.

14 Ms. Hesdorfer, nothing aggravates me
15 more than leaving a federal match on the
16 table. So I appreciate your advocacy with
17 that. And I agree with a lot of my
18 colleagues about universal school meals.

19 And then I'm going to ask questions,
20 if I can, for Ms. Lyman-Torres and
21 Ms. Gerhardt. The thing that bothers me the
22 most, if I can, is the generational problem
23 that we're not addressing. We just never,
24 ever break these cycles.

1 So, Ms. Lyman-Torres, let me ask you a
2 question. It was my understanding that there
3 was going to be a shortfall of federal money
4 for the CACs. Can you speak to that? And
5 how -- how did the Governor do it in her
6 Executive Budget to address that? And what
7 else can we do to make sure you're whole?

8 Because I think I have a limited
9 understanding of just how dangerous it is for
10 children and families without your services.

11 DR. LYMAN-TORRES: That was the VOCA
12 funding at the federal level. And the
13 Governor's current budget has a stopgap in
14 there of \$120 million to kind of protect from
15 that, and that's very important.

16 All the child advocacy centers do
17 receive VOCA funding. It's about 10 percent
18 of our funding. So it is -- it's really
19 important.

20 But we need to continue to press
21 beyond that. When I talk about the child
22 fatalities and the complexity of the -- you
23 know, the trauma that's intergenerational, it
24 really has to do with the fact that we aren't

1 systematically dealing with prevention. We
2 are not dealing with high-risk parents who
3 are in other systems, whether it be DV,
4 mental health, substance use. They are being
5 discharged with children without case
6 management, without supports for those
7 children, and the child fatality rates
8 continue to go up.

9 I stepped out of this session today
10 because we had another child lost in
11 Rochester today --

12 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I heard.

13 DR. LYMAN-TORRES: -- another baby,
14 from the same systemic kinds of issues.

15 And this -- it really is urgent that
16 we put money into prevention.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: I very much
18 appreciate it. Thank you for your testimony.

19 And Ms. Gerhardt, I'm going to close
20 with you. And I don't know if you caught the
21 initial portion for the OCFS commissioner,
22 but I started by asking about the domestic
23 violence workforce. Particularly because
24 it's egregious that we have not increased pay

1 for the workforce since 2008, is that -- is
2 my number right?

3 MS. GERHARDT: That's when the human
4 service group was put together. And we were
5 not included in 2008. So we've never
6 received a COLA, period.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN HEVESI: That's
8 outrageous.

9 And the fact that you've lost
10 1200 positions -- that is devastating,
11 absolutely devastating. And I think it's
12 incumbent upon us elected officials to make
13 you and all of our providers a top priority
14 in this budget.

15 We cannot allow not only the services
16 not to be delivered to children and families
17 but, again, we've got to break the cycle
18 so -- as Ms. Torres said, we've got to make
19 sure this doesn't get taught from one
20 generation to the other.

21 And I've run out of my own time. So I
22 think that is the end of this hearing.

23 I would like to thank all of my
24 colleagues and this panel, and particularly

1 Senator Krueger for her leadership and
2 allowing me to participate today.

3 Thank you.

4 CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'm very glad you
5 participated.

6 And tomorrow people can come back --
7 9:30, the same room, the topic is education.

8 So thank you all very much for your
9 testimony tonight and for staying with us.

10 PANELISTS: Thank you.

11 (Whereupon, the budget hearing
12 concluded at 5:45 p.m.)

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