

**Testimony of Michael Volforte, Interim Director
on behalf of the Governor's Office of Employee Relations
February 3, 2016**

Chairwoman Young, 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 proposal for fiscal year 2016-2017 as it relates to my office and the workforce.

Before looking ahead, let me recap where we've been. During the past year, GOER reached a collective bargaining agreement that covers the bargaining unit consisting of Troopers in the Division of State Police. That agreement continued to maintain the fiscal discipline established by the contracts we began negotiating in 2011 – fair and measured wage growth, rebalanced health insurance premium contributions, and modest, practical changes in the design of our health plan. That settlement brought us to a total of 13 out of 14 negotiating units being covered by agreements through April of 2015 and 2016. We are currently in negotiations with the one unit of employees without a contract from that period but both sides are actively engaged in negotiations and hope to resolve the issues that remain shortly. Additionally, two collective bargaining agreements expired in April 2015 and negotiations are underway with both of those unions – the Public Employees Federation and the Police Benevolent Association of New York State, Inc.

We also continued our longstanding commitment to the education and professional development of the State workforce. Governor Cuomo is committed to protecting and educating the workforce to ensure that our own employees know their rights, enjoy the most inclusive work environment and deliver superior service to the taxpayers of our great State. We recently completed our second year of enterprise-wide training programs for employees, supervisors and managers with a total of nine training programs. These programs educated the workforce about the need to protect information, technology, and other assets; provided information to employees about workplace safety; and established a baseline for respectful and discrimination-free employment and access to government services by the public. We also launched a supervisory skills training to better equip front line supervisors with the skills and tools that they need to manage the workforce. We continued partnering with the Department of Civil Service to provide both continued professional development training for agency human resource managers and tools that they can use to help their respective agencies to meet their missions and plan for tomorrow.

Over the past year, we also continued our commitment to the benefit programs that our employees have come to know and rely upon. We provided pre-tax benefit programs for health care, dependent care and transportation expenses that save both the employee and employer money. Support services continued to be available for the workforce. Information and events designed to improve quality of life, employee health and wellness, and guidance for those who experienced personal issues, were provided through the Employee Assistance Program.

Looking ahead to fiscal year 2016-2017, our activities will focus heavily on collective bargaining. In addition to the negotiations already underway, by this summer a total of 9 collective bargaining agreements will have expired. We will be actively engaged with each and every union in order to achieve fair and fiscally responsible agreements as quickly as possible. Under Governor Cuomo's 2016-2017 proposed budget, the workforce will remain stable – as it has for the past couple of years - and is actually projected to grow by approximately 250 employees. Further contributing to workforce stability, there are no layoffs in the Governor's proposed budget. Moreover in the coming year, my office will continue to deliver employee benefit programs and provide training and development opportunities for the workforce to enhance job skills.

In conclusion, we are confident that in the coming year, while engaging in a frank and constructive dialogue with the unions, we will emerge with agreements that meet the needs of both the public we all serve and the employees who work hard to serve that public. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you.