

Thank you, Chairwoman Pintor Marin, Vice Chairman Burzichelli, and honorable members of this Committee. I am grateful for the invitation to appear before you.

If I may take a moment to recognize the tireless work of every single employee at the Department of State, some of whom are here with me today.

Department of State employees touch the lives of more than 9 million New Jerseyans every day. As a department, we have prioritized diversity and inclusion in harnessing the skills of our talented workforce. Public service is hard work and I appreciate their efforts and counsel.

Across disciplines and on many levels, the Department of State is leveraging New Jersey's natural assets, homegrown talent, and reinvigorated reputation to showcase the state's rightful position as a wonderful place to live, work, and play.

To start—at its very core, the Department of State is responsible for the underpinnings of our democracy: Census and elections. Less than a year from now, the 2020 Census will be in full swing with the goal of providing a reliable, comprehensive economic and demographic data to guide prudent policymaking and resource allocation.

I have enlisted my Cabinet colleagues in this effort given many state agencies have outward-facing relationships or contact with the general public. They have all been incredibly receptive to our outreach.

I would also respectfully ask the esteemed members of the legislature to help the Department of State educate your constituents on the Census, particularly those in hard-to-count communities.

Next, the soundness of our elections sits at the top of my agenda. Here, the goal is two-fold. First, I am committed to enhancing our state's civic health. This is accomplished with innovative civic engagement initiatives. That way everyone can get involved in our democratic process, especially our youth. Second, I am equally committed to voter access and integrity.

On both counts, I am pleased to report that the conduct of last year's midterm elections was successful. The elections took place seamlessly and with immense interest. I attribute our extremely high levels of voter interest and record turnout to some of my Department's 'Jersey Votes' initiatives such as the First New Jersey College Ballot Bowl. The Ballot Bowl was a friendly statewide collegiate voter registration competition that fueled over 100,000 new voter registrations. This year, we look to expand the Ballot Bowl to high schools across New Jersey.

Additionally, our 'Vote for Valor' program paid deserved tribute to our veterans and their loved ones. New Jerseyans were invited to 'dedicate' their votes to veterans or active duty service members. I was very happy that this small gesture helped to recognize their service and sacrifice.

One of the initiatives we are also working on is called 'Constitution in the Classroom' which looks to further the civic health of our youth in the classroom through discussions on issues like volunteerism, civic engagement, and the role of governmental officials.

These efforts have and will go a long way toward increasing voter interest and engagement. As this esteemed body is well aware, the advent of Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) and an updated Vote-by-Mail regime further shepherded in new tools for meaningful voter participation. I thank the Governor and the legislature for heralding this new era of increased voter engagement in our state.

As of this month, New Jersey has an estimated 6 million—registered voters. The 2017 General Election (GE) saw about 2.2 million ballots cast. The 2018 GE saw an estimated 3.2 million ballots cast. In terms of Vote-by-Mail ballots cast, the 2017 GE saw about 182,000 such ballots. For the 2018 GE, VBM ballots cast jumped to more than 400,000.

As I alluded to, the Department of State has been extremely proactive on election security and has become recognized for these election integrity efforts. We are 1 of only 9 states to have 100% participation from every election office in the Election Infrastructure Information Sharing Analysis Center. The Center monitors internet traffic for attempts to attack our systems. The Department of State also maintains regular communication with federal partners to discuss threats and proactive measures aimed at addressing vulnerabilities.

On a national front, my colleagues and I receive classified intelligence briefing on elections. Along with the FBI, the National Association of State Election Directors (NASSED), the Election Assistance Commission (EAC), and others—Secretaries have participated in substantive conversations on key issues including cybersecurity, election administration, and federal solutions to these matters.

As the committee is aware, last year our state received more than \$9.75 million in Help America Vote Act (HAVA) monies. We budgeted these funds for smart investments in cybersecurity, physical security, training, communications, voter registration systems, election audits, ADA compliance, and more.

Part of our state's HAVA funding has been used to fund cyber experts through the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness who liaise with each County to ensure that local election systems and physical facilities are up to protocol.

Additionally, HAVA funds have been spent to update our technology and establish a Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) pilot program. Middlesex, Union, and Warren Counties bought voting equipment with VVPAT. Towns in Gloucester, Essex, and Union Counties took part in the pilot program in 2018; Warren and Mercer Counties took part during school-board elections in 2019.

All of the Counties participating in the VVPAT pilot program are conducting risk-limiting audits (RLA) to better meet any cybersecurity challenges. The RLA process involves the manual examination of a random sample of voted paper ballots so as to statistically validate the results.

Of note is that New Jersey is 1 out of a handful of states that are conducting RLA's. I have had the pleasure of attending several risk-limiting audits. And at one, my Pennsylvania counterpart and her election official delegation observed.

We have expended countless hours and have further benefited from the wisdom of partners at all levels of government, like New Jersey Homeland Security and Preparedness, the State Police, New Jersey's National Guard, U.S. Homeland Security and others.

I am sure that members of this committee will agree when I say that we have to stay several steps ahead by identifying areas for improvement in cyber incident planning, preparedness, identification, and response.

I believe that government should deliver the best in customer service. The Department of State is working round-the-clock to improve the election experience for all New Jerseyans:

- We are developing a voter-centric app to combat disinformation and to ensure that voters have the most timely and accurate information in their hands as they go to the polls.
- We are leveraging HAVA dollars to increase access for persons with disabilities. Elections are for everyone, and no one should feel left behind because of mobility or other challenges.
- We are training our election officials. Last year, I participated in a tabletop exercise (TTX) and we will conduct a statewide one with National partners in September.
- The Division of Elections and the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness are working with Counties to develop Continuity of Operations Plans.

I also oversee an array of the nation's finest artistic, cultural, and heritage assets as well as our Division of Travel & Tourism, Motion Picture & Television Commission, and Business Action Center. Being acutely aware of the value of these portfolios, I have directed them to create synergies and harness these assets into a muscular, affirmative agenda for the vibrancy of our communities and economy.

To start, the State of New Jersey is seeing record tourism numbers. This unbridled success is owed to the Tourism Division's launch of a well-rounded marketing campaign designed to elevate New Jersey's brand; target specific segments based on interest; and highlight our state's diverse regions and abundant activities and attractions.

In my home county of Passaic, for example, the Great Falls stands as a centerpiece of Paterson's revitalization. Cities like Paterson are undergoing a sea change, with neighborhood

revitalization and stabilization at the very top of the agenda. Public spaces like the Great Falls are attractive and offer incredible recreational programming.

With the launch of its long-range strategic plan, the State Council on the Arts remains deeply committed to fostering public interest in the arts. Each year, the Arts Council's smart investments have supported \$275 million in local spending by grantee arts organizations, employing 25,000 workers and attracting 7.5 million patrons. On top of ticket prices, those patrons go on to spend more than \$233 million at New Jersey businesses.

The Arts Council is embracing every chance to identify, sustain, and create opportunities for arts leaders and artists to support under-resourced communities in New Jersey. Particularly noteworthy is the recent announcement of the Council as the first-ever state partner in the Diversity in Arts Leadership internship program. Created by Americans for the Arts, this program is nationally-renowned and strives to strengthen and advance diversity in the arts. In New Jersey, the Council will match undergraduate students from traditionally-underrepresented backgrounds with non-profit arts organizations for a paid 10 week summer internship which will set students on a course for success in the arts ecosystem.

Equipping our youth with the knowledge and skills for a lifetime of success is a critical concern of mine. In addition to the Arts Council's internship program, our Office of Faith-Based Initiatives is a leader in helping faith- and community-based organizations reach more residents. The Center for Hispanic Research and Development hosts an extremely well-regarded Governor's Hispanic Fellows program. This year, the Center received more applications for fellowship positions than ever before, and the quality of the applicant pool was impressive.

The Business Action Center is a source of pride for the Department. More than half of all Americans either own or work for a small business, and small businesses create approximately two-thirds of our nation's new private-sector jobs. At the same time, over half of new businesses face significant challenges within their first 5 years.

For those folks, the BAC is relentless in its advocacy. For instance, it has hosted "Resources for Growth" events where small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs can learn about free or low-cost government resources for small businesses.

The BAC operates a call center for business owners seeking assistance with questions on financing; permitting and regulatory processes; site selection; and so on. The call center fields approximately 500 calls a week and features Spanish-language services. Last year alone, it counseled an estimated 25,000 businesses.

Additionally, the BAC is keen to help businesses seeking to market themselves internationally through the New Jersey State Trade Expansion Program.

I have observed the BAC staff up close, and they take a craftsperson's approach to the task, bringing original research; thought; and experience to the table. Everything is tailored—nothing is off-the-rack.

The Motion Picture & Television Commission is a star player in its own right. It is my pleasure to oversee the Commission, because I get to support the creators who make the world's most exciting stories come to life.

Last month, I spoke at our state's first-ever Diversity in Film Forum in a room full of film executives and creatives. We left with a firm commitment to address multicultural consumers by creating diverse content right here in New Jersey.

Other Divisions in the Department maintain reputations as national leaders in their respective spheres, especially on heritage. We are deeply immersed in planning for the 19th Amendment centennial next year to celebrate women's suffrage.

To honor this legacy, the Historical Commission is planning a number of exciting programs for the centennial:

- In the coming months, the Commission will conduct workshops so our educators can better teach our kids about the suffrage movement. In K-12 classrooms, a cross-curricular humanities contest will be held to coincide with New Jersey's ratification anniversary.
- The Historical Commission's 2019 conference will be focused on the history of women in this state.
- Next year, there will be a Women's Equality Day Celebration here at the State House as well as a Women's Suffrage March in New Brunswick.

Last year, the Department celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Armistice. Looking ahead, my staff is working with national stakeholders on other programming to mark similar important anniversaries such as the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution.

The Department houses many valuable civic and cultural commissions, and is jumpstarting long-inactive commissions with appointments that reflect New Jersey's rich diversity. The Governor's Office on Volunteerism is continuing to work with our federal partners to strengthen our communities and elevate the issues facing our youth. I have directed the Office to develop more volunteer programming to triage economic injustice through volunteerism.

Taken together, these efforts create an essential leadership pipeline and allow our best and brightest to help shape policy and the future of our state. As Frederick Douglass wrote, "it is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

As a custodian of the public purse, the Department of State has exercised appropriate fiscal prudence without sacrificing the quality of its services. The Department continues to investigate and implement methods to efficiently use the resources it has been given.

- We have fewer full-time employees than 5 years ago.
- We have partnered with the Department of the Treasury on our Information Technology functions. That way we can maximize efficiency without the need to hire additional staff.
- The administration of our grant funding programs—almost 500 awards totaling over \$26.7 million this year—are processed through our System for Administering Grants Electronically (SAGE). This is a web-based and paperless system that provides efficient and timely submission and approvals throughout the grant cycle. SAGE has greatly reduced the cost of paper/postage and Department staff time.

In closing, my Department is cementing New Jersey's status as a great place to live, work, and play. I am committed to the success of every single Division. With our talented workforce, I am confident that we will bring the ladder of opportunity closer to all of our residents.

I look forward to working with the distinguished members of the legislature. In a spirit of collegiality and public service, we will bring out the best New Jersey has to offer. Thank you for allowing me to address you this afternoon. I welcome any questions.