

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

**January 25, 2017**

Chairwoman Young, Chairman Farrell, and honorable members of the Assembly and Senate.

Good morning. I am Michael Volforte and serve as the Interim Director of the Governor's Office of Employee Relations and I'm pleased to have the opportunity to address Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget proposal for the upcoming fiscal year as it relates to my office and the workforce.

During the past year, the State reached collective bargaining agreements with several unions that represent our employees. We reached two agreements with the Public Employees Federation that cover the years 2015-2016 and 2016-2019 – both of which were ratified by overwhelming margins. We also reached an agreement with the Graduate Student Employees Union for the 2016-2019 period and the New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association for the 2016-2021 period. These last two agreements have yet to be ratified. All of the agreements we reached strike a balance – fairly compensating our valuable public employees while maintaining fiscal discipline.

Along with our partners in labor, the Governor's Office of Employee Relations provides high quality benefit programs to the State workforce. These include pre-tax contribution programs for unreimbursed health care expenses, dependent care expenses and certain transportation expenses, pre-retirement planning seminars, wellness services and our well established Employee Assistance Program through

which thousands of employees obtain assistance to help them achieve work-life balance and address other issues in their lives.

We have built upon Governor Cuomo's longstanding commitment to protecting and educating the state workforce. We just completed our third year of enterprise-wide mandatory training programs for employees, supervisors and managers designed to protect our workforce and the work environment, stamp out potential discrimination and ensure access to government services by the public. This is in addition to numerous other programs and courses that we offer that promote skills in leadership, supervision, interpersonal relations and the specific skills needed to do the myriad jobs that make up the state workforce. We also continued our work with our partners in Civil Service to ensure, for example, that when a title series is revamped that training and development opportunities are available to employees to assist them in meeting the expectations of their position.

Looking to the next fiscal year, our focus will be on negotiations, implementation of recently negotiated agreements and expansion of the training available to the state workforce to enhance skills and further their professional development. Currently, we are in negotiations with four unions seeking successor agreements for their expired contracts. The overall workforce numbers remain stable and there are no planned or proposed layoffs in the Governor's budget.

I'm also very excited to support the Governor's proposal for the Empire Star Public Service Awards. These professional development scholarship awards will recognize the achievements of our employees and the impact they have on the lives of New Yorkers. It is important that we take the time to recognize them and reward them

for jobs well done. I'm also proud that my office will continue to assist in the Governor's fight to end wage inequality. As you know, the Governor recently issued Executive Order 161 whereby we will no longer collect or request an applicant's compensation history as part of the application process. Through our monitoring and oversight, this will ensure that salary is set based on the skills and abilities a position requires and protect a candidate seeking employment with the State from being disadvantaged based on what a candidate made in their prior employment.

Over the next year, we will continue our collaboration with the unions and I'm confident that we will reach agreements that are fiscally responsible, provide deserved benefits for the workforce, and help ensure continued provision of essential services on which their fellow New Yorkers rely. Thank you.



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