

**Testimony of Michael Volforte, Interim Director
on behalf of the Governor's Office of Employee Relations
February 27, 2015**

Chairman DeFrancisco, Chairman Farrell, and honorable members of the Assembly and Senate. I am Michael Volforte and serve as the Interim Director of the Governor's Office of Employee Relations (GOER). Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to address Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget for fiscal year 2015-2016 as it relates to GOER.

Before we look to next year, let me first talk a little about what we've been doing. During the past year, we've reached collective bargaining agreements with the unions that represent graduate students employed by the State University of New York, employees within the Division of Housing and Community Renewal, and supervisory employees with the Division of State Police. These agreements continue to build on the vision that the State has established over the last four years – responsible controlled wage growth, rebalanced health insurance premium contributions, and sensible changes in employee health plan design. Currently, we've completed negotiations for over 97% of the State workforce and continue to move forward with the goal of reaching an agreement for all employees in the coming year.

Throughout the past year, we strengthened our collaboration with the Department of Civil Service – our strategic partner in human resources management. The goal is that we speak with a unified voice and take action with a unified strategy in an attempt to harmonize what has heretofore been a disjointed approach to human resources management. During last year's testimony, we highlighted our plan to train agency Human Resource Managers to provide them with the tools to be a strategic resource within their own agency in areas such as workforce planning, performance management, employee engagement, and talent development. This training was also designed to develop these individuals into strategic partners for GOER and Civil Service as we continue to move the State forward in the process of developing and managing the workforce in a strategic manner. I'm pleased to inform you that the Human Resource Managers successfully completed the training and have begun putting the lessons and

skills learned to good use. We are committed to continuing the professional development of these employees and have established additional professional development courses for them to attend over the coming year.

Over the past year, employees of GOER and the Labor-Management Committees continued their high quality service to the workforce. Thousands of employees have taken advantage of the State's three pre-tax benefits programs – the Health Care Spending Account, the Dependent Care Advantage Account and NYS-Ride, our pre-tax transportation benefit program that permits employees to use before tax monies to purchase travel on mass transit. Our employees also continued valuable support services for the workforce in terms of improving their personal and professional lives through our website, webinars and in-person events; fostering employee health through wellness programs; hosting informational seminars to assist employees to plan for retirement; providing support for the various child care centers that are located on New York State worksites; and providing resources and referral services through the Employee Assistance Program for employees who are suffering personally.

This past year, for the first time, we successfully expanded our enterprise-wide training programs for employees, supervisors and managers with a total of nine comprehensive and consistent training programs. These programs include internal control, privacy of health information and cyber security training – designed to educate the workforce about the need to protect the State's, and public's, information technology, health information, and other assets; workplace violence prevention and right to know training – programs designed to provide basic safety information to employees and protect them in the work environment; equal employment opportunity and sexual harassment prevention training - programs designed to educate employees about their rights to a discrimination free workplace and procedures for filing complaints of discrimination; reasonable accommodation for employees and reasonable accommodation for religious observances – programs designed to make sure that supervisors and managers are aware of the rights of employees to receive such accommodations and the procedures that need to be followed to ensure that those rights are protected; language access

and reasonable accommodation for members of the public – programs designed to eliminate barriers to the access of governmental services by members of the public. Additional training was offered in many areas such as job skills and professional development for a wide array of represented and unrepresented employees. These programs demonstrate not only the Governor’s vision of inclusiveness in the workplace and dedication to eradicating discrimination but a strong reminder to the public at large that our employees will serve all members of the public competently and completely.

With respect to the year ahead, my office is busy preparing for negotiations for successor agreements for two collective bargaining agreements that will expire this year in addition to planning for contracts that will expire next year. There are no layoffs proposed under Governor Cuomo’s fiscal year 2015-2016 budget. Moreover, his budget actually anticipates growth in the state workforce by approximately 846 people by the end of the next fiscal year. The Governor’s budget, in a fiscally responsible manner, restores pay parity for Management/Confidential employees through the restoration of previously withheld increases in base compensation beginning in July of this year.

Once again, this year, we will build on the gains we made last year and continue to increase the capacity and skills of the state workforce to deliver the highest quality services to the public. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you.

