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Office of Temporary
and Disability Assistance

Testimony
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State Fiscal Year 2015-16 Executive Budget
Human Services

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Good morning Chairman Farrell and Chairman DeFrancisco, members of the fiscal committees, and Chairs of the Social Services Committees. I'm Sharon Devine and I am the new Executive Deputy Commissioner for the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA). I started with OTDA just last week, and I'm excited to work on programs that help the people of our great State get back on their feet.

Let me begin by sharing highlights of how the 2015-16 Executive Budget and the Governor's Opportunity Agenda supports OTDA's core mission of enhancing the economic security of low-income working families. This includes helping the unemployed enter the workforce, providing much needed benefits and services to our most vulnerable residents to help them achieve and maintain stability, enhancing child well-being, and reducing child poverty in the State.

Homeless Services

One of New York State's greatest challenges is addressing homelessness; so it's no surprise that a key element of the Governor's 2015 Anti-Poverty Opportunity Agenda is investing in homeless services. The plan includes an historic investment of over \$400 million in funding for homeless services over the next several years. This investment combined with other State, Federal and locally funded programs will help us make progress toward our common goal of providing housing for individuals and families that do not have a place to call home. Here are just some of the ways that we will address the issue:

- The Executive Budget commits \$183 million of the J.P. Morgan Chase settlement funds to support homeless services over the next several years. This includes \$116 million to support 5,000 new supportive housing units, and \$40 million to help fund New York City's Living in Communities (LINC 1) rental assistance program. Also included is \$27 million to continue the 30% cap on the rent contribution for New York City public assistance recipients diagnosed with HIV/AIDS.
- The Executive Budget includes \$63.5 million for the bonded capital Homeless Housing Assistance Program (HHAP). This represents the State's long-term commitment to increasing the supply of housing – as well as providing necessary support services – for vulnerable populations. A primary focus of this funding continues to be the provision of permanent supportive housing to homeless families and individuals with disabilities and other life challenges to assist them in exiting out of emergency shelters.
- In addition to these resources, the Executive Budget provides a \$31.68 million appropriation for critical homeless services and supports – a \$400,000 increase. These supports are needed to prevent evictions, ensure housing retention, and help move individuals and families toward self-sufficiency. The services are administered by OTDA and delivered by not-for-profit organizations across the State.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Reducing food insecurity is another key OTDA priority. In 2013, Governor Cuomo created the Anti-Hunger Task Force, a statewide effort among experts, advocates, and government officials focused on ending hunger and increasing access to nutrition. In response to the recommendations outlined by the Task Force, the Executive Budget is committing \$4.5 million to bolster the State's emergency food system. Those funds will help 2,600 emergency food providers support New Yorkers who access emergency food programs each year.

OTDA supports numerous initiatives designed to reduce food insecurity, eliminate stigma associated with receiving SNAP benefits, and encourage the purchase of healthy, nutritious foods. Our efforts to increase access to and awareness of the Federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) have led to an increase in SNAP enrollment among low-income New Yorkers from 61 percent in 2008 to 82 percent in 2013. The percentage of SNAP applications filed online statewide has increased from four percent in 2010 to over 36 percent in 2014 as a result of initiatives such as our *myBenefits* portal. MyBenefits helps families apply for a wide range of benefits, services, and work supports.

During 2014, over three million New Yorkers received more than \$5 billion in SNAP benefits. These Federal funds boost the State's economy while helping people in need.

Summer Youth Employment Program

Last summer, the Summer Youth Program provided jobs for nearly 19,000 young people. This year's Executive Budget includes a \$30 million appropriation for the Summer Youth Employment Program, a \$2.5 million increase over 2014-15. The program provides low-income teens and young adults with immediate and long-term benefits from positive work experiences.

Child Support

Another key component of the Governor's and OTDA's commitment to families and children is the Child Support Enforcement Program, which benefits families of all income levels. In 2014, the program provided services to approximately 934,000 families in New York State and distributed over \$1.8 billion in child support payments on behalf of custodial parents and their children.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) State Supplement Program (SSP)

New York State is always looking for ways to provide high quality services at a lower cost. I am pleased to report that in October 2014, OTDA assumed administration of the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) State Supplement Program (SSP) from the Federal government. Over 680,000 elderly, blind and disabled individuals across the State residents now experience excellent customer service at a reduced cost to the State.

Going Forward

I look forward to working with the Governor, our partner agencies, and with you over the coming year as we strive to improve the lives of the State's most vulnerable citizens. My goal is to provide a bridge for these New Yorkers while they get back on their feet – from the young mother struggling to feed healthy food to her family – to the veteran who lost his job, and then his home, while dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder. There should be no stigma associated with these temporary hard times in people's lives, but there should be support from our government and our communities. Everyone in society benefits when those in need are given a hand to help them move forward. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I welcome your comments and questions.