



**Testimony
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Commissioner
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**Before the Legislative Fiscal Committees' Joint Budget Hearing
State Fiscal Year 2020-21 Executive Budget
Human Services**

**Thursday, January 30, 2020
11:30am in Hearing Room B
Legislative Office Building**

Good morning, Chairpersons Krueger, Weinstein, Persaud and Hevesi, as well as the other esteemed members of the NYS Legislature. I am Mike Hein, Commissioner of the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), and it is my honor to appear before you today to discuss the 2021 Executive Budget and the important work of our agency.

OTDA's core mission is to help vulnerable New Yorkers by ensuring essential services for families and individuals that help them advance economically by providing meaningful opportunities for stable employment, better access to affordable housing and quality nutrition for both themselves and their families.

In addition, our agency administers vital programs for those temporarily unable to work, as well as for many working families who simply struggle to make ends meet. These programs create much-needed housing and provide employment services, healthy food as well as heating assistance. We also inspect homeless shelters to improve safety and security; make critical disability determinations that dramatically improve people's lives; provide child support services; as well as assist refugees and immigrants that come to New York in search of the American Dream.

All of these efforts share a common goal – and that is to help individuals and families meet immediate, essential needs while supporting their efforts to achieve lasting economic security.

To that end, under the Governor's leadership, we remain strongly focused on providing New York's most vulnerable residents with affordable, safe and secure housing.

And this year we are extremely pleased that while the Executive Budget addresses serious fiscal concerns it continues the Governor's \$20 billion investment in affordable housing, which is creating or preserving more than 100,000 units of affordable housing and 6,000 units of supportive housing over five years.

Building on this initiative, this Budget makes a major new investment in the Homeless Housing and Assistance Program (HHAP) by actually doubling the funding from \$64 million to \$128 million, while investing \$5 million for projects specifically designed to assist homeless veterans.

HHAP provides pivotal capital grants and loans to expand and improve the supply of permanent supportive, transitional and emergency housing for individuals experiencing homelessness.

This funding expansion will help a wide range of populations, including those experiencing mental illness, and also substance use disorder, victims of domestic violence, youth, as well as our veterans.

I've seen firsthand – like many of you – the amazing impact that high-quality, respectful supportive housing – that HHAP has made possible – can have in quickly transforming people's lives for the better.

Under Governor Cuomo's leadership, New York has also made a strong commitment to fighting hunger and ending food insecurity. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has been a vital part of that work.

SNAP can provide more than \$6,000 a year for a typical household, making it significantly easier to feed a family and make ends meet.

Currently, there are roughly 1.5 million households in New York, totaling nearly 2.6 million people, receiving approximately \$360 million in SNAP benefits each month.

In this year's State of the State, the Governor announced plans to further expand access to SNAP for eligible community college students, ensuring more students receive essential nutrition assistance as they work toward a college degree or certificate, and a better future for themselves and their families.

And to reach even more people, OTDA has worked with the Department of Health and NY State of Health, so that people who are eligible for Medicaid can quickly "opt in" to receive information about SNAP and over 100,000 applicants have already done so.

On another positive note, the Executive Budget increases funding for the very successful Summer Youth Employment Program, providing \$45 million to help approximately 19,000 young people from low-income families get a job this summer. This program helps youth develop relevant skills that can lead to improved school performance, better positioning them for success in the future.

The Executive Budget also continues New York State's commitment to OTDA's other core programs.

This includes resources to fund the agency's child support program, which collected more than \$1.8 billion last year on behalf of nearly 800,000 families. As you know, child support is an important source of income that helps families achieve financial stability, reduces childhood poverty and in turn childhood trauma. For families experiencing deep poverty who receive child support, those essential payments can make up almost 58 percent of the household's entire income, so appropriate collection is crucial.

OTDA also oversees the federally-funded Home Energy Assistance Program that helped nearly 1.5 million households heat their homes last winter and reduce energy needs through energy efficiency investments. This winter, HEAP again allows for a maximum regular benefit of up to \$726, which is especially helpful for low-income households that pay a higher percentage of their income toward energy costs.

And in a portion of our agency that some may not be as familiar with, OTDA is also responsible for making life-altering determinations on claims filed under the Federal Social Security Disability Insurance and/or Supplemental Security Income programs.

This critical benefit for disabled New Yorkers often makes all the difference in the world because every day someone is forced to wait can place them at much greater risk for financial instability. That's why I'm proud to report that according to recent data, our team at OTDA earned the distinction of processing these cases more quickly than any other large state in the entire nation.

That means disabled New Yorkers eligible for these programs are getting their federally-funded benefits faster, improving both peace of mind and much needed financial support for this often-vulnerable population.

Senators and Assembly members, like you, we at OTDA fully recognize the importance and gravity of the work we are committed to and the lives we touch in the process. In partnership with the Governor and the State Legislature, through every program that we administer we strive to empower vulnerable New Yorkers to improve their financial security and household stability in support of stronger individuals, families and communities all across our state.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and I welcome your questions.