



**Department of
Civil Service**

**Testimony of the
Department of Civil Service**

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

February 2, 2021

Good Afternoon Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, and distinguished members of the Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means Committees. My name is Lola Brabham and it is my privilege to serve as the Commissioner for the Department of Civil Service. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to comment on Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2022, and to highlight some of the agency's key accomplishments over the past year.

As the central personnel agency for the Executive Branch of State government, the Department of Civil Service delivers workforce management and development services to 70 state agencies, serving approximately 150,000 employees. In that capacity, the Department is responsible for the administration of the civil service merit system, along with the New York State Health Insurance Program (NYSHIP).

Over the past year, the Department has made significant progress to improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of our programs and services, while advancing the state's strategic workforce needs. And in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have worked hand-in-hand with agency partners to do our part – from ensuring the most critical workforce priorities are met, to ensuring access to high-quality health care, and providing direct support to our first responders.

In terms of workforce needs, Civil Service has acted quickly to establish critical positions needed to address COVID-19 needs. To date, approximately 1,800 positions have been established – including more than 1,300 positions at the Office of Mental Health and the Department of Health.

And on a daily basis, we remain in close contact with our stakeholders, responding to hundreds of inquiries and requests for guidance from the HR community pertaining to personnel recruitment, attendance and leave protocols, and other staffing matters.

During the early days of the pandemic, the physicians, nurses, and medical technicians who work at the Department's Office of Employee Health Service were mobilized to provide immediate support for COVID-19 response efforts by medically clearing health professionals, first responders, and other essential workers who needed to wear a respirator in the performance of their job.

To date, staff have cleared more than 800 individuals in support of this effort – including employees from the Department of Health, State Police, National Guard, Department of Environmental Conservation, Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, and others.

With regard to Civil Service testing, the Department is focused on building back better by modernizing its approach to test delivery through the use of technology and business improvements.

As you can imagine, the pandemic has had a significant impact on the Department's ability to conduct in-person civil service exams for State agencies and local governments. To address this issue, the Department utilized CARES Act funding to invest in new and robust technology to deliver virtually proctored civil service examinations to jobseekers – reducing potential exposure to COVID-19. This testing capability will allow the State of New York to meet targeted hiring needs. In addition, this investment will streamline the exam application and review process and ensure that New York is strategically planning for the workforce of tomorrow.

Further, to ensure equity and access for all jobseekers, the Department has invested in new chromebooks so that examinations can be administered safely to candidates who may not have the technology required to take a civil service exam remotely. Through these actions, we will continue to modernize the civil service merit system and build on Governor Cuomo's legacy of expanding opportunity for all New Yorkers.

Support for diversity, equity and inclusion in the state workforce is of critical importance and under Governor Cuomo's leadership, the Department has worked collaboratively across state agencies to cultivate a more inclusive work environment for all employees.

The Department's Office of Diversity and Inclusion Management continues to work with State agencies to identify and implement best practices related to outreach and recruitment, retention, reasonable accommodations, and other areas. These efforts are laying the groundwork for agencies to develop comprehensive strategic plans to meeting workforce and community needs throughout the State of New York.

In addition, the Department recently debuted a highly interactive virtual implicit bias training intended for all agencies, further promoting the state's commitment to diversity and inclusion principles, during a time in our nation's history that the need for such has become increasingly evident.

The Department of Civil Service also provides technical assistance and training to 95 municipal agencies that are responsible for the civil service administration of approximately 360,000 local government employees. As part of these efforts, the Department reviewed more than 2,500 requests from local government representatives over the past year to support the appropriateness of various merit system activities and the practicability of examination for certain titles.

On the health benefits front, the Department continues to manage one of the most comprehensive public employer health insurance programs in the nation. Early in 2020, the Department launched a new Telehealth program for over one million individuals enrolled in the state's Empire Plan to enable virtual medical visits. The Telehealth program, which is offered at no additional cost, allows members to participate in virtual visits with a board-certified doctor or licensed therapist - by simply using a personal computer, tablet, or smartphone.

The initiatives I have highlighted today underscore the Department's ongoing commitment to supporting high-priority workforce needs, providing efficiently-managed and cost-effective programs, and promoting equal opportunity and access for all New Yorkers.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am happy to address any questions you may have at this time.