



LUCY LANG
Inspector General

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**TESTIMONY OF LUCY LANG
NYS SENATE INVESTIGATIONS & GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE,
and NYS SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
APRIL 25 AND 26, 2022**

Thank you Chair Kruger and Chair Skoufis, and the distinguished members of these Committees for considering my appointment as New York State's Welfare Inspector General, and to Gov. Hochul for my nomination for this role, and appointment as NYS IG and Workers' Compensation IG. As I have only recently taken office as New York State's 11th Inspector General, please allow me to introduce myself. I am a lifelong New Yorker, a mother, an attorney, and an educator. I served as Director of the Institute for Innovation in Prosecution at John Jay College, where I worked on criminal justice reform with prosecutors around the country, and as an Assistant District Attorney and Special Counsel for Policy and Projects in the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, where I investigated and prosecuted complex criminal matters, and built a first of its kind college in prison program to bring prosecutors inside prisons to study social justice alongside incarcerated New Yorkers.

I'd like start by taking a moment to tell you about a program that emerged from this work, which informs the way I think about the importance of our welfare system. A formerly incarcerated student who had served 16 years in prison called me several months after his release and told me how difficult his reentry had been, and that he had an idea. As you know, many people are entitled to SNAP benefits upon release from prison, but what you may not know, as I didn't, is that it takes about eight weeks for those benefits to kick in because the paperwork is usually completed at a parole check-in after release. This means that when people are at their most vulnerable in those weeks after release – when they are most likely to be housing insecure, unemployed, struggling to reestablish family and community ties, and indeed at the highest risk of re-arrest – they often also don't know where their next meal is coming from. Working together with that student, DOCCS, and DSS, last year I piloted a program in three state prisons to help people complete their paperwork eight weeks prior to release to ensure that they have food stamps available immediately. I am hopeful that this model will expand throughout the state.

I share this story because it exemplifies the power of listening to the people most impacted when making decisions about social service needs, which is a bedrock principle of my commitment to public service that I will bring to the role of Welfare IG. As you know, under §74 of the Executive Law, the Welfare Inspector General is responsible for conducting investigations of fraud and abuse within social services, recommending policies relating to the prevention and detection of fraud, and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.

Our office receives several hundred complaints of welfare fraud annually, and through the interdisciplinary work of investigators, attorneys, and auditors across the state, we review every one. In cases where the fraud is substantial, we refer them to law enforcement for

potential prosecution. But in far more cases we refer them back to the agency for administrative disposition including for the delivery of services.

My priority in investigating welfare fraud is to identify vulnerabilities that compromise the system and undermine its ability to serve New Yorkers in need.

I am proud that today is the very first day of work for our newly hired Attorney-In-Charge of all welfare matters. This lawyer will be charged with aggregating resources across the state to ensure thorough and consistent handling of our welfare matters, and with building our relationship with the social service districts to streamline the referral of services to recipients who are defrauded, or who commit low level fraud out of need or desperation. My entire staff across the state will also receive training in trauma-informed investigative practices, to ensure that all victims and witnesses are treated with the appropriate degree of sensitivity.

In my career as a public servant, my guiding principles are commitment to transparency, innovation, and integrity, informed by people most effected by the issue at hand.

I will bring this experience and these values to protecting New York's most vulnerable families, centering their experiences and needs to our work. I am proud of the positive steps our Office has taken in my short time as State Inspector General and acting Welfare IG. If confirmed, I would be honored to continue to work with you and your colleagues to preserve the integrity and accessibility of New York State's crucial social safety net programs.

I thank you again for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have about my experience or my nomination as Welfare IG.