KATHY HOCHUL
Governor
DRU RAI
NYS Chief Information Officer

TESTIMONY OF DRU RAI
NYS CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER AND DIRECTOR OF
NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES
JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING ON EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL

February 13, 2025

Thank you Chairs Krueger and Pretlow, Chairs Gonzalez and Otis, and distinguished members of the Legislature.

It is an honor to work alongside you in service to our fellow New Yorkers.

As you will see, ITS is an agency on the rise.

With the state's digital needs growing by the minute, ITS is doing more this year than we have at any time since this agency was created.

Whether it's enhancing cybersecurity, helping to carry out the Governor's customer experience agenda, responsibly guiding the state's next phase of AI, or pushing forward major modernization projects at our key agencies, ITS is leaning into many of the state's most pressing challenges.

I am pleased to say that this Budget provides ITS with the resources to continue to get the job done for our partner agencies and all New Yorkers.

To carry out these important objectives, we have transitioned to a new dedicated agency service model, which brings our skilled technology workers closer to the agencies they serve.

By doing so, we have strengthened existing partnerships with the subject matter experts at these agencies, become more proactive and strategic, and leveraged our new Deputy Commissioners of Technology and their teams to fuel the state's ongoing digital transformation. At the same time, we maintain shared services for cost effectiveness and compliance.

We have also significantly improved performance, starting with the rapid ITS-directed response to July's worldwide IT outage. This disruption could have been devastating and had lasting consequences for our client agencies and the people of New York.

Instead, we worked to bring all critical systems back online within 24 hours - - and swiftly remediated tens of thousands of blue screens to help our state employees get right back to work.

Further, we now have a comprehensive plan to deal with future emergencies or events, and one that has proven to be successful.

I am proud to say we are completing projects on time and under budget.

We are making significant progress with the transition from WMS to the new Integrated Eligibility System by breaking this massive project into smaller, more flexible and more manageable pieces and ultimately moving our state ever closer to the "no wrong door" public benefits system New Yorkers deserve.

In fact, I am pleased to announce that the Child Support Release 1 Go Live, the first of many coming releases, will be launched at the end of this month.

Working in partnership with the State's Chief Customer Experience Officer, ITS is providing its expertise and resources to deliver the customer experience gains as envisioned by Governor Hochul.

This includes overhauled agency websites, streamlined workflows, optimized digital services for mobile devices, a renewed focus on the customer journey, and improved access for all.

One year ago, at the Governor's direction, we wrote and issued the first statewide policy on the Acceptable Use of AI. It now serves as a roadmap for agencies to adopt AI safely and responsibly.

In the coming weeks, ITS will issue specific guidance to agencies that will help identify and catalogue AI capabilities in use, and create a public inventory shared with all New Yorkers.

ITS will regularly refine and improve these guidance documents to meet evolving use cases and continuously modernize the technology solutions we deliver. And thanks to your partnership with Governor Hochul, this concept is now enshrined in law, ensuring transparency in the state's use of AI to support New Yorkers.

Our aim is simple - - to show the nation what is possible when you optimize the benefits of AI while mitigating risk, provide strong human oversight, create efficiencies in government service delivery, and enhance the workplace experience for our most important asset, our employees.

At the Governor's direction, ITS will soon provide AI training, education and upskilling for our state workforce - - along with other resources - - so they have the tools and skills necessary to make an even greater impact for New York.

In 2022, we built the Joint Security Operations Center to forever change the way we manage cybersecurity in New York. And, it's making a difference.

The Governor's comprehensive statewide strategy is better protecting our State and local entities from cyber threats, and we continue to grow our capabilities every day - - providing actionable intelligence and alerts to our partners and adding new statewide customers.

In fact, ITS now protects more than 95,000 computers in local communities across the State.

The Executive Budget provides new resources to grow the JSOC to meet this surging demand.

With all the work ahead of us, I am grateful that the Executive Budget recommends an increase of $174 million, including 295 new Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) for ITS. If we are going to set the State up for future success, we must grow the ITS workforce to meet this moment.

While the challenges before us are great, so too are the many opportunities.

Opportunities to leave our state better, stronger, safer, more modern and more affordable - - through the strategic use of technology and the many contributions of our hardworking state employees.

Our agency has repeatedly shown that when we use a state employee to deliver a new technology solution, we do it better, faster, and save taxpayers more of their hard-earned dollars.

Therefore, I ask you to follow Governor Hochul's lead and help us right size ITS for the future.

These 295 new ITS employees will collectively help us deliver even more for New York - - including work on the landmark Tax Modernization, ensuring state web applications conform to the global benchmark for accessibility, and creation of an even more robust cybersecurity posture for New York.

Thank you for your time and partnership, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.