

**Commissioner Colleen C. Gardner
NYS Department of Labor
Budget Testimony
February 13, 2012**

Joint Hearing of the Legislative Fiscal Committee

Chairman DeFrancisco, Chairman Farrell, Chairman Robach, Chairman Wright, and distinguished members of the Committees: I am Colleen Gardner, Commissioner of the Department of Labor. On behalf of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the Department of Labor, I thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

The New York State Department of Labor's core mission is to connect job seekers with employers, assist the unemployed and protect all workers. All of those activities are critical to achieving Governor Cuomo's vision of a *New, New York*: a State of good jobs and renewed prosperity.

The Governor's Executive Budget provides the Department of Labor with the resources needed to carry out our mission and support the Governor's goal of more effective and cost-efficient operations. Approximately 87% of the Department of Labor's budget is federally-funded. The rest comes from state special revenue funds, such as fees collected for inspections. While none of our funding comes from the State General Fund, the Department of Labor will continue to improve services without relying on more Federal funds or higher fees for taxpayers and businesses.

A *New, New York* of good jobs and renewed prosperity requires more jobs. Progress has been made. Since the recovery officially began in November 2009, New York's economy has added 180,400 private sector jobs -- 54% of the jobs lost during the last recession. New York's recovery rate is higher than that of the rest of the nation, which we increased under some challenging circumstances.

As you may recall, many counties in this state were affected by Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee. Many residents lost their homes and their jobs. To help address the impact of those storms, Governor Cuomo, among other things, directed the Labor Department to apply for a National Emergency Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. We received \$16.1 million, which we used to hire 266 temporary workers to clean up and rebuild communities affected by the storms. In the program, workers are either long-term unemployed or affected by the disasters. The program was recently extended through September 30, 2012.

In addition to assisting homeowners in the storm, we have been working diligently to get New Yorkers back to work state-wide. Connecting job-seekers with jobs is critical to achieving the Governor's vision for a *New, New York*. Late last year, Governor Cuomo launched "Jobs Express," a new website administered by the Department of Labor that connects New Yorkers to available jobs. Jobs Express takes thousands of jobs listed in the NYS Job Bank and sorts them by region and industry to help job seekers easily see what jobs are available in their area. Since November 2nd, the site has listed an average (based on a daily snapshot) of 52,046 positions each day. Jobs Express has proved enormously popular, receiving over 249,000 unique hits since its launch.

Further, the Governor launched the NY Youth Works Program to address the high unemployment rate among disadvantaged youth. The Youth Works Program provides \$25 million in tax credits for businesses that hire unemployed and disadvantaged youth and \$62 million to support job training programs. The Department of Labor administers the tax credits; identifies community-based organizations to recruit, train and place youth; and reaches out to businesses and youth to encourage their participation in the program.

Also, along with three other states, the Department of Labor recently received a \$2.75 million federal grant to provide timely, better-integrated services to unemployed workers in our One-Stop Career system. The skills and needs of unemployed customers are identified automatically and prior to layoff so that they may be referred more quickly to the specific services they need and matched with jobs. The grant will also be used to explore using social media and smartphone applications to disseminate information and respond to customers in real time – improving customer service. Our goal is to build a public employment service that meets the needs of 21st century workers and employers.

In addition to getting unemployed New Yorkers back to work as quickly as possible, we are also working to build a skilled workforce. In connection with the Governor's ten Regional Economic Development Councils, the Department of Labor has made \$3.7 million in federal Workforce Investment Act funding available through the Consolidated Funding Application process. These funds will be used to upgrade the skills of current workers; support on-the-job training for new hires, especially the long-term unemployed; and train workers for in-demand occupations. To date, we have funded 106 applications to train 5,270 workers. The Department of Labor also provides staff support, labor market information, and other resources to the Regional Economic Development Councils.

And finally, we continue to protect all workers, especially those most vulnerable to exploitation, such as immigrants and low-wage workers. Our Division of Immigrant Policies and Affairs reaches out to immigrant workers in their workplaces and communities to let them know their rights under New York's labor laws.

At the Department of Labor, we are committed to Governor Cuomo's vision of a *New, New York*. The services we offer to jobseekers, employers, the unemployed and workers are important to New York's economic recovery. We will continue our efforts to improve those services for all our customers, especially those most in need, while seeking opportunities to reduce costs and improve efficiency.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I welcome any questions you may have.