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**Department
of State**

Today's New York Department of State



Today's Department of State, one of the oldest and most eclectic New York State agencies, plays a critical role in helping to reinvigorate the State's economy and make its communities more livable. At the direction of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, the Department, long known as the “keeper of records,” has embraced the State's priorities and emerged ready to address a broad range of the changing needs of residents.

From the bustling boroughs of New York City to the idyllic shores of Lake Ontario, the agency aims to improve the lives of all New Yorkers. The results of its daily work can be felt among immigrants who have launched new businesses upstate and economically disadvantaged residents of the Bronx who have trained for high-tech careers. Its effects are seen on Long Island hamlets undergoing downtown revitalization, and in villages that have built inviting walks and pavilions along major waterways like the Saint Lawrence River.

At the Governor's request, the Department developed the foundation for Regional Economic Development Councils to revitalize upstate economies. The Department hosts the first of its kind State Office for New Americans, a network of 27 opportunity centers throughout New York State that has provided free services to more than 90,000 immigrants. It has laid the groundwork for creating vibrant and resilient downtowns, awarding grants to revive dormant, blighted parcels and to reconstruct coastal communities that are better protected from natural catastrophes. And, just recently, it heeded the Governor's call to help lead a multi-pronged effort to reform New York's nail salon industry, fighting wage theft and correcting unsafe working conditions to protect some of our State's most vulnerable residents.

Established nearly 240 years ago, the Department was initially charged with compiling agency rules and regulations and publishing official State documents. Over the two centuries that followed, it took on dozens of unique and essential responsibilities to serve State communities and residents, including setting building construction and energy conservation standards, providing local municipalities with expertise to become more cost-efficient, overseeing 1,800 burial grounds in not-for-profit cemeteries, and regulating the sport of professional boxing in New York State.

Today, the Department's 12 divisions and eight committees and commissions provide a vast array of services. Under New York Secretary of State Cesar A. Perales, the Department has been reimagined as a vehicle to reinvigorate the economy and make New York State's communities more livable. It faces challenges and responsibilities with innovative ideas to produce results for all New Yorkers. Following are examples of modern day Department initiatives and efforts.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS

While New York City was bouncing back from recent economic hardships, a weakened upstate economy seemed to have been dealt a fatal blow. Recognizing the challenge that New York faced, Governor Cuomo established 10 Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs) in 2011 to develop long-term plans for economic growth across the State. The Councils redefined New York’s approach to stimulating economic development and creating jobs, using a community-based, bottom-up approach that allowed regions to compete for state funding for projects and programs.



Governor Cuomo looked to the Department of State to design the REDC process, and appointed Secretary Perales to lead the team of State officials and outside experts who select the top regional plans that then receive increased funding for priority projects selected by the local community.

The Department also launched the Governor’s Opportunity Agenda as part of the REDC process, helping ensure those living in poverty are included in the State’s economic renaissance. For example, a \$1.8 million State investment in 2014 to the New York City region’s Urban Development Center has brought new high-tech jobs to the heart of the South Bronx. The center is a partnership between Per Scholas, a not-for-profit Information Technology training provider, and corporate software testing firm Doran Jones. With help from a Departmental grant, Per Scholas is providing training to hundreds living in poverty who will then be hired for an IT job by Doran Jones, guaranteeing opportunity to those with the most need in an area long devoid of good-paying jobs.

In 2015, Secretary Perales also led the review and evaluation of plans for the Upstate Revitalization Initiative. The initiative, which selected three winners in upstate regions that received \$500 million each, will continue to bring needed investment to our upstate communities.

OFFICE FOR NEW AMERICANS

For generations, New York has stood as a symbol of opportunity for immigrants. In 2013, the Governor created the New York State Office for New Americans, a first of its kind endeavor to recognize and address the unique needs that the State’s newcomers face. Since its inception, the Office and its Opportunity Center network have assisted more than 90,000 newcomers with free services such as English classes, naturalization process guidance, and support to start or expand a business.

With the help of these Opportunity Centers, immigrants have also revitalized communities. In Utica, foreign-born residents now comprise nearly 18 percent of the population, hailing from corners of the world like Somalia and Bosnia. Utica’s immigrants, many of them refugees, have rehabilitated depressed properties, started new “main street” businesses, and brought life back to deserted neighborhoods.



Governor Andrew M. Cuomo with City University of New York DREAMers at CUNY Citizenship Now!

LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

The Department of State oversees Governor Cuomo’s effort to help make local governments more efficient and potentially reduce local property taxes. Today, there are more than 1,600 local governments throughout our State. These counties, cities, towns and villages – with their overlapping services – are increasingly driving up the cost of local government for taxpayers.

The Department provides local governments with funding and technical support for the study, planning and implementation of municipal reorganizations. As an example, a New York Department of State Local Government Efficiency Program grant of \$1 million was awarded to Schenectady County for the consolidation of 911 emergency dispatch services from 25 fire departments, seven police agencies and three emergency medical services into one facility that impacts over 155,000 residents in the County. Not only did this project produce a cost-savings of \$700,000 per year, it also enhanced public safety by improving emergency response times.



The Schenectady County Unified Communications Center.

PLANNING AND DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT

Shortly after being appointed, Secretary Perales restructured the agency to better assist communities with economic development planning and development. A core function of the Department is to help communities plan for public and private development projects that stimulate community revitalization, economic growth, and resilience. Planning and development programs administered by the Department are collectively laying the groundwork for supporting Governor Cuomo’s new \$100 million initiative to revitalize downtowns experiencing economic decline or population loss.

Through its Brownfield Opportunity Areas (BOA) program, the Department is helping communities revitalize dormant, blighted neighborhoods affected by contamination. In 2015 alone, the Secretary designated 26 areas across the State as BOAs, making them eligible for guidance and financial assistance to spur private development. These projects create jobs, restore environmental quality, and jump-start stagnant local economies.

The Hamlet of Wyandanch in the Town of Babylon has been the most economically distressed community on Long Island by many measures. The heart of its community was a Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) station surrounded by a sea of commuter surface parking, pedestrian-unfriendly roads, and few public amenities. Over the last decade, through the help of BOA grants, the community

Right: Secretary Perales (3rd from right) with other State officials in Wyandanch reviewing ongoing construction plans.

Below: Part of the new development in Wyandanch, spurred by a Department of State BOA designation.



studied the extent of its blight over a 150-acre area, analyzed existing infrastructure to prioritize upgrades, acquired key properties, and created a master plan to revitalize the area. Today, the first phase of the community's vision is under way, including mix-use building around a public plaza, a new LIRR station and 2,000-space parking garage for commuters, and a commercial office building.

Ninety percent of New York's population and a wide variety of economic activities are concentrated along waterfronts. The Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) administered by the Department assists coastal communities in making the most of their waterfronts. An LWRP grant to the Village of Clayton led to the design and construction of the Clayton Riverwalk Pavilion in Frink Park, creating a welcoming waterfront gateway to downtown. The pavilion has stimulated tourism by providing event space for festivals and concerts, and has helped attract private investment in Clayton's downtown area.



The completed Clayton Riverwalk Pavilion in Frink Park.

PROTECTING CONSUMERS

The Department also plays watchdog for all of New York's consumers, helping them become savvier on matters ranging from marketplace scams to identity theft. Each day, the Department's Consumer Assistance Unit receives and resolves complaints through voluntary mediation between the public and businesses, recouping money for aggrieved consumers. The Department's Utility Intervention Unit advocates for residential and small business ratepayers in electricity, gas, and telecommunications rate cases. For example, the Department's recommendations on behalf of consumers in the settlement between the Public Service Commission and Corning Natural Gas Corporation were instrumental in freezing the gas delivery rate for residents and small businesses for three years and securing customer refunds, avoiding a nearly \$3 million base rate increase overall.

EMPIRE STATE FELLOWS

Our State government increasingly faces complex problems challenging its residents. Meeting these challenges requires the best and brightest to become the state's next generation of policy makers. To do this, Governor Cuomo directed Secretary Perales to create the Empire State Fellows. Launched in 2012, the program recruits talented professionals with demonstrated leadership potential who want to focus their careers in public service. These professionals work directly with policy makers in the Governor's office or with senior agency officials .

Fellows have included former assistant district attorneys, U.S. Army veterans, business professionals, law firm associates and non-profit managers. A number of Fellows have already transitioned to prominent positions in State government.



Secretary Perales (far right) with the inaugural class of Empire State Fellows in 2012.