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Testimony

Governor's Executive Budget 2026-2027: Local Government/General Government February 11, 2026

Christopher T. Burke, Executive Director, New York State Preferred Source Program for New Yorkers who are Blind

Senate Finance Committee Chair Krueger, Assembly Ways and Means Chair Pretlow, and distinguished members of the Legislature:

Thank you for allowing the New York State Preferred Source Program for New Yorkers who are Blind (NYSPSP) to submit written testimony to the Local Government/General Government Joint Legislative Budget Hearing. My name is Christopher T. Burke, Executive Director of NYSPSP.

Initially, by way of background, NYSPSP operates under the Preferred Source program, a state-mandated initiative to create and sustain employment opportunities for New Yorkers who are legally blind. State and local agencies in New York State are required to purchase products and services that appear on the New York State Office of General Services (OGS) Preferred Source List through NYSPSP. These commodities and services are produced or performed by affiliated nonprofit agencies in New York that employ people who are blind or visually impaired. National Industries for the Blind manages NYSPSP who is designated by the New York State Office of Children & Family Services/New York State Commission for the Blind.

Currently, seven out of ten working age New Yorkers who are blind are not employed. At NYSPSP, it is our mission to enhance the opportunities for economic and personal independence of persons who are blind, primarily through creating, sustaining and improving employment. The employment opportunities provided by NYSPSP include not only producing janitorial, medical, office and safety supplies, but also knowledge-based employment in the areas of contact center services, document imaging and destruction, mailing services and digital accessibility, usability testing and remediation reporting services, and warehouse/distribution services. The affiliated agencies of NYSPSP provide employment to hundreds of New Yorkers who are blind through operations based in Albany, Utica, Rochester, Buffalo, Binghamton, Elmira, Syracuse and three locations in New York City and Long Island.

Like other state and local contractors, NYSPSP and its affiliated agencies around the state must deliver quality products on time and at a competitive price. NYSPSP mentors and supports its

agencies through business development; product and service research and development; program management; distribution channel development and support; marketing; sales, contract administration and related activities.

NYSPSP's role in the Preferred Source program is considered an employment model that encourages public/private partnerships and empowers people who are blind to become integrated into the state's economic mainstream. NYSPSP continuously strives to further diversify employment opportunities for people who are blind; to create product and service awareness within state and local government agencies and customers; to aggressively market the highest quality products and services; to generate public and private partnerships; and to provide technical, operational, marketing and business development services to its affiliated, community-based agencies. As the service industry rapidly expands in the United States and new technologies emerge, NYSPSP fully expects to continue to deliver new and exciting career opportunities for people who are blind.

The Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget proposal includes Article VII language (Part Y, Public Protection and General Government) to increase the discretionary purchase threshold to \$300,000 and the Office of State Comptroller (OSC) contract approval thresholds. The corresponding Memorandum in Support of this language states the purpose is "to make the procurement process for State agencies more efficient by increasing discretionary thresholds and streamlining processes."

NYSPSP applauds the Executive's efforts to streamline public procurement and, as we understand the proposal, Preferred Source contracts are covered by the increased threshold for OSC review. However, changes were not advanced to expedite other aspects of Preferred Source contract review. Currently, pursuant to the State Finance Law, all Preferred Source contracts at or above \$100,000 must receive OGS approval. The OGS application process is lengthy and often delays Preferred Source contract finalization. To ensure ALL public procurement is streamlined, NYSPSP respectfully requests that the OGS approval thresholds for Preferred Source contracts be increased in line with the increase in OSC review thresholds.

The OGS approval not only applies to State agencies, but also to all local government and public authority purchasing. NYSPSP, along with other facilitating organizations for the Preferred Source program, has regularly sought an increase in the \$100,000 threshold due to feedback from several local governments that the process adds time and work and many bypass the program entirely as a result. This is obviously not the result anyone wants here in New York State. By increasing the Preferred Source threshold to \$300,000 across the board, workload will be cut down, there will be greater participation in the program, and great employment opportunities for individuals who are blind.

NYSPSP respectfully requests that the Legislature support these proposed modifications to the Executive Budget proposal in both one-house budgets and ultimately in the Enacted Budget. These modifications will go a long way in enhancing employment opportunities for people who are blind. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on this critically important budget issue and allowing me to provide information regarding NYSPSP.