

**Testimony before the Joint Legislative Fiscal Committees
2026-2027 Executive Budget Proposal
Maria Lisi-Murray, Acting Executive Director**

Good morning, Chairs Krueger, Pretlow, committee chairs and other distinguished members. My name is Maria Lisi-Murray, and I am the Acting Executive Director of the New York State Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about Governor Hochul's Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget, and share updates on the Justice Center's work.

At the heart of the Justice Center is a simple, but powerful, mission: to create a safer, more inclusive New York for all. With Governor Hochul's investment and support from the Legislature, we will continue our efforts to advance that mission.

Over the past year, my main priority as Acting Executive Director was to listen.

I traveled across the state, listening to state agency colleagues, Advisory Council members, legislators, providers, people receiving services, their families, and my staff. I heard their stories and their challenges and focused on identifying where my support would be the most helpful.

Through these conversations, my goals for the agency became clear: prioritize process improvement and data sharing; increase engagement and collaboration; and heighten our focus on prevention and quality.

When I met with agencies and providers to see their work firsthand, I recognized, and they shared, the need for more efficient case processing to help reduce administrative burdens.

These visits helped me better understand the daily realities of those providing care and identify powerful ways to modify our work.

We:

- updated our online reporting form, and piloted new options for video interviewing;
- launched a new Quality Management Dashboard to help providers identify the information needed to move cases forward;
- and reorganized our office structure, creating a new region downstate to better distribute our workload.

These changes led to big results, reducing systemic burdens and allowing us to close 1,600 more cases in 2025 than the year before.

Through these listening sessions, I also heard the call for increased training to support those who interact with New Yorkers vulnerable to abuse- groups the Justice Center exists to protect.

That's why I made workforce training and quality control a key focus this year.

We expanded our law enforcement and first responder training offerings to include district attorneys' offices and educated more than 700 professionals in 2025 alone.

We developed a new trauma-informed investigations training that teaches participants how to conduct more effective, person-centered interviews.

And, through our annual Justice Center Summit, we convened more than 2,300 state agency and provider staff, creating space for learning, dialogue, and recommitting to the shared goal of protecting people in state care.

My dedicated staff also continued to support system-wide quality control measures, conducting 300 audits of service providers that strengthen accountability by assessing whether agencies implemented necessary actions to address abuse or neglect.

From conversations with people receiving services and their family members, I've recognized how much they value our advocacy role during challenging times.

Through roundtable discussions and resource sharing we have developed deeper relationships with parent and family groups and found better ways to address their needs.

The Justice Center employs a team of skilled advocates that answer questions about the investigative process, accompany victims to interviews, and connect families with relevant services. In 2025, our advocates engaged with more than 5,000 people and families across New York State.

The stakeholders we have engaged over the past year, share in our commitment to preventing abuse and neglect in the service system.

I know this because providers have sought our data so they can identify areas for improvement independently – before incidents occur.

Our fellow state agencies want ready-to-use abuse-prevention tools and training programs to bolster their broader educational efforts.

And families want more advocacy resources to equip them with the knowledge they need to keep their loved one safe.

Governor Hochul's budget proposal will help us to further expand the Justice Center's abuse-prevention efforts, and respond to these requests.

To date, investments by Governor Hochul have allowed us to launch a workgroup that leverages the expertise of Justice Center staff to identify trends that help prevent incidents before they happen.

And in the year ahead we will expand these efforts by continuing to gather input from those connected to our mission, including other state agencies, family members, providers, and people receiving services, to develop prevention solutions based on data and emerging needs.

These solutions will decrease burden on providers by offering resources they can implement right away; increase knowledge and education for direct care workers; and strengthen our outreach to people receiving services and their families. The goal: keeping people safe.

This work underscores our role not only as an oversight agency, but as a driver of system-wide quality improvement.

Taken together, this direction for the Justice Center's future, along with our accomplishments this past year, tell a clear story.

We are closing cases more efficiently, engaging more deeply, and investing in prevention to create safer systems.

Guided by a strategic vision that honors our history and anticipates our future, I look forward to listening, learning, and addressing the needs of our stakeholders.

Before I close, I want to thank the dedicated Justice Center team for their work to move the agency forward; the many agency, provider, and family groups that inform our direction; and Governor Hochul, for her continued investment in our nation-leading protections.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer your questions.