



Submission only

New York State Catholic Conference

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Testimony
of the
New York State Catholic Conference
regarding the
2016 – 2017
Mental Hygiene Budget

Submitted by:

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Hearing Room B
Legislative Office Building
Albany, N.Y.

February 3, 2016

In the human services arena, the expertise, experience and advice of the Council of Catholic Charities Directors guides the New York State Catholic Conference. Catholic Charities programs exist in all eight dioceses and all 62 counties of the state to provide services to people in need, Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

Our Catholic tradition compels us to be active participants in the civic life of our community, to fashion a more just world that upholds the dignity of every individual and to serve those in need. The Catholic Church in New York State fulfills its mandate to care for the most vulnerable through its vast network of Catholic Charities agencies.

The needs of the poor and vulnerable must not be ignored. A key measure of any society is how the most vulnerable members are cared for; those with the greatest need are due special attention. There is a long history in New York State of government and not-for-profit provider collaboration to deliver services in a cost-effective manner. This public/private partnership in support of the poor and vulnerable must be maintained.

Across the state, Catholic Charities provides food and nutrition programs, adoption and foster care services, housing programs, immigrant and refugee services, emergency assistance, counseling, child care, behavioral health services, developmental disabilities programs, prison ministry and more. Our partnership with the state in serving the poor and vulnerable provides obvious benefit, both to those we serve and to the state.

Governor Cuomo's sixth Executive Budget totals \$145.3 billion, an increase of \$1.71 billion, or 1.2 percent over current levels. This is the sixth budget proposal in which spending growth is kept below 2 percent.

Given the fact that spending is limited on a year-to-year basis, it is important to recognize and advocate for those commitments that are included in the Mental Hygiene portion of this year's spending plan. In the mental hygiene agencies, there is an ongoing commitment to community-based services which are desperately needed, albeit not at the levels that we would like to see.

For example, for the first time in several years, this Executive Budget includes a 0.2 percent cost-of-living-adjustment. For years, the COLA was deferred, at a cost of over \$500 million in lost revenue to the human services sector. So we are appreciative that this nominal amount is included in this year's plan. Human service providers have worked diligently over the past number of years to make ends meet and continue providing critical services while not receiving increases to their operating budgets. We would have preferred to see a higher COLA, but 0.2 percent is better than 0 percent!

In the mental hygiene sector, we are pleased to see additional funds for new community-based service opportunities, residential opportunities, and ongoing commitments to the Medicaid Transformation agenda. We would respectfully ask the Legislature to agree with this spending plan for mental hygiene,

at a minimum. Obviously, additional funding to better serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities as well as those suffering from mental illness would be welcome. There is also an obvious need for additional state resources to prevent unnecessary heroin overdoses.

While most of what we see in the mental hygiene budget is positive, we must raise a very significant concern with this body as you look to reshape the Executive Budget. The largest issue that needs to be addressed is the Governor's minimum wage proposal. Under that proposal, the state's minimum wage would increase from \$9 an hour to \$15 an hour. This budget does not recognize the costs that not-for-profits will have to incur if such a proposal goes through the legislative process. There is no money in the budget to support a minimum wage increase. A 67 percent increase in the minimum wage without additional state resources for our state contracts/state-authorized payments/state payment rates is unacceptable. After going six or seven years without an across-the-board cost-of-living-adjustment, human services agencies have fallen further and further behind. We have gone too long without increases in our contracts, and to be required to absorb this cost is unrealistic. We will be forced to close programs and reduce services.

We respectfully suggest that a minimum wage increase must include additional resources for the not-for-profit sector, beginning this fiscal year. Otherwise, the NYS Catholic Conference and the Council of Catholic Charities Directors CANNOT support the minimum wage proposal.

It is our hope that humane and wise budget decisions will be made that do not add further stress and hopelessness to those already struggling with great burden. The State Legislature has a history of identifying services that are essential to their constituents and finding a way to address these needs. We can and must find a way to arrive at a result that does not further jeopardize the poor and vulnerable members of our society – a budget that affirms the dignity of all our state's people.

Thank you.