

**Testimony of
Greg Olsen, Acting Director
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the Aging**

**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Conducted By the
Senate Finance Committee
Assembly Ways & Means Committee
Monday, February 13, 2023**

Good afternoon, Chairpersons Krueger and Weinstein, Chairpersons Cleare and Kim, and all the distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly standing committees. I am Greg Olsen, Acting Director of the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA), and I'm honored to testify today. Governor Hochul's Executive Budget is aptly named "Achieving the New York Dream." The Executive Budget seeks to create a more affordable, more livable, and safer New York, while opening doors to the communities and people who have historically been blocked from equal chances at success.

I am pleased to testify on provisions of Governor Hochul's proposed budget that directly affect NYSOFA programs and services, along with additional budget proposals that will positively impact older New Yorkers and their families and move towards the broader goal of creating a more affordable and livable New York.

The Governor's State of the State message and subsequent Executive Budget proposal aims to make New York the healthiest state in the nation through a multi-agency, coordinated effort focused on:

- Developing a Master Plan for Aging;
- Improving physical and behavioral health;
- Combatting social isolation;
- Preventive health care strategies;
- Expanding access to services and training for older LGBTQ individuals;
- Supporting informal as well as working caregivers;
- Addressing disparities in access to care;
- Diversity, equity and inclusion; and,
- Much more.

Utilizing the state's 2019-2024 Prevention Agenda as the umbrella, and instituting a Health Across all Policies approach, New York State agencies are incorporating health considerations into our planning, programs, and initiatives. As agencies, we are committed to working together and considering how our policies fulfill New York's pledge as the first age-friendly state in the nation. We are already meeting this pledge for New York's older population; and now we have the opportunity to further strengthen and coordinate this vital work through the Governor's priority of developing a State Master Plan for Aging. This Master Plan is consistent with the goals and work that New York has been engaged in to improve communities for people of all ages and create healthy environments in which to grow up and grow old.

In 2018, New York became the first state in the nation to receive designation as age-friendly from AARP and the World Health Organization. New York was first because we rank high in the eight domains of age-friendly, livable communities, and due to our comprehensive plan to systematically build age-friendly and smart growth principles into how government operates and functions.

Through much-needed investments, the Governor's FY 2024 Executive Budget expands and strengthens that foundation with initiatives that will help individuals access needed services and lead healthy lives by:

- Maintaining funding for vital services such as Community Services for the Elderly (CSE), elder abuse and Holocaust survivors funding;
- Increasing funding for the Master Plan for Aging;

- Continuing \$23 million in historic investments for older New Yorkers across the state awaiting services;
- Continuing the \$2.9 million to expand efforts to combat isolation, bridge the digital divide, address elder abuse, and strengthen NYSOFA's stipend program for volunteer recruitment and retention;
- Continuing a bill-payer service program in 10 counties to prevent and mitigate financial exploitation of older adults;
- Continued improvements to New York Connects, further increasing access to long term care services and supports;
- Maintaining \$500,000 that is used to draw down more than \$2 million in federal funds to combat elder abuse and financial exploitation of older adults;
- Increasing funding for the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program, which serves as an advocate for residents and their families in nursing homes and other facilities; and,
- A 2.5 percent human services COLA for providers.

The Governor's budget provides the support necessary to continue our trailblazing initiatives. Examples include: our award-winning animatronic pet project, the GetSetUp platform that offers more than 900 lifelong learning and health and wellness classes, the Virtual Senior Center to bring senior center programming into the homes of older adults, Elli-Q, a proactive AI tool to combat isolation and loneliness and improve connectivity to others as well as improving overall health and wellness, GoGoGrandparent, a specialized ride share project to increase transportation options, and the evidence-based caregiver support platform, TRUALTA, which is available to any New Yorker providing uncompensated care to a loved one.

Further, the proposed Executive Budget increases eligibility for those seniors that wish to use services via private pay. Legislation passed in 2019 allowed individuals and families to purchase services directly from their Area Agency on Aging (AAA) when their income was above 400% of the federal poverty level. This did not go far enough, and we are pleased that the Governor's proposal expands access to services to those with incomes between 250% and 400% of the federal poverty level.

NYSOFA has also launched several pilot projects that expand outreach, communication, and engagement, as well as measure the effectiveness of these new models. These innovations will inform the Master Plan for Aging. One such innovation is the launch of a multi-county evidence-based intervention pilot that uses complex analytics to identify caregiver burnout – a leading cause of referral to higher levels of care for older adults. NYSOFA is also currently conducting the state's first ever statewide needs assessment survey of older adults. The results of this assessment will inform our Federal four-year plan, county plans and the Master Plan for Aging.

NYSOFA is also the nation's first state unit on aging to partner with the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) to make Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS) training available to our case managers. This certification improves the ability of our front-line staff to assess, recommend, and incorporate home safety features into care plans, helps individuals age in place, and prevents injuries and falls.

Finally, through our partnership with DOH, we will be expanding a successful integrated care model that coordinates aging services with health services, and strengthens NY Connects data and reporting systems as well as the state resource directory.

This budget is about so much more than any one program or service. It must be examined holistically. Older adults, like all New Yorkers, touch many different systems in their day-to-day lives, which is why the Governor's systemic investments are so important. Key investments and proposals that will further our ability to allow New Yorkers to age in place include:

- The NY Housing Compact to build 800,000 new homes to increase the housing stock and lower costs of rent over time;
- A focus on housing near transit, retrofit commercial property to residential, fund home repairs, expand tenant protections;
- Expanded access to behavioral health services;
- Strengthening EMS, which for many are the first health care responders;
- Continued investments in the health care workforce to increase access;
- Making energy more affordable to reduce out-of-pocket costs;
- Increasing the minimum wage and indexing it to inflation;
- Expanded food access;
- Improving transportation in upstate New York;
- Protecting consumers from medical debt and costs and predatory banking fees; and,
- Prescription price transparency.

NYSOFA will continue to engage sister agencies, private partners, not-for-profits, and community-based organizations as we work to serve New York's older population as effectively as possible.

Thank you—I appreciate the opportunity to be here, and I am happy to answer any questions.