

**Testimony of the Department of Civil Service
Before the Joint Hearing of the Legislative Fiscal Committees
February 27, 2015**

Good afternoon Chairman DeFrancisco, Chairman Farrell and distinguished members of the Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means Committees. I am Jerry Boone, Commissioner of the Department of Civil Service (the Department). With me is Michael Volforte, Interim Director of the Governor's Office of Employee Relations (GOER). I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to comment on the Governor's 2015-16 Budget as it relates to the Department, as well as to highlight some of our key accomplishments over this past year.

During Governor Cuomo's first term, substantial progress was made in transforming State government to improve the efficiency and cost effectiveness of services. A key initiative was adoption of a shared services model to standardize Human Resource (HR) and Finance transactions in the State. With the centralization of routine HR transactions, agencies will be better positioned to focus on their core missions and the State, as a whole, can take a more strategic approach to merit system and HR administration.

To support the changing role of agency HR leaders, the Department and GOER jointly developed and delivered a professional development program for agency HR Directors and leaders focusing on strategic HR. We are building upon the success of this program by providing new tools, best practices and additional training for HR professionals.

The Department also increased training opportunities for local civil service jurisdictions across the State, ranging from refresher training for more experienced HR and civil service professionals, to the annual Civil Service Institute, a comprehensive three-week training program which prepares less experienced local administrators for their independent responsibilities in administering the Civil Service Law.

The Department is also responsible for ensuring that agencies have the necessary talent to fulfill their core missions. With 80 percent of the State's workforce in the competitive class, State agencies (and localities) rely upon the Department to administer examinations to ensure they can meet their staffing needs. Over the past year the Department administered nearly 4,500 examinations, testing over 140,000 candidates for State and local government titles. Our testing programs integrated tried-and-true testing methods with new, more innovative testing paradigms, to enhance efficiencies while also ensuring we comport with merit and fitness requirements.

For example, to more timely attract a cadre of capable and diverse college graduates to public service, the Department piloted a new selection tool, the Professional Career Opportunities (PCO) examination. By including numerous job titles throughout the State in a single written examination, the PCO is designed to ensure that agencies have a ready pool of talent available to meet their hiring needs. The PCO has laid the groundwork for broader use of competency-based testing – allowing us to include several related occupational areas in a single examination in the future.

In addition, in support of local civil service, for the first time, the Department administered examinations for the statewide Director of Facilities titles, to be used by all local school districts. This new approach was required under legislation that specifically directed the Department, rather than the local governments, to classify these job titles and hold an examination for the titles.

Increasing diversity in the State workforce is another important responsibility the Department shares with its client agencies. Our outreach efforts, which highlight opportunities for entry into State service, complement the more targeted recruitment efforts of State agencies seeking specific needs and skillsets for their operations. Over the past year, the Department participated in over 70 outreach efforts to under-represented populations - including, most recently, the NYS Association of Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislators' Caucus Conference – and in the near term, the Somos el Futuro's spring conference.

The Department has also focused on Veteran's employment, successfully launching two new online recruitment portals this past year. One portal facilitates selection of disabled candidates, including disabled veterans, and the other connects veterans with temporary employment opportunities in State government. Finally, the Department implemented a Constitutional change that provides additional credits to eligible, disabled veterans seeking a Civil Service appointment or promotion.

In the health benefits arena, the Department continues to administer the New York State Health Insurance Program (NYSHIP), one of the largest public employer health insurance programs in the nation, covering over 1.2 million State and local government employees, retirees and their families. NYSHIP offers a number of health benefit programs, the largest of which is the Empire Plan. While specific benefits and associated employee costs are negotiated by GOER, the Department is responsible for ensuring coverage is provided at the lowest possible cost to the State and other employers.

Since the Department's conversion of the Empire Plan to self-funding in January 2014, I am pleased to report that approximately \$343 million in Plan savings have been realized, benefiting both the State and participating local governments. In addition, the

Empire Plan has experienced lower rates of premium growth, translating to cost savings for Plan participants and New York's taxpayers.

The Department also continues to collaborate with the Department of Health, to improve coordination of health care purchasing, capitalizing on best practices and efficiencies to improve health care and lower costs. Recognizing the benefits of preventive services, the Department expanded Empire Plan access to cover vaccines for the flu, pneumonia, shingles and meningitis at participating pharmacies.

Looking to the year ahead, the Department plans a follow-up to our 2009 eligibility audit of NYSHIP membership to ensure that ineligible dependents do not claim or receive benefits. As part of the audit, as in the prior audit, we are seeking an amnesty period to be authorized by statute.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you and am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.