



**Department of
Civil Service**

**Testimony of the
Department of Civil Service**

**Before the Joint Hearing of the
Legislative Fiscal Committees**

January 31, 2022

Good Afternoon Chairs Krueger and Weinstein, and distinguished members of the Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means Committees. My name is Rebecca Corso and it is my privilege to serve as the Acting Commissioner for the Department of Civil Service. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you to comment on Governor Hochul's Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2023 as it relates to the Department of Civil Service, as well as to highlight some of our key accomplishments over the past year.

As the central personnel agency for State government, the Department of Civil Service is tasked with providing critical workforce management services to approximately 70 New York State agencies, serving nearly 140,000 state employees. In this capacity, the Department is responsible for the administration of the civil service merit system and ensuring that our partner agencies have the talent to fulfill their core missions and to meet high-priority workforce needs. Similar services and technical guidance are provided to the 95 municipal agencies across New York State who are responsible for civil service administration of approximately 360,000 local government employees.

Over the past year, as the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact us all and altered the Department's ability to hold large-scale in-person civil service exams, we worked diligently to ensure that State agencies and local governments had the ability to fill critical positions so that there was no impact on essential services. We expanded the use of on-line training and experience (T&E) exams as well as other specialized exam holdings. In addition, the Department began holding virtually proctored exams, which is part of a longer-term strategy to streamline the civil service examination process and reimagine and modernize the Department's testing program.

The Department has been working to identify testing space to hold in-person exams. I am happy to say that beginning in October 2021, we began holding state-wide in-person exams, and we are increasing the number held each month. While our first priority is holding exams that were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have also been working closely with State agencies and local governments to identify their other high-priority testing needs. Also, to ensure the health and safety of jobseekers, the Department implemented a mandatory COVID-19 vaccination/testing policy for all test-takers sitting for an in-person state civil service exam and is now offering those approved for a reasonable accommodation the opportunity to take their exams virtually.

The Department is also responsible for administering New York State's occupational health program through medical evaluation and examination services for State agencies. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Employee Health Services Clinics and Nursing Stations continued to provide services to ensure the health and safety of employees.

I am pleased to report that this year's Executive Budget includes several new state workforce initiatives aimed at ensuring that New York State can continue to attract the best and brightest to public service careers. This includes the establishment of new Department of Civil Service testing centers at designated SUNY college campuses, which will make it more convenient for jobseekers to take civil service exams within their own community, connect students to state government jobs, and improve overall recruitment

and employment opportunities for diverse populations. Further, through the establishment of a new Test Validation & Evaluation Unit, the Department will be able to continually create and evaluate test content to ensure that civil service exams are maintaining the highest standards of integrity and equity. Additionally, the Executive Budget advances several pieces of legislation that will streamline hiring practices and make working for New York State more accessible for all New Yorkers, including individuals and veterans with disabilities.

Under Governor Hochul's guidance and leadership, and in partnership with the State's Chief Diversity Officer, the Department is also working at both the enterprise and agency levels to strengthen statewide diversity and inclusion and create pathways for better incorporating equal opportunity principles into the vital services delivered to the public.

To that end, the Department continues to provide State agencies with tailored feedback and guidance to assist in developing strategic plans that identify obstacles, opportunities, and innovative strategies in diversity and inclusion. Focal areas include outreach and recruitment, retention, policy development, training, and trend analysis. As you can imagine, these plans are critically important to our shared objective of meeting workforce and community needs throughout the State of New York.

In 2021, the Department also continued to deliver its highly interactive implicit bias training to the New York State workforce and launched a new training program for Designees of Reasonable Accommodations, both of which are part of our larger efforts to help cultivate a more inclusive work environment across state government. Since its launch in late 2020, the Department has provided implicit bias training to over 21,000 participants across 30 State agencies, and we will continue to expand the suite of trainings available that will facilitate respectful conversations and interactions regarding topics relevant to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

On the local government front, the Department reviewed more than 2,900 requests from municipal civil service agencies over the past year to support the appropriateness of merit system administration activities and the practicability of examinations for certain titles. I am pleased to report that the Department is close to finalizing its comprehensive 5-year initiative to conduct Technical Assistance Reviews for all 95 municipal civil service agencies. Through this effort – which is scheduled to be completed in mid-2022 – the Department is taking further action to ensure that all HR professionals across the public sector workforce have a solid understanding of civil service administration, so that we continue to improve the consistency and quality of HR management across New York State.

In the health benefits arena, the Department remains focused on efficiently administering the New York State Health Insurance Program, also known as NYSHIP, through the Empire Plan and regional HMOs, available under statute or through collective bargaining, to approximately 1.2 million state and local government employees, retirees, and their families.

As part of these efforts, the Department has continued to offer virtual visits through the LiveHealth Online Telehealth program at no cost to all Empire Plan enrollees throughout the duration of the current pandemic. In 2021, the Department also implemented several consumer-friendly provisions of the Consolidated Appropriations Act (CAA) to enhance NYSHIP benefits to enrollees.

In addition, consistent with Federal requirements, the Department acted quickly to implement programs to provide vaccinations, at-home COVID-19 testing kits, and access to COVID-19 oral antiviral medications, at no cost to NYSHIP enrollees. In 2022, the Department will continue to identify ways to improve services to enrollees, while protecting the State's taxpayers through cost-effective management.

As you can see, the initiatives highlighted today reflect the Department's commitment and focus to building back better and modernizing the State's approach to meeting our workforce needs.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to take a moment to extend my sincere appreciation to all of the staff at the Department of Civil Service for the work that they do to meet our mission of building tomorrow's workforce today and for all State employees for their unwavering dedication to serving their fellow New Yorkers during these unprecedented times.

I look forward to working in partnership with all of you to advance a shared vision for a top tier workforce to deliver critical services to New Yorkers.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am happy to address any questions you may have at this time.