



**Office of Temporary
and Disability Assistance**

**Testimony
Commissioner Barbara C. Guinn**

**Before the Legislative Fiscal Committees' Joint Budget Hearing
State Fiscal Year 2026-27 Executive Budget
Human Services**

**Thursday, February 5, 2026
9:30am**

Good morning, Chairpersons Krueger, Pretlow, Persaud, and Davila, and other members of the Legislature. As Commissioner of the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, I welcome the opportunity to speak with you today about Governor Hochul's Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget and its support for the critical programs and services our agency provides to New York State residents.

In partnership with the local social services districts, OTDA is responsible for the delivery of benefits that provide economic assistance and support to eligible families and individuals. This assistance includes helping very low-income New Yorkers meet their essential needs, such as housing, food, and other necessities.

Throughout her administration, Governor Hochul has not only made landmark investments to help make New York more affordable and livable for all New Yorkers, she has been laser-focused on making sure we're doing all we can to help families and children in our state have a better life and a better future.

As co-chair of New York State's Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council, I am proud that the budget agreed to by the Governor and the Legislature last year enacted several major policies that align with the Council's recommendations and will help reduce child poverty. These historic efforts include but are not limited to the following examples:

- Delivering a historic increase to the Child Tax Credit by giving eligible families a \$1,000 credit for children younger than 4 years old and a \$500 credit for children ages 4-16, effectively doubling the credit for the average family. Critical policy changes were also made to ensure those most in need receive the maximum credit. Thanks to the actions taken by the Governor and Legislature, this policy change was effective as of the start of tax filing season on January 26. As you may have seen, we are working with our partners at the Tax Department to make every effort to raise awareness of this historic increase and connect eligible New Yorkers, especially the lowest-income New Yorkers most in need, to this important financial assistance.
- Providing \$395 million to ensure free breakfast and lunch for every K-12 student in New York, supporting free school meals for over 2.8 million students statewide and saving families an average of \$1,600 per child. In addition to the financial support this investment provides for families, it also reduces stigma and permits children to comfortably access needed food.
- Establishing New York's new "Birth Allowance for Beginning Year" (BABY) Benefit, a program administered by our agency that provides \$1,800 to families in receipt of Public Assistance upon the birth of a new child. We are proud to report that this policy went into effect this past November.
- Investing substantially in supportive housing to help some of our most vulnerable residents have access to a home and stabilize their lives.

- Implementing important policy changes to the Public Assistance program that enabled recipients to earn more and save more while maintaining eligibility.

This year, the Governor is continuing to make life more affordable, keep people safe, and expand opportunities for all New Yorkers. These proposals will all have a real positive effect on the lives of families and individuals our agency serves.

The Executive Budget maintains essential funding for our core programs, which serve the critical needs of millions of New Yorkers each day:

- Public Assistance provides economic support to nearly 400,000 households that are temporarily unable to work or whose income is not sufficient to meet basic household needs; as well as one-time grants needed to help families address unexpected emergencies.
- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides vital food assistance to nearly 3 million New Yorkers each month.
- The Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), which issued more than 1.6 million benefits last winter to help households heat their homes and this year is continuing to support New Yorkers in need during the record-breaking cold season.
- Child Support Services, which collected more than \$1.6 billion on behalf of nearly 580,000 families and children last year.

The budget proposal also makes key, targeted investments that will greatly support OTDA's ongoing work on several fronts.

We appreciate the Governor's commitment to provide funding necessary to modernize the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system, which SNAP and Public Assistance recipients use to access their benefits. This investment is an agency priority and will greatly help protect public benefits from sophisticated criminals who seek to steal these benefits from individuals in New York and across the country. Moving to chip-enabled EBT cards is an essential step to reduce this theft and protect needy households across our State. With this action, New York will be one of just a handful of states that have taken steps to begin implementing secure, chip-based technology to help protect SNAP recipients from skimming.

Additionally, the Governor has again provided our agency administrative funds needed to implement a New York State Summer EBT program. Summer EBT provides a \$120 grocery benefit for eligible school-age children to help families obtain healthy meals during the summer months, when children lack access to free school meals.

Summer EBT provides more than \$235 million in food assistance to about 2 million children in New York State. Keeping children well fed during the summer months helps them stay healthy and return to school in the fall ready to learn.

The Executive Budget continues the Governor's commitment to addressing the housing shortage and increasing housing affordability. This includes continued investments to increase the supply of supportive housing for families and individuals who have experienced homelessness.

This year, the Governor also proposes \$153 million for OTDA's Homeless Housing and Assistance Program (HHAP) to meet the ongoing demand for supportive housing. This funding includes a second-year, \$25 million set aside targeted for the preservation of existing HHAP units, as part of the effort to preserve existing affordable and supportive housing stock throughout the State. This is housing that New Yorkers in need rely on to remain housed and avoid homelessness.

Additionally, the Executive Budget continues to support the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI) and increases funding for OTDA's consolidated homeless services programs, which includes the New York State Supportive Housing Program (NYSSHP). Combined, these programs fund services and operating costs for nearly 31,000 supportive housing units. These programs are also vitally important to keeping New York's stock of supportive housing available.

The Executive Budget invests \$95 million to provide employment opportunities for at-risk youth through the successful Summer Youth Employment Program and the Youth Employment Program. The year-round Youth Employment Program targets areas of the state impacted by higher rates of gun violence, as part of the Governor's comprehensive approach to address this issue holistically, including through investment in constructive opportunities for young New Yorkers. These are evidence-based programs that provide additional income for low-income households, critical career development services, as well as positive outcomes for program participants and their communities.

As you know, OTDA's budget relies heavily on federal funding for some of the larger programs we oversee – SNAP, HEAP, and Public Assistance. These programs have been under attack by the federal government throughout the past year, threatening these vital benefits for some of our most vulnerable fellow New Yorkers as they cope with the high cost of food, housing, and energy.

Thanks to the leadership of the Governor, in close coordination with the Attorney General, New York has consistently and effectively fought back against these callous federal efforts to diminish longstanding safety net programs and assistance for millions of vulnerable New Yorkers.

In closing, I look forward to our continued partnership with the Legislature to address the needs of New Yorkers and reduce child poverty in our State. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and I welcome your questions and comments.