



**Department of
Civil Service**

**Testimony of the
Department of Civil Service**

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

January 30, 2024

Good afternoon, Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Jackson, Amato, Ramos, and Bronson, as well as distinguished members of your respective committees.

My name is Timothy Hogue and I am pleased to serve as the 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 2025, as well as to highlight the exciting modernization initiatives the Department of Civil Service is undertaking.

We continue to grapple with hiring challenges that differ from those of generations past. Over the past decade, the state workforce has decreased by approximately 10 percent, leaving vacancies in thousands of positions responsible for providing critical services to New York State residents.

To rebuild New York's public workforce, we are completely retooling the way we conduct our business here at Civil Service to modernize and remove barriers to employment for all jobseekers.

Top of mind for all the efforts we are undertaking is ensuring that diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunity are at the forefront of all statewide initiatives. We want to build a workforce that is reflective of the many unique faces, voices, backgrounds, and ideas of those we serve.

And, I believe the programs we are implementing will carry out Governor Hochul's vision and have a lasting impact on the make-up of the public service workforce for future generations.

When I presented my budget testimony last year, the Department was in the beginning stages of implementing the Hiring for Emergency Limited Placement program (HELP) at both the state and local levels to address the workforce shortage in critical health and safety titles.

These programs are addressing emergency staffing situations by allowing state and local agencies to more swiftly hire candidates that meet the minimum qualifications for those positions.

I am pleased to report that the HELP program has been crucial in growing both the State and local workforce over the past nine months.

To date, more than 6,000 individuals have been hired into health and safety positions through this program, helping to reduce the staffing shortages in these crucial roles.

That said, New York State agencies and localities continue to report chronic hiring difficulties in the post-COVID-19 labor market.

At the state level, agencies are having persistent recruitment challenges, and a shortage of candidates exists across all occupations.

To assist with this issue, the Department, at Governor Hochul's direction, is implementing an expanded program – called the New York Hiring for Emergency Limited Placement Statewide (NY HELPS) program. Through NY HELPS, which was recently approved by the Civil Service Commission, all State agencies will temporarily be authorized to make appointments to nearly **any** position typically filled on an open-competitive basis.

The expanded NY HELPS program will enable New York State agencies to fill critical vacancies more effectively and efficiently during this temporary period.

I want you to know that the Department is very cognizant that local governments are struggling as well, and in fact, we have heard from many legislators and local government officials, expressing their support for implementing NY HELPS in their districts.

This is why we intend to submit a request to the Civil Service Commission at the February 2024 meeting to approve a local version of the NY HELPS program.

While we are working to fully implement NY HELPS for a May 2024 launch, the Department is also undertaking a review of college degree requirements for civil service titles and will consider equivalent experience where appropriate, thereby removing additional educational barriers for entry to civil service jobs.

Public and private sector employers are resetting degree requirements as part of a growing recognition of the value of work and life experience. We are hopeful that reassessing degree requirements will help us in our efforts to reach jobseekers in communities where going to college isn't always possible, but who have real-life work experience to contribute to the workforce.

While this work is underway, the Department will continue to carry out and implement the transformative initiatives proposed by Governor Hochul and adopted with your support as part of last year's budget.

We are building #TeamCivilService, and we will be establishing computer-based testing centers **ALL** across the state, where in-person exams will be held throughout the week to meet jobseekers where they are.

This paradigm shift will boost opportunities for **ALL** New Yorkers to participate in exams, including individuals who do not have a computer or internet access, making the Empire State more competitive with the private sector in our recruitment efforts.

Further, we will promote the availability of thousands of public service careers through the Centers for Careers in Government located at DOL Career Centers. We will also launch a public awareness campaign to promote, in both English and Spanish, the values of public service, and the benefits and varied opportunities available as a New York State

employee. Through this work, we will be embedded throughout communities across the state, which will enable us to further our work with community-based organizations to create awareness about the plethora of opportunities and benefits available in public service careers.

As part of Governor Hochul's ongoing commitment in building a strong public workforce, the Department looks forward to working with our partners across state government to develop and offer new training focused on anti-racism in 2024.

As we seek to recruit more diverse talent to the public sector, one of the key benefits we continue to highlight is the expansive health plans we offer New York State employees.

As the administrator for NYSHIP, which covers 1.2 million members, we are proud to ensure access to high quality providers and services.

We have recently reached a five-year agreement with Caredon for Empire Plan Behavioral Health benefits.

We believe this new agreement will allow us to expand our provider network and provide access to critical behavioral health benefits.

In addition, I am pleased to report the Department expanded dental dependent coverage up to age 26, allowing dependents between the ages of 19 to 26 to remain covered without providing proof of student status.

We will also work to promote the nation-leading paid parental leave program Governor Hochul has implemented for a majority of the state workforce, which provides 12 weeks of fully paid leave for parents to spend caring for their newborn children, as well as implement the expansion of the Paid Family Leave program to allow individuals 40 hours of paid leave for prenatal care.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to take a moment to extend my sincere appreciation to the staff that make up #TeamCivilService. Thank you for your hard work and dedication.

Together, this robust package I have highlighted will help us eliminate barriers to entry for civil service jobs, meet jobseekers where they are, and create a pipeline of the next generation of diverse talent into the State workforce. Thank you.